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# An Attempt at Interdependence Storytelling / Worldmaking

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2017

Trying to heal from a bad break up. Trying to figure out how not to focus so much of my life on automatically taking care of everyone all the time. Exploding the care imperative in order to find more space to think about revolutionary anarchism and revolutionary strategy but feeling guilty while doing it, not feeling smart enough. Not knowing where this leads me but finding comfort in knowing that I am not alone. I never was alone.

## Taking Mugwort Can Cause Lucid Dreams

*Dream one:* Mugwort grows in vacant lots in a “revitalized” post-industrial neighbourhood near the Seaway. Mugwort ripped up to make way for condos. We lose all hope and give up.

*Dream two:* Mugwort in vacant lots is ripped up to make way for condos. Neighbourhood residents resist. Light fancy cars on fire and smash windows. Band together to cook for each other and watch each other’s kids. The fight is not over. The fight is not enough. The fight is perhaps a practicing stage for bigger fights to come. Fighting gentrification is not necessarily the same as fighting colonialism and capitalism.

*Dream three:* Mugwort in vacant lots is ripped up to make way for condos. The mugwort pops up in the lawns of the condo-dwellers causing allergic reactions and hayfever. The mugwort makes it impossible to grow well manicured lawns. The condo-dwellers stop paying their mortgages and the housing bubble pops. Changes are happening fast. People start to squat empty condos in an effort to build an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal resistance struggle.

*Dream four:* We succeed in creating bad-ass revolutionary connected-worlds-crews of people who aren’t cis men. Our self defense is a form of offense and we treat it as such. We are building anti-colonial liberated spaces and moments in the patches where capitalism grows thin. We relate to our interdependence as a liberatory form of life that sustains our relationships and shapes our responsibilities. We are shifting and burning as needed. We are full of confrontation and care and discerning about the appropriate moments for both. The mugwort has come back to the neighbourhood. We drink tea, and smoke mugwort cigarettes and teach each other new skills. We stage our attacks and build something bigger. We are transforming ourselves in the process.

*My actual life:* harvesting mugwort from the vacant lots. Taking it as a tincture years later, when the mugwort fields are now condos.

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If we want to engage with confrontational demos, we must organize ourselves and relate to one another in ways that allow us to work through the trauma and fear that grow out of our encounters with the police. We must figure out what it looks like in practice to focus more on care, support, emotional openness, and reflexivity in our mobilization and organizing for confrontational demos... By organizing to support one another, we hope to provide a basis for more people to feel able to participate in confrontational demos, and more confidence for all of us to be combative in all the ways that we know are necessary.<sup>32</sup>

We need a wider range of tactics.  
We need new strategies.  
We need all the emotions.

That's why I get so angry at the colonized fantasies of so many white middle-class feminists, that we should simply wish ourselves back to those ancient non-violent matriarchies or non-conflictual communal bands. That using uzis or building a clandestine liberation culture is 'playing men's game', is 'using tools of the patriarchy'.<sup>33</sup>

I am searching for traditions that are not just about drinking and finding the people who are most like me.

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<sup>32</sup> "Dear comrades in the streets", a flier handed out at a demo against police on March 15, 2014 in Montreal.

<sup>33</sup> Butch Lee, *The Military Strategy of Women and Children*

*We start gathering in the fall, usually late in the fall, after the first snow. We spend our first meeting talking about how amazing it is that this project continues to exist in this form. We marvel at how meetings feel when we exclude cis men. Then we frantically, quickly, pull together the logistics needed to bring at least one hundred people out to the river on a major holiday to yell and wave across prison walls. Our plans are always more ambitious than our outcome, but, for years now, we have spent that holiday darting through snow, ice, and freezing river-wind, trying to outrun the cops in order to be near enough that people can see us from their barred windows. Fireworks shoot from our shaky fingers. Throats sore from singing and shouting. Blankets and banners and sometimes hot cocoa with marshmallows in tow. The highs and lows of my anxiety tempered by the cheers from now-almost-familiar faces behind bars, behind fences.*

It always makes me think about my father. He loves forging collective traditions in a world that is so alienated. He is no feminist, but he taught me how to draw people together. Going to that bar, on that day, knowing he'll be there with his friends who are also his family, friends whose fathers were friends with his father. Following him there, wondering who is going to say something fucked up and whether I'll say anything back. Talking to his friends, who are more like my uncles, and we always talk about my other home. How long have you been there now? When are you going to move home? These days I have two homes.

## **Confrontation & Conflict are Missing from the Stories About Care**

We don't read care into the stories about confrontation and conflict. We don't read confrontation and conflict into the stories about care.

Things I was taught in school: Species are self-contained. Evolution happens in isolation. Survival means survival of the fittest, and the most important interspecies interaction is predator-prey; kill or be killed. There is no interconnected web. We are not inherently changed by our interactions with others. Species are definable, clear. The classification system is based in Reason.

Boundaries are there, solid, firm at the edge of my skin. We are not physically attached to each other. You can leave and feel just fine. We can stand alone. "As if the entanglements of living [do] not matter."<sup>1</sup> We can be separated from the things that keep us alive.

### **I Am Trying On New Ideas**

*When I'm feeling open to the world, I can feel how you're feeling.  
When I'm feeling open to the world and grounded in myself,  
I can feel how I'm feeling and how you're feeling and I know where to go.*

Our bodies rely on the physical presence of other humans for regulation and steadiness. My immune system is not self-regulating. "Human physiology is (at least in part) an open-loop arrangement, an individual does not direct all of [their] own functions. A second person transmits regulatory information that can alter hormone levels, cardiovascular function, sleep rhythms, immune function, and more – inside the body of the first. The reciprocal process occurs simultaneously; the first person regulates the physiology of the second, even as [they themselves are] regulated. Neither is a functioning whole on [their] own."<sup>2</sup> We are connected. The emotional parts of our brains evolved before capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. Some parts of our emotions are older than the socio-political systems that shape how we express them.

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*

## There is a Difference Between a River & a Seaway

There is a seaway that connects my two homes. It was a river and they dug it deeper and now part of it is a seaway. The water flows. The lakes are growing more shallow. I follow the river from one home to the other. Stand outside of a bar, beer in hand, surrounded by three generations of the closest thing I'll ever have to "my people." The descendants of Irish, Italian, and Polish Catholics who dug up their own roots, became settlers, and figured out how to benefit from colonialism and genocide.

The year the Titanic sunk, my great-grandmother turned 17 and got on a boat to cross the ocean. No one in my family can tell me why she immigrated. Maybe she was escaping poverty or seeking adventure – maybe both. The more I read about Irish people of her generation, the more I realize how far back the uprootedness goes [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.3 pg87*]. Capitalism has a long history.

Prolonged separation affects more than feelings. A number of somatic parameters go haywire in despair. Because separation deranges the body, losing relationships can cause physical illness.<sup>3</sup>

My great grandmother was sick by the time she made it across the ocean. She was sick and she still got papers, even when others didn't. She got papers and made choices to forget the poverty and the anti-colonial struggles back home. Her kids bought stolen land and assimilated.

She died before I was born and so, I have no memories of her. **But her choices have shaped my life.** How much agency do we have over the choices we make? How much can I hold her accountable for? What does holding her accountable even mean? Why did

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## Transformation Through Encounter<sup>29</sup>

How are we always already changing each other? We transform the radical communities we inhabit (although its not a bubble) with the fucked up behavior we learned living under patriarchal capitalist white supremacy (precisely because its not a bubble). We change ourselves in noticing how the people around us feel, the moments that can feel like obligations and restrictions on our freedom, but are actually the inescapable reality of our interdependent lives. We are porous people and porous communities; leaking, patchy, and overlapping.

Love alters the structure of our brains.<sup>30</sup>

My emotions always come flooding back when I cross the river. Being in that city, I deaden my senses and numb my emotions, but they always come back. This both is and is not my life and the self-contained fantasies I inhabit in one city explode in the other. But the act of crossing brings me back into my body and the act of crossing together transforms the worlds so that they are no longer self-contained. They never were anyways. He feel my emotions coming back as we cross the bridge and puts his arm around my shoulders. "Because limbic states can leap between minds, feelings are contagious, while notions are not."<sup>31</sup> I like the weight but I feel conflicted about it. This trip left a weird taste in my mouth. My mom liked him too much and huge parts of me felt unseen. There are ways that being close with men transforms my relationships with the people in my life who are not men, transforms my relationship with myself, and not all transformations are leading us in liberatory directions.

*We have made new annual traditions, finally, after years of living in a city that is a second (or third or more) home for many of us.*

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<sup>29</sup> Tsing, *Mushroom*

<sup>30</sup> Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *General Theory*

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

ity processes, about how to set good boundaries and how political that is, and I feel so conflicted.

I don't entirely buy the story. The one that says that the invisible, interpersonal work in our organizing is the most important, is the work. I know that it is often the least valued, but I don't think we should create a new hierarchy in order to combat that lack of value. Am I making a big deal out of nothing important? I feel like I have to pick a side, pick a problem. It depends on who I'm around, what my context is. I'm trying to only talk about myself, but if I'm understanding what interdependence actually is then my story isn't just about me. It's messier than that.

**It's here that anarchist individualism and very interpersonally focused anti-oppression organizing converge.** It feels to me like some strains of individualist anarchism that focus on the joy we feel in the attack and the innate drive individuals have to revolt, the strains that completely ignore the social worlds we live in, they're missing the point. And so are the fairly liberal forms of anti-oppression politics where the only avenues of political action are focusing on changing our inner worlds, and calling out fucked up interpersonal dynamics. In both cases, moving towards revolutionary horizons feels like a thing we stop talking about. **In both cases, we focus only on the smaller scales and ignore the bigger ones.**

It's here where I keep coming back to care and combativity. Bringing about the changes we want to see in this world isn't easy. The violence of this world already affects some people more than others. We need to step up our game at both taking care of each other and building a force to be reckoned with, a force that can take down the violent systems that structure our worlds. We need a multiplicity of approaches, happening at different scales, over different time frames.

she support her husband when he was down at the mill protesting against Black people who wanted to join his union? Why did she support the politician who fought to keep her neighbourhood white? Why stay with him? Why stand with him?

There is a story I want to write about two cities and a river. It is populated by southern Irish and Sicilian diaspora. Its foundation is Haudenosaunee dispossession. Created by displacement and imperialism, these are places of empire building and genocide. Here the steel mills witnessed the Great Migration. Now their shells look over casinos. Once industrialized, now de-industrialized. Memories are held in dirt, as forget-me-nots and mugwort plants flourish in abandoned factory yards. Memories are held in lung cells and broken down houses with white absentee landlords and counter tops that didn't stay clean until the mills closed. This is, and is not, my story.

## Disturbances & Revolutions

[A] disturbance is a change in environmental conditions that causes a pronounced change in an ecosystem... Deciding what counts as a disturbance is always a matter of point of view.<sup>4</sup>

My friends have started playing with the word revolution again; not "the rev" [*ed. – i.e. singular; see 'Not Fighting the Same Fight'*], but revolutions and revolutionary change. We try it on to see how it feels. **Words are hard, definitions are hard. Revolutions disturb the worlds that make up our lives. But, what counts as a disturbance?** What is a pronounced change? When is that change something we want? What is the difference between change and harm? What are revolutions? Maybe there are only moments when things speed up and change

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<sup>4</sup> Tsing, *Mushroom*,

happens faster. **It is hard to find a strategy because the destination is unclear. What are our goals? Who are we, anyways?** We search for new orientations, new possibilities.

The idea of permanent conflictuality has become a joke or a trope. Maybe we should say permanent engagement. There still isn't a utopia or an end. It's going to look like constantly engaging with what's going on around us.<sup>5</sup>

Not a utopia, but a direction, a horizon.

According to Stephanie Phillips, "the [Saint Lawrence] Seaway had been the long-standing dream of both Canada and the U.S. as a means of improving shipping on the St. Lawrence and of exploiting the river's potential for hydroelectric power."<sup>6</sup> It was dug out to carry grains grown in the Midwest US to markets in Europe. "The need for cheap haulage of Quebec –Labrador iron ore was one of the arguments that finally swung the balance in favor of the seaway."<sup>7</sup> The Seaway as a hydro-electric power project, involved creating a dam that flooded about 49,000 acres of land.<sup>8</sup> The project was finished in 1959.

This is a story about the Seaway. **It is part of many overlapping stories. Stories of displacement, dispossession and disturbance.** The story of the Seaway includes the story of the people in the community of Kahnawá:ke who had 1,262 acres of land stolen and whose access to the river was cut off when the Seaway was dug out.<sup>9</sup> "The construction of the Seaway was an attack on the community's land base and resources, its political autonomy, and

<sup>5</sup> Conversation with IC, Fall 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Stephanie Phillips, "The Kahnawake Mohawks and the St. Lawrence Seaway"

<sup>7</sup> "Saint Lawrence Seaway", Wikipedia

<sup>8</sup> Rosemary O'Flaherty, "Damming the Remains: Traces of the Lost Seaway Communities"

<sup>9</sup> Phillips, "The Kahnawake Mohawks and the Saint Lawrence Seaway,"

**more possible. But it is hard to be clear that changing oneself isn't changing the world.**

I keep trying to find a way to scale those skills up. To make them be the "struggle." And in the process I confuse changing myself with changing the world. Does this scale of change count as revolutionary? The reach feels so short. Interpersonal care as a skillset is important to me. Yet the kinds of revolutions that change many worlds all at once, and not just the one in my living room near the Seaway and the vacant lot that is no longer full of mugwort, I can't make those happen on my own. Changing myself, and my ecosystem of friends, doesn't make those happen.

Lately I've been feeling pretty insecure about how hard I find it to do "big picture political thinking." Some people around me have gotten really into thinking about strategy and trying to figure out how to do revolutionary strategy. I keep getting so lost. Holding on to "what's really happening in the world" is hard, keeping track of "what we need more of" writ broadly is tricky.

On the one hand, I want to fight my feelings by bolstering the political importance of the things I am good at. Telling the demons in my head that its the fucking patriarchy that is teaching me that my lean towards the interpersonal, towards the community relationships, is less important than this "big picture thinking." Take that story and turn it into the idea that "relationships are the most important" and preach that, in order to make myself feel better. I find lines in books like, "because our minds seek one another through limbic resonance, because our physiologic rhythms answer to the call of limbic regulation, because we change one another's brains through limbic revision – what we do inside relationships matters more than any other aspect of human life" and try to use them to feel better.<sup>28</sup> I read all the blog posts and tweets about care and conflict resolution and the intricacies of accountabil-

<sup>28</sup> Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *General Theory*



I was raised by a white second wave feminist. She didn't teach me that the personal was political, but feminism was the first "ism" I felt affinity with. I was assigned female at birth and while I don't necessarily feel excited about that, I've never felt driven to change my assigned gender or sex. I have been a tomboy since I was a kid and knew that my dad wanted a boy and not a girl, an understanding which strongly encouraged me to become a jock in order to bond with him. It helps that I was good at sports, but, for me, it also meant that traditional Western forms of femininity have always felt alien. However, even as a tomboy, I was raised as a girl in a patriarchal world and that world says that women focus on the interpersonal.

So, I have always been drawn (and pushed) towards conflict mediation, emotional support, and analyzing the complexities of interpersonal relationships. I have known for a long time that these skills are undervalued and underpaid, because they are seen as women's work. Twitter campaigns like *#giveyourmoney-towomen* are appealing. They make the argument (among others) that women are regularly doing unpaid emotional labour for men and thus, should be compensated for it.

However, I want to abolish work, not find more ways to commodify my coercively gendered skill-set. It took getting halfway through an application process for social work school for me to realize that going into an industry where the job is (supposedly) about emotional skills wasn't going to work for me. But I digress. It's not as if I'm not using those skills doing customer service.

I generally feel capable of reading and interpreting the interpersonal dynamics in my communities and processing my feelings about all of it. I have done material and emotional support for friends and folks in my communities over the years. I have facilitated accountability processes and meetings and mediated conflicts. **I genuinely believe that if people in my communities all got better at these skills, bigger changes would become**

its way of life."<sup>10</sup> Ahkwesáhsne had 130 acres of land stolen.<sup>11</sup> In total, about 11,000 people were displaced by the Seaway. Humans, animals, and biological ecosystems were altered forever.

This is an international story that crosses U.S.-Canadian lines; an inter-provincial story as it affected both Ontario and Quebec, and a story of the abrogation of long-standing treaties with the Mohawks of Akwesasne and Kahnawake. The story began late in the nineteenth century, heated up considerably throughout the early part of the twentieth, and became a defense imperative for both Canada and the U.S. during World War II. It is a story of political alignments and realignments, big business lobbies, grassroots social protest, community loss, and environmental change in rewriting the landscape of the St. Lawrence River.<sup>12</sup>

The story of the Seaway includes the stories of the canals that closed when it opened. It is the stories of the neighbourhoods around the closed canals that experienced economic shifts and population changes. It is the stories of the 22,000 people employed between 1954 and 1959 to work on "one of the largest civil engineering feats ever undertaken."<sup>13</sup> It is the stories of the 200 odd employees for the Seaway Corporation who almost went on strike in 2014 over proposed automation of the lock system and fear that it would put them out of work completely.

**The Seaway drastically changed the landscape between Montreal and Lake Erie.** New canals were dug out, new locks

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> O'Flaherty, "Damming the Remains"

<sup>13</sup> Roger Benedict and Pierre Camu, "Saint Lawrence River and Seaway" Encyclopedia Britannica

installed. New islands made from the dug up river bed appeared. Whole villages ended up underwater. Called a great water highway, the Seaway is an infrastructure project that cost tens of billions of dollars. The Seaway both is and is not the river. You can't swim in the water. There are signs warning people to not get too close to the locks. You can't fish in the Seaway. "There are many unseen dangers in and around seaway channels."<sup>14</sup>

What kind of river will the Saint Lawrence become when the Seaway ceases to be profitable? What futures are possible in the deeper waters and new locks that run from the ocean all the way into the Great Lakes? This project has permanently altered a landscape and everything that moves through it. How can we find the "life promoting patches" that persist in the aftermath of a colonialist and capitalist project, a disturbance like the Seaway?<sup>15</sup>

There is a vacant lot in a city near the Seaway. A vacant lot in a "revitalizing post-industrial neighbourhood." Revitalized is the word for "there is capital moving through there again." The abandoned factories have become art studios and tech start ups and condos. This vacant lot persists. *The lot is covered in mugwort plants. It's the summer of 2011 and there is a crowd of people coming. You and I dart out in front of the crowd, carrying a big banner. We scurry up to a huge wooden advertisement for brand new condos and spend ten minutes trying to figure out how to drape the banner over the billboard. We succeed, only no one can read the banner because it won't hang cleanly, but no one can read the billboard anymore either – a small act against gentrification.*

*Two days later I go back to the lot. I bask in the sunshine and pick a few mugwort plants. The banner is still there, flapping on the front of the billboard. I head home to stuff the mugwort into jars filled with*

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<sup>14</sup> The St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation, "Tommy Trent's ABCs of the Seaway"

<sup>15</sup> Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times*

*fore we dispersed. We tried again a couple months later and managed to double our numbers with the same tactics.*

Looking back, I want to find bigger and more shared goals, not as a precondition for planning together, but as part of the process. Not to unearth a fictitious unity [*ed. – see 'Not Fighting the Same Fight'*], but to know our differences and work together anyways when it makes sense, instead of assuming that we all think the same things. I want more than protest movements, even while I find value in being in the streets together. I want the men in the group to stay after the meeting and talk through the tears and the emotions that came up in that collective organizing context, even when it's scary. I want those of us who are not men to step up to the front, masks up, and push the confrontation to another level, even when we're fucking terrified. I want struggle that is both more rooted in place and more expansive in solidarity. I want a clearer acknowledgement of our interdependence and a better understanding of our histories.

## Questions of Scale

I think one of the big questions I've been trying to answer as an anarchist is 'what is the relationship between the personal / interpersonal and the "struggle" writ broadly?' What is this relationship, how does it work, is there even really a separation between the two?

In attempting to answer these questions, I have become confused about scale. I know I'm not the only one. "The ability to make one's research framework apply to greater scales, without changing the research questions, has become a hallmark of modern knowledge."<sup>27</sup> I've been trying to answer my question by only scaling up.

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<sup>27</sup> Tsing, *Mushroom*

Capitalism makes us think that we are alone. Capitalism destroys the relationships we need to survive. In some moments, we can escape its grasp, but those moments can feel few and far between.

I keep thinking about the Irish Famine of the 1840s and 1850s, about how capitalism creates famines and colonialism creates death and destruction.<sup>26</sup> My great-grandmother grew up knowing people who survived the famine. She grew up in a world so changed by the specter of the famine and followed a migration path intimately shaped by the fact of the famine. The story of the famine is intertwined with my story. We are shaped by processes that are so much bigger than ourselves and yet, we have a responsibility to act with integrity, to do what we can to understand and change our contexts.

*We started organizing neighbourhood contingents for the annual anti-capitalist May Day [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.3 pg87**] demonstration when it was impossible to take the streets without the cops arresting everyone right away. We didn't believe in asking for permission, didn't believe in giving the police the route of our demo, and so they declared our demonstrations illegal and gave us all \$600 tickets. We didn't want to just walk into a kettle every time we took the streets, so we started casting around for another solution.*

*We met up once a week to strategize and make decisions collectively. We ate meals together. We talked and talked and talked. We settled on inviting all our friends to meet us in a park near the main demonstration. We would walk together in the streets and see what happened: no facebook, no listservs, and no cops. It worked, sort of. We had fifteen not-so-glamorous minutes together in the streets be-*

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<sup>26</sup> ed. – To call this event a famine is somewhat inaccurate: despite the potato blight, throughout all these years sufficient sufficient grain, cereals and livestock in Ireland to solve the problem, but all these were exported to England. The same century saw the British Empire impose starvation many times in so-called India (and not only); when drought struck the Deccan plateau, there was still sufficient rice and wheat in the country; but, aid denied, it was exported to England in record-breaking quantities.

*cheap vodka. To let them sit in my cupboard for the rest of the summer until they become tinctures. The banner stayed up for months.*

## Vulnerability & Interdependence

The “bob-tailed” squid is known for its light organ, through which it mimics moonlight, hiding its shadow from predators. But juvenile squid do not develop this organ unless they come into contact with one particular species of bacteria, *Vibrio fischeri*. The squid are not born with these bacteria; they must encounter them in the seawater. Without them, the light organ never develops. But perhaps you think light organs are superfluous. Consider the parasitic wasp *Asobara tabida*. Females are completely unable to produce eggs without bacteria of the genus *Wolbachia*. Meanwhile, larvae of the Large Blue butterfly *Maculinea arion* are unable to survive without being taken in by an ant colony.<sup>16</sup>

Interdependence is a fact of our lives, but a fact that capitalism obscures through alienation and stories of self-containment. Interdependence is a web of messy necessities that humans, animals, and biological ecosystems build together. **Interdependence isn't necessarily good or bad, it just is. Interdependence can be scary because it means we need others: other people, other animals, other plants, other ecosystems, and maybe other solar systems.** Interdependence is a form of vulnerability. We cannot meet all of our needs on our own. Interdependence just is, but how we relate to it can change. How we navigate interdependence says a lot about our political maps.

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<sup>16</sup> Tsing, *Mushroom*

## Individualism & Anarchists Who Are Not Men

In the early heyday of anarchism, anarchism women, namely Emma Goldman and Voltarine De Cleyre, saw the individual as the base unit of society and understood the individual as the primary actor in resistance. They posited anarchism as a way for the individual to be at the center of social organization, as opposed to (both left wing and right wing) governments that promoted conformity and the “will of the majority.” Emma and Voltarine also wrote about the roles delegated to women in society and the problems created by these roles.

In “What I Believe,” Emma writes, “marriage, or the training thereto, prepares the woman for the life of a parasite, a dependent, helpless servant.” A century later, women perform the majority of the caring and reproductive functions in society, even in countries that have embraced a certain flavour of feminism and “equality” for white cis [ed. – see *Reclaim Your Queer Fucking Life!*] women.<sup>17</sup> These social roles and tasks are still considered invisible, inferior, and are devalued.

People who are not men and not white, globally, experience the majority of the violence and exploitation meted out by the capitalist, patriarchal, and white supremacist system we live under. This violence does not affect people evenly. White supremacy means that many white cis women in the US and Canada have pushed much of the reproductive work that their mothers performed onto the backs of women of colour, so that they can succeed in their capitalist careers. They have done this by accessing wealth and government programs that bring migrant women to the US and Canada to take care of white children. **They have done this by supporting the government, the military, and the prison industrial complex. They have paid their taxes and rallied for the state**

<sup>17</sup> Reproductive in the larger sense, not just child-birth, though also that.

## An Attempt at Being For Something While Being Embedded in Many Things

The combined effects of human activity over the millennia include the creation of extensively altered, highly cosmopolitan species assemblages on all landmasses.<sup>22</sup>

I want to foster chaotic decentralized decision-making. I want worlds where many different forms and ways of life can all exist at the same time. I want “a multiplicity of decision making spaces pervading all moments of life” that “allows different, even conflicting, decisions to be made at different points.”<sup>23</sup> It isn’t all about what I want. I am embedded in an entangled world in which “all organisms make ecological living spaces, altering earth, air, and water.”<sup>24</sup>

Humility seems important here. “If survival always involves others, it is also necessarily subject to the indeterminacy of self and other transformations. We change through our collaborations both within and across species. The important stuff for life on earth happens in those transformations, not in the decision trees of self-contained individuals.”<sup>25</sup> We have so much figuring out to do. We can strategize without pretending to be making a blue-print for the world. We can have conviction in our beliefs, while staying grounded in our relationships.

Capitalism attempts to control our entire lives. It attempts to be totalizing, but it can’t. Capitalism tries to direct all of our relationships towards productivity and commodification, but it can’t.

<sup>22</sup> Nicole L. Boivin et al, “Ecological consequences of human niche construction: Examining long-term anthropogenic shaping of global species distributions.”

<sup>23</sup> Peter Gelderloos, *Worshipping Power: An Anarchist View of Early State Formation*

<sup>24</sup> Tsing, *Mushroom*

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

there ever since. A sign of colonialism and the violent mixing of worlds it brought about, mugwort won't grow if you plant it. It takes root along roadways, in clearcuts and brownfields, in vacant lots, sucking up the nitrogen in the soil.<sup>20</sup>

Mugwort's latin name is *Artemisia vulgaris*. The goddess Artemis, or Diana, is often depicted as a huntress with bows and arrows. **We tell stories about the plants we see, connecting them to human histories, in part to remember their effects on us.** Artemis, goddess of the hunt, supposedly a virgin, associated with a plant that is known for bringing back an absent period. Artemis has meant so many different things to so many different humans over so many centuries. A huge number of those stories are gone, or passed down in traces only intelligible through the systems of violence that structure our everyday lives.

What can we find in sifting through the stories? **We are trying to find the rough edges of capitalism. We are trying to create forms of care against patriarchy. Teaching each other to slow down and listen, and sometimes to speed up and change.**

What does it mean to just stop care? That's a question. There are care strike questions.<sup>21</sup>

On a physical level, a care strike is impossible. If we stop caring for others, we stop caring for ourselves. Care is a physiologic process. Care is my immune system regulating yours. But also, intentions matter. Intentional care is more than a physiologic process. Intentional care is both physiologically and strategically necessary. But care on its own is not enough. We also need to fight, but we cannot give up caring in the process. We need care and combativity!

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<sup>20</sup> Gina Badger and Dori Midnight, "In & Out of Time: An Interview with Dori Midnight"

<sup>21</sup> Conversation with IC, Fall 2017.

**to fix the problems they face. Though my great grandmother was one of those migrant women, she was given a way out. The generations of women in my family since her have been complicit.**

It is no surprise that even in this context where some white women in the US and Canada don't perform certain kinds of care and reproductive work, patriarchy still teaches us to assign care labor to women, cis and trans, regardless of (although differently, depending on) race and class. Growing up, I was often put in the role of paying attention to the emotions and needs of the people around me to the detriment of my own emotions and needs. **Even as a white girl raised in this context, I knew that women were supposed to take care of others and suppress their boundaries and desires, mostly in relation to men.** Becoming an anarchist didn't change the gender role assigned to me, it simply made me more aware of it and gave me a drive to try to change the world that made (and makes) me.

Some anarchist women in my life have found reprieve from the gendered care imperative in tendencies of anarchism that are anti-communal and anti-collective, tendencies of anarchism that heavily emphasize the individual. The logic says, I just have to stop thinking so much about other people and I just have to stop doing all the dishes for my (male) roommates, and I will be free of the care imperative. I think Emma and Voltarine wouldn't disagree. If the individual is the primary actor in resistance, this perspective makes sense.

But, I can't change things on my own. Even if I kill the Man in my head, there will still be men in the world who will hand me a broom and vomit their emotions into my lap. If I succeed in avoiding certain kinds of care labour, it will likely be mostly because I am white and can access money and jobs that make the avoidance possible. This avoidance often comes at the expense of other women elsewhere in the world. The care labour doesn't go away. I just stop being the one doing it.

And so, I am skeptical. Embracing individualist anarchist tendencies involves opposing values like community, connection, and cooperation. It promotes self-containment and ignores the ways that we need others and they need us. It ignores the ways we are still interconnected. I don't want false individualism to be my only option to deal with patriarchy. Interdependence is too real to me. Individualism, even when its anarchist, cuts me off from other people who nourish me and cuts me off from collectivities that sustain me.

While we may not be able to eradicate the systems that imprison us immediately, we stand a far better chance if we don't get tricked into thinking our struggles or the solutions to them are individual. The more ways we find to act in honesty with each other, whether in sorrow or in excitement, the stronger and more resilient we become – individually and collectively.<sup>18</sup>

## Witches

Some anarchists have found respite from the care imperative through valorizing the social roles that are generally assigned to women, like care work and healing work. They tell us we need to heal ourselves from the systems that fuck us up, and a part of me buys it. Heal yourself so you can heal the world from all the things that are killing other people, killing other-than-human creatures and plants. Healing work is the revolution, they say. I'm drawn to it, but it feels like something is missing. What do we mean by care and healing? Who can do it? How?

Sometimes this too feels so individual. It tends to look like herbalism businesses and witchcraft-as-fad. It looks like psychotherapy and rhetoric about self-care. It looks like active listening

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<sup>18</sup> "Self-Care: Self as Other", Crimethinc

workshops and making up rituals. **None of those things are bad on their own.** Some of it is even about creating some sort of culture, something not-just-individual, but it still feels like grasping at straws, especially when it's white women doing it.

Our experience is that often people want to rush to talking about magic, animal spirits, literally hearing words from trees, that sort of thing, while skipping over the long, hard work of getting to know their land-base on its own terms. Similar magical practices exist in various indigenous landbased traditions around the world, but for settlers (especially white settlers) living in the land called North America, we need to appreciate just how gone those traditions are for us. They are really really gone. There isn't an older, earth-based culture for settlers still clinging to existence on the margins of industrial society... There is nowhere for us to escape to when we realize the lives and worldviews we have been given are crap.<sup>19</sup>

*We went out east to support a struggle and one night our host made tea as we sat on the floor, prodding sore muscles and sharing stories. They asked what kind of tea we wanted. I was in the middle of writing this piece and they had mugwort tea so I asked for that. I woke up in the middle of the night with terrible cramps. Couldn't get back to sleep, worried about blood stains and ibuprofen availability. My period wasn't due for another day or two. I had forgotten that mugwort can induce bleeding. The plant has historically been used for liver disorders and as a digestive bitter, but it is also an emmenagogue. Try to slow down, I told myself, you don't know much, remember? Figure out who you are.*

Mugwort likely came to the so-called Saint Lawrence region via Jesuit clergy who used it as food and as medicine. It has flourished

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<sup>19</sup> "Interview with Knowing the Land is Resistance", Black Seed: Issue 4