

How to Destroy The World

Ignorant Research Institute

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*I have heard
there are troubles
of more
than one kind.
Some come
from ahead.
Some come
from behind.
But I've bought
a big bat,
I'm all ready
you see.
Now my troubles
are going
to have troubles
with me.*

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency...

(Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*)

I

There is no such thing as a real woman. Truth logically requires falseness, and what would that falseness be? Or perhaps the answer has already been given, the fight over predicates lost. There are guns and knives and fires waiting for us, and the papers will mock our memory as police snicker. On the street, we're reminded by the gaze, by catcalls, by the fear we feel, and the countless precautions we take to avoid joining the dead, beaten, raped, or imprisoned.

It is beside the point to speak of civil rights or peaceful protests when so many of us are forced into crime to survive: selling our Adderall, shoplifting cans of soup, getting paid to let men cum in us. Even many of us who do have jobs choose crime simply because a life without crime would be even more miserable. We already know that millions of us can't afford college, that millions of us grow up into neighborhoods where we are doomed to poverty – what do we do after the awareness campaigns fail?

II

We are not all Trayvon Martin, we are not all CeCe McDonald, we are not all Breanna Manning. When I say “we,” I *absolutely* do not mean that we are all one, but rather that we share a similar

condition: that our lives and bodies are worth *nothing* unless we can prove ourselves through social security numbers, bank accounts, resumes, and a clean criminal record. For those of us that are people of color, trans, women, or queer, even that may not be enough.

Those of us defined by common identities (like woman, or latin@, or queer) are not all the same. Though he admits to having smoked weed, Obama is not going to get pulled over while driving and stripsearched or shot under “suspicion of drugs.” Even when the differences between us are not as drastic as the differences between Obama and some black teen in a hoodie, our identities cannot be the source of our power – claims that women are somehow intrinsically revolutionary or that “we’re all the 99%” gloss over the host of differences between us. One of us might have gone to a private high school, another might have been paraplegic from birth, I might be a rape survivor, they might be unemployed, you might be an undocumented immigrant, she might be an undercover cop¹, he might own a business.

To gather around shared identities is to repeat and affirm the naming that ultimately marks us as criminal, as killable, as rapeable in the first place. I call *naming* the process by which we are separated as illegitimate (not-normal, worthy of death) while marking others as legitimate (normal, good)². When Lorena Escalera – a trans woman of color and sex worker in New York – was killed by two clients who set her apartment on fire, the New York Times made it a point to reduce her to her *exotic* sex appeal, to describe her possessions as “colorful,” and to quote a neighbor who said, “[f]or a man, he was gorgeous.” They might have stated that her death was a tragedy and treated her memory with respect, but respect is not portioned out to those whose lives are valueless. Instead, we are mocked, used as political fodder, killed.

The progressive and the social justice activist fail to recognize the violence of naming. Instead, they try to name us all as normal. This is *impossible*. The attempt to legitimize ourselves and join the ranks of the upstanding citizens maintains that there are others who are illegitimate, that others are not good citizens – or even citizens at all.

In addition, naming describes how our attributes and identities are not objective features of reality, but are rather produced through various apparatuses. The way we interact with, think about, and read ourselves and each other is empty of any essence we might be able to pin down independently of the social. It is disingenuous to speak of gender or race as being real or unreal. Two things are clear, however: they are massive and terrible systems that affect every person on this planet, and aside from the ways they are utilized to control bodies, they are completely arbitrary.

As an exercise, attempt to describe what a woman is fundamentally:

- You cannot reference her body because women have all kinds of different bodies and brains and hormones and chromosomes and bone structures etc.
- You cannot describe her as someone who is attracted to men because there are queer women.

¹ Be careful, baby anarchist!

² It is worth noting that naming is not something that happens once and sticks. It happens sometimes suddenly, sometimes over time, repeating over and over again to fasten us to our positions. As a result, our positions are not fixed. One can swing from condemned to blameless or (more likely) the reverse. This is one example of how identity politics fails to describe our lived experiences by simplifying and abstracting to the extent that it can only speak in increasingly inaccurate generalizations.

- You cannot describe her as a housewife because there are women who don't marry and don't stay at home.
- You cannot describe her as being good at cooking and bad at sports because there are women who burn salads and play a wicked game of basketball.
- You cannot describe her ... *except by referring to the various mechanisms by which the meaning of "woman" is written on her.*

After all the names and countless words that aren't you, what *are* you?

Nothing

A nothing so infuriatingly indistinguishable and unique that the entire world obsessively works to name you. After all, with thousands of adjectives operating on our bodies, we are finally produced as selves. We are *it* until the doctor genders us. To name is the violence, threat, and cruelty of the signifier come down to bear on the nothing that continually escapes, exceeds, falls short, and fails its self. Importantly though, these systems of legitimacy and operations of subjectivity are constructed and enforced by modes of power, not merely language.

III

There are many places that we do not feel safe, others where we are comfortable. We don't walk down streets with bro bars at night because we are sick of being harassed, or we avoid going to our friends house when they have that one friend over who always says fucked up shit, or we dread going to the part of town near the university because every time we go racial slurs are yelled in our direction.

In reaction to this, we might try to create and cultivate safe(r) spaces to rest for a while from the world. Sometimes we try to do this by excluding those we feel threatened by. This usually works to an extent, but it should be recognized that by doing so we are naming and so our exclusion is of the same form as the exclusion that is or entails violence.

Women's spaces are particularly guilty of interacting in this kind of exclusion. When a "feminist" women's space and the Olympics both measure and exclude members based on biological makeup, there is a problem. When women who aren't read as women enter women's bathrooms and are beat up or arrested, the same exclusion is taking place. Exclusion is not remedied by explicitly including people whose identities do not match the demographics of white or straight or cis spaces, especially if they are still otherized in those spaces. Exclusion is not remedied by inclusion but by attacking those forces that exclude, which are numerous and are rarely entirely within our control.

This world is the totality of social relations (namings and other modes of power), but the total is nothing more than a sum – an abstraction at a global level. Naming, meanwhile, takes place at a local level in a myriad of spaces. Spaces constantly evolve as power influences them. Naming repeatedly operating bends space³ and so it creates and maintains systems of oppression. Spaces

³ A different analogy: if power is electricity, space is not the battery – space is the charge *in* the battery. As power flows, charges polarize, and spaces develop affinities and hostilities to one another and to bodies within them.

are not particularly large, they bleed into one another, and they fluctuate constantly. We can *feel* space as we are affected by it: fear, happiness, anger, excitement. It does not always take a massive effort in order to affect a space. Calling a kid fag or bashing him are both namings, each twists the space around him and makes that space – and by extension, the world – a scarier place for him and for other queers. The difference between the jeer and the bash is one of intensity, not of kind. Both are expressions of power that function to separate him and shove him towards his annihilation.

Power is simply the ability to do, the force of action, the energy of every interaction. There are the obvious restrictive and coercive modes of power, but power is much more. Naming is a particular way that power works, but naming is not only that which confines, threatens, and attacks us – it is also that which has us work towards the reproduction of this world. When we enthusiastically engage in our identities, working to promote or produce them as such – to be better workers or queers or immigrants – we are still naming. Everything is an exertion of power that affects space, but not everything that affects space affects the operation of naming. In other words, *not everything is revolutionary*.

Power is not limited only to naming and other terrible things in this world. Power is our ability to survive, as is their ability to gentrify our neighborhoods and make it more difficult for us to do so. We do not want to destroy power – after all, it is impossible to do so. Rather, we *want* power. We want the power to survive. We want the power to wreck this world. We want things so ridiculous and sexy and feral that we can only barely hint at them within this racist, sexist, heteronormative, cissexist, capitalist world. We've gotten a taste at times, and now we're hungry.

IV

“That is why, according to this doctrine, magic is a call to happiness. The secret name is the gesture that restores the creature to the unexpressed. In the final instance, magic is not a knowledge of names but a gesture, a breaking free from the name. That is why a child is never more content than when he invents a secret language. His sadness comes less from ignorance of magic names than from his own inability to free himself from the name that has been imposed on him. No sooner does he succeed, no sooner does he invent a new name, than he holds in his hands the laissez-passer that grants him happiness. To have a name is to be guilty. And justice, like magic, is nameless. Happy, and without a name, the creature knocks at the gates of the land of the magi, who speak in gestures alone.”

(Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*)

For as long as there have been names, there have been witches. From rebellions against feudal lords in the Middle Ages to queer riots at cafes to insurrections against the institutions of slavery and colonization, we have fought for thousands of years. Witches flit between and among spaces and use their secret powers both to help their neighbors and to resist the machinations of king and country. Anyone could be a witch, but witch is not anyone in particular or an identity that one can exist within. Witches are simply those that use magic and so you are a witch▲ if you use magic. One can be more or less witchy, and there are different ways of being witchy. One thing underlies it all: magic.

V

It has been said that “magic is the knowledge of true names,” but this is not naming. Magic is the *knowledge of naming*, the theory and practice of critiquing this world and increasing our power. True names are to see the truth of naming: we recognize gentrification as hostile to us who are poor, we identify the police as a gang that enforces and protects this already hostile world, we recognize highways as segregation devices. We develop our own languages for our struggles and our experiences. Magic as the practice of critiquing this world does not mean to be an academic, but to actually push against this world *in spaces against* naming.

Magic and naming are two forms of power that are completely incompatible and hostile towards one another. If naming produces our named selves, then magic is an undoing of those selves. In the space of the workplace, the witchy employee can steal from work for herself and others. In doing so and getting away with it, her identities contradict each other – she both is and is not a “good employee.” She also begins to turn the workplace into a space where she and her friends have power and resources. White people can resist their position by actively resisting the systems of whiteness, not *as white*, but as against *naming*. By naming us, we are marked as victims-already and victims-to-be. To attack the naming is not to name ourselves otherwise, but to resist being made a victim or to attack the victimizing systems.

Witches are bad, magic is evil. Evil because magic is the power of nothing that overflows, resists flow, fails, and breaks every containment. Evil because magic resists even the attempt to legitimacy, casting aside the question, and attacking every norm in the world. Evil is not ‘good’ and it does not try to be – it is not that we are evil, but that good and evil are irrelevant here.

We already put on and take off our masks in every moment of our lives. We can use this as disguise, playing with the names we have been given and taking new ones on intentionally – not to become them, but to disrupt and hide. Magic is not *becoming* other identities or modifying our own, but antagonism to the identification that marks us. This is not simply done by making it difficult to identify us or by confusing the use of words, but by actually fighting naming.

VI

Naming is not a linguistic operation. Even when we are called slurs on the streets, it is not the slur itself that is the naming but its threat of violence. It is fairly easy for us to see the surface linguistic operation of naming, but to respond to it on the level of words is to completely misunderstand its power. Simply removing slurs from our vocabularies does not resist the power that creates and maintains those vocabularies. We might be racist even if we never say racial slurs because we lend our support to racist systems. Magic, similarly, is not linguistic. Magic is power.

Let’s talk about one axis of space that power can influence: fear. To illustrate this, let’s go back to that queer kid who’s being threatened and gonna get bashed. If the bashers have their way, he and other queer people will feel it. If, however, he fights back (or we see the event and intervene), we are not scared walking at night – now the would-be bashers are the ones who are afraid. They want to end queers, witches want to end queer bashers.

Witches view space as a terrain in which the world can be made or destroyed. By attacking the structures of naming and enacting schemes of gaining power, they create, warp, puncture,

and remake space in their own designs. In a world where spaces are not our own – school, work, the streets, even our homes – we can make and steal our own spaces this way.

We can make spaces hostile towards those who hate us. Doing so is magical. When our neighborhoods are dangerous for rapists and cops, when calling out an oppressive slur on our streets means you get beat up, that is one of the most beautiful things I can imagine.

VII

The word 'occult' comes from the Latin *occultus* which means hidden, not divulged. 'Esoteric' comes from the Greek and refers to secrets kept by an inner circle. Magic is a secret you share with your closest friends and *do not ever tell anyone*. Of course this does not mean that you do not try to help initiate others to the use of magic, only that you cannot let the muggles know unless you can trust them. At best, they'll think you are silly. At worst, well...

In 1999 and 2000 Marius Mason attacked *with fire*, causing millions of dollars of damage to mink fur farming, GMO research, and the construction of real estate. His husband at the time, Frank Ambrose, turned into a snitch and testified not only against him – leading to a 22 year sentence for him – but also against others who attack the powers of environmental destruction. Frank was still sentenced to 9 years despite his treachery.

In 2008, some members of Bash Back!, an international queer anarchist organization, disrupted a service at Mount Hope, a notoriously anti-queer megachurch. They threw pamphlets, dropped a banner that read "It's Okay to be Gay! Bash Back!" to let the queer kids in the congregation know that they were not alone, and a couple queers made out. Even though their actions were legal, it sparked a national lawsuit and witch hunt by subpoena for *anyone* involved with Bash Back! that went on for a number of years.

Attacking the world is dangerous. Witches do not shy away from the attack out of fear, but they are careful to keep their activities to themselves because to brag, to tell the wrong person only opens them up to retaliation.

Being a witch means that the world wants to burn you. Our crimes are cursing the priests, fighting the police, robbing banks, smoking or selling herb, vandalizing homophobic storefronts, wrecking the offices of white supremacist organizations and beating up their members. We find ways of acquiring useful items and knowledge and distributing them: abortion and contraception, power tools, food, squats, weapons, medicine.

Magic is the use of power that we were *never supposed to have*. We have been named as powerless and as victims, so when we gain access to power we are a threat and a target. Magic is the use of forbidden power. It is stealing that power and it is attacking the power that works against us. It is crime, it is defense, and it is attack. *Witches don't snitch and and keep their lips zipped!*

VIII

For hundreds of years, the Church executed and imprisoned thousands for the heresy of Attempting to Immanentize the Eschaton. The eschaton is the end of the world, and immanent means "within," so to immanentize the eschaton is to make the end of the world here and now: Heaven on Earth, Paradise made real. This notion was a problem for the Church because according to doctrine, we must wait through the unknown eons of history for God to bring it about.

There is a related concept – revolution – that is spoken of in similar terms. History must progress through a series of stages, we must build our Party, and when the time is right, the revolution will occur and everything will be awesome. While this end of history is desired, it is considered counterproductive to try and make it happen now. Instead, we are to defer to our priests and our churches all of our energy and desires.

Witches agree with Walter Benjamin when he says that this concept of the end of the world / end of history is inaccurate. We have no idea when the world might end, but every action we take is a possibility. Who knows what spark? It could be yours or mine. All we have to do is try.

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