

Cut Straight to the Fear

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I think it's important to question ourselves about the sensations and emotions that this society, that we want to fight against and in which we live, uses to legitimise itself and to nourish the idea that its necessity is inescapable.

Capitalist organisation of life – based on exploitation, on the imprisonment of troublemakers, on the poisoning of the planet and on techno-scientific ideology – has a well-stocked arsenal of weapons of mass pacification. To uphold its domination, the eternal rule of the strongest employs coercion and raw violence as inevitable means. But it also has elaborated a different set of tricks over time.

Other institutions and tools taking part in the construction of the subject/model citizen – like culture, religions, family, school, means of mass communication – work continually towards annihilation and paralysis of any urge of rebellion and individual destruction by leveraging the emotional sphere of all of us.

The hand of the state delicately shapes our emotional sphere while constructing, through this silent operation, the most solid bases of social peace.

Fear is one of these instruments, sharp and venomous.

“Fear the Lord, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing.” - Psalm 34:9

“For by this authority that has been given to ‘this man’ [the Leviathan] by every individual man in the commonwealth, he has conferred on him the use of so much power and strength that people’s fear of it enables him to harmonize and control the wills of them all, to the end of peace at home and mutual aid against their enemies abroad.” - T. Hobbes

All powers resort to fear to legitimise their existence and to reproduce – en masse – the reverence of their subjects. It's an old, polymorphous history that deserves to be mentioned to understand certain mechanisms inherent to domination and power, and to not attach an innovative and exceptional character to the society of control in which we are living.

Modern Europe, the social structure of which had been destabilised by serious demographic catastrophes and the plague, is certainly an indicative example. It seems that the daily life of individuals – crossed by permanent fears connected to the unknown (like the fear of the sea, stars, ghosts...) and by contingent fears (like the plague, passing armies, drought, hunger...) – was populated by a feeling of permanent anguish. These fears – partly culturally and historically determined – have been channelled by the ruling class and in particular by the Church that embodied power at that time. It strove to construct interpretative frameworks and an imaginary

that permits the identification, naming and representation of these fears. It put in place a process of normalisation of the emotional sphere in the religious and moral frame of Christianity, aiming to integrate populations that were often resistant to the sternness of religious order. The ruling classes would thus construct an inventory of internal and external enemies of the constituted order. They would be represented as agents of evil that Satan mobilises to impose his domination (Turks, Jews, heretics, witches, madmen...). In this manner it would provide the dominated masses the theological arguments allowing to interpret that feeling of fear and anguish. While at the same time allowing them to stigmatise and control those parts of the population that resisted the constituted order, those living on the fringes of all norms. It is not a coincidence if the years of the unleashed hunt against heretics coincides with the fight against vagrancy and with the imprisonment of the poor, with the goal of reducing the ranks of potentially rebellious and to clean the cities of possible contaminations.

To dominate through fear. To poison the existence of individuals with a profound feeling of worry and anguish. For which at the same time is proposed the sinister moral and security antidote that conceals a project of total submission. It's not a matter of making forced analogies between two completely different times and social contexts, but of considering propaganda through fear as an instrument characteristic of all forms of authority. Power – yesterday between the hands of the Church and today of the state, capitalism and techno-science – manipulates the weaknesses of its potential subjects to filter through their conscience its inevitable necessity.

We're living today in a *society of risks*, a society used to representing and considering itself constantly on the brink of disaster. Not only the individual, but also the entire society is incessantly threatened. And the risk doesn't only come from outside – for example natural catastrophes – but it is produced by society itself on a political, ecological or public health level. A risk – so concrete that it becomes banal – that becomes a harrowing mirror of social life for everyone and transforms into fear. When this fear takes on concrete forms (for example when an event of extreme seriousness occurs: a terrorist attack, a nuclear incident, an oil spill, a pandemic), power imposes its ritual frame to control and channel it. Beyond these moments, it inhabits in a muted way the miserable existence of the subject. The fear that threatens, that can appear suddenly from everywhere. And the individual without any hold on the world and on their emotions, delegates control to those who are supposed to be in possession of the knowledge and power to contain it.

Take for example the fear of environmental disasters, which are linked notably to the consequences of the progress of science, of technique and of technology. Which continue to provoke unexpected effects and with great severity. A risk existing in the four corners of the world. Where capitalism thirsty for energy and primary materials to reproduce itself, and continues to construct and feed massive and destructive infrastructures – the source of exploitation and poisoning. Only states and science can “guarantee” a protection from these infrastructures once installed (for example electrical and nuclear plants, oil drilling...).

Likewise on the more specifically “political” terrain, where consensus always prevails over coercion. Collective emotions – being expressed especially in reaction to unexpected events mobilising the attention of the media – imprison public space in a network of passions orchestrated by a rhetorical and institutional device. One that shapes the emotions of citizens in the narrow grid of identity; national, cultural, ethnic or religious. And in France during the last years we don't lack examples of big collective passions produced and steered by the state.

Like the recent, paradoxical image of thousands of people who with tears in their eyes comment on the work done by the nice little fire that transformed the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris

into an inferno (one that didn't respect the rigid protocol of every temple that respects itself). Persons who join their rulers in a mystical contemplation, who mourn the destruction of a sinister symbol while claiming it as "our history" or "our national identity". Resounding tears next to a generalised indifference of those same citizens towards the news on the front pages that 15 April. Namely that it is French weapons which bomb the inhabitants of Yemen, weapons and equipment sold by the French government to Saudi-Arabia and the Emirates.

The emotion that strengthens the Nation, which has traversed French society after the attacks in 2012 (in Toulouse and Montauban) and in January and November of 2015. The collective emotion which always appears at the right time. Which the state doesn't hesitate to capitalise support on. Which leverages fear; a feeling that power uses as cement to build its hierarchical and authoritarian order. A fear of the unknown, of the unforeseen, of what we cannot dominate. A fear to which society accustoms us. That fear is not left to its own. But it is channelled and projected on clearly identifiable objects. It is thus transformed into a precise fear.

This is the Leviathan at work. This allegory of a monstrous Union, that of the state, which responds with an organised fear to the fear unleashed in men. "That mortal god to which we owe, under the immortal God, our peace and defence", the only capable of putting an end to the spectre of the "war of all against all". A spectre that is supposed to be engrained in the dominant imaginary and to be the only way of viewing the absence of the state.

A monster that works tirelessly to manufacture the *external enemy* (the legalised or illegalised immigrant, radical Islamism, health emergencies coming from elsewhere) which is functional for the consolidation of a feeling of unity and internal coherence, as well as for its home-made alter ego: the *internal enemy*. Criminals, rebels, *banlieusards*, French jihadists or yellow vests (depending on the season) who spread danger in the streets of the cities. They are pushed by the rhetoric of power to an irrational dimension; while on one side exaggerating the real aspects and on the other side flattening out all conscious and critical characteristics. An enemy that permeates the social tissue which contributes to a permanent feeling of distrust and anguish, pushing into the background other fears for which the state and capitalism are the sole responsables (like exploitation, inhumane living conditions, the proliferation of pollution...).

A fear, *perpetually hammered in by all the media*, which is instilled in citizens from their early childhood. It's enough to think about the countless anti-terrorist exercises inflicted on students of all ages for years already in the oh-so-republican French schools. In some cases consisting of real role-plays of terrorist attacks (explosions, firing of bullets, assaults) without prior warning for the involuntary protagonists. And the students – already recorded, controlled and watched over in different ways in schools – seem to react to these experiences by developing a profound feeling of anguish. During these occasions of "exercises" (of securing, of confinement...) the students, budding citizens, become literally hostages of a state that terrorises.

The strategy is clear. On one side the fear of the other that paralyses consciences. This contributes to *feed the war between the poor*, hindering any urge to revolt against those really responsible for the profound anxiety that this era of desolation instils in the hearts of the living. On the other hand power, which shapes the fears of its subjects, swiftly proposes all kinds of antidote. In a flash *the tyrant transforms in a protector* in whose arms individuals – now convinced that they *know nothing and can do nothing* – can only surrender.

The path is thus open to all kinds of *illusionary protections* in a *spiral of security* that only tightens the net of control. Through more generalised measures like the state of emergency (practically permanent in France since the attacks of 2015) against the terrorist threat, the lasting militarisa-

tion of urban spaces, and first the experimentation and then the application of technologies that allow for a surveillance that is increasingly capillary.

The state answers to the fear of terrorism or daily violence by infesting the cities with surveillance cameras (today called video-protection; either on the streets or in the pockets of municipal cops) and all kinds of sensors. There are the continuous experiments with new tools like the cameras installed in Nice with facial recognition, the sound recorders in a neighbourhood of Saint-Étienne, the security applications for smartphones like the one being experimented with by zealous citizens who want to denounce “antisocial behaviour” through video calls to the police, or drones – already used during demonstrations – to control mass events such as festivals or used daily by municipalities at the forefront who gave it to their local police force as a mobile means of video surveillance and which maybe tomorrow will fly en masse over the metropolitan streets. Those are some of the repressive measures that the state proposes as a remedy to the insecurity that it had itself cultivated and nourished.

“Only the state can protect us”, repeatedly affirms the decent citizen – terrorised and atomised in their dispossession. Let’s think about the fear that pours out of the television interviews after riotous demonstrations that have coloured many Saturdays. The fear inspired by the state through its media servants, of the “hooligans”, of the “black blocs”, of the “ultra-yellows”, basically of all imaginary figures that are supposed to embody the violence of those that revolt and come out on the streets.

It is the same citizens – brought to identify themselves, in an identitarian withdrawal, with the ground on which they trample, work and consume – who learn to perceive those who come from the outside as a danger coming from a hostile “elsewhere”. The same who feel reassured by the multiplication of surveillance and the imprisonment of outsiders, by the hardening of deportation measures and the strengthening of national borders.

Individuals who are alienated from their emotions, incapable of living them, of reflecting them, of acting them. They *delegate management* to the state and the bosses. And that doesn’t only concern the most contingent and historically determined fears like those we have briefly mentioned. The feeling of insecurity and anguish leveraged by the state concerns also the more intimate one linked to the fear of physical pain, psychological suffering, sickness, death.

The state hand in hand with pharmaceutical multinationals and with the blessing of scientists makes the total medicalisation of every “dysfunction” of the body into a social diktat. While capital finances the work of scientists and technicians who seek to conceive of a total, robotic intelligence. An intelligence imagined as the miracle cure of all ills. And which will give life to a transhumanist world in which one doesn’t age and maybe even doesn’t die.

In this ideal society that has been built for us – *a society intoxicated by fear* – the inevitability of the domination of the state and techno-scientific knowledge in all areas of existence, imposed as a self-evident fact, has reached the most intimate sphere of each individual. A society that would like to suppress adventure to condemn us to security; “justice can bury alive whoever holds their head high”. Because, despite its apparent untouchability, in the silence of its greatness and the loneliness of its terror, the Leviathan also has fear. The fear of a moment of rupture. Of that “renunciation of subjection”, which is to call into question, in words and acts, of the authority of the sovereign (to which one has originally freely submitted by an unspoken conclusion of a contract). The fear of a revolt which represents a constant and latent danger to this political system.

On the contrary, in a movement of rupture the individual capable of freeing themselves and freeing others should push back against the intrusions into their emotions and their passions. The individual should learn to live them and hold on to them. Thus to go beyond the obstacles to which we are confronted in the war against this system.

Those who think that this world can be attacked and destroyed, put all they have – time, determination and the capacity of identifying the enemy – at service of the fight against the state, capital and the techno-scientific system. And instead of the catastrophism of science-fiction and of *despair* we should include in this arsenal the capacity to confront ourselves in our emotional sphere, in the ways we have of listening to our tensions, to *know* and *go beyond our limits*.

Human, All Too Human

We, anarchists, enemies of this order, we who want to destroy it and for this reason confront it directly; how do we relate to our fears?

Some time ago an episode made me think about this question. It was after participating in an assembly in solidarity with arrested and imprisoned anarchist comrades during which an energetic exchange took place. A young comrade stood up to older comrades because he interpreted their words as an exhortation to not have fear. A feeling he sensed he was suspected of having.

For the first time I noticed at what point this feeling is a taboo between comrades. One shouldn't have fear, neither mention it nor invoke it, and watch out for who talks about it. Any more or less voluntary reference to this common feeling could be perceived as an insult.

Maybe because there is no space for feelings that are commonly and crudely associated to weakness, passivity and cowardliness in the self-representation that anarchists who practice direct action forge of themselves. One prefers displaying confidence, irreverence and reluctance about introspection.

But it seems to me that the ascetic and combative image of the anarchist-hero is far removed from reality. Besides, what is a hero? In the classical mythology it is a half-God to which are attached phenomenal achievements, taken over as the model for a group who will be founders of a new order. Anarchists who put or have put themselves at stake by acting don't only have nothing divine, but are they not *a fortiori* the bearers of disorder? Isn't that the specificity of their violence – which is a means of conquering freedom? And don't anarchists confront themselves in their emotions and fears by carrying out this violence?

We put up a wall against fear and anguish, making our passion and rage artificial and inhuman. As if those who choose to act would be gifted with a superhuman will. And which by the effect of an inverted mirror, transforms in a justification for inaction for those who don't consider of themselves as disposing of this force.

I think on the contrary that we could think again the beauty of the anarchist passion that pushes us to act against this world if we succeed in freeing ourselves from this representation. We all have our fears. And fighting also means confronting them on our own and with others, to make them into travel companions, to face them, to defy them, to invert them.

To know one's limits, to be able to identify them and to discuss them; all this allows to have the means of going beyond them.

Because the choice and the decision to act also entails the transformation of our fears. It could lead to paralysis if we are subjected to our fears. But they can be surpassed as any other obstacle in the choice to provoke a rupture with the world that surrounds us, if we understand them. In a moment of revolt, of destruction that reintroduces life into our existence.

Because to give up fighting would be like dying.

And it is unthinkable to provoke others to rebel without shattering this atmosphere charged with fear, without puncturing the individual bubble of “I don’t know anything, I cannot do anything”. It would be difficult for the fear to change sides – as one hears often being repeated as a refrain – if we don’t even know and recognise ours.

And the anarchist fight, far from being a supernatural gift, is a practice of will, of determination, of effort (and not of sacrifice). By the individual who leaves behind the comfortable space of certainties. And who storms the world *with the idea of being capable of succeeding* and with the vital energy of someone who is ready to *put oneself at stake*, to *assume the risks* that are part of the fact of thinking and acting as an enemy of the state, capital and power.

Nothing innate, but the fulfilment of a raging tension.

Nothing more human.

And I’m aware that certain comrades have a similar reaction of paralysis and frustration when they confront themselves with the exceptional experiences of anarchists from the past. Anarchists who fought in all four corners of the world against oppression and domination. As if the greatness of their exploits and their lives would be a heritage too heavy to carry or a confrontation too hard to support. Nevertheless if we manage to free ourselves from this aesthetic distancing which is at work in the heroic imaginary, we could relish the force of a will that can only inspire us. And to say it with the words of a comrade who answered those who considered the will to be a metaphysical trick of anarchists: “*We’re not talking about the abstract and metaphysical will, the one of Schopenhauer or of Nietzsche; but of the creative and active will of individuals and of the great mass – of the former more than the latter. A will that has to be force and action at the same time.*”

Anarchy is nothing like the cynicism of the bureaucrat, but continues to nourish itself with ideals and myths. And this is not because it finds its strength in a transcendent epic of half-Gods unattainable by fear, but in the strength of an all-too-human fighting spirit that should be cultivated.

“If there is a personal fate, there is no higher destiny, or at least there is, but one which he concludes is inevitable and despicable. For the rest, he knows himself to be the master of his days. At that subtle moment when man glances backward over his life, Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which become his fate, created by him, combined under his memory’s eye and soon sealed by his death. Thus, convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human, a blind man eager to see and who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. The rock is still rolling. I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one’s burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.” - A. Camus

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