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Hope

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if we do nothing and we will suffer if we act. However, if we act, this horror may one day end.

So if a fire now grows within you, even if it is only a spark, let it catch; tend it carefully to fruition so that it might spread outside your bounds. Let it invigorate a truly revolutionary conception instead of a simple resentment. Then hand each ember alight to those others who suffer...so that you might bring about the dignity within them and offer the possibility that they will then seek their own liberation in turn. Only hope can lead us through this long darkness wherein our guiding light is so dim and our possibility of escape sparkles so delicately. Your fulfillment and meaning lie inescapably within a lifelong process of struggle. All that is left for you is to accept this burden and not to let it crush you, but to transform yourself into the being you must be to bear it. Reject all of the doomsayers trapped by the misery of the death machine. Reject the rose-tinted naivete of those who would bid you to simply trust to the processes of history. Resist defeat and inaction until death. Because, if we act, then eternally...there is hope.

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the new ethos of complementarity and creative strength. If we do not, this death-oriented machine will have imprinted itself forever not only upon our world, but upon us. As Howard Zinn says at the end of his work, *A People's History of the United States*¹⁵:

“To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.”

This “infinite succession of presents” as Howard Zinn calls them, are the center of our struggle. And in each present, we must decide: will we accept that we are nothing but historical automatons, carrying out a machine-like inevitability? Will we give in to the systematization of the mega-machine and its desire to turn us into thoughtless cogs? Will we watch as the sun sets on the great horizon of Earthly life? Or will we choose an eternal struggle for emancipation? Will we choose death? Or life? These are the questions that stand before us and, if we seek to abolish our misery, the choice between them is clear. Under a system of suffering, we will suffer

¹⁵ Howard Zinn, “A People's History of the United States” (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/howard-zinn-a-people-s-history-of-the-united-states>)

ing life that uniquely characterizes this planet in a vast, dead universe, will have joined the deadness of the great expanse, leaving only a husk behind, populated by a people who must know what their species has done to the mother that birthed it. If you chose defeatism or naive optimism and this future human asked you “why did you not act to stop this?” what would you say? What could you say, knowing that your inaction was instrumental in bringing about this hellworld? I contend to you that the only excuse which could conceivably suffice is “I fought until my dying breath to stop this from happening.”

Anyone who bids you to sit down and fold under the weight of this burden counsels you to allow the subjugation of all that is good and, in time, the eradication of life on this planet. It is precisely as Bookchin has said in his *Ecology of Freedom*:

“The crises are too serious and the possibilities too sweeping to be resolved by customary modes of thought—the very sensibilities that produced these crises in the first place. Years ago, the French students in the May-June uprising of 1968 expressed this sharp contrast of alternatives magnificently in their slogan: ‘Be practical! Do the impossible!’ To this demand, the generation that faces the next century can add the more solemn injunction: ‘If we don’t do the impossible, we shall be faced with the unthinkable!’”

We must do much more than to simply reject the death-oriented society we have been given. Mere rejection is not negation. The negation of a death-orientation lies crucially within the embrace of a life-orientation. So, while we must revolt, we must not lose sight of our goal. Because, if we seek to build a society of human autonomy, solidaric coordination, and ecological integration, then we must embody those precepts. And those of us who are the opponents of this horrible machine, must go to work with haste, reifying

Foreword

The following is the script of the video I published on my channel Anark. If you would like to watch that video, it is here: <https://youtu.be/yBRTm1tMdAw>

Minor edits have been made to the script to instead refer to itself as an essay instead of a video. Other than this, the content has remained the same and may be seen as a copy of the video, in text form, that can be distributed wholly in place of the video.

Solidarity forever.

Introduction

As I write these words, great, black clouds billow forth from the fires of human domination, drifting now overhead, they seem to block out the sun. We look to the sky and think we remember a time when it was blue; when the light at least shone through between the great storms and we ask: was it a memory or the dream of a hopeless people? Will we ever outlive the damage that is being done? Can the fires ever truly be quenched?

Not knowing the answers, many give in to the justifying philosophies which underpin hierarchical society; after all, a truly enormous propaganda machine is in place to take advantage of the mental exhaustion of the impoverished and to counsel them toward acceptance of a system which functions upon their exploitation. And it has succeeded magnificently at this goal. As it has been said “it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism.”

Yet the machine’s manufactured consent is weakening, or should we say, it is becoming untenable. It is bare upon its face that the system is degrading around us. It seems even to those who have doubted for long eras, that the death machine is accelerating toward a disaster which affects the lives of everyone we know and love. For others, it is easier to grab on to the optimistic fantasy

of a subjugated people; that the drivers of this great machine will simply steer away.

But both of these impulses represent the rejection of a grounded realism. Just as we cannot fall for the naive belief that a utopia awaits within our certain future, we cannot simply give in to the doomsday prophets. Not only because it does not serve us, as we shall soon demonstrate, but because it is not within our species to accept a final defeat. As Ernst Bloch says in his work *The Principle of Hope*: “as long as man is in a bad way, both private and public existence are pervaded by daydreams; dreams of a better life than that which has so far been given him.”¹ He, like us, does not speak of a wayward daydream which idly envisions a reality that can never be solidified. This notion, of conceiving a future project which negates our current suffering, is both practical and necessary. Further, it is the organic impulse of all oppressed peoples, even though they may be thoroughly deluded from this recognition.

Yet, to those crushed by the manufactured realism of hierarchical society, any conception which emphasizes the possibility of success can almost seem absurd. Just as within a great darkness, one who was dwelled there for a long era may forget the light, it becomes easier not to remember what sight once offered and to give in to blindness. But in this essay I would like to remind you of a light outside the darkness of our narrow account. More than this, I would like to tell you why the only path which can lead us from the darkness is...hope.

Futurity

Humanity is a most peculiar species. Our minds, the most advanced cognitive machines ever uncovered, are able to conceive of

¹ Ernst Bloch, “The Principle of Hope” (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/205/205-h/205-h.htm>) (<http://library.lol/main/F13D673A8D5F2CFA3CB25BB754A31B3A>)

hope is hard. Both pessimism and optimism offer an easy way out. Instead of shouldering the burden of determined action and constant vigilance, they flee to a false certainty and reduce the complexity of the real world to a dead symbol. The realistic position is that there is no certainty; that we are beings observing a perpetual present and cast out before an unknowable future. And, in this great churning vortex, we are bid to act.

So we must ask ourselves seriously what future it is that we wish to bring into existence. Because whatever actions that we choose, they will coordinate with that future. If we wish to create a world that holistically meets the needs and desires of the biosphere, we must work towards it consciously. We must inspire within the populace a fire for revolt and transformative construction. Because, if we do not, we are certain to fail. If the people are not roused to action, us among them, and we all instead convince ourselves that our inevitable future precludes the importance of our prefigurative work, ecological collapse will go unhalting and the great social mega-machine will escalate its oppression prolifically.

Just...imagine you are able to speak with someone from the hell-world after the decline of life on Earth. After the planet has been so thoroughly ravaged that hardly any terrestrial life will remain, save for these humans and their machinations. Upon the rocky surface, only bacteria will hearken to the common ancestry of terrestrial consciousness. Think, when you imagine you will speak to them, that this person will have never heard the birds singing in the morning light, never seen great tree canopies full of life, butterflies flitting between flower heads which sway from the gentle breeze. They will never have known what it is to hear the peace and racket of a primal nature and connect with this ancient and unbroken lineage between all life. No spores will ever again carry upon the wind. No sweet smell of honeysuckle will drift to meet your nose, no orange shall offer up its supple skin, concealing an ancient pleasure, nor shall any head of wheat bear a loaf of bread, nor any bush bear its berries, nor bee hive enclose honey. The great team-

The Will to Act

And so we must act, even knowing nothing for certain. It is not only, as Frantz Fanon has said,¹³ that “we revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe.” It is because we are one of the few species which can actually dream of better worlds. In this extraordinary capacity, we may become the architects of our future moments, if only we act. And crucially, we must act. Because, even if there is some inevitable revolutionary future, it is still not one that is known to us, for better or for worse. When all is said and done, we cannot know the possibility or impossibility of a struggle which seeks to fundamentally break with the previous paradigm. The very enactment of this paradigm embodies a fully new conception of society. And so, in seeking this exceptional goal, our response must perpetually be “I do not know what lies ahead, but I will do what is necessary to bring about the future I demand.”

What defines this hope is that it is a goal that never dies. The hopeful realist asks until their last moments what is left to be done to achieve the thing at hand. Hope refuses internal defeat, it turns its bearer into a perpetual being-in-struggle and, in doing so, welcomes the possibility of liberation into our communal future. Hope is the fertile soil where a new seed might be planted and so, the possibility that we might tend it to fruition. In hope, there is the construction of something new, of the circumscribing of new lines and of the pioneering of new ideas which may then bring transformation. Hope animates the wheels of change. Hope channels distress into action and actualizes theory. In the darkness, hope does not assume help will come, nor does it give up, it lights a candle so that we may set out in search of the door.

But, as John Cleese humorously said,¹⁴ “it’s not the despair [...] I can take the despair. It’s the hope I can’t stand.” And it is true:

¹³ Frantz Fanon, “The Wretched of the Earth” (https://monoskop.org/images/6/6b/Fanon_Frantz_The_Wretched_of_the_Earth_1963.pdf)

¹⁴ John Cleese, “Clockwise”

ideas far beyond all precedent or rationality, yet are, tragically, limited in their ability to enact those ideas by the burdens of a physical world. We can conceive of being disembodied minds, existing prior to physical things, but the moment that our brains are mutilated or destroyed, so too are our minds. We can conceive of a transcendent psyche which endures after death, disentangled with the physical realm, but one day, we will nevertheless meet with our end.

Similarly, although we can mentally conceive of the future, we are bound to perceive an eternal present, our minds acting like a spotlight on the ever-moving slideshow of life.

But this last antagonism cannot be simply dismissed as a philosophical oddity. One cannot live their life narrowly preoccupied upon a mental present, even if they are inexorably tied to it. The present configures an eternal trail of past moments once in flux, continually written into granite and it proceeds through an inevitable future, which appears before us undecided, within its great potentiality the arc of all things terrible and terrific. As beings which must act perpetually without foreknowledge, we are then constantly bound to the process of forecasting the future. To do anything, one must think of a future moment wherein that action has come to fruition. And this process of constantly being-without-conclusion, can lead to an overwhelming sense of distress and anxiety. In absence of some method of determining our future, every moment to come is an ineffable void.

How well we forecast these future moments then comes to determine much happiness and suffering we experience throughout our lives. If we form poor understandings of the world, if we give in to delusion, or if we simply divest ourselves of the responsibility of interpretation and action, we will continually fall short of our desires, and this will inevitably create misery. We are, in every moment, locked into a cycle of future anticipation. This is what Ernst Bloch means when he says: “Primarily, everybody lives in the future, because they strive, past things only come later, and as yet genuine present is almost never there at all.”

Each human, bound by this inherent futureness, is then also inevitably bound to form a set of expectations, based on precedents and desires, a perspective on how they view the possible resolution of events to come. But those who seek to determine this inevitable tide of future events most accurately must invest the time that is needed to understand the world, to quantify its many intricacies and to work out the complex interconnections. And this process can be very mentally draining. The world, after all, is far too complicated for our minds to ever truly grasp and all of our attempts are doomed to a small sampling of an almost impossibly vast dataset, no matter how well adjusted.

With this in mind, under a capitalistic paradigm in which the lives of the masses are increasingly filled with frivolous, unfulfilling, alienated work, in which we are more and more atomized from our communities and our peers, driven into both physical and mental exhaustion just to stay afloat, the desire to have one's expectations settled, is in high demand. Without the time nor mental energy to really pursue what appears to be a byzantine maze of philosophy and political theory, it is only natural that many will seek an escape from the burden of constant measured prediction and action, of dealing with mistakes of understanding, and of correcting their mental framework such that they may succeed where they have failed before. It is then easy to give in to the two extremes of future conception: that the universe either fundamentally confounds our desires or that it fundamentally fulfills them. These two extremes are called pessimism and optimism.

By contrast, the realist position is that the universe neither has some intention to realize our desires, nor is it out to categorically deny them; the universe simply is. There is no positive or negative fate which alters our present to its preordained ends. The future is nothing but the culmination of the present moment. Therefore, if we wish to manifest a future moment which meets our desires, it is our duty to go to work in creating it presently.

task. Upon the hilltop, this last archer stands alone, having endeavored one hundred times as much as the pessimist and optimist to achieve it and having attained a mastery far beyond anything they could conceive because of it.

Revolution requires both our expertise and the confluence of the great circumstances of history. To achieve such a challenging goal, we will need to train ourselves to mastery in confounding the megamachine and bringing more people to the fore, ingraining within them a realistically grounded hope, such that one of our many attempts may meet the mark. If we cannot conceive of our future in such a way, wherein some hope may always be kindled, we will only ever achieve an aimless and unskilled flailing. Hope is not a luxury, it is a prerequisite of successful struggle. If we cannot stoke the dream of a better future, we cannot make it. As Kropotkin says in his work *Law and Authority*¹²:

“It may [...] be said that the more miserable a man is, the more he dreads every sort of change, lest it may make him more wretched still. Some ray of hope, a few scraps of comfort, must penetrate his gloomy abode before he can begin to desire better things, to criticise the old ways of living, and prepare to imperil them for the sake of bringing about a change. So long as he is not imbued with hope, so long as he is not freed from the tutelage of those who utilise his superstition and his fears, he prefers remaining in his former position.”

¹² Peter Kropotkin, “Law and Authority” (http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/kropotkin/lawauthority.html)

never conceiving what is necessary to succeed, while the archer who hopes fires their arrows endlessly, approaching the goal more and more. As they do, over the course of weeks, the hopeful realist begins to find that, even with this mastery, the task is exceedingly difficult. Indeed, having attained expertise, as we have said, they must continue firing arrows for an average of 10,000 times before one shall meet the mark. But none of these three know such a thing. The task appears only repetitive and infuriating. The only certainty appears to be failure.

Over this long suffering process, the optimist gives up firing arrows. After all, if all things are guaranteed to get better, why must they be the one who endeavors? They look to the last archer, whose skill is much greater, and pat them on the back as they leave "I will see you back at the archery range."

In this moment, the hopeful archer experiences despair. They stand alone before a windswept valley, filled with arrows which have failed to meet their mark. The rose-tinted naivete of the optimist was wrong and the defeatism of the pessimist appears to foreclose failure in this Sisyphean task. For a moment, they consider that perhaps the pessimist is right. They entertain that their goal may be truly unachievable. But they are reminded of their own creed. "I do not know whether it is reachable or not...but I will do what is necessary to achieve it."

And it is only in the last archer's rejection of defeatism that they fire those 10,000 arrows. One after another arrows leave their bow and land short or long or left or right of the target. The wind blows them about and the hopeful realist accounts for the wind astutely as best they can, its torrential gusts constantly confounding their mastery.

However, eventually, sailing through the air as so many had before, the winds blowing in some fortuitous way, and the hopeful archer's mastery having become exceptional, the arrow lands upon the target. Only this hopeful realist, who set their lofty goal and adjusted their actions to its dictates had any chance of achieving the

Within this recognition of existential neutrality we therefore find a revolutionary horizon which is brought into being by action and characterized by a simultaneously radical, yet practical goal setting. Because we are fundamentally precluded from knowing the future moment, until the final failure has arrived, we can never be certain that success is truly lost. And, because we can never rest knowing that our oncoming victory is absolute, we must continually act to safeguard what has been achieved. It is not that we know we will succeed, it is that there is a recognition that cannot be dismissed by doubt: if some goal might be reached, there is always still more work to be done in achieving it. In other words, realism suggests the hopeful approach. Thus, we will call this perspective "hopeful realism."

This sort of grounded hope stands in contrast to the hope of the optimist. In conceptualizing an inevitable moral arc to the universe, or to human affairs themselves, optimism creates a false image of how progress and improvement are brought about to begin with. Nothing comes into being unless we make it. To sit idly by is to guarantee failure. So built on a falsehood, optimism abstracts the procession toward its desired future. The optimist's hope then often serves as a placating naivete and therefore a cruelty to the downtrodden. It is a false hope. The optimist thinks they can free themselves of the burden of truly transformative action and thus their weakened response is one which serves the ends of the dominators.

But we will not spend most of our time on the optimist. Instead, we must confront the defeatism of the pessimist. After all, the perspective of the pessimist can be easy to arrive at when we witness the size and efficiency of the mega-machine: seeing a world full of horrific cruelty, expedient politicians, and parasitic systems with seemingly insurmountable odds of being overturned, the pessimist takes what might seem like a very safe gamble that more will follow. As we said in the introduction, to one who has been trapped

in the darkness for a very long time, it becomes easier to accept blindness, than to search for the door.

Humans, after all, can delude themselves to nearly any paradigm, even when its proclamations are deeply alienating and even actively reinforce extraordinary misery to maintain them. What humans absolutely cannot tolerate, is having their expectations of the world continually disrupted, because this ingrains deep questions of doubt that cannot be dismissed. Pessimism is then a sort of coping mechanism in an indifferent universe. The pessimist can't be let down by high expectations, because they have pathologically discarded them. In preparing only for the worst, they come to feel as if they have control of their misery, that because they have chosen it, is somehow better. If the worst comes, they reassure themselves that they have prepared for it in the way that they could, then seemingly confirming their wisdom. But, in doing so, they abandon the achievement of a greater possibility and thus bring about the confirmation of their defeat; by having no hope for success, they take their failure from the realm of possibility, into reality.

The pessimist can then come to see all around them as a dead world which cannot be salvaged. To see it burned to ashes can then become the most liberatory impulse imaginable. The contention of the anarcho-nihilist work, *Blessed is the Flame*, for example, is that life in the modern world is really best comparable to the logic of concentration camps. And, as we know, the concentration camps were not dismantled by their inmates.

Instead, the occupants of the camps were contorted into the hell of their conditions and came to focus their minds into an eternal present. The past was a reflection of a world they could never return to and the future was a cruel phantom. They could no more know that they would eat again the next day than that they would one day escape the camps. The acts of rebellion which did exist, were entirely focused in the present moment and thus sought only to confound and entangle the operation of the camps. In *Blessed is the Flame*, this presentist perception of the passage of time

The pessimistic archer spends the first few days training, but endeavors only toward the task of firing his bow. "It is no use wasting my time working to achieve a greater expertise to hit this target. It is not achievable. I merely continue firing my arrows for the joy of archery. I know that I will not achieve such an impossible task, but I am invigorated by the attempt."

The optimist archer tries for quite some time, firing their arrows only lazily, failing time and time again and confused by it "I do not know why I cannot reach the target. I continue attempting and I am certain that such a target will be reachable if only I allow the process to play out, but I nonetheless continue to fail."

Meanwhile, the last archer goes to work immediately improving their aim. They set their eye upon the task without conceiving whether they will achieve the goal or not. The hopeful realist, instead, merely asks what better training might be necessary if there is some world wherein they might hit the mark. "I do not know whether it is reachable or not...but I will do what is necessary to achieve it." The winds blow their arrows about and they fail to meet their mark, but they come closer than the others before long.

Soon, the pessimistic archer gives up. The pleasure has dried up and thus motivation has ceased. "This isn't achievable, as I said. I think I will go focus upon goals that are more realistic, such as the targets in the archery range back in the village. I bid you both to continue this hopeless task."

The optimist stays, but just the same as before, they come to the fore and they fire their arrows, but they do not endeavor to properly improve their aim as is needed. They say to the third archer "I still can't seem to reach the target, even though I don't understand why. I know that one must merely become an archer and try again and again and the task we desire shall be fulfilled. But I just cannot seem to make any progress."

Meanwhile, the last archer continues improving their archery, achieving mastery as they strive for an exceptional goal. The optimist returns again and again, never reaching closer to the mark,

to make the colossus tremble; another revolt has stirred a whole province into turmoil, and the army, till now always so imposing, has retreated before a handful of peasants armed with sticks and stones. The people observe that the monster is not so terrible as they thought they begin dimly to perceive that a few energetic efforts will be sufficient to throw it down. Hope is born in their hearts, and let us remember that if exasperation often drives men to revolt, it is always hope, the hope of victory, which makes revolutions.”

All that is, was brought about by the striving of a previous peoples toward a goal. And it was that striving, not knowing what might come, that has been the only force in bringing new worlds into existence.

The Parable of the Archers

But perhaps the point is still not clear. In order to illustrate these ideas in more depth, let us conceive of a thought experiment. Standing upon a hill, three archers meet. A target lies through a small valley which is exceptionally far away and under high winds. Within the experiences of all three who are present, it is unprecedented that such a target can be reached, especially under such poor conditions. With this, the three set upon a discussion of the challenge. The first says: “the target is unreachable. I have fired many arrows in my day and I have never seen a person achieve such a task.” The second says “I am certain that it will be no challenge at all to reach the target because we are, every day, achieving greater and greater feats. Surely it will be no difficulty if we aid the natural procession toward success!” The third says, however, “I do not know whether it is reachable or not...but I will do what is necessary to achieve it.” What none of these archers know, is that only an expert will ever hit the mark and they will only ever do so 1/10,000 times.

which reifies a joyful rebellion is called “Messianic Time.” It is the only thing, the author argues, that had any chance of negating the camps and, because our conditions are most comparable to theirs, they argue that it is the only type of futurity which has any chance of negating our own. As they say²:

“Anarcho-nihilism understands the positive program as ‘one that confuses desire with reality and extends that confusion into the future’ by either making promises about what a revolutionary future might hold, or attempting to bring those conditions about from within the existing order. Such positive aspirations offer nothing more than a dangling carrot for us to pursue in a situation in which the stick, string, and prize all need to be destroyed.”

Here we see a notable trend in pessimistic thought. That is, the pessimist wishes to convince others that they are the sober bearer of hard truths, the only one willing to do the dirty work of accepting a cruel and unwavering reality. The pessimist will then have a tendency to co-opt the aesthetic of the utilitarian, presenting themselves as the true pragmatist among the many idealists. But the pessimist cannot prove that their position represents the acceptance of a hard truth; pessimism is enticing precisely because it affords comfort in its simplicity. Optimism and pessimism alike, both actually represent a sort of blind faith in future circumstances, despite the insistence of the nihilist that they have rejected future thinking. That is to say, the positions of the optimists and the pessimists alike are not based on evidence, but instead reactions borne from despair or naivete, beliefs built by a desire to quell confrontation with uncertainty. There is no evidence, after all, of any effectiveness in the pure present focused revolts any more than there is evidence in the effectiveness of a teleological procession toward progress.

Nonetheless, we would do well not to reject the pessimists outright. These raw emotional reactions to the horrors of society; re-

² Serafinski, “Blessed is the Flame” (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/serafinski-blessed-is-the-flame>)

sentment and anger, deconstruction and destruction, escape and rejection, should not be dismissed as invalid responses to the death machine. As has been said by Edward Culp in his work “Escape:”³

“Cynicism, depression, and hopelessness fill reservoirs unleashed against Empire in revenge for the wounds it causes. Dangerous emotions pose a threat, not just to those who bear them, but to their source, Empire – the political imperative is to channel them. [...] [T]hese dangerous emotions are not unhealthy reactions to a sound world; they should be everyone’s natural reaction to the terrible situation facing us all. To throw them away would only rob some subjects of the only thing Empire has ever given them.”

These are fair points. We should not overcorrect in opposition to the pessimist and dismiss insurrectionary negation outright. Such a system as ours creates a great deal of misery and there is therefore a real potential to transform the distress of the populace into a sort of active nihilism. But, we must be constantly aware that, having centered such a negative approach, many would-be revolutionaries can be coaxed into a narrow and ineffective ideology of pure presentist revolt. Having learned of the rot in the capitalist paradigm, but feeling helpless to really change conditions, they can become a sort of clergy in a religion of denunciation; generating righteous outrage; pointing their finger astutely to the problem at hand and declaring its size, shape, and nature, yet eternally failing to correctly prescribe a real solution.

While it is true that the concentration camps configured in their occupants a present mind, devoid of future planning or past contextualization, just as Blessed as the Flame has said, those who had this

³ Edward Culp, “Escape” (https://www.academia.edu/5516631/Escape_Dissertation_)

of the Japanese anarchist, Kanno Sugako just before her execution by the state¹⁰: “Born in a tiny country, I am sacrificing my little body for a glimmer of hope.” Upon the tombstone of Lucia Sanchez Saornil, who lived through the Spanish Civil War and had to flee to France, the words are still inscribed “But is it true that hope has died?” To this we respond, hope cannot die. Not only because it is motivated by an eternal factor in human intention, but because it is required for the churning cycle. As Kropotkin laid out in his work *The Spirit of Revolt*¹¹:

“Men of courage, not satisfied with words, but ever searching for the means to transform them into action,—men of integrity for whom the act is one with the idea, for whom prison, exile, and death are preferable to a life contrary to their principles,—intrepid souls who know that it is necessary to dare in order to succeed,— these are the lonely sentinels who enter the battle long before the masses are sufficiently roused to raise openly the banner of insurrection and to march, arms in hand, to the conquest of their rights [...] it awakens the spirit of revolt: it breeds daring. The old order, supported by the police, the magistrates, the gendarmes and the soldiers, appeared unshakable, like the old fortress of the Bastille, which also appeared impregnable to the eyes of the unarmed people gathered beneath its high walls equipped with loaded cannon. But soon it became apparent that the established order had not the force one had supposed. One courageous act has sufficed to upset in a few days the entire governmental machinery,

¹⁰ Kanno Sugako, “Reflections on the Way to the Gallows” (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/kanno-sugako-reflections-on-the-way-to-the-gallows>)

¹¹ Peter Kropotkin, “The Spirit of Revolt” (http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/kropotkin/spiritofrevolt.html)

“Ilyich never for a moment doubted that [grim battles for proletarian revolution] were the prospects. But, as to how soon that coming revolution would take place – that, of course, Ilyich could not know. “We of the older generation may not live to see the decisive battles of this coming revolution,” he told the people gathered before him.

Yet only a few weeks later, the Czar was overthrown by the trade unions and the factory committees. And a few months after that, Lenin would end up at the helm of a historic revolutionary project. This upset fueled an entire generation of revolutionary attempts. In so many of the waves of transformation, it was the work of some great revolutionaries who preceded their era who gave examples of revolt and bravery that inspired hope within the people to emancipate themselves. In this way, we can look to the work of the factory committees and the workers’ councils within revolutionary Russia as the demonstration of an undying impulse toward liberation that lays within all subjugated beings; just as the Paris commune or Spanish Catalonia or the KAPM or the many peasant revolts themselves, though each must be understood upon their own basis. Each are, for better or worse, experiments in the development of a fully conceived revolutionary practice and their stories all contribute to a growing canon of revolt. Though we must be gravely careful in recognizing how each of their failures could have been avoided, we must also support the impetus to revolt, for within it, we discover the will to transform conditions.

The acts of those who have struggled before us inspire us toward action. We have never been a species who sealed away our martyrs as purely cautionary tales. These great struggles, even ending in pools of blood, always tend to find their ways back to the public psyche as symbols of a process toward emancipation, just as John Brown and Nat Turner still live on in the memories of the abolition movement, so too are contemporary anarchists learning the words

mindset enforced upon them also did not destroy those concentration camps. The concentration camps were certainly confounded by these rebellions, but the concentration camps were ultimately ended by wide scale conflict, carried out in earnest toward a goal, which was grasped out of the future possibilities and brought into reality through action toward an expectation. This is not to say, of course, that we should mimic the United States and associated governments in their organizational style. But it is to say, an organizational form is what destroyed these death camps, not presentist rebellion. Why would we seek to mimic the behaviors of those who were consumed by the dominator’s hellscapes and whom we can see did not succeed in liberating themselves from them? Why would we seek to invoke in ourselves the mentality of the institutionalized prisoners interned inside one of the most revolting institutions ever devised by human beings? It is as Ernst Bloch says:

“Only in times of a declining old society, like modern Western society, does a certain partial and transitory intention run exclusively downwards. Then those who cannot find their way out of the decline are confronted with fear of hope and against it. Then fear presents itself as the subjectivist nihilism, as the objectivist mask of the crisis phenomenon: which is tolerated but not seen through, which is lamented but not changed.”

This conception cannot configure a new society then, because it does not even conceive it and it cannot negate the current society because it misunderstands how it came into being. This is to say: they are only carrying out half of the anarchist program; the deconstructive aspect. Capitalism will never implode just by sheer weight of its own contradictions, neither by way of some natural stagist progression nor through some chaotic systems collapse. As Deleuze, a notable advocate of active nihilism, has said⁴:

⁴ Giles Deleuze, “Anti-Oedipus” (<https://libcom.org/files/Anti-Oedipus.pdf>)

“The death of a social machine has never been heralded by a disharmony or a dysfunction; on the contrary, social machines make a habit of feeding on the contradictions they give rise to, on the crises they provoke, on the anxieties they engender, and on the infernal operations they regenerate. [...] [T]he more it breaks down, the more it schizophrenizes, the better it works, the American way.”

Systems of power do not fear the simple setting of fires, because no single fire will ever spread to the degree it consumes the machine. They fear the construction of something which can actually undergo a systems conflict and then maintain itself within the torrential winds which follow such an affair. This is why, for example, that J. Edgar Hoover was known to have said that it was not the Black Liberation Army that made the Black Panthers enemy number one of the FBI, it was instead the breakfast programs that were “potentially the greatest threat to efforts by authorities to neutralize the BPP and destroy what it stands for.”⁵

This is why it was a defeatist pessimism that the Nazis sought to imbue into the Jews within the camps, because that is precisely the conception of the world which maintained their dominance. The Nazi guards notably did not counsel the interned Jews to “hope for a better world and then work toward that end.” The mental degradation they imposed was entirely predicated on the destruction of hope. This is because pessimism is really just a manifestation of the diminished futurity which every hierarchical system attempts to establish in order to maintain control. As Bloch has said:

“[...] bourgeois interest would like to draw every other interest opposed to it into its own failure; so, in order

⁵ J. Edgar Hoover (<https://www.history.com/news/free-school-breakfast-black-panther-party>)

always bound to boil up time and time again, providing examples of both martyrdom and success for struggles to come. They were both a representation of the ensuing wave which crushed the old monarchies beneath its weight and an impulse toward self-emancipation characteristic of all peoples held under suppression.

But no simple act of force could have produced the liberal era. The final success of the capitalists over the aristocratic class was born in a constructive, prefigured program within the belly of feudal relations. In the 13th and 14th century, there arose in the Italian city-states and lower country the mercantile ruling class of the “bourgs.”⁸ This word, “bourg,” is even the root of the more familiar word “bourgeois.” Yet this capitalist class did not truly come to hold its decisive power until the 17th century and the revolutionary transformations which have been studied time and time again by socialist thinkers, would not come until the 18th century.

For this roughly four hundred year span, the claims that feudal relations would one day be superseded by capitalism would likely have appeared absurd to many. And, though it may have been a deeply incomplete destruction of the system of domination, this process nonetheless represented a true transformation of the relations of society, and those who expressed their pessimism were ultimately in the wrong.

We simply do not have four hundred years. And if our program is all that more urgent, so too should we be doggedly pursuing the construction of our dual power, lest we leave ourselves unprepared. After all, revolutions are often quite unexpected. Take, for example, the February Revolution in Russia. Lenin’s wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, in her memoir titled “Reminiscences of Lenin” recounts a speech he gave in January of 1917⁹:

⁸ Bichler and Nitzan, “Capital as Power: Toward a New Cosmology of Capitalism” (https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/157829/1/bna-285_20100500_bn_casp_toward_a_new_cosmology_of_capitalism.pdf)

⁹ Nadezhda Krupskaya, “Reminiscences of Lenin” (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/krupskaya/works/rol/index.htm>)

“react to the ‘black redistribution’ not only with personal fear and a savage lust for vengeance, but with horror toward the desecration of their hierarchical vision of ‘order.’ [...]

“Behold the palaces thereof, their walls are dismantled ... Behold, all the craftsmen, they do no work; the enemies of the land impoverish its crafts. [Behold, he who reaped] the harvest knows naught of it; he who has not plowed [fills his granaries] ... Civil war pays no taxes ... For what is a treasure without its revenues? ... Behold, he who has no yoke of oxen is [now] possessor of a herd; and he who found no plow-oxen for himself is [now] owner of a herd. Behold, he who had no grain is [now] owner of granaries; and he who used to fetch grain for himself [now] has it issued [from his own granary].”

But, while it is laudable that they achieved this affair, we still must concede to the pessimist, the revolt did not last. Just like the Nazis crushed the attempts at concentration camp revolts, so too did this black redistribution get crushed in time. And thus, judging from the precedent of history, we are forced to accept that not every insurrection can be waged under the impression that it will succeed or, if it does, that it will last indefinitely. We cannot overcorrect to the naivete of the optimist. Instead, each insurrection and every act of prefiguration we undertake must see itself as part of an endless striving for liberation, planning in all ways for what must be done to arrive upon the desired goal, ultimately aware that it is part of an endless process which may one day eventually produce the transformation of this world system and have its necessary part in the abolition of human domination.

These many attempts at revolution were all necessary components of the broader revolutionary process itself. The peasant revolts expressed an emergent impulse toward resistance which is

to drain the new life, it makes its own agony apparently fundamental, [...] The futility of bourgeois existence is extended to be that of the human situation in general, of existence per se.”

What Bloch says here of the bourgeois is true of all hierarchical power structures. Hierarchical power benefits from the aimlessness of defeatism and pure presentist negation, because hopeful realism is all that truly confounds them. A truly active negation is simultaneously constructive and deconstructive. As Bookchin says toward the end of his work, *Ecology of Freedom*: “The means for tearing down the old are available, both as hope and as peril. So, too, are the means for rebuilding. The ruins themselves are mines for recycling the wastes of an immensely perishable world into the structural materials of one that is free as well as new.”

If we are to undergo such a project, in which we are required to recycle the wastes of the world we seek to tear down, we must plan our actions wisely. We cannot resign ourselves to simply destroying one machine, not having prefigured the coherent, organized structure which will weather the vacuum. Having chosen narrow cells of action and eschewed popular integration, what impetus would really prevent the cancer of tyranny from metastasizing once again? While the presentist rebel thinks they represent the corrosive acid that will eat away the state of hierarchical society, their refusal to think of a better future has actually made them ineffective at undermining the machine, ineffective at building a liberatory replacement, and often threatening to slide into a ravine of despair and uselessness. This lack of planning and organization threatens to form a weak, disorganized populace, susceptible to a new exploiter. Worse, this future-lacking pessimism, if it fails to cause the messianic rupture it desires, can devolve into a doomer defeatism, which then only produces more weak opponents for the machine to crush.

The true challenge and the only realistic perspective, is in a grounded hope, because it sets its goals and then demands a path of action, because it rejects the stale acceptance of an optimistic futurism, because it rejects the aimlessness of pure presentism, and because it refuses defeat until death. Dreams are not inherently unpractical. Hope of a better world is not naive. The gap between what can be imagined and what currently exists, is the fuel of the engine of change. The goal we must set for ourselves is to decide what dreams lie in the realm of the achievable, then aim high, demanding that our shortfall land us among a better future. In this, we see what was meant when Pisarev has said⁶:

“One gulf is different to another [...] My dreams can overtake the natural course of events, or they can go off at complete tangents, down paths that the natural course of events can never tread. In the first case dreaming [...] can even encourage and strengthen the working man’s power to act [...] If a person were completely devoid of all capability of dreaming in this way, if he were not able to hasten ahead now and again to view in his imagination as a unified and completed picture the work which is only now beginning to take shape in his hands, then I find it absolutely impossible to imagine what would motivate the person to tackle and to complete extensive and strenuous pieces of work in the fields of art, science, and practical life [...] The gulf between dream and reality is not harmful if only the dreamer seriously believes in his dream, if he observes life attentively, compares his observations with his castles in the air and generally works towards the realization of his dream-construct conscientiously. There only has to be some point of contact between dream and life for everything to be in the best order.”

⁶ Dmitri Pisarev “Blunders of Immature Thinking” (Cited in Principle of Hope)

History and Contingency

In the essay up until this point, we have emphasized the reality that we do not know the future and that trying to forecast it too narrowly, is a serious pitfall. But, while we do not know our future, there are nonetheless valuable precedents to inspect. Every past, after all, was once the future of a previous moment. And now, within our history lies a ledger of those previous futures; it is a record of fits and starts, horrors followed by triumphs and triumphs followed by horrors, liberation both where it is expected and where it is not, suppression and overthrow, destruction and construction in varying measures. All of this once lay only in the potentialities of past peoples.

And with this in mind, one cannot look upon political history and only take a dim view of our prospects, even though, surely, for thousands of years, there were those who expressed their pessimism as fact. Upon finishing their toil, surely there were these defeatists who would have told their fellow serfs that imagining the end of monarchy was naive optimism. And think of the evidence they could have brought to bear. Historical record shows that peasant revolt after peasant revolt was savagely suppressed and we can assume that many more took place that were not even recorded.

Yet, throughout the history of humanity under hierarchical rule, there has also been the impulse to recapture our alienated power through collective action and in some occasions, the peoples living under hierarchical society even had the necessary will to enact their desired re-organization. This impulse toward liberation proceeds back to some of the earliest societies. Murray Bookchin, in *Ecology of Freedom*, recounts one of the oldest of these momentary successes, an event in ancient Egypt, around 2500 BC, called the “black redistribution” by the dispossessed ruling class.⁷ They

⁷ Murray Bookchin, “The Ecology of Freedom” (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-the-ecology-of-freedom>)