Total Liberation

Anonymous

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Things have never been spinning so decisively out of control. Not once in the history of humanity, nor even in that of life in general. Extreme weather is no longer an abnormality; the fish are disappearing from the oceans; the threat of nuclear holocaust is back. Poverty ensnares us as much as ever, whilst the bodies pile up at the borders. To say this order is choking us is nowadays more than a metaphor: in most cities, you can no longer even breathe the air. Which is to say, in short, that the *very atmosphere* of the existent has become toxic. Within the confines of the system, there's nowhere left to go. But that isn't to say such confines are inescapable – not in the slightest. A million roots of inquiry, each one as unique as you could imagine, begin to converge on exactly the same conclusion: *the need for revolution has never been so pressing.*

Perhaps it's a little predictable to point out the hopelessness of this world – almost everyone knows. What's more remarkable is that, even in spite of it, normality somehow finds the strength to grind on. The defendants of the existent hold dear to their claim that, for all its obvious flaws, liberal democracy remains the *least bad* form of human community currently available. Which is such a meagre justification, and yet it tends to work. Even avowed rebels, so convinced they're outrunning this sacred assumption, merely reintroduce it in another form – the latest leftist political party, or even some grim fascist resurgence. And how successful have we revolutionaries been in demonstrating which worlds lie beyond all this? Such is the basic tension blocking our advance: even though the need for revolution has never been so clear, our idea of what one would even look like has rarely seemed so distant.

How do we ring in the system's death knell a little sooner, whilst there's still so much to fight for? How do we jump ship and live our lives outside this increasingly uninhabitable mess? Indeed, how do we unlearn the myths of this order of misery altogether, and really begin living in the first place?

Of course, it isn't like these questions are being asked for the first time. All too often, though, calls for change are met with echoes from a distant century, as if mere resurrections of once dominant methods – be they Marxist or anarcho-syndicalist – are even close to applicable nowadays. No longer can we talk about oppression mainly in terms of some tectonic clash between two economic classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Nor can we be too sure of limiting the scope of revolutionary struggle to *human* liberation, dismissing out of hand the plight of other animals, not to mention the planet we call home altogether. At such a decisive historical juncture, it's necessary to call *everything* into question: the times cry out for new visions, new strategies. Ones with a fighting chance of forging beyond the current impasse.

We don't need any more reminders that this civilisation is heading for the abyss. What we seriously need to ask is what we're going to do about it. There's a great deal of potential to the current social context, one in which the status quo forfeits its title as the most realistic option. But mere *potential* isn't enough. Mainstream politics can hardly be expected to collapse under its own weight, except into something more monstrous than what we already know. Only in combination with concrete, accessible means of deserting it all do new forms of life begin to take shape.

This one goes out to the revolutionaries, wherever they're to be found.

1: The 21st century context

From class struggle to identity politics

It's not that we've forgotten the meaning of revolution; on the contrary, it's the refusal to let go of the old meaning that's holding us back. With every passing moment, the state of the world changes irreversibly. Perspectives that once commanded utmost dedication begin to stagnate, losing touch with the tides of a reality that swirls in constant motion. Even the brightest ideas are bound to accumulate dust. And so too those offered in response.

To this day, most dreams of revolution come grounded in some variant of Marxian analysis. On this account, class is the central principle, both for understanding oppression as well as resisting it. History is taken to consist primarily in the drama of class struggle; different historical phases, meanwhile, are defined by the mode of production that sets the stage. The current phase is capitalism, in which the means of production – factories, natural resources, and so on – are owned by the ruling class (the bourgeoisie) and worked for wages by the working class (the proletariat). Almost everyone in capitalist society is split fundamentally between one of these two molar heaps – bosses or workers, exploiters or exploited. Whilst the basic solution, as Marxists and anarcho-syndicalists traditionally see it, is the application of workplace organisation towards the revolutionary destruction of class-divided society. In concrete terms, that means the proletariat rising up and seizing the means of production, replacing capitalism with the final phase of history: communism – a classless, stateless, moneyless society.

Having risen to predominance in the West around the end of the 19th century, this current of revolutionary struggle approached its climax towards the beginning of the 20th. At this point, the mutinies that closed down the First World War avalanched into a wave of proletarian uprisings that shook Europe to its core. Beginning with the Russian Revolution, 1917, the reverberations soon catalysed major insurrections in Germany, Hungary, and Italy. Two decades later, this unmatched period of heightened class struggle culminated in the 1936 Spanish Revolution, arguably the single greatest feat of workers' self-organisation in history. Centred in Catalonia, millions of workers and peasants put the means of production under directly democratic control, especially in Barcelona – amongst the most industrially developed cities in the world. Yet the glory days of the revolutionary proletariat were in many ways also its last stand; in Italy and Germany, the fascist regimes of Mussolini and Hitler already reigned supreme. In the Soviet Union, meanwhile, the initial promise of the Russian Revolution had long since degenerated into Bolshevism, diverting most of the energy associated with socialism towards authoritarian ends. Apparently both fascism and Bolshevism succeeded in annihilating the possibility of workers' control all the more effectively by simultaneously valorising it. Never again would organised labour come close to regaining its former revolutionary potential.

What followed was a period of relative slumber amongst the social movements of the West. This was eventually undone by a wave of social struggles that broke out during the 1960s, which in many places put the prospect of revolution back on the table. But something about this new

era of revolt was markedly different: besides its various labour movements, here we see the likes of second-wave feminism, black liberation, and queer struggle begin to occupy the foreground. No longer was class struggle regarded as one and the same with the overall project of human liberation. And that began to profoundly undermine the neat old picture you get with Marxian class analysis. Maybe there's no primary division splitting society any more, no single fault line upon which to base the totality of our resistance? The situation has instead been revealed as much messier, exceeding the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, if not capitalism altogether.

That said, something vital you still get with Marxian analysis, even centuries after it was first formulated, is its timeless emphasis on the material features of oppression. After all, it's not as if the classical concerns of revolutionaries – in particular, the state and capital – have since just melted away. One of the biggest problems with many contemporary social struggles is their readiness to turn a blind eye to these structures, forgetting the key insight worth salvaging from Marx: genuine liberation is impossible without securing the material conditions of autonomy. On the other hand, though, classical revolutionaries tend to emphasise these concerns only at the expense of neglecting those which are in a sense more psychological, defined by matters of identity rather than one's relationship to property. There's something reassuring in that, given that treating class as primary allows you to take the entirety of problems we face – social, political, economic, ecological – and condense them into one. But such an approach has little chance of reflecting the complexity of power in the 21st century, with all divisions aside from class soon being neglected.

To note, there are conceivable responses here: some have made a point of extending Marxian analysis beyond an exclusive focus on class. Of the arguments offered, perhaps the most influential contends that structures such as white supremacy and patriarchy, homophobia and transphobia, are strengthened by the ruling class in order to divide and rule the working class; therefore, any prudent take on class struggle must take care to simultaneously oppose them all, or else fail to build the unity necessary for overthrowing capitalism. Such is exactly the kind of discourse used to give the impression that Marxian analysis is *equally* concerned with all oppressions. Granted, this approach is more sophisticated than claiming any deviations from the class line are mere distractions, as some do even today. But still, you shouldn't be convinced too easily: lurking beneath the sloganeering here is the basic assumption that, even if class isn't the only form of oppression, it remains the central one, underpinning the relevance of all the rest. Other oppressions are important to oppose, yet hardly on their own terms; their importance remains secondary, pragmatic, warranting recognition only insofar as they serve *as a means* within the broader class struggle. This shortcoming has long since been a call for new forms of struggle to emerge. Ones which recognise that class isn't the only oppression worthy of intrinsic concern.

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The fading of the Old Left, along with its fixation with Marxism and class struggle, soon gave rise to a "New Left" in Europe and America. Amongst other factors, this transition has been defined by the growing predominance of identity politics over class struggle. Identity politics follows from the presumed usefulness of coming together around various shared identities – say, being black, a woman, gay, transgender, or disabled – as a means for understanding and resisting oppression. This eagerness to treat all liberation struggles as ends in themselves did away with

the primacy of class; rather, efforts were split more evenly between different minority groups, adding depth to previously neglected concerns.

At first, this trend offered a fair degree of revolutionary potential. The Black Panther Party, for example, recognised that black power was inseparable from achieving community autonomy in fully tangible ways, as was manifest in a range of activity that included everything from armed self-defence to food distribution, drug rehabilitation, and elderly care. Also in the US, the Combahee River Collective – who introduced the modern usage of the term "identity politics" in 1977 – saw their own liberation as queer black women merely as a single component of a much larger struggle against all oppressions, class included. Even Martin Luther King, currently a favourite amongst pacifist reformers, emphasised not long before his death that anti-racism was meaningless when separated from a broader opposition to capitalism.

As time passed, however, identity politics drifted irretrievably from its antagonistic origins, eventually coming to be associated with the separation of issues of identity from class struggle altogether. Broadly insensitive to the material features of liberation, the term nowadays suggests political engagement that's heavily focused around moralistic displays and the policing of language – something that, quite inadvertently, can easily end up excluding the rest of the population, especially those lacking an academic grounding. Any larger political strategies, meanwhile, are typically focused not on dissolving the institutions of politics, business, and law enforcement, but instead on making them more accommodating to marginalised groups, thereby conceding the overall legitimacy of class-divided society. It's no coincidence that this reformist, essentially liberal approach to social transformation only took off in tandem with that unspoken assumption, cemented since the '80s, regarding our chances of a revolution actually happening any more. In short, identity politics has been contained within a fundamental position of compromise with power, taking it for granted the state and capital are here to stay.

Perhaps the central problem with identity politics today is that, having had the good sense to abandon Marxian analysis, it loses the ability to account for what's common to the plethora of social problems we face. If oppressive relations cannot be reduced to class, then what's the underlying structure that binds them all together? The only alternative is to treat different oppressions as disconnected and remote – problems that can, in their various forms, be overcome without challenging the system as a whole. Identity politics thus lacks the conceptual bridge needed to draw different social movements into a holistic revolutionary struggle. Particularly in its most vulgar forms, liberation struggles are treated as isolated or even competitive concerns, inviting the reproduction of oppressive relations amongst those supposed to be fighting them.

Having said that, an explicit response to these limitations was offered by intersectionality, which began gaining traction in the '80s. The point of this theory is to demonstrate how different axes of domination overlap, compounding the disadvantages received by those exposed to more than one oppressive identity. By focusing *only* on gender, for example, feminist movements tend to prioritise the experiences of their most privileged participants – typically white, wealthy women. In order to undermine patriarchy effectively, therefore, feminism must embrace a much larger spectrum of concern, inviting the narratives of marginalised women to the forefront. A key virtue of intersectionality has thus been its emphasis on the interconnected nature of power, predicating the effectiveness of different liberation struggles on their ability to support one another. Unlike with Marxian class analysis, moreover, it does so without positing that any single axis of domination is somehow primary, which offers a vital contribution for going forward.

Despite its utility for revolutionaries, however, intersectionality has generally failed to avoid co-optation by neoliberal capitalism. Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign, with its numerous references to the likes of the "combined effects of intersecting issues that impact communities of color," is but one example. Or else look at its seamless application by the mega-corporations nowadays, to the extent that Sony Pictures even has its own Director of Intersectional Marketing, a role designed to ensure that "marketing campaigns achieve maximum outreach to targeted multicultural and LGBT demographics." How has a seemingly radical theory been diverted towards blatant reactionary ends? A first problem with intersectionality, as with identity politics more generally, is its abandonment of classical revolutionary concerns. At best, class is discussed merely in terms of "classism," namely, an individual prejudice that can be undone simply by changing opinions, rather than abolishing class-divided society overall. Meanwhile, the state – a concrete institution, not an identity category such as race, gender, or class – is typically ignored altogether, inevitably resulting in toothless political programmes.

Moreover, this distinct lack of material analysis leads to a second problem, apparently the inherent defect of any take on identity politics: the inability to locate a common thread to the constitution of oppression as such. By setting out ever more subcategories of oppressed identities – not just being a black woman, for instance, but also a black trans-woman, a black disabled trans-woman, and so on – the consequence is an endless process of compartmentalisation. This emphasis on complexity could easily be a source of strength, opening up multiple fronts of diffuse engagement, inviting greater numbers to participate without having to assume a secondary role. Yet by focusing *only* on particularities, any notion of a common enemy against which to generalise revolt soon vanishes. Only when combined with a broader, concretely revolutionary vocabulary can intersectionality be used to promote diversity rather than fragmentation, undermining power as a totality.

Of course, none of the failures of identity politics should detract from the gains hard-won over the years. Even if transphobia continues to lag behind, overt racism, sexism, and homophobia are rarely tolerated by mainstream politics in much of the Global North – something unthinkable just a few decades ago. The uncomfortable fact, however, is that capitalism has been quite happy to adapt to these changes, taking on this or that superficial tarnish, yet remaining wholly the same in terms of its core operations. Women have flowed into the workforce, just as the nuclear family continues to disintegrate; nonetheless, human existence remains dominated by wage labour, property relations, and value accumulation. Amidst all the profound historical shifts, the misery of employment remains constant: workers in Amazon's warehouses – as contemporary a workplace as you could imagine – are subject to intense surveillance and control, with many too fearful of their productivity quotas to even use the bathroom. No joke: only recently, various companies have begun *microchipping* their workers to keep track of them better. The opportunity to vote for a black or female head of state, or for queers to marry or join the military, poses little threat to the operation of business as usual. If anything, it only strengthens the liberal paradigm, allowing people to convince themselves – despite the gap between rich and poor growing consistently worldwide, as well as each new day dragging us closer to the brink of ecological meltdown – that somehow things are actually getting better. Decades of alleged ideological progress, only to be met with the turning of a circle: the basic features of authoritarian society, at least as strong as they were a century ago.

Such is the impasse we're faced with. Taken by itself, class struggle fails to account for the complexity of oppression, attempting to subsume each of its forms into the monolithic category

of economic exploitation. Identity politics, on the other hand, breaks out of this formula, yet only by abandoning any semblance of a revolutionary perspective. Rather than collaborating to produce a tangible threat to the existent, therefore, all that class struggle and identity politics did was swap their problems. Both trends offer their own vital insights, but neither charts the possibility of new worlds altogether – not even close.

The prism of social hierarchy

Amidst these broad historical shifts, the last decades of struggle have also seen a critique of social hierarchy becoming increasingly influential, particularly within anarchist circles. Writers like Murray Bookchin described hierarchies as including *any* social relation that allows one individual or group to wield power over another. In his words:

> By hierarchy, I mean the cultural, traditional and psychological systems of obedience and command, not merely the economic and political systems to which the terms class and State most appropriately refer. Accordingly, hierarchy and domination could easily continue to exist in a "classless" or "Stateless" society. (*The Ecology of Freedom*, 1982)

What Bookchin offers here is a lens for understanding society that explicitly exceeds Marxist and anarchist orthodoxies, especially the class reductionism. This isn't a matter of doing away with the struggle against the state and capital, given that both institutions are as hierarchical as any. Rather, the point is to recognise that additional hierarchies – those based, for example, on relations of race, gender, sexuality, age, ability, and species – cannot be entirely contained within the narrow categories either of economic exploitation or political coercion. Various hierarchies existed before the advent of both class and the state, be it the hierarchy of men over women, the old over the young, or humans over other animals. And they will continue to exist in the future, too, even within ostensibly radical circles, unless we make a concerted effort to undermine them in the now. What we need is a broader focus for our resistance, one that includes a deep concern for the old targets without being limited by them. A social critique based on hierarchy offers this distinctly horizontal outlook, combining an appreciation of the holism of domination with the refusal to single out any one of its axes as primary.

This is no call to do away with class analysis altogether. The broad, materially focused analyses of theorists like Marx remain useful for explaining how economic factors motivated much of the development of oppressive relations. Nor can we forget that, were it not for the invention of the state, the normalisation of these relations to such a staggering extent would have been impossible. But we need to appreciate these insights without going overboard, mistakenly taking either class or the state to be *the* crux of social domination. Treating any single form of oppression as primary (almost always the one we just happen to feel closest to) is all too often a cheap excuse for sidelining the others. And this problem isn't somehow abstract or peripheral, either, but denotes one of the main reasons many resistance movements seem incapable of relating to broader sections of society nowadays. Only by granting equal consideration to all oppressions can the struggle begin to maximise its inclusivity, accommodating those people – in fact, the vast majority of people – whose experiences and wellbeing have already been marginalised everywhere else.

Unlike identity politics, however, what keeps the critique of hierarchy from trailing off into reformism is that it nonetheless locates all oppressions within a single power structure. Only this time it's hierarchy, not class, that frames the discussion as such. You can explain patriarchy, for example, not only as a specific form of oppression, but also as something that arises from a set of relations that includes gender whilst vastly exceeding it. Because there's something inherent in patriarchy that permeates all other instances of oppression, and that thing is its core structure – specifically, its *hierarchical* structure. Patriarchy can be summarised simply as gender hierarchy; white supremacy, meanwhile, is a specific kind of racial hierarchy; the state is the hierarchy of government over the general population; capitalism is the hierarchy of the ruling class over the working class; and so on. It's impossible to imagine an instance of oppression that isn't grounded in exactly this kind of setup, namely, an institution that grants one section of society arbitrary control over another. Which is to say that all oppressions, no matter how diverse, presuppose the very same asymmetrical power relations, each of them subordinating the needs of one group to the whims of another. Everything from homelessness, to pollution, to transgender suicides can thus be revealed not as isolated issues, but instead as flowing from a common source. What we're dealing with, basically, is a single problem: social hierarchy is a hydra with many heads, but only one body.

Some might approach this description with caution, as if it were just another attempt to reduce all oppressions to one. But the critique of hierarchy isn't reductionist in the Marxian sense: rather than singling out any one form of oppression as more fundamental than the others, it merely emphasises the *structure* they all assume. This kind of bigger-picture thinking hardly means failing to realise what's unique to every liberation struggle, as if to subsume them into some amorphous whole; the point is only to emphasise particularities without getting bogged down in them. That means combining an intimate knowledge of different oppressions with a broader understanding of those features they all hold in common, including the very real pain, exclusion, and destruction of potential each entails. In other words, every form of oppression, aside from being a problem in itself, must also serve as a gateway for entering the clash with social hierarchy as a whole.

It can be easy to feel overwhelmed by the sheer breadth of issues we're facing – that is, if we're going to approach them one by one. But this isn't the only option open to us. Framing the discussion in terms of hierarchy (already common sense for many) offers that broad, revolutionary perspective we've lost sight of, locating all oppressions within a single power structure. Yet it does so in a way that refuses to prioritise any particular aspects of that structure, thereby balancing the key virtues of class struggle and identity politics.

Revolutionary struggle in the 21st century calls out to a new horizon. It's time to strive beyond mere economic destinations such as socialism or communism, just as the absence of formal political institutions like the state will never be enough. Rather, what matters here is bringing about *anarchy* – the absence of mastery *of any kind* – in the fullest sense of the word. The anarchist project must thereby be distinguished from the antiquated goals of Marxists, as well as the Left more generally: the point is to dismantle oppression in *all* possible forms, and it means taking the maxim seriously, too, instead of cashing it out as just another empty slogan. Be wary, comrades. Who knows what adventures could result from such an audacious proposal?

2: The greening of revolution

Animal liberation

There's a certain volatility to resisting oppression in all forms. This is exactly the kind of project that can easily run away from you, vastly exceeding one's familiar terrain. Let's do our best to keep up: throughout the last decades, one of the most distinctive developments amongst social struggles in the West has been a dawning of concern for other animals and the environment. Many radicals have been keen to drag their heels, passing off the oppression of nonhumans as irrelevant to our prospects for revolution; the Left, after all, is firmly rooted in the humanist ideals of the Enlightenment, something unquestioningly reproduced by Marxism as well as orthodox anarchism. Yet the weighty tradition of a bygone era is no excuse for closing down possibilities in the present. The critique of social hierarchy, besides deepening the scope of human liberation, applies just as well beyond our own species boundary: animal and earth liberation are no less integral to the new revolutionary mosaic than any other aspect of the struggle.

The first half of the greening of revolution – animal liberation – can be traced somewhat to the onset of the radical animal rights movement in the UK. As early as the 1960s, hunt saboteurs had been intervening to disrupt bloodsports across the country, focusing on the legally sanctioned practice of fox hunting. From the outset, this cultivated an understanding, realised by so many liberation struggles in the past, that the law was designed to protect the exploiters and therefore had to be broken. This brimming emphasis on direct action – on achieving political goals outside of mediation with formal institutions – was then gradually applied to an ever broader spectrum of targets. Not only were hunts targetted whilst underway, their facilities and vehicles were often sabotaged as well, the point being to prevent the hunt from beginning at all. During the early '70s, one group of hunt sabs based in Luton – calling themselves the "Band of Mercy" – even began attacking hunting shops, chicken breeders, and vivisection suppliers. Perhaps most memorably, in 1973, the Band burned down a vivisection lab under construction near Milton Keynes, pioneering the use of arson for the purposes of animal liberation.

Such activity soon gave rise to an even more formidable threat. In 1976, members of the Band of Mercy created the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), calling for the application of sabotage tactics to prevent *any* form of animal exploitation. More of a banner than an actual organisation, anyone can do an action and claim it as the ALF, so long as they adhere to a few basic principles. Lacking official members or branches, the front is composed mainly of small, autonomous affinity groups; acting in the style of a clandestine guerilla movement, participants strike mainly under the cover of darkness, only to subsume themselves back within the population at large. This informal, leaderless terrain of struggle is exactly what allowed the resistance to proliferate so effectively, all the while minimising the risk of state repression. Hundreds of thousands of raids have been completed worldwide, liberating countless animals from the facilities that enslave them, either by transporting them to sanctuaries or simply releasing them into the wild. No less, those profiting from the misery have suffered incalculable losses, with the companies

targetted – vivisection labs, livestock breeders, fur farms, factory farms, slaughterhouses – often being driven straight out of business. The vast majority of these raids have resulted in zero apprehensions.

Amidst a steady decline in courage and militancy from the Left over the last decades, groups such as the ALF have often been exactly the ones to keep the flame of revolutionary struggle alive. Rather than biding time with parliamentary procedures or marches that go in circles, the ALF refuse to wait for historical conditions to improve, instead setting out to immediately begin dismantling the physical infrastructure social hierarchy depends upon to function. We're faced with an age in which power has no centre: revolution isn't merely a matter of storming palaces, but also of confronting this order of misery on every front, especially those most blatantly ignored in the past.

Every single day, literally millions of animals are confined, mutilated, and killed for the purposes of food, clothing, entertainment, physical labour, and medical research. Were it humans being massacred as such, the death count would exceed that of many holocausts – merely in a matter of hours. Of course, it *isn't* humans on the other side of the barbed wire, so we turn our backs to their wretched treatment, quite confident such concerns just don't matter. Yet that's quite the grave response: what on earth if we're wrong?

The most influential case for the baselessness of this indifference came from Peter Singer in the book *Animal Liberation* (1975). Centring on a seminal discussion of the notion of speciesism, the term is there defined as "a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species." To this liberal definition, we could add that speciesism, aside from manifesting in the dispositions of individuals, is strongly rooted in a pervasive ideological framework – reproduced by institutions such as mass media, the law, and public education – that serves to detach humanity from the enslavement of billions of animals. Indeed, many professed radicals continue to cast aside the topic of anti-speciesism, even if they're committed to fighting oppressions like racism or sexism. Yet that makes little sense, given that each of these relies on the very same logic: a particular group is morally excluded not on the basis of their actually held capacities, but simply because they appear to be members of a different biological category. Clearly we would reject this kind of reasoning in the case of assertions of white supremacy over non-whites – skin colour just isn't a morally relevant quality. What needs to be noticed, though, is that speciesism operates in almost exactly the same way; the only difference is that it singles out species, not race, as the relevant biological category.

That said, few would admit to maintaining such a crude speciesist outlook. The assumption here – again, as with white supremacy – is that the relevant moral exclusion is grounded in science, not prejudice. In particular, the capacity to reason is normally singled out as the prime candidate for justifying human supremacy. Such an approach contends that, rather than relying on an arbitrary biological category to distance ourselves from other species, we're instead doing so on the basis of our actually held capacities. But this commonplace justification is really nothing more than a ruse. Far from being an inherent aspect of human cognition, the capacity to reason is merely a trait that *most* of us hold (and to varying degrees). There are many humans who lack the capacity for abstract cognition, such as ordinary infants and adults with certain mental disabilities; however, no one serious about fighting oppression would take that as an excuse for their moral exclusion, especially not if it meant treating them as we do other animals. That can only mean that rationality isn't what we really care about when making moral considerations –

rationality is just an excuse. The thing that matters here is sentience: the capacity to feel both pleasure and pain.

It should go without saying that sentience is accessible not only to humans, but also the vast majority of nonhuman animals. Nor is the kind of sentience involved here some watered down version of the human experience. Many or even most animals lead extremely rich emotional lives, characterised intensely by all the highs and lows that colour our own states of mind, including excitement, joy, awe, respect, empathy, boredom, embarrassment, grief, loneliness, anxiety, fear, and despair. In other words, access to all the feelings that have defined the best and worst moments of our lives – that determine most fundamentally whether one's life is worth living – vastly transcends the boundaries of our own species. Animals are aware of the world, and of their place within it; their lives are intrinsically valuable, irrespective of what they can do for us. To morally exclude them on the basis of species membership is only the kind of thinking that sets aside skin colour as a valid justification for human slavery. But we can't deny the logic of domination in one case whilst relying on it so whimsically in another: animal liberation must be fought for just as ardently as we fight for our own.

Anthropocentrism was suited to an age in which most believed God to have created humans in His own image, commanding us to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." Come the 21st century, however, numerous leaps in human understanding – the Copernican revolution, Darwin's theory of evolution, Freud's theory of the unconscious – have significantly dethroned the idea that human culture somehow inhabits a world apart from Nature. Clearly we differ from other animals in many of our cognitive abilities, but this is a matter of degree, not kind; our evolutionary history merely upgraded the mental functions already present amongst nonhumans for millions of years, rather than conferring humanity with radically unique capacities. Other animals are able, if only to a lesser extent, to grasp language, demonstrate self-awareness, use tools, inhabit complex societies, appreciate humour, and enact rituals around death. Not only that, many seem to easily outdo humans when it comes to the capacities of memory, navigation, and sociability. In terms of ecological integration, finally, any notions of human supremacy start to get embarrassing: bees pollinate so many of the world's plants, phytoplankton photosynthesise half of its oxygen, fungi and bacteria are the primary decomposers of organic matter. And what of the human contribution to the planetary community? The highlights include climate change, radioactive waste, and the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Apparently narcissism marches in lock-step with incompetency: the idea that Nature somehow requires the imposition of human order has only ever meant her ruination, and that all too clearly includes our own.

To make something explicit, though, note that it's not *humanity* that's laying waste to the very fabric of life. Vulnerable human groups hardly stand to benefit from speciesism; animal agriculture, for example, is the leading cause both of water pollution and carbon emissions, besides being responsible for some of the most atrocious workplaces on earth. All so that capitalism can supply its human captives with so-called "food" loaded with growth hormones and antibiotics. In essence, all creatures who find their home on this dear planet, including those oppressed within our own species, suffer in common at the hands of a disease – equal parts antisocial and ecocidal – called social hierarchy. This is the moment to abandon our speciesist assumptions, from which the disconnection of human and animal liberation struggles results. The struggle for liberation admits of no final frontiers.

Earth liberation

The emergence of animal liberation has been mirrored by an additional trend, no less vital for the ongoing greening of revolution: earth liberation. In this case, the extension of political concern to nonhumans goes even beyond the domain of sentience, here being applied to ecosystems altogether, if not planet Earth as a whole. Many relate to the oppression of the land least easily, given that the value beholden to ecosystems is the most far removed from the kind we ourselves possess. Yet this stubborn attitude is doing us no favours: as we move into the thick of an uneasy century, for the first time unsure as to whether we'll even make it to the next, we can only begin to reconsider the human presumption of supremacy over all things.

Compared with the radical animal rights movement, the origin of radical environmentalism tells a different story, arising as it did in response to the failings of the mainstream movement. When Greenpeace, for example, was established in 1971, its explicit purpose was to overcome the conformity of groups like the Sierra Club and Friends of the Earth. But it wasn't long until Greenpeace, too, ended up looking like any old political party or corporation. By attempting to build a centralised mass movement, the bureaucratic division between campaigner and supporter was continually reinforced, swapping the commitment to direct action for an uninspired focus on fundraising. The radical image was maintained as a winning advertising technique, even though illegal actions were typically condemned in favour of institutional engagement. Actual change was supposed to be brought about not by ordinary people, but instead by lawyers and business-people, their salaries (and indifference) soon growing out of all proportion. Despite access to untold funds and resources, therefore, groups like Greenpeace failed to offer much trouble to the growing surge of environmental devastation, often halting certain projects only at the expense of openly endorsing others. The presumed sincerity of its founders were ultimately irrelevant: playing by the rules of a system that takes economic growth as inviolable can only mean complicity in the ecocide.

Faced with this largely symbolic environmentalism, one definitive response was the formation of Earth First! in 1980. Set up initially in the US, and spreading internationally a decade later, the point was to exceed the limitations of the mainstream movement by focusing instead on grassroots organising and direct action. This opened up a terrain of struggle in which dialogue with the state, and bureaucratic procedures more generally, became completely unnecessary. Committed from the start to offer "No compromise in defence of Mother Earth," Earth First! encouraged people to take matters into their own hands, quite aware that obeying the law would only guarantee defeat. In doing so, countless ecosystems were protected from the likes of logging, damming, and road-building, in spite of activists having never spent an hour in a boardroom meeting. To note, similar direct action tactics were already being used, for example, by anti-nuclear activists in Germany and the UK; yet Earth First! made a point of applying this approach much more broadly, setting out not only to oppose new projects, but also to roll back the frontiers of industrial civilisation altogether.

Another key event in the development of radical environmentalism was the creation of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) in the UK, 1992. Modelled along the lines of the ALF, the ELF set about utilising the very same emphasis on informal organisation and sabotage, only this time in the defence of the environment. This allowed aboveground groups like Earth First! to publicly dissociate itself from more militant actions, concentrating instead on mass demonstrations and civil disobedience, even though strong ties were maintained between the two movements. The

ELF soon spread capillary-style across the globe, firstly throughout Europe, and then to North and South America. From the forests of Khimki and Hambacher, to the sprawling metropolises of Mexico City, Santiago, and Jakarta, the fires lit for earth liberation continue to land on fertile ground; hundreds of millions of dollars worth of damage have been caused to ecocidal industries, including targets such as logging infrastructure, biotechnology labs, power lines, retail sites, car dealerships, luxury residential projects, and ski resorts. Already in 2001, the effectiveness of the ELF had been confirmed beyond all doubt, with the FBI declaring them "the top domestic terror threat" in the US, despite having never caused physical harm to a single living being.

What set groups like Earth First! and the ELF apart from the mainstream movement was not, however, merely a matter of tactics. In many cases, the refusal to compromise on the defence of the planet was underpinned by a philosophy Arne Næss called "deep ecology," namely, the view that ecosystems possess value in and of themselves, irrespective of their utility for human beings. As a replacement for anthropocentrism, Næss endorsed biocentrism, the idea that life itself is the locus of moral value, and that such value is equal in weight to that which we ourselves possess. The human experience is but a single facet of a vast, interconnected web of life, all members of which – from forests, to insects, to mountains, to oceans – have just as much right to exist and flourish as we do. Biocentrism thus contends that richness and diversity within the biosphere can be reduced only in order to satisfy the most vital of human needs. The exploitative assumption that wilderness is wasted unless made profitable must be turned on its head: the wild is intrinsically valuable, whether or not humans are there to enjoy it. *Life exists for itself, not merely for us.*

Deep ecological thinking is often contrasted with what Næss described as "shallow ecology," which is the tendency to respect the need for ecological protection, but only insofar as doing so can be justified as promoting human interests. All that shallow ecology offers, therefore, is a more prudent take on anthropocentrism: given that our own long-term survival as a species is dependent (to a degree) on a healthy environment, it would be foolish to devastate it too severely. Which might sound like a benign view, but it brings with it severe implications. If ecological concern is taken only as a means towards promoting human wellbeing, it follows that, in those cases in which the two fail to coincide, no basis whatsoever can be provided for worrying about the environment. Without adopting a deep ecological position, we couldn't explain, for example, what the problem would be with wiping out every last trace of wilderness on earth, presuming that doing so had no adverse effect on humans. Nor should we see anything wrong with the idea of artificially altering global weather on purpose, so that rain or sunshine could be triggered with the touch of a button. Neither does shallow ecology treat climate change as a problem in itself, meaning that, if humans could somehow relocate to another planet in the future, we could quite happily choke this one to death.

These are only thought experiments, but for most of us they stir an important intuition, rooted in the part of ourselves that hasn't yet been fully domesticated: humanity is but a part of Nature, with no higher right to inhabit reality than anything else. Besides, there's something about shallow ecology that's inherently paradoxical: an authentically ecological sensibility can only be grounded in respect for the horizontal symbiosis of all life, something that treating the earth merely as a pool of human resources necessarily violates.

Whilst the terminology invented by deep ecology is recent, however, the wisdom it invokes is not. As long-standing ALF/ELF warrior Rod Coronado explains, in light of his Native American heritage: "The world that our people come from and that still exists for many indigenous people –

and non-indigenous people too, if they choose to recognise it – is a world that sees every human being, every animal being, every plant being, as part of a whole and equal to each other." Understanding deep ecology isn't so much a matter of learning something new, but of *remembering* that which was once as obvious as anything. The intrinsic value of life itself must be rediscovered and fought for until the bitter end, not as a distraction from other liberation struggles, but instead as an inseparable component of a single, multifaceted fight against all forms of oppression. The last few decades divided the struggle; at this point, these separate strands are invited to converge, offering a glimpse of an entirely new revolutionary horizon.

Some of the most revolutionary texts penned in recent decades – think of Alfredo Bonanno or the Invisible Committee – possess at their core a profound affirmation of life. This is exactly what inspires that eagerness to see the existent cast in flames: the order that professes to rule over us is, in essence, a system of death, capable of persevering only to the extent it grinds down all that's wild and free. Far too often, though, an appreciation of this sentiment is limited to a discussion of human life, forgetting that life *in general* is what's really at stake. By reproducing human supremacy within revolutionary struggles – that is, by predicating the liberation of our own species on the enslavement of all others – we fail to challenge the common enemy on every front, inviting it to recuperate where our backs are turned. The struggles for human and nonhuman liberation do not compete, precisely because they aren't separate. In the 21ˢᵗ century, the only fault line that splits the entirety of society, including each of us, is that which affirms life compared with that which destroys it.

3: One struggle, one fight

Economy and ecocide

Both animal and earth liberation offer key footholds in the imagination, but we're not there yet. You could say anti-speciesism and deep ecology are revolutionary, yet not necessarily in a political sense, only a moral one. Indeed, the best-known thinkers of both movements – Peter Singer and Arne Næss – sought to analyse the oppression of other animals and the earth in isolation from a critique of the state and capital, taking it for granted that the system isn't *inherently* ecocidal. Both intellectual movements – themselves outcomes of the New Left – thereby found themselves looking at oppression in a way suspiciously similar to identity politics, offering practical proposals focused around personalistic evolution and legislative change. The corresponding activist movements have, of course, often utilised much more radical tactics, but even militant strategies run a certain risk: promoting animal or earth liberation in separation from an assault on social hierarchy overall.

The theory of social ecology introduced by Bookchin is extremely useful here. The point of social ecology, as the term suggests, is to provide a combined analysis of social *and* ecological issues. More specifically, Bookchin argued that the domination of the natural world is rooted in domination within society, especially hierarchies such as the state, capitalism, and patriarchy. The ways in which humans mistreat nonhumans are in so many ways an extension of how humans mistreat one another; hence, rampant hierarchy between ourselves can only lead to the subjugation of life in general. It's no coincidence that those societies most heavily burdened by economic inequality are almost always the ones that treat their environment the worst. Nor should we expect a liberal response, one focused on piecemeal reforms and consumer choice, to effectively challenge the devastation. On the contrary, achieving balance within Nature is one and the same with creating a nonhierarchical society, which is exactly why most social ecologists pose *social revolution* as the only viable response to the growing environmental crisis. In short, this world cannot be made green: promoting sound ecology means creating new worlds altogether.

The ecological problems inherent in capitalism are amongst the most urgent to consider. It's becoming increasingly impossible to ignore the ecocidal tendencies of the dominant mode of production; far from being an outcome merely of this or that version of capitalism, however, the devastation of the natural world stems from its simplest and most irrevocable features. The basic motor driving capitalist production is the need for businesses to generate profit. And profit is generated by converting natural resources into products that are sold on the market. Moreover, businesses will be successful, in the eyes of capitalist logic, to the extent they're profitable. Which means that the success of the capitalist economy equates, roughly speaking, to the extent to which it uses up natural resources. The fact that businesses are incentivised to use these resources as efficiently as possible (less money spent on purchasing and processing them) makes little difference, given that any sound business will merely reinvest the money saved into consuming

even more, thereby maximising profit. The basic equation is thus, on the one hand, that more production means more profit, and also that more production means more ecocide.

Capitalism offers no hope of a way out. Its need for growth is absolutely insatiable. Without achieving constant economic expansion, any business tempts the possibility of recession or even bankruptcy, inviting competitors to undercut its share of the market. With the economy as a whole, too, the mere failure to maintain endless growth is defined as a crisis. To even consider a limit to the conversion of our living, breathing environment into mere stuff speaks a foreign language to a corporation.

It's no mystery that the vast majority of the natural world has already been destroyed, as is one and the same with the smooth functioning of the capitalist machine. And what a hideous notion of "wealth" it offers: collapsed fisheries, wiped out forests, chewed up landscapes, topsoil turned to dust, fossil fuel reserves bled dry. Far from slowing down, no less, the rate of depletion is only speeding up, exactly as the mantra of constant growth requires. Since the Industrial Revolution, especially, we've been living well beyond our means, something that's only risen enormously since the mid-20ᵗʰ century. The economic demand for higher levels of consumption has been met with an exponentially rising global population of consumers, as well as the flooding of the market with ever more useless crap, but it can't go on like this forever. We're hurtling towards a crunch of one sort or another, and one of two things must go: either capitalism, or the planet.

Life and the economy exist in a fundamental state of tension with one another. To the extent that the health of one is coextensive with the devastation of the other. We're never far from the latest report either of a catastrophic oil spill or endangered species being driven to extinction, nor another "revelation" as to the living hell of factory farms. Yet the basic contradiction of liberal discourse is to bemoan these horrors whilst refusing to question the economic conditions that necessitate them. We need to be outraged without being surprised: the cause of such abject abuse can only be a mode of production that disregards everything irrelevant to the generation of profit. Economists describe those factors unconducive to immediate growth simply as "externalities," unintelligible to capitalist logic and utterly devoid of concern. Carbon emissions, for example, are released into the atmosphere merely as a side-effect of industrialised production; given that there's no economic incentive to avoid this outcome, any hope of an alternative is quite futile. Even the very real threat of climate change – the imminent ruination of life as we know it – fails to offer a conceivable problem for the economy. The laws of the market literally deem it irrational to deal with such a problem, given that any corporation would be bankrupt long before the prevention of catastrophe offered the chance of a return to its shareholders. Nor can we expect capitalist governments to intervene effectively instead, precisely because their success, too, is measured first and foremost with respect to short-term economic growth.

It might seem a strange thing, therefore, that most people find themselves going along with business as usual. Yet there's an important explanation here, and that's "green capitalism" – the vilest of oxymorons. Green capitalism can be summarised as the idea that the market can be used to fix the deepening environmental crisis. It began gaining influence in the Global North in the '80s, largely in response to a combination of two factors: on the one hand, corporations realised that many consumers possessed a newfound, sincere desire to protect the environment; on the other hand, however, the majority of these consumers seemed to prefer an environmentalism compatible with the preservation of normality. In particular, green capitalism appeals to the expectation that the health of the planet be maintained alongside our resource-intensive lifestyles, cemented amongst the burgeoning Western middle class throughout the 20ᵗʰ century. But re-

ally this indulgence is only the ultimate form of consumerism, putting a price-tag even on the sense of moral righteousness. As the planet suffocates, the solution offered by green capitalism is to consume *even more*, as if we're honestly expected to believe that organic meat, hybrid cars, and energy-saving lightbulbs are going to save us. Most people simply cannot afford the luxury of appeasing their guilt whilst the environment is ravaged. And even if we somehow could, it wouldn't make much of a difference, given that the overwhelming majority of pollution – including greenhouse gases – is emitted only by a relatively small group of corporations, not the sum of individual consumers. The green economy markets a million different things, yet each of them is only a different version of the same futile product: the hope the planet can be saved *without* attacking the economy.

All the talk of "sustainability" is but a distraction from questioning the unquestionable, painting over that which is fundamentally rotten. What's really being sustained here is capitalism, not the planet. Even an allegedly renewable capitalist economy – one based, for example, on industrial solar, wind, or tidal power – would just be another means of powering a system that, at its core, is both antisocial and ecocidal. All the idea offers is a greenwashed version of what we already have: a monopoly on energy held by corporations and the state, resource-intensive consumption for privileged members of society, and the inevitable exhaustion of what little remains of the living planet. Moreover, we can hardly be sure a shift towards renewables would stop climate change, even if most governments somehow agreed to it. It's highly doubtful whether the global economy could be fundamentally restructured in time to avert catastrophe. Nor should we assume that, compared with maintaining a reliance on fossil fuels, such immense construction efforts won't actually release significantly more carbon emissions in the short-term, marring our efforts in the decisive years ahead of us.

There's no limit to the hollow excuses the defenders of the existent will throw at us. But now is the time to be done with them, decisively parting ways with the certainties of this world, which nowadays offer but the certainty of extinction. For biodiversity to outlast the century, humanity must dare to call into question the economy itself. Which is often an unthinkable task, given that the economy has been the main beneficiary of the religious urge, eagerly seeking new form since the death of God – the steady withdrawal of theism as a stabilising moral force. Yet there's no chance for redemption here. No afterlife in which to seek salvation, nor another planet to escape to. The economy needs to be destroyed. It has to be torn down completely. Or else it will only arrive at its destination, completing its suicidal dash for the cliff edge, taking each of us with it.

Destroying the economy isn't a matter of forgetting about meeting our everyday material needs, as if to do away with economic considerations altogether. What it does mean is realising that *the* economy – the subsumption of the totality of our needs within a single, monolithic, globalised system of production – could never be squared with the perseverance of life. Levelling this structure is a process of reclaiming the conditions of existence, piece by piece, by localising and demassifying them. It's a call to form communes aimed at self-sufficiency, each of them striving to meet its material needs – food, energy, accommodation, and so on – wholly within the means of what they can produce for themselves. Which is a political undertaking as much as an ecological one, given that the autonomy of any community is surely inseparable from it being the source of its own potency, its own vitality. Anything short of that risks one of two things: either dependence on an external body for your most basic needs, or else the necessity of outward expansion, defined in equal parts by imperialism and ecocide.

More specifically, taking apart the economy is synonymous with dismantling the institution of private property. Communising the means of production has often been recognised as the material basis of human autonomy, given that, as long as we lack direct access to the resources needed to survive and flourish, there's no choice but to accept the exploitative terms of work dictated by the ruling class. What's more rarely recognised, however, is just how relevant the critique of property is to the liberation of *nonhuman* life. The domination of animals and the land is facilitated primarily by their legal status as human property, something that confers our mastery over them. Animal liberation would be unthinkable without pushing back the frontiers of property relations, as was the case with resistance to other forms of slavery, including the trans-Atlantic slave trade and many traditional forms of marriage. Earth liberation, moreover, describes the completion of this historical progression, entailing the abolition of property altogether. There's no doubt that using the land respectfully is compatible with appreciating its intrinsic value; by contrast, treating it as property – that is, *owning it* – necessarily declares an inferior status. In this sense, animal and earth liberation, far from being even slightly reconcilable with capitalism, begin to look inseparable from the communist project.

As far as destroying the economy goes, though, the state would never allow it. Not willingly. To refer to the state as distinct from the economy might well be an overstatement; at the very least, the needs of the economy constitute its supreme law. Even avowedly radical political parties – social democratic alternatives to austerity, for example – purport to serve the economy *even better* than the status quo itself. No departure from this logic is conceivable within the realm of politics. After all, the primary role of the state has always been to safeguard the needs of capital: it was at the forefront of the assimilation of the peasantry into the industrial proletariat, as well as the expansion of market relations across the globe. What you see nowadays, moreover, is the reinvention of this union for the secular age: whilst the state once tasked itself with representing the divine will, today it represents the economy, mediating between the masses and that which is sacrosanct, keeping our needs locked into the growth-imperative. There's an enduring temptation to think that state and economy can somehow be separated (most Marxists favour this approach, still serving up whichever reheated variant of the state socialist paradox). And yet, of all the stupid ideas tried out in the long, weary history of civilisation, few have claimed more lives than the anti-capitalist sympathy for statecraft. Either the state and the economy are confronted as one, or not at all.

To bring it back to social ecology with a simple summary, taking nonhuman liberation seriously means living our lives outside and against the system that engulfs us. The state and capital cannot be reformed or compromised with, because theirs is a nature that is fundamentally extra-terrestrial. Not in the sense, of course, that they originate from beyond this planet, but instead because their existence is inherently incompatible with that of the earth.

The time for timid critiques is over. This is the moment to make serious plans for desertion. At such an unforgiving moment in history, there can be no pretensions of neutrality: working for the economy can only mean complicity in our own annihilation. That leaves each of us with a vital choice, one between compliance with social hierarchy and the perseverance of life itself. Suddenly the phrase "revolution or death," tagged on a wall during Trump's inauguration, takes on a whole new meaning. There you have it: *revolution or death*.

Interconnections of oppression

The last section outlined the roots of nonhuman domination in human domination, according to the theory of social ecology. Yet to leave it at that fails to account for the converse relationship, namely, the sense in which human domination is equally predicated on nonhuman domination. The relationship between the two spheres is wholly reciprocal: neither plays a more integral role in the overall structuring of hierarchy. Which is important to clarify, or else we risk sidelining the task of nonhuman liberation, perhaps even deferring it until *after* the revolution. That would miss the point entirely: animal and earth liberation can't be dealt with afterwards, precisely because their liberation *is* the revolution. To prioritise human liberation over nonhuman liberation ensures we'll get neither.

This horizontal emphasis is distinctly missing for Bookchin. According to him, hierarchies between humans arose first historically, with hierarchies over nonhumans only later emerging as a consequence thereof. With somewhat comical irony, therefore, Bookchin rejected class reductionism only to replace it with an equally dangerous variant: the idea that ecological problems are a mere subsidiary of social problems, unworthy of concern in their own right. To be fair, the fact he spent so much time discussing ecology is already a clear improvement on Marx, for whom the topic was pretty much absent. Yet Bookchin still never treated nonhuman liberation as an end in itself: ecological domination was described wholly in terms of the problems it poses for humanity, whilst the domination of animals wasn't discussed at all. This corresponded with a consistent refusal to engage honestly either with deep ecology or anti-speciesism, leaving social ecology with a subtly anthropocentric interior. Apparently our treatment of nonhumans just wasn't considered a form of *oppression* in the first place.

Bookchin never even considered the possibility, for example, that speciesism might actually have been the first hierarchy (certainly the first form of prejudice) to become institutionalised in many pre-civilised communities millennia ago. Yet the predation of nonhuman animals was surely vital for everyday survival – for producing things like food and clothing – in a way that other forms of hierarchy, like those based on gender or age, simply were not. In other communities, of course, we might well suspect that hierarchies between humans crystallised first. But this is exactly the point: the development of hierarchy throughout the globe was surely quite messy, something that universally stating the primacy of human hierarchy grossly oversimplifies.

This thread warrants following: once you begin to seriously consider the historical significance of nonhuman domination, our capacity to understand the domination of humans deepens profoundly. You might even say we're offered the missing piece of the puzzle. One of the most important cases to consider here is the advent of civilisation itself, namely, the invention of mass culture based around cities and agriculture. Things weren't always this way: of the roughly 200,000 years in which human beings have existed, the vast majority were lived out in small groups of nomadic gatherer-hunters that lacked any notions of the state, class, money, borders, prisons, laws, or police. It was only at around 10,000 BC, in Mesopotamia, modern day Iraq, that these forms of life – sometimes described as "primitive communism" – began to be superseded by the Agricultural Revolution. Agriculture initiated the widespread cultivation of crops and domestication of nonhuman animals, generating a surplus of resources that encouraged cities to develop and human populations to rise. Here we see the invention of mass production, if not the economy itself, along with the ascension of the quantitative, calculating, expansionist mode of perception over human culture, the ability to understand value only in terms of the poten-

tial for exploitation. This shift also provoked the definitive emergence of the ugliest features of our behaviour, including slavery, imperialism, and genocide – often mistaken as brute outcomes of human nature. To claim that civilisation gave rise to hierarchy itself might be an overstatement, given that rudimentary hierarchies seem to exist amongst some (although by no means all) non-civilised peoples still scattered around the globe today. What civilisation did mean, however, was the intensification of hierarchy beyond all comprehension, allowing it to grow more violent, overbearing, and institutionalised than had ever been even remotely possible. It was thus with good reason that Fredy Perlman, following Thomas Hobbes, described this artificial beast as "Leviathan."

What needs to be emphasised is just how deeply these cultural changes were rooted in the domination of nonhumans. As of yet, non-civilised peoples offer some of the few examples of genuinely sustainable, ecologically harmonious human communities; the Agricultural Revolution, by contrast, can be summarised mainly in terms of the redefinition of human needs in opposition to those of the wild. No longer was the world conceived of as an undivided whole, but instead as something to be carved up and exploited. The land was altered dramatically, driven towards satisfying the needs of one species amongst billions; wild animals, meanwhile, were confined, tortured, and genetically altered beyond recognition. Nature herself, once understood as the mother of us all, was betrayed and degraded, recast instead as something dirty and evil. Whilst everything Leviathan touched soon turned to dust: the once verdant, ecologically diverse landscapes of Mesopotamia, the Levant, North Africa, and Greece were transformed largely into deserts by a combination of monocropping, cattle grazing, and logging, never again to return to their former state of untamed abundance.

The interplay between nonhuman and human domination also occurred in a number of even more direct ways. Herds of livestock, as well as surpluses of stored grain, were likely the first instances both of capital and private property. The development of agriculture saw the division of labour intensify as well, with those who owned natural resources forming the original ruling class, and those who worked them – now dispossessed of the means of generating their own nourishment – forming the working class. The invention of the state simultaneously became necessary to enforce this distinction between included and excluded. Moreover, it's surely no coincidence that the region of Sumer, Mesopotamia, saw not only the invention of widespread animal domestication, but also the earliest known instances of human slavery; presumably the former normalised practices such as confinement and forced labour, enabling them to be applied more easily to marginalised human groups, especially defeated foreigners. The expansion of Leviathan into new areas would also have been unthinkable without the surplus of food and rising populations generated by agriculture. Just as those civilisations most adept at animal domestication, particularly in service of warfare and transportation, possessed the military edge necessary to subdue these areas most effectively.

A similar story has played out throughout history, especially with respect to the practice of colonialism. Some of the most definitive examples here were significantly rooted in the domination of animals and the land. The extermination of Native American Indians in North America, for example, was largely based in an interest in expanding the international trade of leather, wool, and fur. The Mexican-American War was significantly motivated by the profitability of acquiring grazing land for cattle, as with the British colonisation of Ireland over the centuries. In fact, this theme is no less noticeable today; just look at the recent attempt by Shell to subdue the Ogoni people of Nigeria, or the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline through Standing Rock –

both projects of the oil industry. Something similar can be said about the creeping genocides currently occurring in West Papua and the Amazon, motivated as they are mainly by an interest in extracting natural resources. The history of colonialism, in short, has always intimately combined the subjugation of humans, animals, and the earth.

The key conceptual links between human and nonhuman domination should also be emphasised. Ecofeminists have long since noticed that patriarchy is significantly rooted in a disdain for the natural world, especially the attempt to characterise women as being irrational, and thereby somehow less human than men. The same can be said of white supremacy, given that it tends to treat non-whites (especially non-civilised peoples) as being irrational, wild, or savage, and thereby of lesser moral status. The moral exclusion of various members of the human race – women, non-whites, the disabled, and so on – has always been tightly bound up with their dehumanisation.

You can trace such associations back as far as you like. In the West, anthropocentrism probably finds its most influential expression in what medieval Christian theologians, following Plato and Aristotle, termed the "Great Chain of Being." This categorised the entirety of the universe in hierarchical terms, with each aspect of being supposedly existing for the sake of its master. The chain leads down along a scale of lesser perfection, starting with God, then going through angels, kings, lords, serfs, animals, plants, and ending with inanimate matter. This scheme was decisive in legitimising the misery wrought by the feudal system; no less, the very foundation of the structure was human supremacy, divinely ordained in one and the same movement.

Make no mistake: anthropocentrism has played an integral part in some of the darkest moments of human history, even just in recent memory. In 1943, for example, Winston Churchill attempted to justify a famine in Bengal – wholly avoidable, yet killing millions – by blaming it on locals for "breeding like rabbits." Prior to the Rwandan genocide, 1994, Léon Mugesera used a decisive speech to characterise the Tutsis as "cockroaches" liable for extermination. In 2015, as refugees fleeing war found themselves met with the guns and barbed wire of our proud civilisation, David Cameron described as "swarms" those drowning in the Mediterranean. Just as Donald Trump, in 2018, attempted to rationalise the brutalisation of migrants at the US border on the basis that "these aren't people, they're animals." This kind of language – speciesist at its core – is so often lurking beneath the oppression of human groups. Although, to offer a final example, its perfection was surely attained only in the form of Nazi eugenics, certainly in terms of the rigorous formalisation of such associations both in science and in law. In this case, the persecution and mass murder of Jews, Slavs, Roma, homosexuals, and the disabled was based on their classification as literal subhumans; the logic internal to the Holocaust, in other words, was majorly founded upon a speciesist base. In so many cases, committing atrocities against human groups means taking for granted the status of nonhumans as the lowest of the low. Only by first attacking the most vulnerable amongst us do oppressive practices gain the breathing space necessary to expand.

In sum, no axis of domination can be passed off as secondary compared to the others. Even if we're a long way from understanding how all the parts fit together, what should be clear is that neither class, nor human relations in general, are somehow primary within the immense tangle of hierarchies we inhabit today. In essence, there's only one victim when it comes to the horror wrought by the system: *life itself.* Whether it's a question of the suicide netting surrounding iPhone factories, the futile panic of animals in the vivisection lab, or the deathly silence of a clear-cut forest, any really subversive discourse ends up putting *everything* into question.

A total liberation ethic

May 13, 1985, West Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Police Force launch a dawn raid on a suburban house, but clearly the occupants have no intention to leave. Over the course of the morning, about 500 cops fire over 10,000 rounds of ammunition at the house, combined with endless volleys of tear gas and even anti-tank rounds. The occupants hold out all the way into the afternoon, at which point the state makes the decision to bomb them with a military helicopter. Four pounds of plastic explosives are dropped onto the roof, which soon results in a vicious blaze, yet the police commissioner orders the fire department to keep well away. The house burns down, along with 65 others in the (predominantly black) neighbourhood. Only two of the occupants survive, with eleven of them – including five children – failing to outlast the day.

Those defending the house were a group called MOVE. Formed in 1972, MOVE were defined by their combination of black liberation and armed struggle with veganism and deep ecology. The group also balanced a focus on individual campaigns, such as those against local zoos and police brutality, with a broader emphasis on building community autonomy. The statements that outlive its founder, John Africa, speak for themselves, as with his claim that "Revolution means total change, a complete dissociation from everything that is causing the problems you are revolting against," as well as the group's assertion that they were fighting for "a revolution to stop man's system from imposing on life, to stop industry from poisoning the air, water, and soil and to put an end to the enslavement of all life." Africa happened upon biocentrism, too, even before Næss had written on the topic, as is confirmed by his claim that "All living beings, things that move, are equally important, whether they are human beings, dogs, birds, fish, trees, ants, weeds, rivers, wind or rain." In the history of social struggle in the West, MOVE were perhaps the first to commit in equal parts to the liberation of humans, animals, and the earth.

Despite being largely crushed by the state, reverberations of MOVE's struggle have been picked up here and there, gaining pace. A comparable ethic surfaced amongst the Zapatista National Liberation Army, a group comprised mainly of indigenous Maya fighting for land rights. On January 1, 1994, the Zapatistas declared war on the Mexican state, on the very day the North American Free Trade Agreement came into force. They seized large areas of the state of Chiapas, including the key city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, immediately collectivising the land. Despite eventually being forced into retreat by the Mexican army, the rebels were able to hold up in the mountains, consolidating control over many of their own rural communities. To this day, the autonomy carved out by the Zapatistas amidst the Lacandon Jungle has been successfully maintained, despite numerous incursions at the hands of the state. Which remains an ecological struggle as much as anything: from the outset, the Zapatistas emphasised that their own liberation as indigenous people was one and the same with the liberation of the land.

The front opened up by the Zapatistas was arguably but one in a much larger struggle, namely, the anti-globalisation movement. Peaking in intensity around the turn of the century, this worldwide struggle saw diverse participants – workers, students, indigenous peoples, radical environmentalists, animal rights activists – unite around a shared interest in opposing the expansion of global finance. The international summits of organisations such as the G8 and the World Trade Organisation were the obvious targets, with some of the most spectacular flashpoints including Seattle 1999, Prague 2000, and Genoa 2001. In many cases, moreover, superficial critiques of globalisation and imperialism deepened into resolute rejections of capitalism altogether, even if a frequent outcome was an inebriated expectation of some imminent world revolution. And

whilst the anti-globalisation movement is now largely behind us, it continues to offer a legacy focused around a grand convergence of struggles, something vital for taking things forward.

The '90s also saw Earth First! move towards a steadfast rejection of all oppressions, dropping the machismo and patriotism that had been present in some of the earlier days. Such a broadening in emphasis was particularly evident in the writings and activism of US member Judi Bari, who placed significant emphasis on the need for Earth First! to reach out to the working class, including timber workers. This marked the arrival at a distinctly revolutionary take on eco-defence, one informed by social ecology as much as deep ecology.

Around the same time, the ALF and ELF also began working ever more closely together, with the two movements becoming indistinguishable in many countries. The same activists would often participate in both fronts, merely swapping banners to suit the specifics of an action, whilst their aboveground networks mingled greatly. Not only that, the communiques published by various cells began making increased reference to the state and capital, confirming a focus that had shifted from targetting specific industries towards attacking the system as a whole. One communique, published during the beginning of ELF activity in the US, remains especially memorable:

> Welcome to the struggle of all species to be free. We are the burning rage of this dying planet. The war of greed ravages the earth and species die out every day. ELF works to speed up the collapse of industry, to scare the rich, and to undermine the foundations of the state. We embrace social and deep ecology as a practical resistance movement. (Beltane, 1997)

Diverse though they are, these developments help explain something quite striking: at some point during the last couple of decades, various radical animal rights and environmental activists committed to exceeding single-issue campaigning in favour of a holistic, revolutionary struggle against *all* forms of hierarchy. As Steve Best puts it, "it is imperative that we no longer speak of human liberation, animal liberation, or earth liberation as if they were independent struggles, but rather that we talk instead of *total liberation*" (*The Politics of Total Liberation*, 2014). No instance of oppression can be understood in separation from the whole: different hierarchies interact with one another profoundly, facilitating the domination of one group – human or nonhuman – in virtue of the domination of all others. And so, too, all genuine liberation struggles must recognise that, far from having disconnected goals, each of them depends on the success of the other.

Even though specific circumstances inevitably constrain what we can do as individuals, such efforts must be situated within a shared project that greatly exceeds our isolation. That means learning how to reach out beyond the current milieu in meaningful ways; it also means improving our own practices to make it possible for outsiders to reach back. The point isn't to subsume the struggle into a single organisation, a single identity, but instead to increase the density of ties between its various fronts, nourishing the strategic alliances and networks of mutual aid necessary to leave the common enemy in ruins.

There can be no quick fixes here. No utopias, perhaps no culminations at all. Truth be told, none of us are likely to witness a totally liberated world – that is, a planet entirely free of hierarchy. Nor can we be sure, from the current standpoint, if such a thing is even possible. There's no knowing what, if anything, is at the top of the hill; the beauty of the struggle, however, is realised in the very act of climbing. Total liberation isn't merely a destination, as if to separate the end goal from how we live our lives in the present. No, *total liberation is an immediate process.* It's the process

of confronting power not as something disconnected, but instead as a totality. It's one's refusal to condone any notions of a final frontier – not now, not ever. If anything absolute can be known about such a struggle, it's that it never ends. But ask not what total liberation can do for us in a hundred years: *the point is to realise its full intensity already now.*

It seems every generation thinks theirs will be the most remarkable, yet ours might just be the first that turns out to be right. To say this century is the most crucial our species has ever faced is actually an understatement: we're dealing with the most significant crisis life *in general* has faced, even amidst billions of years of evolution. We've entered the sixth period of global extinction, this one the first caused by a single species of animal. The rate of extinction amongst plants and animals is at least 1,000 times faster than before our arrival on the scene. The vast majority of wild animals have already been killed off. And that includes 90% of large fish vanishing from the oceans. From the air we breathe, to the water we drink – from the highest mountain peak, to the deepest of ocean trenches – the filth of this civilisation pervades it all. To be clear, the apocalypse isn't something foretold by a prediction: *it is already here.*

Death, of course, is fundamental to ecological wellbeing, because life could never be sustained without destruction and renewal. Yet the kind of death the system brings isn't in the slightest a matter of balance, but instead simply of wiping out. Social hierarchy is fundamentally at odds with the very basics of organic development, including diversity, spontaneity, and decentralisation. There's no longer any doubt that the system will crash, and hard. The important thing left to consider is merely how best to speed up the process, minimising the suffering yet to be wrought, maximising the potential for life to regenerate outside this unfathomable mess.

No compromise with the system of death. Toxic waste cannot be made nutritious, nor can their idea of life be made liveable. Our revolutionary task can only be the creation of our own worlds, destroying theirs in the process. This is exactly the historical moment we were born to inhabit: the apocalypse is already here, yet the extent to which it deepens is quite the open question. Anyone who listens carefully can hear the call.

4: Putting into practice

The limits of activism

What we have so far is a vision of total liberation. As of yet, however, it can only be admitted that this vision remains by and large a fantasy. Throughout *The Politics of Total Liberation*, Best speaks of the need for "radical, systemic, and comprehensive social changes, of a formidable revolutionary movement against oppressive global capitalism and hierarchical domination of all kinds." This clearly describes the struggle that resonates so deeply amongst many of those committed to animal and earth liberation. It confirms that total liberation must be *revolutionary* in order to gain substance at all. But, then again, we seriously have to ask: does the current trajectory of total liberation activism – contained as it is primarily within the terrain of activist campaigning – justify speaking in such terms? The answer to this question is surprisingly obvious, given how rarely it's admitted: we are *not* a revolutionary movement. For such ambitious rhetoric, our strategy leaves a lot to be desired; the state and capital aren't going to fall any time soon, least of all from our efforts.

It's not as if total liberation has no revolutionary content – what was said in the previous chapter contends that it certainly does. Yet this component refers mainly to something abstract and intangible, rather than anything significantly manifest in reality. Writing from behind bars rather than the comfort of academia, ALF prisoner of war Walter Bond offers an honest assessment:

> In my estimation Total Liberation should be making steps to unite various struggles in the real world against the common leviathan of government and towards the reality of free communities. Unfortunately, I don't see much grassroots organization around Total Lib. It remains, thus far, in the world of ideas, of salutations of solidarity. (Interview with *Profane Existence*, 2013)

Addressing this shortcoming is essential for moving forward. But it can also be an uncomfortable point, given that it means questioning the very basis of total liberation as it currently exists, namely, the method of activism itself. In the notorious pamphlet *Give up Activism* (1999), Andrew X argued that various direct action movements are held back by the widespread assumption of an activist mentality, where "people think of themselves primarily as activists and as belonging to some wider community of activists." We often look at activism as the defining feature of our lives, as if it were a job or a career. Yet such strong assumptions of political identity often hold us back, not merely because they obscure the important differences between us, but especially because they distance ourselves unnecessarily from the rest of the population. Rather than being members of the oppressed along with everyone else – ordinary people who just happen to be fighting back in our own way – we see ourselves instead as specialists in social change, somehow uniquely privileged in our ability and willingness to intervene.

This mentality immediately undermines the possibility of revolution: by implication, the rest of society is, in virtue of lacking activist specialisation, written off as an inherently passive mass.

Outsiders, in return, typically see us as weird cliques or inaccessible subcultures, often justifiably so. And what a strange outcome that offers: we've ended up doing the work of the mainstream media for them, isolating ourselves from society at large, paving the way for our repression to be met without broader resistance.

Such a dynamic is further solidified by the amount of practical specialisation often required for getting involved in activism. To paint a crude picture, the model activist is a highly trained, ideologically advanced being that utilizes a repertoire of skills, contacts, and equipment to effect social change. Those outsiders who see our struggle as relevant to their lives risk being excluded by such demanding requirements, particularly unrealistic if your life is already sufficiently burdened by everyday survival under capitalism. Even those with a chance of getting involved will need us to show them the way, which always encourages a hierarchical dynamic. Either we'll end up being the accidental vanguards of the revolution, or, more likely, our involvement will prove irrelevant to the sudden moments of upheaval that revolutionary change is defined by. The activist subculture has thus been relegated to a kind of bubble, floating around the edges of society, and winning victories here and there, yet remaining forever impossible for outsiders to get a firm grip on. Some would say this status even strengthens the liberal paradigm, given that we perfectly play the role of the annoying, fringe radicals the centre ground so gracefully tolerates, but only because we pose no real threat to its stability overall.

This introduction to the activist mentality can be refined in light of a second key limitation of activism: the focus on issue-based campaigning. The tendency with activism is to engage with power gradually, attempting to transform society one issue at a time. Normally a campaign will centre on a particular aspect of the economy – say, this specific slaughterhouse, or that form of energy extraction – rather than targetting the structure as a whole. This fine-grain approach certainly has its uses, allowing something as broad and abstract as social hierarchy to be confronted in its individual, concrete manifestations. Not to mention, halting the expansion of the capitalist machine (even just in one place) is always an important victory. The basic problem, however, is that issue-campaigning remains focused on achieving essentially reformist goals, intended merely to make the system more bearable. A multitude of different concerns – potentially revolutionary if taken as a whole – are condensed into a narrow range of issues, exactly the kind promoted by capitalist organisations such Greenpeace, PETA, or the Green Party. What makes a campaign radical might be that it employs militant tactics, or else opens up a space – usually a protest camp – in which to live out a holistic critique of power. Such endeavours are always bound to ruffle feathers. Yet the *primary* goal of a campaign – its basic target, which determines whether we "win" or "lose" – almost never stands to bring us any closer to dismantling capitalism. After all, preventing a forest from being turned into a coal mine is the kind of thing that sounds good to most liberals, even if the means we're willing to employ set us a world apart.

Even in the event of a victory, issue-campaigns often fail to improve the overall situation, with the devastation merely being shifted elsewhere. In Germany, for example, nuclear energy had been fought against already since the '70s, and in 2011 the campaign finally won, with the government announcing it would close down all nuclear power stations by 2022. However, the bigger-picture outcome was merely the economy shifting towards a greater reliance on brown coal, a form of resource extraction at least as ecocidal as nuclear power, especially with respect to climate change. A gradual phase out of coal mining seems increasingly likely in Germany; in particular, the ongoing Hambacher Forest occupation has played a vital role here. But a victory would only mean the economy shifting once again, only this time to fracking, or biomass, or tar

sands, or hydroelectricty, or industrial wind. Either that, or simply importing more coal from Russia – no problem. Such outcomes merely offer an inconvenience, maybe even an economic boost, leaving the deep structure of the highly flexible modern economy wholly in tact. Meanwhile, any anti-capitalist discourse contained within issue-campaigning is normally just empty rhetoric, failing to map onto tangible realities.

Some would respond, of course, that this critique is unfair. After all, total liberation activism was previously defined as rejecting single-issue campaigning in favour of a much broader revolutionary focus. This is exactly what Best, for example, offers in his proposal for an alliance politics that builds links between different liberation struggles, drawing them into a resolutely anti-capitalist trajectory. But this isn't a new idea, and it doesn't overcome the problems inherent in activism. Already two decades ago, we saw exactly that being attempted by the anti-globalisation "movement of movements," which rarely seemed to gain an honest grasp of what the destruction of capitalism might look like. In the aforementioned pamphlet, Andrew X clarified that such engagement merely amounts to making links *between* activist groups, not beyond them. The shift remains quantitative rather than qualitative, a matter of strengthening different campaigns, but not of exceeding a framework based around campaigning on issues in the first place. The challenge is that, besides simply increasing the personnel of the struggle, we need to find ways of deepening our engagement. Otherwise, total liberation cannot help but remain a kind of paradox, the revolutionary scope of its vision scraping hard against the reformism of its strategy.

That isn't to say, on the other hand, that we should give up on activism altogether. Any critiques here should be careful not to get carried away: activism has proven indispensable over the last decades, be it with keeping the global elite in check, opening up vital autonomous spaces, liberating millions of animals, or defending countless ecosystems. All of which continues to make a very real difference to an untold number of lives, revolution or no revolution. Not only is such activity valuable in itself, moreover, it's often kept the spirit of revolutionary struggle alive, incubating a libertarian, anti-capitalist consciousness within various direct action movements over the years. However, the basic problem is that activism remains tailored for an era in which the overall stability of the system was taken as a given. If we no longer consider ourselves to live in such a context – *if we're honestly ready to experience what lies beyond it* – then we need to exceed the current formula.

Despite offering a theory that questions everything, total liberation remains hampered by a practice that changes a great deal less. How do we bridge this gap between vision and strategy? That is, how do we make total liberation a *revolutionary* movement? At last, and in the middle of this piece, no less, we've arrived at our central problem.

The collapse of workerism

Of course, some would have it that we never lost a revolutionary perspective at all, quite confident they had the solution all along. This comes in the form of workerism, a broad set of strategies – mainly Marxist or anarcho-syndicalist – that affirm the centrality of the working class for overthrowing capitalism. In the history of revolutionary struggle, few ideas have consistently held more sway; but surely that's only the reason why this sorely outdated approach has proven so hard to get over. Things have changed more dramatically than ever in the last decades, shatter-

ing the material conditions that once granted workplace organisation such grandiose pretensions. It's important to clarify why, or else the attempt to exceed activism risks being subsumed by yet another reformist method, this one all the more stagnant.

Only a few decades ago, the prospects of organised labour in the Global North were much more hopeful, with trade unions retaining a great deal of strength into the 1970s. Mainly during the '80s, however, capitalist production underwent some major alterations. Profound technological developments in the field of electronics – especially digitisation – caused the productive process to become much more automated, requiring significantly less human input. This combined with an increased ability on the part of employers to outsource employment to less economically developed countries, where labour was much cheaper. Fairly suddenly, therefore, the two biggest sectors of the economy – split mainly between industry and agriculture – were greatly reduced in size, resulting in massive layoffs. Yet those who lost their jobs were generally absorbed by steady growth in the services sector, thereby avoiding immediate social destabilisation. Whilst it was once the smallest economic sector by a long way, the services sector is now by far the largest in the Global North, even approaching 80% employment rates in the US, UK, and France.

The result has been a striking redefinition of the common notion of work. It's lost its centre of gravity in the factory, having fragmented instead in the direction of various post-industrial workplaces – restaurants, shops, offices. Once a largely centralised mass, the working class has been dispersed across the social terrain, the new focus being on small, highly diverse productive units. Between these units, workers possess few common interests and interact little, leading to a significantly diminished potential for collective action. Of course, resistance in the workplace continues, but the internal avenues necessary for revolt to generalise have been majorly severed, the situation continuing to decline in light of ever greater technological advance.

Nobody can deny the profound identity crisis faced by the working class. Only a few decades ago, the factory was seen as the centre of everything, with workers offering the vital component in the functioning of society as a whole. Work was once a way of life, not so much in terms of the amount of time it took up, but instead because of the clear sense of existential grounding it offered. For generations, there had been a strong link between work and professionalism, with most workers committing to a single craft for the entirety of their lives. Career paths were passed down from father to son, who often remained in the same company; the families of different workers also maintained close ties with one another. Nowadays, however, everything has changed: employment is immensely uncertain, the relentless fluidity of the post-industrial economy forcing most to get by on a roster of precarious, low-skilled jobs. Far fewer people take pride in their work, especially given that employment only rarely has a convincing subtext of doing something socially important. Trade unions have also vanished as a historical force, having been defeated in the key battles of the '80s, their membership levels imploding in lock-step with the advance of neoliberalism. A residue of the old world still exists, but it continues to dissipate further every day, never to return. In the Global South, too, things are inevitably moving in the same direction.

These developments cast serious doubt on the validity of Marxist and anarcho-syndicalist strategies for revolution. It's becoming increasingly meaningless to speak of "the workers" in reference to a cohesive entity. It isn't as if the disintegration of the working class implies the absence of poverty, nor of the excluded – in no sense whatsoever. What it does mean is the end of the working class *as a subject*. One that was, as Marx put it, "disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself" (*Capital*, 1867). Over the last

decades, the working class has been dismembered and demoralised by the very same mechanism: just as the mass application of steam and machinery into the productive process created the industrial proletariat two centuries ago, the invention of new, automated technologies has led to its dissolution. There's no single project around which to unite the working class any more; it follows, as with identity politics, that gains in the workplace will almost always be limited to improving capitalism rather than destroying it. The Industrial Revolution has been superseded by the Digital Revolution, yet the revolutionary optimism of workerism remains ideologically trapped in a bygone era, fumbling for relevance in a century that won't have it. Although, to be honest, this is hardly news: already for some time now, the nostalgic language of workerism has come across as stale and outdated to most, even if academics often struggle to keep up.

In any case, the collapse of workerism might be nothing to mourn. Another implication of the end of traditional employment is the predominance of a range of workplaces few would want to appropriate anyway. The factory has been replaced by the likes of call centres, supermarkets, service stations, fast food joints, and coffee shop chains. Yet surely no one can imagine themselves maintaining these workplaces *after* the revolution, as if anything resembling a collectively run Starbucks or factory farm is what we're going for? When workerism first became popular, there was an obvious applicability of most work to the prospect of a free society. In the 21st century, however, the alienation of labour runs all the deeper: no longer is it the mere fact of lacking control over work, but instead its *inherent function* that's usually the problem. To put it another way, it should come as no surprise that Marxists haven't yet replaced their hammer and sickle with an office desk and espresso machine, as would be necessary to keep up with the times. The modern symbols of work are worthy only of scorn, not the kind of valorisation involved in putting them on a flag.

This is another big problem for the workerist theory of revolution, given its conception of revolution primarily or even exclusively in terms of the seizure of the means of production. Achieving reforms in the workplace is one thing, but only rarely can such exercises in confidence-building be taken as steps towards appropriating the workplace altogether. Surely the point isn't to democratise the economy, but instead to pick it apart: those aspects of the economy genuinely worth collectivising, as opposed to converting or simply burning, are few and far between. Of course, they still exist, *but they're marginal*. And that confirms the absurdity of expecting workplace organisation to offer the centrepiece of any future revolution.

This hardly implies doing away with the material aspects of revolutionary struggle, given that communising the conditions of existence remains necessary for living our lives – not just this or that activist campaign – in genuine conflict with the system. All the more, the moment in which these subterranean influences suddenly erupt, and mass communisation overturns the ordinary functioning of the capitalist machine, surely remains a defining feature of revolution itself. Yet such endeavours must be sharply distinguished from seizing *the* means of production – that is, appropriating the capitalist infrastructure more or less as it stands before us. Far from offering a vision of the world we want to see, the syndicalist proposal to reclaim the conditions of work – to assume control of very the system that's destroying us – merely implies self-managing not only our own exploitation, but also that of the planet.

As an aside, it should be added that these issues undermine the contemporary relevance of Marxism altogether. It was previously suggested that Marxian class analysis no longer offers a credible account of oppression; the current discussion, meanwhile, suggests it cannot be used to frame the topic of revolution either. As a method for interpreting the world, as well as for

changing it, Marxism has had its day. If we wanted to be a little diplomatic, we could say this isn't so much a criticism of the theory itself, more a recognition of the fact that the world it was designed to engage with no longer exists. If we wanted to be a little *less* diplomatic, moreover, it should be added that what's left of Marxism is utterly boring, reformist, and kept "alive" almost exclusively by academics. As the big guy declared back in 1852, "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living." Yet in no case has this claim, offered in response to the lack of imagination amongst revolutionaries in the 19th century, been more relevant than with Marxism today. We should pay our respects, if indeed any respect is due, whilst refusing to be crippled by an outdated approach. The same goes for anarcho-syndicalism, its once unbridled potential decisively shut down by the combined victories of fascism and Bolshevism.

To offer a last word of clarification, none of this implies doing away with workplace organisation altogether. There's still much to be said for confronting power on every front: the collectivisation of any remaining useful workplaces, as well as the fierce application of the general strike, surely remains vital for any effective revolutionary mosaic. Just as workplace organisation continues to prove effective for breaking down social barriers, as well as potentially improving our lives in the here and now. The core claim offered here is only that it cannot be considered the centrepiece of revolutionary struggle altogether – quite the minimal conclusion. Merely in terms of asking what the abolition of class might look like today, workerism has lost its way. And that doesn't begin to consider the abolition of hierarchy as such. When taken in isolation, organised labour offers nothing more than a subtle variety of reformism, thinly cloaked in its stuffy revolutionary pretensions. Total liberation, by contrast, refuses to single out any focal points of the clash, be they workerist, activist, or otherwise.

A revolutionary impasse

What an uneasy situation we're in: whilst the need for revolution has never been greater, rarely has our grasp of what it means to build such potential seemed so vague. Perhaps this is unsurprising, given that workerism – the dominant model of anti-capitalist struggle for a century and a half – has collapsed before our very eyes. The tremors continue to reverberate, most remaining unsure of how to respond. Few are willing to give up the rhetoric of revolution, not at a time like this. And yet, it doesn't take much to see that, in all but name, the majority of radicals have long since abandoned the prospect of actually destroying the system.

One clear indication of the current impasse is how easily supposed Bolsheviks – Leninist, Trotskyite, Stalinist – get swept up by every latest rehash of social democracy. Perhaps the most important tension underlying the history of Marxist engagement was the split between reform and revolution, exactly the point of Bolshevism being to pursue the latter. Nowadays, however, the two strands are normally lumped together, even at the price of utmost incoherence, merely for Marxism to maintain a guise of relevance into the 21st century. Surely no one who still took the revolutionary potential of the proletariat to be anything more than a buzzword would find themselves campaigning for Syriza or Podemos, Jeremy Corbyn or Bernie Sanders. Since the 2007 financial crash, the Left has played a sly game, gaining favour amongst the young by utilising vaguely revolutionary sentiments – slogans of "people power" and "real democracy," stolen from the anti-politics of grassroots movements like Occupy and 15M – to dress up its lukewarm parliamentary policies. Bear in mind, though, that such duplicity remains concealed only for as long as

the crypto-politicians fail to seize power, their cover instantly blown if they ever manage to win at the ballot. The functions of state and capital have *always* proven inviolable when approached from the inside. A glum image comes to mind, one of Syriza carrying out EU-dictated austerity measures, even in open defiance of a nationwide referendum, thereby betraying the very platform that secured them the right to govern in 2015. This is exactly what a "victory" for such a party looks like.

Of course, this problem is hardly faced by Marxists alone. Nor is the issue as superficial as many anarchists finding themselves requesting the hand of governance every once in a while. Bookchin, for example, showed as much appreciation as anyone for the great libertarian upheavals of the past, including the Paris Commune and the Spanish Revolution. Throughout the course of his life, however, it slowly became clear that such admiration was mainly retrospective, lacking any serious designs on the future. Already in 1985, he declared in a speech that "the revolutionary era in the classical sense is over" – a shrewd observation. It could have been the basis for reconceiving the possibility of revolution in the post-industrial era, only it was used to give up on the idea altogether. The alternative Bookchin offered was termed "libertarian municipalism," which proposes engaging in municipal elections with the aim of putting local councils under anarchist control. Yet it will come as no surprise that Bookchin eventually gave up on the hopeless idea of convincing anarchists to become politicians, to the extent he even publicly dissociated himself from anarchism in 1999. The significance of this outcome – one of the key theorists of contemporary anarchism turning his back on the very possibility of revolution – can hardly be overstated.

Another major attempt to divorce anarchism from revolutionary struggle came from Hakim Bey, this time in the book *Temporary Autonomous Zone* (1991). One of the main claims offered here is that "realism demands not only that we give up *waiting* for 'the Revolution' but also that we give up *wanting* it." Not only is the supremacy of the state supposedly unassailable nowadays, apparently there's also little chance of attacking authority without inadvertently becoming it. What ensues is a curiously dignified take on the simple fact of giving up, a hedonistic defeatism focused around occupying the accidental cracks of autonomy left unattended by the system. Such zones are defined as *temporary* precisely because there's no intention to defend or extend them, the point being to remain invisible to power for as long as possible, scampering away and setting up elsewhere whenever confronted. This might seem like the most hopeless of the examples mentioned here, even the most pitiful; yet that's only because Bey is so upfront regarding his pessimism. At least he nonetheless stays true to the need to live anarchy now, rather than spending our lives merely dreaming of it.

A final example on the topic comes from Deep Green Resistance (DGR). This radical environmentalist group distinguished themselves with a hard-nosed strategy for uprooting industrial civilisation altogether, something that won them the hearts of many libertarians. The kind of unflinching overhaul of vision and tactics DGR offers is all too rare at the moment, especially as the ecological situation really starts to bite. Yet this can be the only explanation for how such an irredeemably flawed approach enjoyed its relative success – that is, the sad fact it has so few contenders. It's clear this already tired clique has taken the abandonment of revolution as a central point of departure, assuming in line with co-founder Derrick Jensen that "the mass of civilised people will never be on our side" (*Endgame*, 2006). This leads to a terribly muddled strategy: having jettisoned a commitment to popular upheaval, DGR offers the hilarious proposal that industrial civilisation itself could be brought down – not to mention *kept down* – by the activity of a

relative handful of professional activists. What an odd combination: on the one hand, DGR seem to recognise the problems inherent in activism, that the current approach will never initiate mass struggle; on the other hand, however, they've extended the task of the activist milieu beyond any semblance of credibility. Whilst DGR once held a fair degree of influence, this trend flopped very quickly indeed, not least because of their rampant transphobia. And that was only a particular symptom of a much more general problem, namely, their obnoxious insistence on building a rigidly hierarchical, ideologically uniform resistance movement that reeks of eco-Leninism.

These examples are diverse, yet each of them stems from exactly the same sense of dejection regarding our revolutionary prospects nowadays. Some anarchists have attempted to escape such associations, at times even exploiting the moment to label themselves the only revolutionaries in town. But that comes across as all too certain: it's become increasingly clear that to be an anarchist does not entail one is also a revolutionary, certainly not any more – a point both interesting and terrible. Revolution, after all, is no game of abstract identities, but instead the art of putting into practice. It would be much healthier to take a step back at this point, if only to get a clearer picture of the current impasse. We need to get our heads round the end of the classical era of revolutions. (And then immediately set out to define the next).

5: The insurrectional path

"The secret is to really begin"

The point of departure for what follows is simple: revolution is not around the corner. Presumably most would agree, yet the road forks sharply regarding how best to move forward. The Left maintains that proceeding into open conflict with the state and capital would be premature, given that "the masses" can't be expected to join any time soon. A reformist agenda is sought instead as the only realistic approach – just until the conditions necessary for revolution arise. But there's a big problem here, because to merely wait for the revolution ensures it will never arrive. Contrary to Marxian dogma, there's nothing about revolution that's inevitable; rather, the only thing that invites the right historical conditions – the only thing that can actually bring revolution any closer – is to proceed to action *now*, even if the time is not ripe. When undertaking a momentous project of any kind, it's always necessary to start by taking a few decided steps, even if at first they lead into the fateful unknown. Those who merely wait, too unsure of whether to get going at all, guarantee their destination never comes any closer. Only by testing the boundaries of the existent do you begin to learn just what is and isn't possible.

In this formula we find our foothold: the nucleus of revolutionary possibility resides in our determination to live free already now. The liberal idea of freedom is that of a ghost, one of meaningless hypotheticals, of incarcerated desires: you can think and do absolutely anything you want, but only insofar as it makes no difference in material terms. Of course, there's a great deal to power that's abstract and intangible, open to critique but not physical assault. Yet this is only part of the picture, given that you can only change so much on a subjective level – really not much at all – before your growth becomes limited and deformed by the bars of this cage-society. Enclosed by the system of death, the only way to make sense of our lives – *the only way to be sure we're still breathing* – is by striking back against the physical infrastructure that holds social hierarchy in place. Beneath a veneer of calm supremacy, only a little investigation reveals that, through being spread so thinly, such objects are actually quite vulnerable. Even more so in an age in which everything depends on the most fragile of technological flows. Computer algorithms, fibre optic cables, and electrical transmitters hold the system together far more effectively than the words of politicians nowadays. Power is everywhere, yet the repressive forces are not, nor could they ever hope to be.

A single act of sabotage is, of course, of no great concern for the stability of the system overall. But there's something extra here, something that spans the vast divide between individualistic revolt and insurrection itself, and that's the capacity for insurgency to spread throughout the population. By acting now, the very quality of revolution – of uncompromising, autonomous revolt – begins to infuse the social terrain. Then it's only a question of multiplication over creation, something altogether more approachable. There will always come unpredictable moments of future turmoil, moments in which the animosity of state and capital has been violently exposed, the futility of legalistic engagement revealed for all to see. Those who previously disagreed with

confrontational tactics might well find themselves grasping for the right means of expression. And at that point the clashes have the potential to spread like wildfire.

This potential can be nurtured by a particular consideration, namely, the reproducibility of our own techniques. By focusing on tactics that require little or no specialisation, meaningful revolt is able to avalanche much quicker during moments of heightened social tension, greatly surpassing application only by a handful of experienced militants. This emphasis is exactly what was missing from many of the armed struggle groups active in Europe during the 1970s and '80s, such as the Red Army Fraction in West Germany and the Red Brigades in Italy. These professional revolutionaries required extensive training, specialised weaponry, and vast support networks in order to offer their contribution, promoting an idea of struggle (or at least of its highest forms) as something highly exclusive. Such isolation is forever the swamp of revolutionary potential, distinguishing the insurgents all too clearly from the rest of the population, drawing combatants into a pitched battle between two armies. On the contrary, the extent to which methods of struggle are easily reproducible – focusing on widely accessible tools and information – is the extent to which citizens can, even in a heartbeat, transform themselves into insurgents. Not only that, it also means those just getting involved can already struggle with as much intensity as anyone else, in no way relegated to the indignity of a secondary role. Forget about the vanguard, it has no use to us: generalised revolt, lacking leaders or a focal point, is exactly what no army or police force could ever hope to contain.

The moment of rupture is always much closer than it seems. The substratum underpinning all the everyday monotony is one of wild rebellion, and spontaneous community, which the present order must work day and night to subdue – often unsuccessfully. No longer can we profess to know in advance whether our intervention will not lead to a future insurrectional situation. The social conditions that gave rise to economic determinism have fallen apart: the metamorphosis of the economy has ransacked the factories, creating generations of non-citizens with no solid identity to bind them to this rotten world. Particularly in the ghettoes of the modern metropolis – in Paris 2006, London 2011, and Baltimore 2015 – the unpredictable nature of the historical moment has already been revealed, each case offering a clear image from the future. It's as if the air is steadily getting drier, the slightest spark ready to set off a blaze. Especially once the environmental crisis can no longer be ignored, that dryness will become much more literal, calling into doubt the once undisputed stability of many regimes. Surely the only option is to make the most of the inevitable volatility, transforming these blind moments of rage into conscious insurrections – even revolutions. Any social order founded so strongly on hierarchy forever contains the seeds of its own collapse. Insurrection is merely the sudden bang let off as a structure, which had already long been falling, finally crashes to the ground.

Imagine a collective gasp for oxygen in a life defined by suffocation. A million gestures of indignity, previously suffered in silence, abruptly come to the surface. The illusion of social control – held together by fear, not respect – has been decisively cast off, all sections of society invited to project their newfound freedom into the void. Insurrection doesn't divert the course of the dominant order, *it derails it.* Work grinds to a halt, students refuse to study, the economy is thoroughly paralysed; goods are circulated without money, public spaces transformed into theatres of discussion and festivity, the laboratories of exploitation overrun in broad daylight. Free play streams through the streets, manifest in a million different ways. Such is the spirit of insurrection. It is social, not military – the moment in which dissonance resonates.

The point of insurrection is to begin the revolutionary process in its full intensity, bypassing any notions of a transitional period. Such an event is clearly far more profound than any riot; nonetheless, it's also defined by the fact it stops short of bringing about an actual revolution, failing to hold down either the necessary time or space. The quantitative limits of the uprising, however, are no excuse to label it a failure: such an intense encounter is its own reward, wholly worthwhile even when taken in isolation. Not only that, insurrections nurture the potential for more ambitious experimentation, for ruptures that last. Even once the fires have gone out, what remains are forged affinities, honed skills, deepened perspectives. And the population at large has gotten a taste for freedom no queue at the polling booth can soon quell. This is a concrete idea of what it looks like to do serious damage to Leviathan, even if it isn't yet a deathblow. Along the insurrectional path, we forge beyond the revolutionary impasse.

Of course, there's a strong sense in which this topic – equal parts festivity and devastation – shouldn't be dressed up in too much poetry. Especially when true freedom is a novelty, there are many risks involved, risks that shouldn't be trivialised. But what also cannot be denied is that *every* path, including inaction, necessarily comes with its own hazards. There are no easy options here. No promises to escape the gravity of the situation. As if allowing things to continue like this would be the non-violent option? Such is the right of the dominant culture, to present itself as neutral, ambient, even as it ravages the fabric of life to its very core.

It's not as if we chose to be born into such miserable conditions. Yet how we respond remains entirely down to us, an infinity of potential choices vibrating through every moment. The opportunity to live passionately lies open to us still – no authoritarian regime could ever take that away. As Bonanno once put it, "It is not a question of opposing horror with horror, tragedy with tragedy, death with death. It is a confrontation between joy and horror, joy and tragedy, joy and death."

The question of organisation

How do we coordinate with one another, comrades and beyond, in order to transform society? The history of anarchism – especially its most revolutionary moments – is rich with examples of large, formal organisations that concentrated most or all aspects of the struggle within a single structure. These were organisations of synthesis, some of which still exist: they promote a specific political programme, hold periodic congresses to make unified decisions, and aim to serve as a mediator between power and the masses. However, it would be a big mistake for anarchists to place such an organisation – indeed, the route of formal organisation altogether – at the centre of revolutionary struggle today. At the very least, the option should be considered only in light of some major risks.

Consider, for one, the central tension of any anarchist organisation: the trade-off between size and horizontality. The larger an organisation becomes, the more hierarchy becomes necessary to maintain its basic functions – in other words, the more quantitatively successful the organisation, the less anarchist it can be. This is something no amount of conscious procedures, such as consensus decision-making or a rigid constitution, can successfully alleviate. As a matter of necessity, any organisation incorporating thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even millions of members can maintain direction and coherence only at the cost of extensive specialisation. In particular, those tasks that command the most influence – mediation, accounting, publicity –

begin to stagnate in the hands of a few experts, either implicitly or explicitly. And what a sorry outcome that offers: any large anarchist organisation soon becomes incapable of prefiguring the very world it's supposed to be building, the principle of nonhierarchical association relegated to a mere abstraction. If there's any doubt on this point, that can only be because the vast majority of anarchist organisations remain woefully small nowadays. An honest look at the towering bureaucracy of the CNT in Spain during the 1930s – the largest anarchist organisation there's ever been, incorporating a million and a half members – provides an unambiguous picture.

The link between formal organisation and hierarchy runs deeper yet; besides internal hierarchies, a second major problem concerns external ones. Built into the logic of the organisation of synthesis is the hidden assumption that ordinary people are incapable of organising themselves. Society is split between the passive masses on the one hand, and the enlightened revolutionaries on the other; the role of revolutionaries cannot be to engage horizontally with the rest of the population, but instead to approach them from the point of view of recruitment or education, to make them one of us. All potential social realities are distilled into a single way of doing things, as if we alone hold the one true set of revolutionary aims and principles. Such a monolithic approach was never realistic, much less so today: honestly speaking, most people will *never* see the need to join our organisation, to stomach all the long meetings and tedious subculture. The 21st century has ushered in a human condition that's unfathomably complex, calling for a much richer diversity of organisational forms than the "one big union" model that worked so well in the past. That means opening ourselves up to a more pluralistic notion of struggle, one that abandons any notions of revolutionary primacy, especially that of the organisation of synthesis.

It isn't even as if what formal organisations lack in principle they make up for in pragmatism. Merely in terms of their capacity to actually engage in struggle, the organisation of synthesis has proven ineffective. Any structure of significant size must spend the bulk of its time and energy merely on maintaining itself, the task of physically confronting power always coming second. Meetings are now insufferably long, and the only viable collective decisions have become increasingly timid and legalistic, members always going for the lowest common denominator just so everyone can agree. Having succumbed to the quantitative game of putting recruitment before all else, reputation has become a prime virtue, and combative actions are normally condemned in the name of not upsetting public opinion. Compromise and conciliation are instead always favoured by the emerging bureaucracy, the rank and file of the organisation betrayed time and time again. Nor could it be any other way: with obvious leaders, headquarters, and membership lists, the threat of state repression is forever present, severely limiting the scope of militant activity. What you're left with, therefore, after funnelling so much time and effort into a grand synthesising effort, is a lumbering, introspective mass that can be used for little more than putting the brakes on real struggle.

With this critique in mind, some would respond that the risks posed by the organisation of synthesis are indeed a necessary evil. Perhaps this route offers us something quite indispensable, namely, the prospect of unity itself? The nation state towers over us more ominously than ever, its military, police force, and repressive technology contained within a single, cohesive structure. It might seem like folly not to build our own structure, rigid and undivided, to contend with power on its own terms – an organisation stronger and more unified than the state itself.

However, the problem with taking unity as an end it itself, rather than simply as a tool to be applied depending on the situation, is that it actively invites the concentration of power. Any structure that fancies itself to be building *the* new world in the shell of the old can only turn

out to be a state in waiting. Remember that social hierarchy, besides being localised in certain physical objects, is also a state of mind; it's always seeking to revive itself, and nobody is immune to the threat, anarchists included. We need not repeat the painful lessons of the past: there's never been a large organisation of synthesis that hasn't also been stale and bureaucratic, even subtly authoritarian, functioning like a political party to the extent it grows in size, ultimately favouring to collaborate with power rather than destroy it. This is no attempt to denigrate some of the most inspiring moments of anarchist history, but we also need to learn some hard lessons; let's not forget the integration of the CNT into the government during the Spanish Civil War, to the extent that even an anarcho-syndicalist trade union ended up running its own forced labour camps.

Fortunately, though, this critique warrants no strategic compromise. In short, the quality of unity is essential only for those movements attempting to seize power rather than dismantle it. Amongst Marxists, liberals, and fascists alike, unity is *the* vital ingredient of their organising, the intention almost always being to assume the functions of the state in one sense or another. Without unity, the state is inconceivable; such a complex structure can only function properly when operating in a centralised way, forming a robust whole that maintains cohesion by relaying orders to the different parts. Any genuine shows of diversity are a threat to its integrity, because they undermine the singularity of the social body, lessening the capacity for a single will to be imposed upon it. But remember just how little applicability this framework has to our own desires: the point isn't to emulate the state, as if to treat it as a rival, but instead to destroy it. And for this project a fundamentally different logic is required.

Here's an idea: as far as effective libertarian struggle is concerned, a high degree of multiformity is the essential ingredient. There's much to be said for social movements that are messy and fragmented, even to the extent that you're not looking at a single movement any more, but many different ones with fuzzy lines between them. Building strong links between different fronts of the struggle is essential for encouraging one another to go further, yet the circulation of energies must also remain decentralised, diffuse, or else risk denying vigour to key areas of engagement. The repressive task undertaken by power – by the media, especially – will always be to sculpt us into a cohesive subject, something with discernible leaders and demands, which can thus be easily crushed or assimilated. This is why the struggle must always prize a diversity of tactics and perspectives, empowering all participants to fight on their own basis, and for their own reasons, yet nonetheless against a common enemy.

Multiform struggles are far too disjointed and unpredictable for the state to repress in a straightforward way, and also for the Left to co-opt. They're more inviting to newcomers as well, offering massive variation of potential involvement, allowing everyone to find their niche without compromising. And multiform struggles, finally, are much more effective at going on the offensive, given that the structures of domination are nowadays far too multifaceted and complex – quite devoid of any centre – for a monolithic approach to successfully unhinge. It would be far better to avoid the fatal error made both by formal organisations and armed struggle groups, namely, to engage with the state symmetrically, in a frontal assault, which is precisely where it will always be militarily superior.

Often we see a split between comrades as a disaster, but that depends entirely on your perspective: diversity is only a curse only when crammed into the stubborn rubric of a movement demanding unity. Remember that it's rarely the differences between us that cause conflict, but instead one's refusal to respect them. Such differences are inevitable, and we should be thankful, too, because disagreement is one of the surest signs of vitality, if not of freedom itself. Especially

with the struggle for total liberation – defined, in part, by the plurality of its concerns – these unavoidable differences can only be a blessing. The challenge is merely to nurture disagreement respectfully, bearing in mind that, despite the divergent methods we employ, each of these is ultimately grounded in a shared need to dismantle social hierarchy altogether.

* * *

This critique surely begs the question: if not formal organisation, what instead? For some time already, insurrectionary anarchists have been organising the attack mainly through small affinity groups, often incorporating around half a dozen (or fewer) comrades. Affinity here refers to reciprocal knowledge and mutual bonds of trust, as well as a shared project for intervening in society. Affinity groups are temporary and informal, incorporating no official members or branches, refusing to take numerical growth as a basic goal. One doesn't "join" an affinity group any more than you join a group of friends; the act of signing up to an organisation is done away with, including the largely symbolic notion of involvement it offers. Theoretical agreement is often a good starting point for building affinity, but the vital thing is to find those with whom one can combine long-term trajectories for practical engagement – an ongoing process in which discussion is only the first step.

By remaining small and tightly-knit, affinity groups remain unhindered by the cumbersome procedures that inevitably come with organising as a mass. They can respond to any situation with utmost rapidity, continually revising the plan in light of unexpected developments, melting away whenever faced with unfavourable odds. This fluid, informal terrain of struggle is also immensely difficult for law enforcement to map out and undermine, especially when it comes to infiltration. A decentralised anatomy shouldn't discourage groups from coordinating with one another horizontally, fostering the broader networks of friendship and complicity necessary to undermine power on a large scale. The point is only that affinity groups remain fully autonomous, in no way bound to sacrifice spontaneity for the sake of cohesion, always waiting for the green light from some higher body prior to taking action. Perhaps this description sounds familiar: anonymous, flexible, and leaderless, such is exactly the informal composition utilised with great success by the ALF/ELF. The main difference is that insurrectional struggle includes a broader range of activity, the question of how best to generalise revolt always taken into consideration.

In any case, large anarchist organisations are apparently a thing of the past, having disintegrated in unison with the workerist glue that once held them together. But that doesn't mean we're in the clear. There's still a very real risk of exactly the mindset underpinning the organisation of synthesis – the emphasis on uniformity and respectability, as well as the subtle mistrust of autonomous struggle – merely reinventing itself in whatever contemporary form, as it will always attempt to do. We saw exactly that manifest in the bureaucratic, centralising tendencies that stifled much of the energy of Occupy and Nuit Debout (most memorably, there were those who refused to condone absolutely anything that hadn't first received permission from the general assembly). This insistence on sculpting a multiform population into a monolithic subject – in essence, the determination to lay down the law – is always lurking amongst movements with revolutionary potential. Perhaps it's no exaggeration to say that such an attitude, writ large, is exactly what devoured the initial beauty of the 1789 French Revolution, 1917 Russian Revolution, and 2011 Egyptian Revolution alike. Almost all previous revolutions were defined at first by a spontaneous, ungovernable outpouring of discontent; once that energy lost pace, however, it was

gradually remoulded into representational forms – elections, negotiations, bureaucracy – and its original content decisively choked out. Between these two phases, the possibility of a revolution that gets to the root of dismantling power, rather than merely reshuffling it, depends on eliminating this second phase completely. In its place, the first must be extended towards encompassing the whole of everyday life. Informal organisation facilitates this outcome to the highest degree, precisely because it promotes a terrain of struggle that is *inconvertible* to the functions of state power.

In any case, nothing offered here amounts to a complete blueprint. This is not a programme! Comrades might well decide, according to their local circumstances, that some degree of formal organisation remains indispensable for tasks such as getting new people involved, planning aboveground events, and procuring resources. Which is to say, once again, that the conclusion offered here is only a minimal one: formal organisations cannot be considered the locus of revolutionary struggle altogether, as may have been the case in years gone by. They must instead be ready to adopt a more modest, supportive role, sticking to objectives both specific and temporary, remaining eager to take a step back or even disband entirely if needed. Rather than falling back on outdated formulas, tired and inflexible, total liberation means embracing the fullest multiformity, wild and ungovernable – the only kind of energy capable of bringing social hierarchy to ruin.

December '08

December 6, 2008, Athens. For the neighbourhood of Exarcheia, it's a familiar scene. The central square is buzzing, interspersed with youths hanging out and travellers fraternising. They're surrounded by the usual bustle of cafes and bars, as well as crowded corner shops selling cheap beer. A few blocks away, riot cops stand guard, but only as they do every evening, marking out the border of this unruly neighbourhood. Such is how things start out, anyway, but it's not how they end. At around 9pm, something unusual happens, something that tears a hole in the very social fabric. Two cops start mouthing off at a group of kids on Tzavella Street, only to leave in their patrol car. They park round the corner, returning on foot. Now one of the cops pulls out his gun, firing a few bullets, striking young Alexis Grigoropoulos – a fifteen-year-old anarchist – in the heart. Alexis dies in the arms of his friends, if not instantly. It's a dizzying moment, the kind that doesn't seem real. And within seconds everything explodes.

Already inside the hour, fierce rioting erupts throughout Exarcheia. Then it spreads beyond the neighbourhood, permeating the city of Athens with lightning pace. In countless locations, banks are trashed, police stations laid to siege, luxury shops ransacked – even a shopping mall is burnt to the ground. Meanwhile, three universities are occupied, and idle revellers are quickly drawn into the fray. The news spreads fast, mainly between friends rather than the media, and already that night concurrent riots take place in dozens of cities across Greece. The next day, there are thousands on the streets in every corner of the country, the clashes continuing to multiply without interruption. Most expect things to calm down now, what with the weekend drawing to a close, but instead the very opposite happens. On Monday morning, students everywhere abandon their classes, and hundreds of schools and universities are occupied. In villages no one has heard of, there are scenes of twelve-year-olds defeating the police, reclaiming the streets from state occupation. Clearly there's something special in the air, causing the illusion of social

control to dissipate. The Christmas tree in Syntagma Square, Athens, is torched and re-torched; in Zefyri, the Roma community attack a police station with their rifles; almost everywhere town halls are occupied amidst a backdrop of looted supermarkets. Even the state-owned broadcasting studios are invaded, with protestors interrupting an announcement by the prime minister on live television. They display a banner that reads simply "stop watching, get out into the streets." But they were merely pointing out the obvious. Only towards the end of the month does normality begin to return, and cautiously at that.

A lot could be said about December '08, but perhaps the most remarkable thing was how profoundly it broke down social barriers. This wasn't just another flurry of anarchist riots, but instead a moment in which the revolutionary spirit resonated unmistakably across the population. Students, workers, migrants, and the unemployed all offered unique contributions, their involvement vastly exceeding what anyone could have expected. Methods that for years had been exclusive to anarchists – attacks against power, horizontal organisation, the refusal of demands – suddenly became mainstream, blurring the boundaries between the insurgents and the population at large. And that, in essence, is the meaning of insurrection: *anarchy beyond the anarchists.*

Such an outcome was no accident. It was instead made possible only by years of considered participation in the struggle, laying the groundwork for revolt to generalise. One of the most visible features of the Greek anarchist movement had always been an emphasis on attack, which communicated reproducible tactics to the rest of the population that could easily be utilised en masse in the future. Had the years of struggle prior to 2008 been defined by timid, legalistic protest, it's likely the death of Alexis would have been met with more of the same. Yet by defying the submissive logic of the Left, and proving that meaningful resistance is *always* possible, the outcome was that an insurrectional storm had already long since been brewing, merely waiting for the right moment to smash the floodgates of the anarchist milieu.

Not only that, these years of combative engagement served to prepare the anarchists themselves at least as much as anyone else. It's no small matter that only through acting do you learn how to act, developing the skills and affinity necessary to proceed further, maximising your potential to intervene effectively in the unpredictable moments of turbulence forever on the horizon. This is the kind of knowledge that cannot be taught in any book. And yet without it the insurrection in Greece would have been impossible.

Another thing to note about December '08 was its informal, leaderless composition. Had the anarchist movement in Greece been unified within a single structure, with comrades always seeking to reach widespread consensus before taking action, there's no way the insurrection would have happened. It's only because various affinity groups were forever ready to take the initiative – immediately kicking off the riots with a high degree of intensity, and occupying the universities so everyone could gather – that the rage felt at the murder of Alexis wasn't simply internalised. Moreover, had the insurrection held a single programme or a unified set of objectives, the state would have had an easy time repressing it, knowing exactly where to mass its forces. It was precisely because the insurrection was so brilliantly multiform – expressing a vast diversity of tactics and participants, whilst remaining grounded in a shared desire to fight the system altogether – that it proved impossible to contain.

But there were also key limitations to the insurrection, blockages which need clearing for next time. In particular, it has often been said that December '08 wasn't brought down by external forces, but instead by its failure to provide an alternative to what it was fighting. Throughout the

month, the authorities had no chance of clearing the insurgents off the streets, at least not by force. The modern Greek state has always been pretty weak, and here it was in a critical condition, as if ready to collapse. The police, who at times ran out of tear gas, had been vanquished. And the government was too afraid to call in the army, quite aware of the rumours of mass defection. In this moment, *revolution was literally possible*. Yet for some reason the population didn't go further. By the time Christmas came round, everyone was exhausted from weeks of fighting, and with all the banks already gutted, it was unclear what should happen next. Once the rage began to subside, therefore, the demonstrations stopped and the occupations were abandoned, even though everyone knew what they had set out to destroy would soon recuperate. Clearly it wasn't a matter of desire, but instead of imagination: the uprising had bridged the gap between riot and insurrection, but not between insurrection and revolution. Nor should we really be surprised. Perhaps we no longer know what a revolution would even look like.

This isn't the only time in recent memory a major insurrection in the Global North stopped short of its revolutionary ambitions. Something similar already happened with May '68 in France, when weeks of comparably intense rioting more or less simply fizzled out. Student uprisings, workplace occupations, and the largest wildcat strike in French history had led to the decisive breakdown of normality. With the threat of anarchy in the air, and key government buildings at risk of being stormed, the president Charles de Gaulle suddenly left the country, apparently to secure the loyalty of crucial sections of the military. He returned some hours later, taking to the radio to warn the country of absolute paralysis – indeed, of civil war. Which was a strikingly honest admission! And yet, for many, it was also the obvious turning point. Already for weeks the clashes had thundered on, but they couldn't continue on that plane forever; either they would progress to the level of something more revolutionary, or else merely run out of steam. It was, of course, the latter that happened. But what a curious situation: even though revolution seemed genuinely possible, somehow the people didn't go further, as if they had been met with an invisible barrier. Speaking of which: déjà vu, anyone? Apparently the very same barrier has been rediscovered by the gilets jaunes, this time half a century later.

In France, as in Greece, you could say the population had arrived at a revolutionary precipice: the point of no return, beyond which nothing would be the same again. To take that step, smashing all the miserable certainties of this world, is surely the stuff of our wildest dreams. Yet to do so within the current conditions is impossible, because destroying the system we depend upon so heavily in material terms – for food, energy, accommodation, and so on – would be mass suicide, plain and simple. The embarrassing fact is that, by and large, we don't yet know how to feed ourselves without capitalism (even skipping and shoplifting confirm a relationship of dependence). Which is a massive problem, given that people will always choose government over starvation, even if they know it's just the lesser of two evils. As such, until we successfully combine fighting *and* living in a reproducible way, all talk of revolution will forever remain pure theory.

Compare these insurrections with Catalonia, 1936 – the best known example of anarchist revolution. It would be easy to understand the event as having occurred in a day or two, at the moment in which the workers defeated the fascist coup and seized the means of production. Yet such a simplistic perspective risks obscuring the vital years of struggle that took place throughout the preceding decades. This included a number of important insurrections, each of which brought the population at large closer to the possibility of permanent rupture. But the anarchist movement also had a more constructive side, taking years to develop the vital elements of a concrete social alternative, or what Bookchin described in *The Spanish Anarchists* (2001) as a "countersoci-

ety." This aspect of the movement was characterised, for example, by the importance of various social centres – mainly run by the syndicalist unions – that were used as bases to hold meetings, run workshops, and disseminate literature. Children were educated at self-organised libertarian schools, outside of control by church and state; nor were they baptised or registered for birth certificates, just as their parents refused to enter into legal marriages. Money wasn't particularly useful here, either, with the fabric of this countersociety being held together mainly by bonds of affinity and mutual aid. One of the things that made the Spanish anarchist movement successful, therefore, is that it had already constructed its own world, fostering the experiences necessary for people to trust in their own abilities. It meant that, when the big day arrived, the anarchists were quite capable of seizing the opportunity, having convinced a critical mass of the population that the risks associated with revolution were lesser than those of keeping things the same.

There's a great deal of futility that comes with applying insurrectional methods to the exclusion of other forms of struggle. A great deal of miscomprehension, too, because insurrectionary anarchism was never supposed to offer a complete ideology or blueprint for the future, only an ongoing practice aimed at dismantling the most concrete aspects of power – specifically, the state and capital. It can be combined with more substantive political visions, and indeed it must, if it's going to work. As long as revolution means not only the end of the current order, but also of everyone else along with it, you can be sure it's not going to happen. Insurrection, maybe, but never revolution. Insurrection is easier, because it doesn't warrant spending so much time on constructive efforts. But to honestly expect the population to go beyond a few weeks of rage and part ways with the system decisively – *to expect parliament not to be rebuilt even after it's been burnt down* – you need to think about offering an alternative. Not necessarily an alternative system, and certainly nothing uniform, but still *something*. Some kind of assurance revolution won't be the death of us.

This touches on an important point, both for life and revolution: in order to advance within any given situation, it's always necessary to balance creation with destruction. Regaining a revolutionary perspective means initiating the attack in conjunction with building working models of anarchy, both of them already now. Because there's no destroying something you're physically incapable of living without: "Those who pretend to split material autonomy from the sabotage of the imperial machine show that they want neither" (*Call*, 2003). Insurrection is vital, given that it opens up the time and space necessary to pose questions with any meaning. But what of the positive content – indeed, *the new worlds* – with which to sculpt our answers?

6: Autonomous zones

Revolution in the real world

Perhaps the most influential argument levelled against anarchism is that it just isn't realistic. Even amongst those who feel an idealistic attraction towards the prospect of a nonhierarchical society, it can be difficult to square this vision with the real world. After all, we're not on the cusp of a revolution: there are few countries in the world today (if any) with anarchist movements capable of becoming mainstream any time soon. Can we really be sure that revolution is going to happen in our lifetimes? What if it were *never* to happen? It's worth asking… Of course, many of us feel the imminent potential for widespread or even global upheaval, especially when we're young. As we grow older, though, we often shed that youthful optimism, perhaps becoming disillusioned, burnt out even. This is no doubt a big problem. And yet it's entirely avoidable.

Maybe we've been tricked into looking at it the wrong way, approaching the issue exactly as the statists do. If the goal of your programme is to assume control of the state, its success will be determined by its degree of implementation nationwide. Most people tend to think of anarchism, too, as a project that sticks to national boundaries; on this level, it can be dismissed as unrealistic, given that it's far from being the most popular movement in most countries. Yet such logic is really of little use to us. Anarchy isn't just another option – along with socialism, liberalism, conservatism, and fascism – on the menu of authoritarian ideologies. Statists might be our enemies, but they're not our rivals: *we don't want what they want.* That means evaluating our own prospects in a completely different light, one that refuses to play the same all or nothing game focused around achieving national hegemony. In short, anarchy – *real anarchy* – is achieved within any territory, no matter how big or small, in which the authority of state and capital has been deemed null and void. We don't need to wait for the revolution to realise our dreams; we need only take the necessary practical steps, establishing our lives outside the grip of centralised control.

Looking at it this way, the uncompromising nature of anarchism is soon redeemed by the fact that – on the level of quality, not quantity – it can be implemented in full even within the current historical context. A perceived lack of widespread support is no excuse for inaction: instead of waiting on large numbers to begin living wild and free, all we need is a bit of determination. And without taking that chance, no less, we risk relegating anarchy to the realm of abstraction, never to actually *experience* what we're fighting for. Hakim Bey provides some solid inspiration:

> Are we who live in the present doomed never to experience autonomy, never to stand for one moment on a bit of land ruled only by freedom? Are we reduced either to nostalgia for the past or nostalgia for the future? […] To say that 'I will not be free till all humans (or all sentient creatures) are free' is to simply cave in to a kind of nirvana-stupor, to abdicate our humanity, to define ourselves as losers. (*Temporary Autonomous Zone*, 1991)

The beauty of an autonomous zone is that it opens up a rupture that lasts, already encompassing the whole of everyday life. Potential candidates include squats, occupied universities, protest camps, wildcat strikes, communal gardens, free parties, travellers' sites, and even rainbow gatherings. Familiar examples include the territory of the Zapatistas and the MOVE communes in Philadelphia. Or you could think of Freetown Christiana in Copenhagen, at least before it made the gradual push towards legalisation. The Kurdish territory of Rojava, former Syria, should be added to the list, depending on whether one agrees the state and capital have actually been dismantled there. Moreover, some of the largest autonomous zones around today are the least overtly political; this includes the Zomia of Southeast Asia, as well as many interior regions of sub-Saharan Africa, which managed to escape subjugation of the years despite incorporating millions of inhabitants. Similarly, any non-civilised tribes still scattered around the globe inhabit autonomous zones, even if their communities fall within the theoretical boundaries of whichever nation state. All untamed areas of wilderness are last examples.

In Europe, perhaps the largest recent example of an autonomous zone was the ZAD (zone à défendre) of Notre-Dame-des-Landes. This started out in 2009 as a single-issue campaign, with the illegal occupation of the land – approximately 2,000 hectares of it, 14km across at its widest point – being applied merely as a means of blocking the construction of an airport outside of Nantes, France. Yet what was once a tactic soon became an end in itself: within that vast, lawless zone, a large number of rural communes were set up, each of them utilising the opportunity to experiment with genuinely autonomous ways of living. The authority of French law was made meaningless there, and private property was squatted out of existence; strictly speaking, the ZAD, which had been lovingly described by one local politician as "a territory lost to the Republic," couldn't even be referred to as a part of France any more. Perhaps this project – defined not only by its audacious victories against state invasion, but in equal parts by its abundant vegetable plots, medicinal herb gardens, numerous bakeries, and pirate radio station – even embodied the intensity of anarchist revolution, only realised for now on a smaller scale. At the beginning of 2018, the Macron regime finally announced it would scrap its plans to develop the area, admitting defeat to the land defenders; yet the ZADists attempted to stay, airport or no airport. Compared with an ambiguous tradition of eco-defence campaigns, in which most victories merely return us back to square one, the ZAD offers a clear idea of what taking a step forward in the struggle against power could look like.

Back to the theme of total liberation, autonomous zones can be used to demonstrate that even the most uncompromising of visions is hardly utopian. There's no need to feel overwhelmed by the breadth of what we're fighting, stressing over which issues to prioritise: any successful autonomous zone opens up the time and space necessary to call *everything* into question. Especially with more rural projects, we can overcome our alienation from one another in combination with overcoming our alienation from the land. Along with opening up the possibility of experimenting with vegan horticulture outside of a capitalist context. The best insights of anti-speciesism, deep ecology, and social ecology – far from being relegated to the confines of pure theory – are invited to bloom in combination with one another, already fully manifest in the real world. We need not swallow the association between realism and compromise. We just have to start off more modestly.

What if, hypothetically, you could see into the future, and discovered that the revolution was never to occur? Would the struggle still be worth it? The realisation of autonomous zones offers one good reason to know that it would. Our prospects are not so bleak that, only after generations

of thankless sacrifice, perhaps the earthlings of some prophesied age will finally be free. The joy of insurrection – which, in essence, is surely but the joy of unflinching defiance – must permeate everything we do. The desired quantity might escape us for the time being, but the necessary quality can be realised now, before revolution – before insurrection, even. All in all, then, we have at least one method for taking the struggle forward: inhabit territories, outside and against the system, whilst striving to dismantle all hierarchies within them. That's no complete strategy, but it certainly offers a solid foothold.

Zones of resistance

At a glance, it might seem as if a tension is arising here. Whilst insurrectional methods attack power, perhaps autonomous zones attempt instead to slip away, seeking inner peace in a world defined by catastrophe. This is exactly the idea you get with Hakim Bey, whose autonomous zones are defined by their insistence on disbanding rather than risk confronting the state. It goes without saying that leaving Leviathan to it as it decimates the planet isn't an option for most of us; thankfully, though, such defeatism isn't an inherent feature of autonomous zones altogether. On the contrary, these experiments, aside from offering essential places of immediate refuge, are just as indispensable for going on the offensive.

Opening up an autonomous space sets a rallying point for comrades to find each other, share resources, and combine projects, all of which is vital for launching the attack. Rather than dispersing ourselves amidst the social terrain, there's much to be said for focusing our efforts within strategic locations, thereby increasing our chances of having a tangible impact. It's no coincidence that the Italian anarchist movement of the 1970s and '80s was defined not only by its formulation of the insurrectionary tendency, but also by its vast network of squatted social centres. Moreover, the anarchist movements of Chile and Greece – amongst the strongest worldwide at the moment – are distinctly grounded in certain rebellious neighbourhoods. The Exarcheia quarter of Athens is itself something of an autonomous zone; it's a no-go area for the police, and in general maintains an atmosphere of intolerance towards the projects of state and capital. The ongoing emphasis on insurrection in Athens would be unthinkable without it, and the same can be said of Villa Francia in Santiago. Especially once a resistance movement really starts to pick up the pace, it soon becomes clear that its ambitions can only advance as far as its material base supports. Here we can think of the separatist movements in Ireland, Kurdistan, and the Basque Country as important examples.

No less, the mere existence of an autonomous zone is enough to do real damage to the state, relinquishing its control over a territory. Yet this will only be the case insofar as its inhabitants refuse to seek permission in the process of seceding. The prospect of legalising a commune warrants utmost caution: the price of avoiding physical confrontation here is not, as with Bey's zones, invisibility, but instead *indistinctiveness* from the system as a whole. Whether temporary or permanent, what makes a zone autonomous is the fact it escapes the authority of the state – that is, refuses to recognise its servants or laws. Strictly speaking, inhabiting such a zone isn't a matter of committing crime, which implies breaking laws to which you're ultimately subject, but instead of extricating yourself from the legal framework altogether. The offer of legalisation might sound like a victory, but this is only one of power's most cynical tactics: a few minor concessions will

be granted, but these are ultimately a small price to pay for subsuming our lives back into the economy, transferring real struggle into something symbolic.

During the early '80s, for instance, the squatting movement in Berlin was one of the strongest in the world; yet the spearhead of the state's repressive campaign wasn't brute force, but instead integration. Many squats were invited to become legal – to submit to the rule of law and market – which split their interests from the rest of the movement. That deprived any more combative projects of the solidarity needed to successfully resist evictions, and they soon found themselves getting picked off one by one. Had none of the squats decided to legalise, however, the state may well have been forced to capitulate in the face of such an uncompromising movement.

With this in mind, an obvious worry arises: it might seem ridiculous to take a stand against the might of the modern nation state, particularly in a more or less symmetrical conflict. But the picture isn't quite that simple. In much of the Global North, at least, the liberal paradigm compels the state to play by certain rules when repressing dissent, and that offers us a fair degree of leeway. The repressive forces always prefer to engage with riot police rather than the army, "nonlethal" methods rather than just going in and killing everyone. That owes not, of course, to any heightened sense of benevolence on the part of our dear rulers, but instead to their need to destroy otherness in a way that avoids exacerbating social tensions even more. You might say that, following the death of God, the state is on its last legs; rather than clinging to the pretence of enacting the divine will, it has reinvented itself in secular form, claiming instead to represent the will of the people. This leaves power forever at pains to maintain a democratic veneer, with which it attempts to conceal its ugliest, most volatile of secrets: the fact that liberalism is just another form of authoritarianism. It would indeed be a damning realisation that, beyond being expected to play out the most miserable of lives, even those attempting to peacefully defect will forever be sought out and crushed, dragged by their hair back into the embrace of this cage-society. Any successful autonomous zone damages the territorial integrity of the state, which is why it would never be tolerated willingly; when met with fierce resistance, however, a regime might well be forced to hold back, facing a greater risk of destabilisation by committing the violence necessary for an eviction.

This is no fairytale: in 2016, one French government minister admitted that, for fear of a localised civil war breaking out, there would be no new attempt to evict the ZAD of Notre-Dame-des-Landes. Which just goes to show, rather than whining about the contradictions inherent in liberal democracy, we could instead be taking advantage. Either we'll make the most of the state's softened capacities to strike, or else provoke it into revealing its true nature. In both scenarios, there's something to be gained.

Having said that, not everyone wants to live behind a barricade forever – something important to consider. It's a funny thing that possibly the single biggest factor killing participation in the struggle isn't repression, *but parenthood.* Either that, or at least the need to find a bit of safety or stability, which everyone needs once in a while. These issues need to be addressed if we're going to extend the possibility of autonomous living beyond the easy grasp of those in their twenties. It's often forgotten that, besides increasing our capacities as militants, revolutionising the struggle means broadening out meaningful involvement in ways that allow much greater numbers to participate. The case for illegality, whilst indispensable, cannot dictate a uniform approach: as always, a diversity of tactics is necessary to surge forward. The essential ingredient is merely that legal and illegal projects maintain strong ties with one another, thereby providing

commmunes on the front-line with the support needed to go further, all the while maximising the level of involvement achieved by safer options.

To return to the main point, the ZAD of Notre-Dame-des-Landes should be visited one last time. In April 2018, the Macron regime committed 2,500 gendarmes, backed up by tanks and drones, to its latest attempt to crush this unruly project. That was a striking thing, because the plans to build an airport there had already been abandoned, yet this time the invading force was more than twice as large as during Operation Cesar – the attempt that failed during 2012. Apparently this chapter of the ZAD had been deemed all the more dangerous in the lack of a single-issue to limit its scope. The failure of a flagship project is, no doubt, a headache for any government; something immensely worse, however, is a practical method – indefinitely reproducible – for destituting its rule altogether. Zadification proceeds as such: occupy a locale with potential; promote material self-sufficiency; defend like hell if attacked; reoccupy if evicted. The ZAD shouldn't be idealised, as if it offers some pristine utopia. But what cannot be denied is something quite simple, something that makes all the difference: *it works...* Contrary to popular wisdom, there's nothing inevitable about the system of death. Defection is always possible! And such a window of opportunity is something any state must set out to mercilessly destroy, lest it risk its very foundations – both material and ideological – being seriously undermined. As of yet, though, our enemy has surely failed: whilst the mother-ZAD is, after almost a full decade of flagrant autonomy, nowadays mired in the drab business of legalisation, as many as fifteen additional ZADs have sprung up around France since the first was established.

It was previously said that we might no longer know what a revolution would look like, and this problem continues to define our era. Given an age in which power has no centre, there's reason to quit holding out on that coveted grand soirée in which the world is remade in a day or two. Perhaps revolution is less a definitive event, and more an ongoing process – something with obvious peaks and troughs, for sure, yet without a clear beginning or end. By promoting the multiplication and expansion of autonomous zones, we're granted a tangible means of furthering that process, and also of measuring our success. In order to make anarchy viable on a large scale, we need to start off more modestly, immediately infusing the terrain with practical, accessible alternatives to Leviathan. Only by living autonomously now do we develop the skills, experiences, and affinity necessary to proceed further. Waiting only teaches waiting; in living one learns to live.

There can be no distinction between construction and destruction here: by ceding a territory from the state, *you're going on the offensive.* Every autonomous zone undermines the normality of total control, revealing the state for the military occupation it really is. Fighting communes tear holes in the social fabric, eking out further space in which we can finally breathe, inviting the rest of the population to take a stand. In particular, it's difficult to imagine the possibility of larger autonomous zones – *autonomous regions* – as being possible except off the back of insurrection. The moment of upheaval temporarily dislodges power's grip on a region; the construction of autonomous lifeways within it makes the rupture permanent. Starting off more modestly, and becoming as ambitious as the situation allows, there might well come a day – a day we surely still know in our hearts – in which the insurrections and revolutions have become indistinguishable.

7: Pushing the boundaries

Anarchy made liveable

Something important for revolutionaries to bear in mind, particularly during the more pessimistic moments, is that the system isn't working for most people. We're confronted with an uncertain situation nowadays: a great many people – *if not most* – are clearly unhappy with the way things are, perhaps even profoundly so. As the everyday strain of fitting into this world increases, rates of suicide, addiction, and self-harm all continue to rise. School shootings – the clearest indication of a society at war with itself – proliferate at an ever quicker pace. Whatever semblance of social peace remains is banded together by the mass consumption of psychiatric drugs, which are frequently administered even to one-year-olds. Whilst anyone still unconvinced can expect to know the four cold walls of a prison cell, the populations of which continue to surge. These dire portents are all too commonplace, to the extent one easily fails to notice them; when you consider just how many of us are being fucked up merely as a matter of due course, though, the excuses begins to stink.

The lucrative decades of the 20th century promised us that anything was possible, that the end of poverty was just around the corner. Yet here we are, exclusion from the basic necessities of life – already sufficient motivation for the revolutions of the previous century – crippling us as severely as ever. Just as this civilisation thinks itself worthy of colonising Mars, as many as a billion humans hunger on Earth. Moreover, about half of the food produced globally goes to waste, and the supermarkets respond by padlocking the bins. Are we honestly expected to believe that capitalism is capable of undoing material scarcity, its most intrinsic of features? The utter contempt afforded to us should be no secret, and it isn't the kind of realisation that lands softly.

What's more, even those who "make it" in this world are quick to find themselves assimilated into a plastic paradise that, at its core, is defined by form without content, matter devoid of feeling. Each of us is quite acquainted with the hollowness of everyday life. The irony of consumer capitalism is that it promises to restore exactly what it deprives us of: the capacity to inhabit ourselves fully, undaunted by a constant sense of existential lacking, of spiritual want. Mass advertising has it that obediently consuming whichever latest cheeseburger, deodorant, or smartphone will heal the tear in the fabric of our being – in essence, the trauma of amputation from each other and the land. And yet, like any addiction, all this superficial consumption fills a hole only to soon leave it emptier than before. This is no image of human civilisation ravaging the planet whilst partying through the night; rather, ours is a culture that, like the most miserable of bullies, casts its torment outwards just to get through the day.

Meanwhile, access to this desert comes at such a high cost: the prospect of a life on the clock, almost all our waking hours spent either at work or recovering from it. Only in comparison with the literal risk of starvation could we be thankful for employment. All that wasted energy – the boredom, the anxiety, the fear – just to find ourselves thrown out by the economy as soon as our productivity drops, arriving at retirement broken and forgotten, without the slightest clue as to

what all the sacrifice was for. No doubt, some of us have it worse – in some cases, immensely worse. But we all have it bad. Even the most privileged members of society are traumatised by the sound of their alarm clocks, by the ripping indication that another day of selling ourselves to exist has begun.

Productivity nowadays is higher than ever, but there's no link between that and happiness, nor our sense of fulfilment. On the contrary, there's an unspoken agreement amongst many of us that somewhere down the line things have gone horribly wrong. It can be difficult to say exactly what the problem is, but the warning signs are there, only continuing to grow. Contempt for the political establishment is rife, and even the middle class begins to falter under the weight of perpetual economic crisis. The oceans are filling up with plastic, whilst climate change threatens to plunge all living things into an epoch of unthinkable calamity. In such a context, to claim things are going to shit is one of the most banal things you can say. It seems the Western psyche is shedding its ancient sense of purpose, provoking a deep sense of existential angst. What's left of that mythical social contract is evaporating fast, our reasons to comply vanishing one by one. The only promise this order of misery still holds is that of its own destruction.

Worst of all is that, having colonised almost every known corner of reality, capitalism convinces us that *life itself* is what's awful. Which would be so much easier to believe, relinquishing us from the added strain of imagining what possibilities might lie beyond the existent. But some things can never be fully ground down, some truths – physiological rather than intellectual – never quite forgotten. As children, everything was so different: we promised ourselves we'd never become old, nor surrender our dreams. With the passing of time, though, those joyous days, in which all activity was but a modification of play, somehow receded into the distant past. Hammered out of us by the banality of routine, and the violence of constant stress, that youthful wisdom – the unashamed passion with which we approached every conceivable issue – slowly withered and died. As adults, most of us have totally forsaken the preciousness of life – not merely our own lives as individuals, but also of life itself. Yet it can always be rediscovered. Lying within each of us is a dormant truth, something so terrible, so revolutionary, that it threatens to demolish everything that makes the 21st century such a wretched affair: *life is not merely something to get through.*

* * *

With all this in mind, there's a curious mismatch developing. On the one hand, levels of hatred for the system are surely enormous; on the other, the vast majority of people somehow find themselves going along with things, swamped by the mass of little compromises. Why is it that relatively few people – extremely few, all things considered – seem to be consciously interested in fighting back? This is a complex issue, but here's an idea: perhaps the majority of our methods just aren't of much use to most people. It isn't that they simply fail to care, but instead have already been sufficiently burdened by everyday survival under capitalism without the added expectation of struggling *even more*. The things we dedicate ourselves to – whether peaceful protest or militant revolt – offer us a great deal, but only rarely does such involvement stand a chance of making life any easier. In other words, the value of the struggle is in a sense spiritual, not material: it enhances our lives, but almost always lessens our ability to make ends meet.

Perhaps that's the reason many of us are having a hard time exceeding the (often distinctly privileged) margins of society, *because the struggle is a luxury.* Only once your basic material

needs have been met can you start worrying about less immediate concerns, including the well-being of society and the planet. Which just goes to show, there's no excuse for losing faith in the species, not yet: the conditions of economic scarcity imposed by capitalism – its ruthless combination of debt, bills, and joyless careers – deem it physically impossible for most to realistically dream of changing the world. Not only that, it also means those who get involved are likely to find their commitment weighed down by the pressures of long-term economic security, that once youthful idealism often waning into our thirties. Only by reconnecting the struggle to the promotion of material autonomy can we expand its breadth of engagement, both for outsiders and ourselves.

What's being proposed here, basically, is the need to make anarchy liveable. Why wait for some mass upheaval to get hold of the necessary means of production? We can't sustain ourselves on symbolic gestures alone: only by securing immediate solutions to everyday material needs – solutions valuable in and of themselves, irrespective of what's on the horizon – can you expect to get greater numbers involved. People are hurting now, and that won't be alleviated by some millenarian hope of revolution. All too often, anarchism sees itself as an ideology rather than a way of life, as if levelling hierarchy were a mere matter of aggregating opinions – a distinctly liberal notion. On the contrary, anarchy expands by realising itself immediately within the social terrain, supplanting every function that keeps us loyal to the system, generating solutions *more realistic* than it has to offer.

We already have some useful examples, including the free breakfast programme run by the Black Panthers, and the squatted ADYE medical clinic of Exarcheia. In order to reinvent itself as a true historical force, however, anarchism must increase its ambitions massively, reclaiming every condition of existence – food, shelter, education, medicine, transport, entertainment, social care – in the name of autonomy. This notion of anarchy as an immediate, communising force stands to make major gains against the failings of institutional engagement: rather than getting bogged down in lengthy and prejudiced bureaucratic procedures, we could utilise direct action to start building our strength without delay.

Autonomous zones are extremely useful here, but they're not enough. Pushing the boundaries isn't only about having a concrete social alternative, *but also an accessible one.* In too many cases, our communes remain out of bounds to outsiders, something not at all helped by subcultural barriers or even outright contempt. These issues can, of course, be remedied with only a little sensitivity, but in many cases the problem stems from exactly the point of an autonomous zone: to establish a definitive break with normality. Rather than expecting outsiders to leap into the unknown, therefore, we're the ones who need to be doing so, putting in the effort to build affinity beyond the usual circles. No excuses here: it isn't as if all such engagement introduces a hierarchical dynamic, one between the revolutionaries and the masses, the missionary and the heathen. Separated from a commitment to organisational growth or ideological conversion, what one might call "outreach" is much more capable of occurring horizontally, opening up a reciprocal process in which either side stands to learn just as much from the other. The point isn't to absorb outsiders into our own way of doing things, but instead to encourage people to struggle against power on their own terms, wherever that might lead.

In any society based on hierarchy, resistance to subordination is a fact of everyday life, no less so for "apolitical" people. The problems of capitalist expansion are rarely faced by ourselves alone, whether it's a question of gentrification, maxi-prisons, slaughterhouses, migrant detention centres, nuclear waste dumps, high-speed railways, or surveillance systems. Take your pick: we're

already surrounded by opportunities to break down social barriers, counteracting any attempts to ghettoise our efforts. The struggles we undertake are diverse, yet each of them is grounded in a singular need to confront social hierarchy, thereby containing the potential to call *everything* into question. Even if the local, specific objectives of an intermediate struggle aren't achieved, the mere fact of struggling together can be decisive for bringing people – ourselves as much as anyone – closer to the future possibility of rupture. Rather than abandoning the terrain of activist campaigning, therefore, the point is merely to deepen the perspective with which we approach it, shifting from a preoccupation with the specific to an appreciation of the general, from a reformist focus to something concretely revolutionary.

Miserable conditions are never enough for revolution; what makes this world *intolerable* is that one has confidence in an alternative. Surely most people continue with their lives – with working a job, paying rent, or going to school – not because they like it, but because they've been convinced, in the lack of a viable alternative, that it's just the way it is. No matter how awful a situation, if it has a monopoly on meeting your basic material needs, the only conceivable response will be to suck it up and continue, perhaps even blaming feminism or immigration for the deepening crisis of modernity. As yet, we've failed to puncture that illusion. Which confirms the strange sense in which even we, as dissidents, must bear part of the responsibility for propping up this awful mess. Pushing the boundaries of struggle means establishing viable routes of desertion from the system, both accessible and secure. In short, *anarchy expands by making it liveable.*

"Make the most of every crisis"

Common sense wisdom would have it that things will forever stay pretty much the same. The current situation will change, no doubt, but always gradually, taking care to maintain the guarantees of modern life. The privileged amongst us count on remaining insulated from the turbulence of history; any unavoidable volatility, meanwhile, will take place only on our television screens, never outside the front door. Maybe!? Of course, maybe not. Remember that such is exactly the arrogance preceding the collapse of every great civilisation. There's a growing fear amongst many of us that our sacred assumptions are beginning to expire. Perhaps a day will come – a day many of us could well live to see – in which we'll arrive at the supermarket only to find it has nothing left to sell, let alone to find in the bins. And by that point it will already be too late.

Every day, global supply chains increase in complexity, to the extent that even minor disruptions have the potential to provoke widespread instability. The integration of our needs into a single, planetary economy provides certain conveniences, but it can't go on like this forever. Just in order to survive, the system stacks itself up higher and higher, merely ensuring it has further to fall. With oil, for example, industrial civilisation has already likely surpassed its peak capacities for extraction; in recent years, the economy has demonstrated an increased reliance on the dirtiest, most inefficient fossil fuels the planet has to offer, including shale gas, tar sands, and brown coal. Something similar can be said about water reserves, currently being depleted twice as quickly as they're naturally renewed; already today, billions lack sufficient access to fresh water, especially during dry seasons, and the number is increasing fast. Soil erosion, too, is a significant threat, as industrial agriculture – with its relentless application of monocultures and pesticides – lays waste to what land around the globe remains capable of supporting complex

life. Factors such as these suggest that, as the 21st century smoulders on, economic depression and resource wars will begin to proliferate on an ever greater scale.

There are already over 7 billion of us on the planet, and we're predicted to hit the 10 billion mark around the middle of the century. Moreover, population growth is likely to crescendo in combination with the aforementioned factors, potentially leading to a sudden incapacity for the system to support its inhabitants in many regions. Having said that, population levels might not be the core problem here: most slum-dwellers in the Global South consume only a fraction of the resources consumed by middle-class Westerners, perhaps even one hundredth as much. What's especially worrying is that population is booming in the very places – India and China, for example – that are beginning to emulate the resource-intensive lifestyles previously hoarded only by much smaller numbers in the Global North. It's difficult to imagine a gentle outcome to this situation: an exponential *decrease* in available resources, combined with an exponential *increase* in our reliance on them, seems to deem some kind of major collision inevitable.

It's not even the likelihood of crises that's increasing, but also our inability to deal with them. We live in an age in which, having become so severely alienated from the conditions of existence, merely growing your own food is considered eccentric. This is a distinctly contemporary situation, owing to the destruction of peasant life wrought by the Industrial Revolution, as well as the further deskilling of the workforce ushered in by the Digital Revolution. Whilst the system used to concern itself mainly with the political organisation of our lives, it nowadays holds down a monopoly on almost every conceivable facet of our material needs. This brings heaps of volatility: until a few decades ago, the collapse of a civilisation would, despite the obvious turmoil, nonetheless have left most people capable of feeding themselves. The 21st century, however, is such a strange creature, absolutely convinced of its advanced abilities, yet completely lost when it comes to the most basic gestures. *We can have absolutely anything we want.* (Provided the credit card reader is working).

Our techno-addicted culture is expanding at an ever greater pace, far quicker than anyone can begin to understand its implications. Rather than merely altering reality, this brave new world has created an entirely new one, steadily digitising the entirety of the human experience. Information technology is used to augment basic cognitive functions – memory, navigation, communication, imagination – to the extent users suffer literal symptoms of withdrawal without them. We fantasise about cyborgs as if they were the stuff of science fiction, failing to realise that they're already here, *that we've already become them.* Merely leaving the room without our smartphones is often unthinkable, and that's saying a lot. We need to be wary of becoming utterly dependent on our digital prostheses, particularly when their operation relies so heavily on centralised infrastructure. Any level of disruption here – as with a solar flare, power failure, or terrorist attack – would spell major tumult.

It's time to seriously ask ourselves: if the collapse happened tomorrow, would we really be ready? With every passing day, this question becomes increasingly unavoidable. Fortunately, however, the key solution is also quite straightforward, having already been discussed in some detail: *make anarchy liveable.* By securing our material autonomy now – something highly valuable in itself, whatever the future brings – we increase our chances of coping and even expanding during any unpredictable moments of future turbulence. As this civilisation tumbles into the abyss, it will expect to pull each of us along with it; yet that outcome can be avoided, insofar as we already know fully well how to live on our own terms. It would be ridiculous to wait for the

supermarket shelves to be looted clean before trying our hand at growing a cabbage. What we do *before* things get really serious will be decisive.

For many of us, this could well be a matter of life or death. Yet the situation isn't quite so bleak, either: there's good reason to believe that crises (of certain sorts, anyway) present important opportunities to increase our strength. A crisis can be thought of simply as a breakdown in the smooth functioning of normality, something that might potentially offer its share of advantages. With the system failing to perform its expected roles, these are moments in which the status quo has become *even less* realistic, inviting autonomous projects to fill the void. Quite commonly, a self-organised response occurs organically, devoid of conscious political consideration: as with so many disaster situations, ordinary people rediscover their dormant prosocial instincts – those spontaneous, impartial inclinations towards solidarity and mutual aid – just in order to pull through. By intervening in these accidental ruptures in intelligent, sensitive ways, we can add strength to the efforts, pushing them towards a permanent break. Important examples here include US anarchists providing material solidarity to those devastated by the 2017/18 hurricane seasons, as well as the Greek anarchist movement squatting accommodation in response to the ongoing European refugee crisis. In all likeliness, however, the familiar depth of crisis will pale in comparison to what's ahead.

We cannot shy away from crises: to hide from them is to hide from history – from *our* history, in particular. Literally every example of libertarian revolution – Ukraine 1917, Manchuria 1929, Catalonia 1936, Rojava 2012 – emerged from a situation of outright civil war. Perhaps that's a shame, but it's also no surprise, given that any large-scale experiment in autonomous living will usually need a power vacuum to fill. After all, it's not up to us to choose which multifaceted contexts are inevitably thrown our way, only to work out how best to inhabit them.

That said, none of this suggests we should look forward to crises. Not only do they bring great danger to humans and nonhumans across the board (especially those already worst off), they also provide the moments of instability necessary for authoritarianism to lurch forward. Fascist governments, too, have relied on crises – real or imagined – in order to seize power. No less, long-standing regimes will always gladly exploit moments of panic to crack down on dissidents. Exactly that happened, for example, with the 1923 Amakasu Incident in Japan, in which the imperial army used the turmoil generated by the Great Kantō earthquake as an excuse to murder anarchist figureheads. Or look at 9/11 more recently, gleefully utilised by regimes in the Global North to roll out an unprecedented wave of "anti-terrorist" repression. The bottom line on crises is simply that, whether we like it or not, they're inevitable – especially under capitalism. Given that stubborn conundrum, we can only ask how best to make the most of them.

This isn't a matter of counting down the days until the shit hits the fan, quite the opposite: *the crisis is already here.* Social hierarchy, in its very essence, is crisis. Merely in order to persevere, it must forever overextend itself, destabilising the very fabric of life wherever it goes. By intervening effectively in the carnage that engulfs us, we can minimise the damage wrought, all the while building the strength necessary to confront the single, planetary disaster this civilisation has become. As the crises multiply in scale and frequency, it's possible the recklessness of the system will be its undoing, granting ample opportunities for insurrection and even revolution. Just remember that the failings of our enemies will never be enough. *We must also be ready to take advantage.* And to do that we need to get going now.

8: Confronting the future

"It's later than we thought"

The current historical conditions are shifting, giving rise to a new epoch. As the heat gets turned up, so many of our deepest assumptions about the world – about just what is and isn't possible within it – are beginning to melt. A distinctly novel, far more volatile terrain is piercing through the current one, promising a century of confused certainties and gritty opportunities.

Confronting the future means returning to the theme of crisis, only this time to a specific case: climate change. This is surely the distinctive crisis for the coming decades, the one that threatens us most severely. Yet few still truly believe it can be still be stopped, at least not completely. Each new headline smashes into our optimism, confirming a fraction of what's yet to come: droughts, floods, heat waves, hurricanes, forest fires, forced migrations... The glaciers are melting faster than ever, and sea levels are rising indisputably. Whilst the years 2015–19 are set to be the five hottest ever recorded, already a degree higher than pre-industrial levels. We've departed the moment in which you could accurately refer to climate change as a prospective event. Honestly speaking, it's later than we thought.

Leviathan has always gone hand in hand with ecological crisis; it's no coincidence, then, that the globalisation of capital over the last few decades has been mirrored by the first distinctly *planetary* ecological crisis there's been. This story has, of course, also been one of ongoing resistance: the anti-globalisation movement, for one, threw many obstacles into the path of capitalist progress, even if its impact failed to last far into the 21st century. It was succeeded somewhat by an international, fairly grassroots movement directed specifically against climate change, the high points of which included various climate camps, as well as mass mobilisations around the COP 15 and 21 summits. But it should come as no surprise that this movement was also unsuccessful, given that it could only set the bar impossibly high. In order to stop climate change, a movement of immense quantity *and* quality was required: it had to be worldwide in influence, yet sufficiently radical to transform the deep structure of the economy. It's obvious, though, that global libertarian revolution – the only thing that will get to the root of the problem – isn't about to happen.

Nor are reformist attempts to change government policy looking any more hopeful. The worthlessness of the 2015 Paris Agreement – focused on the wildly unrealistic goal of keeping global temperature rise well below 2℃ – is made abundantly clear by each new carbon-intensive development project signatory states implement. No less, even that scrap of paper has proven too demanding for some, with the world's largest economy – the US – pulling out of the non-binding agreement in 2017. By a president who denies the very existence of climate change... But at least The Donald is upfront in his contempt for the environment, rather than playing the two-faced game of his liberal counterparts. At the end of the day, this or that government policy isn't what really matters, given that solving climate change is inherently unfeasible for any capitalist state. After all, taking the issue seriously would mean restructuring (if not dismantling) the entirety of

global production, entailing massive economic recession. And whilst such recession will no doubt pale in comparison to what's on the horizon, that hardly presents an intelligible problem for a government seeking re-election in the next few years, not when it means devastating themselves economically in the short-term.

That leaves us faced with a troubling combination. On the one hand, industrial civilisation is racing towards massive, irreversible climate change; on the other, there's surely no force on earth capable of averting this outcome. It seems a new wave of climate movements is emerging at the moment – these could make all the difference. But we also need to be realistic about what can still be achieved. Truth be told, the opportunity to stop climate change has surely passed us by: no longer is it a matter of avoiding global ecological meltdown altogether, but instead of limiting its severity. Gone are the years in which we could deny the inevitability of the crisis. And what a strange time to be alive that makes it! One gets the feeling of standing on the seashore, watching the approaching flood in a state of calm acceptance. Maybe it's time to downgrade our expectations: *the world will not be saved.*

Don't jump to any conclusions, though. The world won't be saved, but it's hardly about to be destroyed, either. A little too often, environmentalist discourse is pitched as a dichotomy between utopia and extinction: either we'll mount a global ecological revolution and solve all our problems at once, or else we'll fall short of the mark and all life on earth will be annihilated. Honestly, though, neither is remotely likely – not for the time being. This kind of all or nothing thinking is unhelpful, because it sets us up for failure once it becomes clear that, actually, we're not going to win this one. On the contrary, sustaining a lifetime of struggle means focusing on goals that, besides being ambitious, are also achievable. And such goals remain open to us still: even though we can't stop climate change altogether, we can still soften the blow significantly. Not only does that mean minimising the amount of carbon dioxide yet to be released into the atmosphere – that is, bringing down the economy as decisively as possible – but also preparing others and ourselves for the inevitable crunch ahead. If anything, this is the worst time of all to give up. There's still so much to fight for, and also to win. This isn't just a matter of damage limitation! The future promises a great many opportunities to live wild and free; dramatically more than today, even.

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This discussion gives way to another, namely, the question of what a climate changed world might actually look like. On this topic, the book *Desert* (2011) – a key source of inspiration for this chapter – offers some important suggestions. Presuming anything approaching a 4℃ temperature rise occurs this century, the planet would be left unrecognisable compared to today. Such a high level of heating – which could well be exceeded, given current trajectories – would mean hot deserts expanding massively beyond the Equator, possibly seeping deep into Europe. It would also mean sea levels rising as high as 10 metres, inundating vast swathes of dry land, including many of those regions most densely inhabited by humans. Faced with a combination of warming, acidification, and pollution, the oceans will become increasingly incapable of supporting complex life. Across the globe, moreover, millions of species of plants and animals stand to be wiped out by the relatively sudden destabilisation of long-standing ecological conditions. Finally, as human refugees amass in vast numbers, in countless locations trampling borders in search of safety, the toll on our own species will likely be unprecedented. It seems surreal to even write it, but here it is: faced with a combination of extreme weather, famine, flooding, war, and disease, the loss of human life could well climb into the region of billions.

It goes without saying that an extremely volatile (and also massively diverse) social situation would result from these changes. Already today, many equatorial regions house regimes which are failing to provide local populations with basic material needs, including sufficient food and clean water. Climate change will multiply numerous pre-existing threats in many places – much of Africa and the Middle East, for example – beyond the capacity for effective governance to be maintained. As the viable borders of global civilisation shrink, much of the loss of human life will be suffered by those who, having been forcibly incorporated into an inherently unsustainable economic system, will be hung out to dry once they can no longer be supported. In many cases, "anarchy" will ensue, but not at all in the sense we mean it: local warlords and religious extremists will rush in to exploit the situation, merely replacing the state and capital rather than dismantling them – something looking much more like Somalia than Catalonia.

In other cases, however, the destabilisation of various regions will likely favour a more peaceable outcome. The collapse of a civilisation doesn't need to mean the end of the world: with many cities failing to support their inhabitants, one of the surest means of survival will be to retreat to communal, decentralised setups that avoid the unstable reliance on imported resources and heavily concentrated populations. Even today, the inhabitants of many rural regions – think sub-Saharan Africa, Central America, and Southeast Asia – continue to rely on robust subsistence economies that could well act as an effective buffer for many. In areas of reduced agricultural viability, moreover, various forms of 21st century gatherer-hunting are likely to emerge, interspersed with a strange brew of dropouts from mainstream society, including hippies, pirates, cults, and hillbillies. Even if stateless societies aren't the most inevitable of social arrangements, they nonetheless remain the most natural – that is, the least reliant on complex social relations. This will offer a strategic advantage, depending on the extent to which we're capable of appreciating these often accidental anarchic flowerings, most of which will fall far short of our idealised standards.

Amidst such unprecedented conditions, libertarian revolution may also become possible in many places. Social hierarchy – especially class – is a constant balancing act between oppressing the excluded enough to maximise the privileges received, but not doing so to the extent they rise up and kill you. Climate change will make that tightrope immensely harder to walk. As the mountain glaciers melt into nothing, many heavily populated regions will suffer severe water shortages, but you can hardly expect people to die quietly whilst the rich keep their mansion fountains running. Given the realisation that the least responsible for the crisis stand to suffer the most, insurrection will spark off in locations currently unthinkable. That won't always be a pretty picture, especially given that many rebel movements will undoubtedly be nationalist in nature. But there's also a solid chance the rage can be pushed in a more hopeful, liberatory direction, depending on the extent we find ourselves ready to intervene. Some good could well come of this mess: anarchism will enjoy a growing demand for a radically different vision of what the world could look like, one that gets to the root of the problem rather than just blaming the victims. In terms of the necessary external conditions, certainly, it's possible the golden age of insurrection and revolution lived out by anarchists a century ago will be exceeded.

At given moments, it will be tempting to overstate the nature of the destabilisation, but let's not get carried away. This won't be the end of hierarchy, nor of the struggle against it, only a transformation of the conditions within which this eternal tension manifests itself. Whilst no doubt including fits of intensity here and there, the process of disintegration will be both limited and gradual, defying our Hollywood-induced expectations of a sudden, all out collapse. This will

surely be the end of that totalising, globalised form of capitalism known to some as "Empire," but not of capitalism itself, nor of civilisation altogether. As for the next decades, more temperate regions – especially island nations such as New Zealand and the UK – are likely to remain somewhat insulated from the destabilisation, at least relative to what will be going on closer to the Equator.

Moreover, it's even possible that, whilst civilisation and its borders will retract in many places, in others these will actually expand. Another theme for the 21st century will be the continued thawing of cold deserts, such as those found in Siberia, Scandinavia, Canada, Greenland, and Alaska. This will open up new possibilities for capitalist expansion in the form of yet more trade, settlement, and resource extraction. In fact, the process already started some years ago, and is likely to pick up the pace throughout the century, perhaps even including the forgotten continent of Antarctica. As the once uninhabitable recesses of the planet become prime lands for colonisation, many stronger, more imperialistic countries – including those with nuclear weapons, such as the US, Russia, and China – stand to be drawn into further geopolitical conflicts. For the time being, as well as the foreseeable future, Leviathan is far from being dealt its deathblow.

The relative stability of many temperate regions, however, hardly suggests that life will continue as normal there. For one, the threats destabilising equatorial regions – drought, flooding, water shortages – will increase markedly everywhere, even though regimes in the Global North have a better initial chance of holding down effective governance. Considering current trajectories, no less, it's only a matter of time – a few extra decades, maybe less – before temperate regions are hit much harder by the social and ecological effects of climate change, especially with cities like New York, Amsterdam, and London already at risk from flooding. Even before then, a major portion of international trade will crash once equatorial regions start to fold, pulling the heavily externalised economies of the Global North into unprecedented recession. With many centrist regimes failing to keep a lid on their ever multiplying crises, many moderates will find themselves looking for radical alternatives. All the destabilising factors that prefaced the revolutions of the past will be there (if anything, they'll be immensely greater). Just remember that these are the very conditions that gave rise to fascism in the 20th century, only this time with staggering numbers of climate refugees thrown into the mix. As always, the inevitability of crises within hierarchical systems is both our greatest enemy and friend.

Some will respond, no doubt, that such predictions are over the top. Perhaps climate change will turn out to be less severe than the current evidence suggests, or even significantly mitigated. But really no one knows. Presuming things do begin to majorly disintegrate in one sense or another – be it through climate change, the potential crises mentioned in the last chapter, or something else entirely – an outcome resembling the picture outlined here seems probable. Comrades would thus do well to consider how their local terrain of struggle could change over the next decades. That isn't to say we should get too caught up in the game of making predictions, especially given that history is typically defined by the events no one saw coming. Yet by preparing well for the future – that is, by struggling hard now, in combination with a little forethought – we can maximise our potential to convert even the most abysmal conditions into solid opportunities for growth.

A thousand Syrias

Only with the help of historical hindsight do you really know what period you're living in. It's unlikely there will be a distinguishable ground zero marking out the new epoch, only a blurry line separating the previous era from something altogether different. Perhaps future generations will even consider the current historical moment to fall within the boundaries of the new era, given that arguably the first major geopolitical conflict triggered by climate change – the Syrian Civil War – began some years ago. This conflict might well bear an image from the future, suggesting what's likely to be reproduced on an ever greater scale over the coming decades.

It's hard to imagine now, but not long ago Syria was one of the most politically stable Arab regimes. Chief amongst the factors that altered this picture so dramatically, however, was the worst drought ever recorded in the region. Lasting from 2006 to 2011, this period of severe dryness – near impossible to explain without reference to anthropogenic climate change – led to major crop failures, livestock collapse, and water shortages in many rural areas. Up to 1.5 million locals were forced to migrate from the countryside into the cities, combined with an influx of similar numbers of refugees from the war in Iraq. The result was a significantly diminished capacity for urban facilities to provide for such sharply growing populations, thereby intensifying certain social tensions – unemployment, corruption, inequality – that would otherwise have been far less noticeable. An autocratic regime is one thing, but something entirely different is one that can no longer ensure the basic material needs of most of its citizens. Inspired by numerous uprisings in other Arab states, the first protests and insurgencies against the Assad regime began in 2011, escalating decisively into a civil war by 2012.

The basic dynamic here is clear: rather than single-handedly causing the conflict, extreme weather conditions stressed pre-existing social tensions beyond the capacity of the local regime to cope. Without climate change, control would likely have been maintained; combined with such volatile ecological conditions, however, Syrian society has been permanently altered beyond recognition.

It's worth noting that this conflict, which began exactly around the time *Desert* was published, validates some of the key predictions the text offers. In particular, the Syrian Civil War supports the expectation that climate change will leave many regions "engulfed in civil war, revolution, and inner-state conflict," offering "much horror but also much potential for constructing free lives." The horrible aspects of the war are all too obvious, having been broadcast almost constantly for years now. Faced with brutal repression at the hands of the Assad regime, many were convinced to join the Free Syrian Army just for a chance to fight back. However, the choice was ultimately between the less authoritarian of two statist groups, both of which remain committed to controlling the entirety of Syria. Not only that, this power-play also provided the destabilisation necessary for ISIS – an Islamist statist group, fascist in all but name – to gain control of much of Syria and Iraq by 2014, bringing yet more barbarism to the fray. Responding to this volatile situation, many foreign powers – the US, Russia, France, Iran, Turkey – became increasingly involved, exploiting Syria as yet another theatre in which to further their geopolitical interests. All of which soon left millions of refugees with no choice but to flee for their lives, only to reveal the true colours of many EU states, who in most cases simply favoured raising the drawbridge. These are exactly the characteristics you can expect to see reoccurring across the globe this century; if anything, the author of *Desert* was mistaken only in suspecting it would take much longer for the process to begin.

That'll do for the horrible aspects of the war, but what of the potential for constructing free lives? Far from merely generating bloodshed and authoritarianism, the Syrian Civil War also proves that "In some places peoples, anarchists amongst them, could transform climate wars into successful libertarian insurrections." It's immensely reassuring that all this destabilisation gave birth to the first libertarian socialist revolution since 1936. For years prior to the war, the Kurds of Syria had been organising themselves clandestinely, forming the People's Protection Units (YPG) in response to the 2004 Qamishli riots – surely an insurrection. In 2012, with Assad's forces drawn elsewhere, the Kurds seized their opportunity to throw off the Syrian state, thereby initiating the Rojava Revolution. This struggle has always been about much more than Kurdish independence. Having demonstrated a profoundly libertarian and anti-capitalist character, taking the autonomous commune as the nucleus of its social transformation, it could hardly contrast more starkly with anything else happening around Syria right now – even the planet as a whole. It's quite something to be witnessing the first *feminist* revolution in human history, the only in which women's liberation is at least as important as any of its other aspects. The combined emphasis on ecology, moreover, places it closer to a total liberation ethic than probably any explicitly anarchist revolution there's been. Already today, the Rojava Revolution has lasted far longer than the Spanish Revolution, achieving astonishing gains against ISIS, whilst refusing to be broken by an invasion launched by Turkey at the beginning of 2018.

It can be a curious thing, how history often works. For decades, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) had been facing off against the Turkish state in a long and bloody civil war, all the while sternly promoting Marxism-Leninism. After being captured in 1999, however, the leader of the PKK – Abdullah Öcalan – became the sole inmate of the prison island of Imrali, where he somehow came across the writings of one Murray Bookchin. And what an elegant twist of fate that was: this is exactly what initiated the shift in Öcalan's thinking away from Marxism, with its fixation on statecraft, towards a new proposal for Kurdish liberation that he called "democratic confederalism." This theory is defined by a broad application of Bookchin's libertarian municipalism to Middle Eastern conditions, taking feminism, ecology, and multiculturalism as its central pillars. Given the strong influence of Öcalan over the Kurdish liberation struggles in Syria and Turkey, the majority of those involved eventually adopted democratic confederalism in full, swapping their ambition for a new nation state for the goal of achieving autonomy from states altogether. The Syrian Civil War was merely the opportunity needed to put theory into practice on a large scale. In doing so, the Kurds have proven that democratic confederalism offers the most realistic hope of achieving lasting peace not only in Syria, but also the Middle East more generally. The future is no done deal: the Rojava Revolution offers much needed hope for the ever darker times ahead.

On the other hand, Rojava doesn't offer an obvious picture of an anarchist society, certainly not yet. Whether or not the state continues to exist there is a matter of debate, whilst the economy remains split between private and communal ownership. Some level of a police force exists, even though its operations are difficult to distinguish from communal self-defence; prisons remain as well, although their application nowadays – primarily a matter of detaining members of ISIS – is a shadow of what it was under Assad. It goes without saying that Rojava isn't perfect, not least because of its fragility. But none of this should detract from what's been achieved by this heroic experiment amidst the most trying of circumstances. Maybe the Left has become a little too accustomed to losing to know what a victory looks like. This isn't fiction, nor is it history: this is real, *and it's growing in this very minute.*

What's more, any doubts as to the revolutionary content at the core of Rojava – usually voiced by those sitting in another continent – are soon dispelled by the testimonies of the innumerable international anarchists who've fought (and fallen) in this ongoing struggle. Of the more dramatic examples, Anna Campbell (Hêlîn Qereçox) – already long since engaged in hunt sabotage, eco-defence, prison abolition, and migrant solidarity – travelled from the UK to Rojava in 2017, enlisting with the Women's Protection Units (YPJ). After taking part in the fight against ISIS at Deir ez-Zor, she defied the advice of her commanders by joining the defence of Afrin against invasion by Turkey. It was there that Campbell lost her life to a Turkish air strike, in March, 2018. Yet her readiness to give everything for Rojava continues to resound, as in the words to a comrade (grounded in almost a year of living and fighting there) that "I'm not looking to die, but if it's necessary to die in this struggle then I'm ready." Also the more detailed clarification:

> I joined because I wanted to support the revolution, and because I wanted to participate in the revolution of women that is being built up here. And join also the weaponised fight against the forces of fascism and the enemies of the revolution. So now I'm very happy and proud to be going to Afrin to be able to do this. (From a video posted online by the YPJ, 2018)

Besides affirming the prior achievements of Rojava, finally, this kind of international solidarity has helped bring the ongoing social revolution to uncharted terrain. Green anarchist group Social Insurrection (formed in 2015) offer an emphasis not only on ecology, but also vegetarianism. Just as the International Revolutionary People's Guerilla Forces (IRPGF, formed in 2017) announced in their opening statement: "We are committed anti-fascists, anti-capitalists, anti-imperialists and against all forms of patriarchy and kyriarchy," even going on to affirm that "We fight in defense of life and we struggle for total liberation." Perhaps the icing on the cake was then provided by The Queer Insurrection and Liberation Army (TQILA, formed later in 2017), themselves claiming that "the oppressive structures that seek to erase Queers are also simultaneously the ones that oppress women, workers, peasants, ethnic minorities et al. Our fight for liberation is tied with every oppressed group's fight for liberation. If one is in chains, all are in chains."

Society is a complex problem, never moving towards any single end. If the Syrian Civil War offers a microcosm for the future (and there's good reason to believe it does), it's fair to locate both intense horror *and* beauty on the horizon. Within the next decades, such destabilisation will begin exploding around the world, offering major opportunities both to our enemies and ourselves. Moreover, if climate change continues unabated, it's only a matter of time before something resembling Syria begins to engulf the entire planet. No longer can we hope to stop climate change altogether; whether that situation might offer its fair share of fruitful outcomes, however, remains entirely down to us.

Choosing sides in a dying world

Only three decades ago, the Berlin Wall fell, revealing a mess of broken dreams and genocide on the other side. The revolutionary movements of the 1970s and '80s had subsided, whilst the anti-globalisation movement hadn't yet begun to fill the void. This moment of respite allowed the ideologues of modernity to calmly scan the globe, confident there was no viable alternative to the rule of liberal democracy. So severe was their sense of certainty, that "the end of history"

itself – the supposed culmination of humanity's social evolution – was proudly declared. Yet the arrogance underpinning that little claim is exactly what continues to blind power to the imminence of its own implosion. The honeymoon is over: for the first time in history, the viability not of this or that civilisation has been called into question, but of civilisation *as such.* Perhaps the end of history really is upon us? Yet not at all in the sense Fukuyama meant it.

The ecological changes ahead are likely to put serious strain on the viability of liberal democracies the world over. Resources will dwindle, re-exposing deep class divisions that decades of economic growth merely covered up; meanwhile, the guarantee of a decent living standard even for the middle class will begin to lose its credibility. With the social fabric starting to unravel completely, centrist regimes will find themselves employing ever more repressive measures in order to maintain control. The boundaries of the surveillance state will continue to be expanded, aiming for a take on omniscience beyond the wildest dreams of any Stasi agent. Rising levels of immigration will be used not only as an excuse to fortify borders even more, but also to keep ever greater tabs on those inside the walls. Climate change will be rolled out as the latest frontier of that already pervasive social war – other aspects of which include the war on terror and war on drugs – waged against the population in the name of our protection. Ever more peculiar laws will be sought, and states of emergency will be utilised much more frequently. At every turn, the state will fight tooth and nail for its ambition of total control, gaining as much ground as we're willing to give it.

Especially once tensions get really high, any democratic government will prove itself willing to take ever greater risks. The assassination of Fred Hampton and other Black Panthers during the COINTELPRO era gives a taste of what the US state has perpetrated when necessary; no less, look at the 1969 Piazza Fontana bombing in Italy, in which a fascist terrorist attack – perhaps even facilitated by NATO – was used as an excuse to persecute and murder local anarchists. These kinds of underhanded tactics are only likely to be outdone in the years ahead.

Just as the right to choose your master doesn't stop you being a slave, neither does the right to vote for your government stop you living in a dictatorship. The death of liberal democracy – something many nations will endure this century – is guaranteed by that lurking contradiction so fundamental to its existence: whilst such regimes prize progressive, egalitarian ends in theory, they're defined in practice by almost as hierarchical a setup as any other. These inconsistencies are less noticeable during times of relative social peace, but all it takes is a bit of turbulence to tease them out, revealing the basic mismatch between saying one thing and doing another. As the material benefits offered by liberalism run dry, citizens will find themselves less willing to entertain the democratic myth. The authoritarianism at the core of any state will steadily become undeniable. That will leave many centrists confronted with a choice between following the democratic ethos to its logical, anarchic conclusion, or else rejecting it outright in favour of a more honest dictatorship. In many cases, opinion will polarise around the only two coherent options on offer: anarchism, with its rejection of hierarchy in any form, and fascism, which wears the affirmation of hierarchy on its sleeve.

This warning of the likely re-emergence of fascism is hardly alarmist. The social contract has always been a trade-off between freedom and security; as the insecurity posed by climate change really gets scary, however, the degree of freedom many of us will opt to surrender is going to increase dramatically. Whether explicit or implicit, gradual or sudden, fascistic logic will continue to infiltrate the sphere of mainstream politics, as has already begun in recent years. Especially once it becomes undeniable that economic growth is at the heart of the environmental crisis,

it's hard to imagine the sludgy centre of neoliberal discourse continuing to hold sway. Either the killing machine that is the economy will be torn down completely, or else an even greater monster – the omnipotent state – will need to arise just to keep it in check. The fascist option, defined not only by its nationalism, but also the rejection of free markets, will seem like an increasingly logical choice for many.

In particular, the 21st century is likely to witness the widespread reinvention of fascism in ecological form. Pentti Linkola, exposing the dark side of deep ecology, summarises the authoritarian take on environmentalism as such: "the survival of man – when nature can take no more – is possible only when the discipline, prohibition, enforcement and oppression meted out by another clear-sighted human prevents him from indulging in his destructive impulses and committing suicide." Don't forget that Nazism was at times strangely sympathetic to the plight of nonhuman animals and the environment. Hitler's regime endorsed organic farming and banned vivisection, whilst Savitri Devi – amongst the most influential Nazi writers since the Second World War – attempted to combine fascism and the occult with animal rights and biocentrism. Much of the appeal of contemporary fascists such as the Alt-right lies in their promise to restore, along racial lines, the sense of community neoliberal capitalism has so meticulously destroyed; yet it's ecofascism – the fixation with blood *and* soil – that will offer a return to unity with Nature as well. Just as Hitler and Mussolini legitimised themselves with workerist overtones, exploiting one of the leading moral forces of the early 20th century, the need to protect an increasingly uninhabitable planet will be taken as the latest excuse to pulverise the most vulnerable amongst us.

The attempt to combine fascism with ecology is, of course, seriously confused. This synthesis should be granted about as much durability as Hitler's appraisal of workers' power, which was inevitably swapped for outright annihilation of the trade unions the moment he gained power. Particularly given that, far from abolishing the growth-imperative that defines capitalist production, fascism merely seeks to centralise it under state control. All the while fortifying the very hierarchies – the state, class, and gender, if not civilisation itself – that lie at the root of the environmental crisis. Having said that, however, the inevitability of a political quick-fix merely compounding the horror down the line has never been a guarantee it won't still be tried.

This confirms the urgency of engaging in effective anti-fascism now. Whilst confrontation remains essential, though, any long-term anti-fascist strategy must also take care to offer more attractive, libertarian alternatives to the decomposition of mainstream politics. The status quo is failing – something which, in a weird way, both Trump and Brexit already begin to indicate – and more of the same isn't going to save us. There's a growing need for a resistance movement against *all* forms of hierarchy, one that affirms ecological balance as one and the same with the construction of horizontal social relations. In these increasingly intense times, the emergence of a bold movement for total liberation – immediate in its impact, yet forever with its gaze on the revolutionary horizon – will become less of a luxury, much more a matter of everyday survival in an increasingly hostile terrain. There can be no pretensions of neutrality in this dying world.

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Four and a half billion years ago, planet Earth was a glowing, volcanic expanse. With time, our planet cooled and the atmosphere formed; water and oxygen emerged, generating the conditions necessary for life to flourish. The story of our origins, billions of years in the making, gave rise at first to single-celled organisms, then to complex life. Evolution continued to develop, and life

multiplied into a vast diversity of flora and fauna, wholly contained within a single, perfectly balanced ecological continuum. Ours is a planet so beautiful, so unfathomably complete, that God Himself had to be invented just to make sense of it all. And yet, here we are, one species amongst billions, laying waste to the life-experiment. For those plants and animals already driven to extinction by civilisation, as well as almost all non-civilised peoples, the apocalypse has long since come and gone, leaving nothing but death and distant profits in its wake. This catastrophe continues to deepen and expand at an inconceivable pace. Until the very erasure of life as we know it begins to stare each and every one of us squarely in the face.

Within such an unforgiving context, it is necessary to choose a side. That can be done with courage and purpose, or we could resign ourselves to getting swept up yet again, only this time by the most genocidal of centuries. Make no mistake, it's impossible to do nothing: you're always either going with a flow or against it, and neither option is free of risk. What of the possibility that, beyond failing to fight for the things in life that really matter, we'll even end up complicit in annihilating them? Capitalists have proven their fondness for hiding behind the atrocities of the 20th century, but it seems the 21st – driven to the brink by the "most realistic" of economic systems – is digging mass graves the likes of which one dares not imagine. Suddenly it's those calling to keep things the same with their heads in the clouds: no longer are we guaranteed a decent shot at survival in return for giving up our dreams.

Take a stand, fighting earthlings. Waging war with the system of death, far from being a matter of declaration, merely faces up to the reality that already engulfs us. The planet is being throttled, the economy is crushing us, and fascism is on the rise. Faced with this dizzying combination of circumstances, total liberation is literally the most realistic response we have. Gone is the time in which so many amongst us – humans, animals, the earth – could justifiably be left behind. Such a plurality of concerns, far from being a drawback, is exactly the source of our revolutionary potential, something that's nourished all the more by agreeing *not* to put our differences aside. The point is merely that, irrespective of the unique path of each liberation struggle, these must nonetheless attempt to meet in the middle, achieving a complete break with the state, capital, and social hierarchy altogether.

This isn't a story of sacrifice, nor a yearning for applause; what makes the struggle worth affirming – amidst both the joy and the pain it offers – is that, even in the direst of contexts, it offers a life that's beautiful and true. The meaning of revolution, aside from its promises of a world to come, is embodied in the very realities we succeed in creating now. Even amidst the fumes that choke us, you can't deny the possibilities bursting through.

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