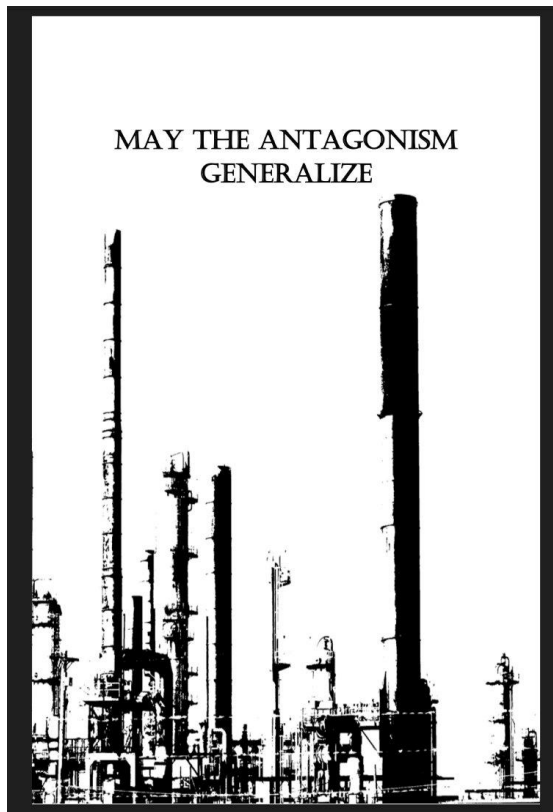


May the Antagonism Generalize

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It is late November, 2023. For the last seven weeks, the world has watched as the Israeli state has (with massive aid from the U.S. and most European governments) continued its decades long escalation of colonial violence against the Palestinians. Using the October 7th attack by Hamas militants as justification, the Israeli state has demonstrated the logical conclusion of their settler-colonial project through escalating their violence (once again) to genocidal scale. In these seven weeks more than 15,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been murdered, including more than 5,000 children. Hundreds of thousands have been internally displaced. This is to make no mention of the incredible violence waged by the Israeli state against Palestinians within what is recognized as the Israeli border and within the West Bank. This horror has no sign of slowing down (I write this in the midst of a supposed temporary ceasefire which Israel has already violated, and vowed to resume their genocidal violence once it has ended). This is far from the only horror this world of death machines is enacting at this moment. Ethnocidal violence in Sudan and the Congo continue to rage to the benefit of the U.S., Chinese, and European governments and corporations in their ever-growing hunger for the accrual of natural resources. Azerbaijan continues to escalate violence against Armenians at ethnocidal scale in large part thanks to the explicit support of the Israeli (and by proxy the U.S.) state by way of weapons shipments.

In the U.S. (the context of which I will focus on for the remainder of this piece), as of October 31st of this year police have murdered at least 1,082 people, putting us on pace for the deadliest year of police violence since 2022, which was the deadliest year of police violence since 2021, which was the deadliest year of police violence since 2020. US prisons and jails currently keep nearly two million people in cages. All of this while the foundation mythos is used as justification for celebrating nearly 300 years of genocidal, settler-colonial, violence that continues every day this country is allowed to go on existing. The existent world is built upon, sustained by, and ever reproducing horrifying systems of inconceivable brutality. We exist in a world of death machines.

Formal “revolutionary” orgs in the US continue to fail to materialize any meaningful resistance to these machines other than arguing for why the world would be better with their leaders in the driver’s seat. Given their predisposition to think capture of the state apparatus is the primary goal at hand, they remain incapable of undermining the violences inherent to this world of states. Outside the formal org, clandestine action has been occurring in many (often meaningful) ways, however despite being a sign that revolt may be spreading among some faction of society, these actions have not been enough to change the present state of things.

If we are interested in really destroying the institutions of our suffering and actually ending the incredible capacity for genocidal violence this world of states reproduces (rather than continuing to react to specific manifestations of that violence), we must find ways to generalize a culture of antagonism to the existent world and its death machines. Without cultivating such a culture in which individuals are able to articulate their suffering and resist that which kills them, we will forever be limited to selecting the next firing squad to turn on those of us who will accept nothing less than a life worth living. I want more than this world of death. I want the antagonism to generalize.

What Do I Mean by Generalized Culture of Antagonism

When I speak of a culture of antagonism, I’m referring to a set of social relations where 1) resistance is not an act or performance reserved for specific persons in specific places during spe-

cific moments but rather an inseparable part of how we orient and understand daily life, where 2) we navigate our physical, social, economic, and political locales with intentional desire to undermine present systems of suffering in order to genuinely live differently, and where 3) we are capable of recognizing the interconnectedness of seemingly disparate struggle so as to articulate that interconnectedness in our acts of resistance. Speaking towards generalization refers to making this framework of struggle as reproducible and accessible as possible without compromising what desires we wish to bring about or undermining our rejection of the machines/systems killing us.

To put this framework into contrast with another prominent framework, I understand generalization as being at odds with the vanguardist politics of many formalized organizations (especially those which prescribe statist solutions to the violence inherent to the state). I use “vanguardist” to denote groups (formal or otherwise) who exceptionalize their acts of resistance and/or who allude to there being a “true/correct” form of resistance which they are ostensibly leading. By exceptionalizing acts of resistance, the vanguardist makes those acts less reproducible, making it appear as though resisting inherently requires particular expertise or training. Thus, the vanguardist reinforces the notion that it’s only by joining their (or a similar) organization that meaningful action may be taken.

When we exceptionalize resistance we reinforce the same pit of disempowerment wielded by the systems killing us, only this time with an optimistic sheen. We give leverage to the notion that individuals are powerless and that most do not have the ability or knowledge to meaningfully resist their own oppression. We effectively tell ourselves and others to spectate and cheer for the self-described revolutionary groups that do emerge, and maybe even join them if we’re brave enough. However, through this framework, we fail to develop any real critical analysis through which we are able to articulate our own desired way of existing and we fail to undertake organizational practices that might actually bring about those desires. Political action becomes just another part of the spectacle and we (save for the select few) remain looking for orders to follow.

If we are to genuinely pursue a world in which all are able to dictate the terms of their lives, then a “generalized culture of antagonism” must also connote a culture in which we work to improve one another’s capability (as we improve our own) to articulate our present suffering (in both its individual manifestations and interconnected systems). At the same time, we must expand our capacity to imagine other ways of existing beyond this world of racial capitalism, of work, of police and prisons, of borders and states and every other machine of death whose barrel seems to ever more deeply press into our skull.

Pushing Towards Generalization

So, if we’re on the same, or at least a similar, page regarding the importance of developing a culture of antagonism (and the role of generalizability in that development) the obvious question is how do we do it, both within our scenes/communities and writ large? While I won’t claim to have some divine knowledge to declare the singular path towards such a culture, I want to offer some starting points that I hope you will kick around (and maybe even get some friends together to discuss).

Firstly, I believe we need to be brave, we need to be earnest, and we need to be willing to take risks that potentially make us vulnerable. In order for antagonism to generalize, it needs to be (at least in some way) accessible, meaning a person not already part of a political scene/community has access to it. This means prioritizing things like open assemblies, zine distros, and other visible, encounterable, projects. Such projects open physical and temporal space for people to engage with ideas they largely won't encounter elsewhere (especially outside of the internet), while also allowing for people to take what they find useful and leave what they don't. Any project that encourages earnest discussion increases all of our capacities for critical analysis of the present state of things. If they're done well, these spaces also offer the potential for meaningful connection to develop between individuals who might otherwise never meet. This could mean more affinity groups at the next demo or moving around in the dark, more folks at the next prisoner letter writing night, or just a few more friendly faces around town to look towards when the cops fuck us up (or better yet, when we wish to strike back).

Clandestine action can also contribute to the generalization of this culture of antagonism, though it does not inherently contribute. Again, leaning on the idea of accessibility, clandestine action best generalizes when it can be understood as reproducible. This is best conveyed through communiques that offer at least some detail of why and how a particular action was taken. Even a few sentences to say "We did *this thing* because we hate the police" disseminated in an accessible way can mean the potential propagation of the act they reference. This can be done through flyer town, online communiques, tabling reportbacks, or even graffiti. We can also spread the word of actions we've heard about happening elsewhere but thought were cool enough to share with others.

We can call our own demos rather than waiting for the formal organizations to throw a march (or parade) together, which we'll attend and then complain about later to our friends. We can set goals with our affinity group and encourage others to do the same. We can set the tone we desire with music or fireworks, and we can remain nimble in our targets and trajectories to make it more difficult for police to plan ahead. Whenever the formal orgs do call their protests we can disseminate flyers ahead of time to call for blocs to form up in specific locations so that we may find one another and be able to better identify (and make use of) interesting moments in what might otherwise be a relatively uninteresting action.

The theme that underlines all of these possible approaches is the refusal to exceptionalize or specialize any act or project. Anyone can call for and facilitate an assembly, anyone can put together a distro project (and we should do what we can to pool resources that make taking on such a project more accessible). Anyone can climb out of their window at night with a crowbar or rattle can in hand. Anyone can throw a brick or tell a cop to fuck off. The goal of generalization is not to increase the number of people who call themselves anarchists but rather expand the capacity for all of us to believe ourselves capable of really fighting against that which is killing us. We all carry the potential to resist in our fists and in our chests. The project for those of us interested in generalization is to encourage the transfer of the potential held in a fist into the momentum of an arm in motion.

On The Importance of the Night Time Stroll (or Cruise, or Ride, or Roll)

One thought experiment I've found useful in encouraging motion in myself, and you may find some use for, is the idea of the Night Time Stroll (though it doesn't necessarily need to be at night). Think about taking a daily or nightly walk (or drive, or ride, etc) around your town, alone or with a few friends. While you are walking think about the broader systems and institutions of suffering that eat away at you, that you spend your waking hours railing against (if only in your own mind). Think about how those systems materially manifest. Where do those manifestations appear, what do they look/sound/smell like?

While you're walking be intentional in taking in your surroundings. Let your footsteps follow whatever catches your eye/mind. Consider the architecture around you. Consider the economic and social function of the structures you observe. Can any of these structures be understood as manifestations of the broader systems and institutions you desire to fight against. Think about what interventions might undermine the form and function of those manifestations.

When you get home from your walk, sketch or journal what felt most noteworthy. Set up a weekly time to hang out with a few friends (who also take similar walks) to talk about what you've observed that week. Share ideas about worthwhile interventions and seriously consider what it would mean to attempt those interventions. Plan a time to take an excursion together, and then intervene. If you are unable to pull a group of friends together, it's still worthwhile to set aside intentional time to consider your observations and potential interventions, it might just mean adjusting how certain interventions would be approached.

The Secret is to Really Begin

The phrase is near cliché among insurrectionary (and other) anarchists at this point, but it only reached that status because of its resonance. I guarantee that anyone who has meaningfully fought back can attest that in the moment resistance something changes in your head. It might have been the first time you threw a bottle or tear gas canister back at the riot line. Maybe it was the first time you de-arrested a friend in the crowd. Maybe it clicked with the sound of broken glass or with the sight fear in a cop's eye. Whatever that moment looked like for you, once you knew what you were capable of, that you could act instead of only spectate, a whole new world of possibilities opened before you. Put plainly, it is that feeling I wish to see generalize more broadly.

In full honesty, I don't know if the type of generalization I speak of is possible in the context of the US and I'm certainly under no impression that, if it is possible, that it would be easy to achieve. However, I recognize that my ability to act for myself is dependent on the ability of others to act for themselves, and so my ability to resist to the extent that I desire is directly tied to the ability of others to resist. So, the project of generalizing antagonism and resistance as daily life is where I place my focus. Everything seems impossible right up until it doesn't. Prior to 2020, I imagine most in the US did not think they would ever see a police precinct of a major city burn to the ground so thoroughly that it would set off weeks of cop cars burning and centers of commerce being smashed up in hundreds of cities throughout the country. I'm not so naïve as to believe that assemblies and distro projects can materialize mass revolt, but I'm also not so cynical as to

believe there is no use in fighting against my own brutalization (or that of any other) or that such brutalization is simply inherent to existence. The world being the way that it is does not mean it must be that way.

I want so much more than what this present world of death machines allows. If we wish to truly live differently, we cannot wait for particular manifestations of the death machines to reach their crisis point before we decide the time is right to act against them. Every state holds within it the potential for inconceivable, genocidal violence. Every police precinct the potential for brutalization and imprisonment. Wherever capital has a stranglehold on daily life there will be exploitation and brutality in the pursuit of its accumulation. This violence, brutalization, and exploitation will always be borne most intensely by those most marginalized by the present state of things. Every prison and every precinct, every border wall and every immigrant detention center, every weapons manufacturer and every military recruitment center is reason enough to act.

If you've read this far, I appreciate your time and consideration of the ideas described above. Whether you found them interesting and worthwhile or mundane and useless, thank you for engaging. I'll leave you with a quote taken from Jean Weir's "Tame Words from a Wild Heart", an essay collection that I find myself coming back to time and time again. Be brave. Be dangerous.

"No, lack of numbers is no cause for alarm. They are there, the exploited, all around us—are also 'us'—and could take us by surprise again at any moment (as could we ourselves). In the realm of the quantitative our task is to experiment and spread an insurrectional method for the self-organization of the necessary destruction of power and subjugation. Small groups with intermediate destructive aims based on affinity that can multiply, spread horizontally and coordinate, without limit. The apparent rift between anarchist theory and practice thus disappears along with the false conflict between individual and mass, and not least the conviction that the tenets of anarchism must be espoused by the exploited before they can fight for their own freedom along with that of others. An informal practice of attack leads to freedom revealing itself qualitatively, in leaps and bounds, far from the straight line of quantity, education, progress and waiting."

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