

# **On Existential Crisis, The Collapse of Doctrine and the Embracing of Impasses**

Institute For The Study of Insurgent Warfare

2016

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## ABOUT A NIGHT, LATE IN 2012

Though this may be an odd place to begin an article about the current existential crisis that is sweeping the anarchist milieu, it is fitting nonetheless. Rather than beginning with a discussion of the fall of Occupy, the increasing irrelevance of anarchists in most of the recent anti-police activity in the United States and the general collapse of concentrations that seemed to be capable of driving the inertia forward, rather, we will be starting this discussion with a night in 2012, the collapse of the Romney campaign, and the meltdown that followed. Almost as quickly as the election results began to come in on November 6, 2012 stories began to be written about the impending implosion that was beginning to build up within the heart of the Republican Party, an implosion that has led to many of the dynamics that we are now seeing in electoral politics. Speculation began months before with the creation of a website called Unskewed Polls, which attempted to make the claim that political polling was skewed in the favor of Democrats, and which would begin to “unskew” polls, or taking polls which heavily overestimated the percentage of voters that were Republican in political tendency. This led to two dynamics being constructed. The first, which is entirely unsurprising, is that Romney all of sudden seemed to be winning the election, at least in the view of those who relied on this site for their election news. The other is that this approach, by virtue of being undertaken by a well known Republican strategist, Frank Luntz, began to shape the narrative around the election for a certain group of possible voters, namely voters who derived their news from the echo chamber of talk radio, Fox News, a collection of websites and News Corp dominated newspapers.

What began as clearly a propaganda experiment in the height of an election began to play a role in the construction of a worldview, one that had already been in development since the 1990s. This worldview, one held by a subset of Republican stalwarts, perceives the world in a certain way, operates within a certain interpretation of events that is repeated between media outlets, and which contains a clear comprehensive narrative of events within a reactionary approach to world events. On its own this would not be newsworthy, let alone the place to begin a discussion of the emerging existential and strategic crisis within the anarchist milieu, but this is only part of this story. What occurred from this point, as Summer merged into Fall, was that this propaganda campaign came to influence the propagandists themselves, and came to shape an approach to electoral strategy that was, at its core, separated from the dynamics on the ground. As conservative news outlets started to report these polling results as reflective of the actual situation on the ground, the campaign strategists themselves began to believe the polling information as well, and began to shape their electoral strategy around these polling results. A narrative had constructed itself, borne out of decades of Republican complaints about the “liberal media” that the repeated information being dispersed by any number of other outlets could not be relied upon, that the only source of information that was reliable was the information that they were generated on their own. This closed the doctrinal loop, constructed a narrative that was built purely on self-replicating rhetorical assumptions, and one that had to be trusted in an almost religious way, otherwise one would have to come to terms with the failure of doctrine to yield true narratives.

In the days before the election political commentators started to ask questions about Romney campaign strategy, and why they were focusing on campaigning in states that most polls showed them far behind in. Their only response was that they possessed information about polls that rationalized that strategy. As the day of the election progressed an odd dynamic began to construct

itself; those within the Romney campaign were absolutely confident in victory, while all other information, including exit polls told a very different story. That night, as the results were almost finished being tallied Karl Rove, chief strategist for the Bush Administration had what could only be called a meltdown live on Fox News; the anchors had called Ohio for Obama, at a point that it was statistically impossible for Romney to get enough votes to win the state, and Rove lost it, claiming that the election results were wrong, and almost storming off the set. Romney came to Boston that night without even having written a concession speech. What followed was a series of reports about a crisis within the core of the Republican establishment. It was not just that they had lost an election that they were certain they were going to win. Rather, with this loss all sources of information, the same sources that constructed the core of this worldview, were shown to have provided incorrect and fallacious information. It is at this point that a strategic loss became the basis for a wider philosophical collapse, one that threatened to destroy the entirety of the Republican establishment, and one that has set the stage for the implosion of any form of rationality within our current political situation, one widely characterized by Twitter battles and attempts to make rhetorical claims more extreme and fascist than the next candidate.

Though many of us will be quick to hurl scorn and accusations of stupidity at those that were seemingly taken by this vision, and the implosion that was caused by its collapse, there is more to be taken from this example than a simplistic reaction to the context of this collapse, an increasingly terrifying fascist bent among Republican Party adherents. Rather, there are a couple dynamics latent within this scenario that require a more careful analysis. Firstly, what this situation demonstrates is less a scenario of delusion, but rather an interesting illustration of something that can only be characterized as a theological dynamic. Within theological dynamics a fascinating inversion occurs; rather than making sense of things, and having this construction of a notion of sense begin to fuse into a narrative, the narrative begins to shape the things themselves. In other words, with the departure of the contextualization of events from a position of theological metaphysics the events that occur begin to take on a meaning that exceeds the contextualization of events, and begins to become an expression of a wider metaphysical context. This is latent, to some degree or another, in all forms of thought, but within the theological context this inversion begins to frame the very activities themselves, a dynamic that we can witness in the contemporary American Christian obsession with pointing to events as a harbinger of the “end of the world”. In this scenario the adherence to the idea of non-minoritarian status that upholds much of the conservative narrative came to express itself in specific actions that reinforced the narrative, constructing a closed loop that only collapsed within a quantitative metric, a vote count. Secondly, in the implosion of the operational worldview that motivated this collapse and descent into internecine warfare, the fundamental question was never asked, the question of whether the failure of the narrative lies in the very construction of worldview, rather than in the immediate aesthetic variables of specific worldviews. In other words, as quickly as the collapse occurred the search was already underway for another worldview that could replace the former context. It is this tendency toward replacement, this tendency to insist quietly on the construction of worldview itself, that we will focus our attention on primarily here. The crisis of political form, in this context, is less about the collapse of worldview, and more about the conflict that emerges in the space generated by this collapse around the question of in what form political unity is attempted to be constructed once again. Within this process of the tendency to re-establish worldview, and to understand the political through the injunction to establish clear, coherent worldviews that supposedly express the totality of moments and ground actions in a narrative of legitimacy, the

process moves from the collapse of worldview, this opening of conceptual and material possibilities, into a process through which the material is framed entirely through the lens of conceptual terrain within the context of re-established worldview. Though this is a necessity within any statist framework of thought, there always must be a worldview within a context fundamentally centered around narratives of life as such, this is a possibility that can be escaped outside of this context. But, for as clear as this line of flight may be, it is this grasping to the dynamics of worldview, and the implosions that accompany the failure of worldview to express the world itself, that lies at the core of the malaise that has currently gripped the anarchist milieu.

To write this phenomena off as simply the result of a significant number of people being taken by media propaganda is not only to miss the importance of this specific moment in history, and how it led to the incoherent ranting that passes for mainstream politics today, it is also to miss the very structure of worldview, and the ways that worldview comes to inform much of what we term politics. Within this example the operative moment was not just the moment of deception gone awry, but more the moment in which the future promised through this deception became unfulfilled. It is in this concept of the abortive future that we can come to see the fundamental structure of the concept of worldview itself. In this example the collapse of the future, in this case the future without a second Obama term, came to collapse the very structure of the political framework that this future vision was based on. Rather than, in military thought for example, the strategic doctrine collapses, causing some ideas to be rethought, but the fundamental structure of the ontology of the state intact, this moment caused a collapse of the entire Republican ethos. Granted, this collapse had been coming for some years, ever since the entire politics of the Republican Party became about raising the corpse of Reagan, and the mythology built about that age, but the final implosion and the current power crisis that embroils the organization as a whole began to gain momentum with the implosion of this concept of the future.

It is in this notion of the abortive future that we can begin to gain a glimpse into the outlines of worldview, and how this framework of thought structures much of what we now understand to be politics, as well as forms the basis of the current crisis within the anarchist milieu. In the construction of worldview the past, present and future collapse into a form of vision without any contour, a completely flat understanding of time and space, in which every moment exists on a continuum between past and future, and in which this continuum is determined through the outlines of conceptual speculations. In this phenomena the temporality of time and space cease to matter in their particular features, in their dynamic ontologies, and begin to function as nothing other than a representation, a quantity of representability expressed through objects and activity. The structure of value comes to exist through a transcendental understanding, a metaphysics of conceptual thought, that comes to function as explanation of past events, as expressed in the present, and as guide for the future. We can clearly see this sort of understanding play itself out in the mind of someone like Alex Jones, who within an hour of any catastrophe will proclaim that it is a false flag, and already have had the time to produce a video about it. We can also see this in millenarian Christian organizations, who are constantly attempting to put a date on the “end of the world” always to be shown to be incorrect, leaving them to either attempt some sort of outlandish explanation or to be left with a very thinned group of followers. But, for as much as we can see this in constellations of assumption that we find absurd, this same structure also lies at the core of primitivism, or of the revolutionary mass movement tendency as a whole, which is content with repeating tactics over and over again based on some loose understanding of the power of the “working class”.

The problem here cannot be simply written off as a collapse of doctrine, or as a problem of the indeterminacy of the so-called “post-left”, as many of our more traditional accomplices would like to think it. Rather, to understand the dynamics at play here we have to think this problem as a dual move, and a profoundly temporal problem within this dual move. Within the initial move we have some material moment that causes the implosion of a conceptual framework, and within this opens space up within thought to construct a multiplicity of possible forms of making sense. This is less about the failure of worldviews, or something like this, and more about the confrontation between the particularity of the unique moment in history<sup>1</sup>. It is in this confrontation, as in all confrontation, or all activity for that matter, that the possibility of anything exists. Without this, if the world were actually defined by this fusion of all temporality, this atemporality, of theory, nothing could occur, and everything would be the repetition of some transcendental meaning. On the other hand, and this is where the confrontation that has led to the current incoherence within political discourse lies, there seems to always be an attempt, almost an injunction, to try to impose new meanings of things, to attempt to impose a new concept of sense once again, and to structure discourse not around how to make sense of the complexities of the world, but around how to imagine these complexities away within nice, neat transcendental frameworks. In other words, this injunction to always be able to explain the world, to ground action in some sense of certainty, attempt to take the possibility unleashed in the crisis in worldview, and to ossify it, to conceptualize it, to pretend that the confrontation never occurred, that it does not necessarily always already occur, and to attempt to make the priestly claim that we can actually make sense of things, even if we were somehow mistaken before. This conflict is not over the dissolution of worldview necessarily, although there are definitely many within our orbits that hold on tightly to dying ideas, but, rather, around the terms of which this possibility will become defined once again, will become eliminated, within a specific conceptual framework.

We are assaulted on all sides by this tendency, a tendency toward absolutism that is largely obscured through the rhetoric that this theological tendency attempts to manifest itself, increasingly so as the theological becomes an increasingly impossible position to maintain. As a simple example, we find this tendency toward certainty lying at the core of contemporary atheism, specifically within the Dawkins/Harris school of thinking. Within this thinking one takes the abandonment of God as the beginning of the advent of other conceptual possibilities, namely one defined by the thin king around science. But, as quickly as this space is declared it is again dominated by a crude form of rationalism, defined by Dawkins concept of selfish rational genetics and Harris’ reliance on some concept of absolute reason that will free us from the chains of religion. In this second move they create the seeds of the most disturbing forms of fascism, one defined by the rationality of “thinkers” or the biologism of the scientist. Within our uniquely political, meant in the original sense of the term, sense, we are being attacked on all sides by attempts to take the space generated by the failure of the insurrectionary project in North America. In one instance we find the rise of a new school of pacifism, which deluded by illusions of the revolution in Tahrir Square (which they somehow, in their revisionist history, portray within

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<sup>1</sup> For us to think of any action as relevant, and the entire revolutionary concept relies on this notion, we have to assume that the universe is not deterministic, and that actions, activity, in any form generates effects. As such, it therefore follows, that the only way to even begin to construct a category for the moment is to construct a category, as Nishida Kitaro argues, which recognizes the moment as both particular in time and space, and as fundamentally separate from the past that was destroyed in the effects of the action itself, even if the dynamics of past moments construct the dynamics of the present.

the context of pacifism) attempt to make some proto-strategic argument about the necessity of nonviolence. Outside of Gelderloos demonstrating the myriad of ways in which this mentality not only guarantees the retreat into symbolism and the survival of the state, to the point of being encouraged by the state when it is in its own interest, the problem resides much deeper than this. If we understand conflict as some immediate moment, as a conflict within trajectories of activity, and we understand the moment as being relevant at all, then we cannot then think the moment as something that can be defined by, discussed through or limited in the deployment of, some concept of universal, atemporal morality; they attempt to impose a moral absolutism, and then retroactively define all moments through this. In this the partisans of pacifism not only impose activism, a symbolic engagement on symbolic terrain framed within a moral imperative to act, as the only possible option, they begin to approach the very dynamics of policing exemplified by the most insidious of authoritarian regimes, portraying some image of resistance as the limit, and collaborating with the state whenever this vision is violated. But, for as awful as the pacifists are, and always have been, we find a similar dynamic at work in the rise of the tendency to either continue the insurrectionist project, and the retroactive attempt to justify a concept of the necessity of engagement, as well as the rise of the urban guerrilla. Even if we cannot say, nor would any of those involved in this project ever claim that this tendency are collaborators like the pacifists, there is a similar moral logic involved, but one that deploys in a very different direction. The question here does not revolve around means, clearly there is divergence here, but rather these tendencies converge around the almost moral injunction to act, in all moment, with some concept of hope lying on the horizons of this activity. This often reduces the risky action taken by those that are very close to this project in many ways, to the symbolic strike against the material symbols of the enemy, the facades of buildings or the bodies of functionaries, and then to attempt to construct some strategic vision out of this activity. So, the question here is not whether we choose total confrontation or absolute pacifism, which is merely a question of which moral framework, but, rather, how we have found ourselves in a situation in which the only option seems to be to impose some new strategic vision.

## REVOLUTIONARY MILLENARIANISM

The roots of this almost pathological attempt to grasp for meaning, some meaning that can ground action beyond the sense that one has speculatively made sense of the world, lies not necessarily in the modern revolutionary tendency itself, but rather traces itself back to the rise of Protestantism, and the advent of the printing press. Now, we clearly do not have the time to treat this subject with the care and detail that this deserves, and will likely do so in a future piece. The only aim here is to draw a picture, a speculative framework, in broad strokes. For, as Stirner discusses<sup>2</sup>, it is within the Protestant Reformation, a dynamic that could have not been unleashed without the ability to disseminate information through the printed word, that we find the beginnings of the dynamics that eventually led us to the concept of revolution in the modernist age. An important move was made in the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation, one that would lead to any number of concepts of millenarian conflict. In this move the individual became an agent, one that could act, but that could only act in a very specific way; that could only act if guided by divine providence. Within the Catholic context the individual, and political

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<sup>2</sup> Stimer, Max (1995). *The Ego and Its Own*. Trans Leopold, David. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press

structure, is framed within the concept of arbitrary action, we are all imperfect. For some, the aristocratic class, this arbitrariness was divinely sanctioned by the Church, and its functionaries, the priests, who alone had access to Truth, in the form of Vatican teaching. With the advent of Protestantism the individual became, in theory, capable of making direct contact with the divine, making the individual a moral agent, but only to the degree that their actions were moral. There are any number of outcomes of this idea, but one of which was the concept of attempting to fuse the concept of action with the concept of morality, with some worldview of action, that would ground action in legitimacy.

As Schmitt discusses in *The Concept of the Political*<sup>3</sup> this structure of the conceptualization of action generated not only the basis of revolution within the modernist period, but also a very odd conceptualization of politics, as a relationship of force grounded in principles of absolutism. For Schmitt, in liberalism, we see an odd sort of formation construct itself, one that is not only tied to the absolutism of modernist revolutionaries, but also to the Terror and the Red Terror. Within feudal concept of sovereignty the actions of the sovereign were understood to be arbitrary, and as Foucault later elaborates, were based on the concept of the actions of the sovereign against the subject, based in the maintenance of the power dynamic between the sovereign and the subject<sup>4</sup>. With the collapse of monarchism, a dynamic directly related to the Protestant concept of the moral activity of the individual, the concept of action took on a very different tone. Rather than being action that was arbitrary, but sanctioned, action began to be framed within a certain form of moralism, typified by more simplistic readings of Kantianism. Action ceased being the purview of those that cannot actually understand truth, but became framed as the action of moral individuals, or action that existed as more or less an expression of some absolute morality, some concept of theory, of the transcendental. Within this framework not only did the state become something that was at its core framed within the concept of universality, leading to not only the execution of those that violated “truth”, but also to the rise of the ubiquitous concept of policing that we currently find ourselves embroiled within, but revolution became framed within the same idea, as a form of salvation, a form of moving away from a false world into a world grounded within a narrative of universal truth, which both grounds the argument for the legitimacy of action as well as the speculative concepts of the future that are then conceptually connected to the notion of conflict and fighting.

We clearly see this same tendency when we attempt to read thinkers like Kropotkin<sup>5</sup> or even Emma Goldman<sup>6</sup>, in her worst moments, and definitely in the thinking of the platformists, and even more clearly in Lenin<sup>7</sup>. In all of these works, as opposed to a thinker like Novatorre or Bakunin, we find a retreat to a form of naturalism, an ethics that becomes derived from a concept of the natural, which as we can see in the experiments of the early to middle 20th century always plays out in the worst forms of fascism, where the state is able to define the natural. In these thinkers we find the most odd sort of contradiction, that one the one hand the situation that they are proposing is natural, and if we overlook the arrogance of claiming to understand truth in

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<sup>3</sup> Schmitt, Carl (1996). *The Concept of the Political*. Trans Schwab, George. Chicago. University of Chicago Press

<sup>4</sup> Foucault, Michel (1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans Sheridan, Alan. New York. Penguin Press

<sup>5</sup> Kropotkin, Peter (1995). *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings*. Ed Shatz, Marshall. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press

<sup>6</sup> Goldman, Emma (1969). *Anarchism and Other Essays*. Mineola. Dover Publications

<sup>7</sup> Lenin, Vladimir (1975). *VI Lenin: Selected Works in Three Volumes*. Moscow. Progress Publishers



itself (to understand all possible things in all possible ways), while on the other hand they are proposing that we somehow have come to exist outside of this inherent, natural, true, state. The problem here not only resides in the philosophical problem; if something is true then it cannot have any sort of counterexample, it cannot be untrue, even for a single possible moment, but rather in this attempt to unleash hell, only to define heaven as Earth. The problem here resides not so much in the failure of concepts, if we are to understand concepts as attempts to draw categorical commonalities around particular things in particular moments then concepts will always fail, but in the attempt to take this failure, draw revolution, the physical manifestation of the collapse of world view, into being, only to define that possibility again within another universal framework.

It is in this worldview, the very same worldview that has driven the totality of the modernist revolutionary tendency, that we find the core of a certain millenarianism. In other words, this vision is motivated less by the concept of the failure of former ideas, than it is by the concept that if we act in light of some actual truth, if we only act within the purview of absolutism, that we will manifest some sort of heaven on Earth. It is clear that we do not need to explain how this replicates the Christian vision, specifically in its modern American Fundamentalist manifestation, in which practitioners hope that if they take the right action (which not only imply a sort of religious fascism, but also the attempt to bring about the collapse of the environment or to continue the occupation of Palestine) then the end of the material world, the temporal historical world will come, and the transcendental kingdom will prevail. For the anti-theists amongst us, the ones that are left, this vision should seem clearly problematic, but this is not even the issue, that it violates some concept of anti-theism. Rather, the problem resides in how this concept of universality, of “truth”: forms the core of the concept of antagonistic action, or the antagonistic posture in itself.

The problem is further deepened when we begin to approach the lines of flight out of this conundrum, in the form of post-structuralism. Though we have our Foucaults and Deluzes, who attempted to think their way out of this problem, to ground action against the state not in the attempt to reimpose absolutism, but in the speculative conceptual analysis of the operational dynamics of the state itself, and formed the core of an actually relevant operational thought, we have seen this tradition compromised not only through the reappropriation of Foucault by field like “management theory” and finance, but also in the eclipsing of these thinkers by the covert influence of a thinker like Lyotard, Badiou or Zizek. In Lyotard, and this is continued in Derrida, we are left with nothing but critique, an idea that is brought to its absolute absurdity with Simon Critchley’s proposal that if we only bombard the state with demands then it will collapse. These thinkers take theoretical impossibility of absolute truth to be a conceptual problem, combines this with a purely conceptual idea of the state,<sup>8</sup> and defaults into come notion of the conceptual collapse of the state without any clear discussion of the material operational capacity of state functionality. Zizek, on the other hand, completely disregards the importance of the criticism leveraged by the post-structuralists, and attempts to reimpose the concept of common revolutionary vision, exemplified by the Leninist state, but in a form divorced from its concept of truth, which becomes groundless and nothing but either a random preference or some sort of

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<sup>8</sup> This conceptual understanding clearly becomes clear in the Putinism state’s disregard for conceptual consistency within a dynamic operations posture, a dynamic discussed in a series of texts about Ukraine and Syria.

odd Mussolinist<sup>9</sup> claim. Badiou<sup>10</sup>, on the other hand, attempts to delegitimize any form of conflict that does not fit his distinctly Maoist version of revolution, which is covertly hidden within some nice rhetoric, as being illegitimate, concealing some sort of assumption of the notion of the Party, and the reimposition of some sort of worldview, which goes unarticulated within his clearer writings.

The post-structuralists failed us. They took an interesting idea, that we could transcend modernism, and the absolutist tendency to ground action in some form of absolute legitimacy, and squandered the opportunity that was laid bare. The clear inheritance of this failure resides in Tiqqun<sup>11</sup>, and the Invisible Committee<sup>12</sup>, at least in their earlier writings.

In these writings we find a retreat to concepts that form the core of an idealistic revolutionary vision. Speckled throughout these writings we find conceptual figures, whether this is the concept of community, or the notion of a certain revolutionary form of life, that attempts to remain without definition, as some sort of sight of indeterminacy, but at the same time imposes a very distinct form of conceptuality. This has constructed not only a certain rhetorical form of expression, also constructs a sort of strategic vision, inspired by the activities in Tarnac, which though more inspirational than most, and framed within an otherwise interesting analysis, is hindered by a certain sort of almost religiosity that adherents express, a form of life if you will. Even here, and in its more loose insurrectionist expressions, we still find an attempt to draw some sort of middle ground between the abandonment of ideas as ways to make sense of the world, as complete expressions of the particularity of dynamics, and the attempt to hold on to ideas as the medium that will deliver us from the torments of the current situation. But, for as these visions have not gone far enough, for as much as they have failed to abandon modernism enough, they do begin to point in a direction, on that is increasingly forming, but of course without its complications and difficulties.

## PESSIMISM AND THE ABORTIVE FUTURE

Since the collapse of Occupy there has been a gap, something missing, and this cannot be reduced down to a lack of hope. Many of us watched the demonstrations in the Middle East and Northern Africa morph themselves into armed revolutions, grasping for some faction to feel affinity for, eventually with many settling into a rote positionism around supporting the YPG. Domestically we watched Occupy rise and fall, and with it the influence that many of us had. And, just as in past times where the high wears off, and many are left with arrest records, injuries, trauma and a sense of loss, the internal dynamics of many collections of anarchists fell into a worst sort of infighting, a dynamic that often does little but heighten the sense of betrayal many of us feel toward others of similar political identifications. In this space many things became very clear to many of us, specifically the folly and lack of calculation that led us down the path of replicating movement building processes, first almost out a sense of tradition, and then out of sense of strategic justification. What has arisen from these ashes is not only the implosion of

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<sup>9</sup> Mussolini, Benito (1975). *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*. New York. Gordon Press

<sup>10</sup> Badiou. Alain (2012). *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*. Trans Elliott, Gregory. New York. Verso Press

<sup>11</sup> Tiqqun (2010). *Introduction to Civil War*. Trans Smith, Jason and Galloway, Alexander. Los Angeles. Semiotext(e)

<sup>12</sup> The Invisible Committee (2009). *The Coming Insurrection*. Los Angeles. Semiotext(e)

many of the “scenes” that had sustained activity for many years, but also a new tendency, one based in a sense of pessimism that, if we are to be honest without ourselves, is more than a little justified, at least on an emotional level.

What occurred in this process was not only the collapse of relationships, the betrayal of friends, cynical attempts at political positioning and the use of internal dynamics to damage those that we felt wronged us, but more, what occurred was that the future, or at least the vision of the future, collapsed. For a moment it seemed as if everything was falling apart. Regimes were falling, people were coming out into the streets, conflicts were happening with increasing regularity within cities around the country; we felt powerful. And then it collapsed .. With this collapse what disappeared was not only “the movement”; for whatever that is or was, but the entire idea that there was a future that one could fight for, and a more or less safe space to do that fighting from. What dies cannot merely be written off as the death of a mythology, even if that mythology, of the glorious revolutionaries leading the mass movement, was one that many of us had wished the death of long ago. Rather, what died was a worldview, a framework that took the past as a harbinger of the present, and thought of the present as leading to some clear, “better” future. This cannot also be written off as the folly of naive and youthful idealism, although there is no shortage of that. Rather, the entire anarchist ethos, understood in its traditional sense, underwent yet another death. The conflicts largely arose in the attempt to make it rise again in another form. But, within this process, one that many of us have become intimately familiar with over the years, another tendency rose, a tendency based in pessimism. This tendency has taken on some interesting characteristics, and has fused together some trajectories of thought that veer in very different directions, but which have settled within a more or less passive posture toward futurity.

This initial tendency was inaugurated by a series of texts, but which culminated in *Letters Journal*. The structure of the journal itself was based in a conceptual critique of anarchist ontology, the fundamental conceptual underpinnings of the “anarchist project” and the reliance on mass movements in an age of increasing surveillance, degrading capacity to fight and the increasing realization that the actions that many of us lauded as being at the height of revolutionary activity were in themselves relatively minor in comparison with the obstacles we faced and the sheer force of the enemy. This often culminated in the thesis that the best that we can do at this moment, and potentially the most effective course of action, was to withdraw, and to maintain a position of being “pro-revolutionary”. This concept of the “pro-revolutionary” functions as an attempt to prevent the collapse of the entire revolutionary idea, and an implosion into the sad, pathetic acceptability politics of generations past, while still recognizing that the time to act may not be the current moment. The central argument here centers around the thesis that the end of hope is a central point that must recreate the basis for the very possibility of the concept of revolution, and that this lack of hope has emerged through contingencies that are outside of our control; a sort of passive disappointment grounded in external circumstance. Though *Letters* elicited a number of very harsh reactions, it is not only based in a thesis that many of us have entertained, but is also a harbinger of things that would emerge just a series of years later.<sup>13</sup>

This attempt to articulate the concept of the abortive future, and a process through which this can the thought, also emerges in a slightly different form in *Desert*.<sup>14</sup> Within this text the basis through which the possibility of the traditional revolutionary future is abandoned lies less in the

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<sup>13</sup> *Letters Journal* (2009–20 13). *Letters Journal: Issues 1–4*. Philadelphia. *Letters Journal*

<sup>14</sup> Anonymous (2011). *Desert*

inability of revolution to occur, and more in the fact that something that can be termed revolution in the traditional sense has not occurred.

In this non-occurrence the meta-conditions of conflict have become hopeless in themselves, not through some form of degrading ability to mobilize force, but rather through the inability to reverse the effects of having failed, in this case the effects are centered on ecological degradation. Rather than the conclusion come to in Letters, that we can remain “pro-revolutionary” while not engaging at all, Desert makes the argument that within this condition spaces for activity become possible through the same conditions that render the concept of revolution both impossible and irrelevant. Within the destruction of the ecological carrying capacity of the planet, a process that the anonymous author argues is irreversible, the conditions for the sustainability of the state degrade at the same time that the concept of revolution, framed around this concept of a “better future”, also become impossible. In this space possibilities occur on the frontier, not for some unitary political force or vision, which has always been at best a fiction, for for a multiplicity of processes to emerge in response to the collapse of ecological condition. Within this framework, again, the impossibility of the future is less a result of failure, and more of a result of a passive condition that renders the concept of revolutionary vision an impossibility within the current scenario, but possibilities may arise within the dynamics of events in themselves.

Within this thesis we see many of the same characteristics that we saw in the earlier example, and that we have often witnessed in Christian groups that fail in their predictions of the end of the world; the future that we thought was going to occur failed to manifest, and as a result the entirety of our approaches to temporality itself must change, and be centered around a new concept of metaphysics. Within the framework of Letters, and similar works, the framework centers around a failure in the base concepts of the traditional revolutionary project that becomes apparent in the current conditions. Within Desert the approach is different, beginning with the thesis that even if the revolutionary project were to, hypothetically, be based on solid ground, that it becomes irrelevant in the context of an irreversibly degrading ecosystem. What joins these theses together is not the shape of the argument itself, but a foundational double move. On the one hand there is the argument that the traditional revolutionary project was based on an almost fanciful worldview, which conceived of a reading of past events, connected them to some interpretation of the present moment, and then led to an abortive future due to the failings of the conceptual foundations themselves, coupled with external conditions. On the other hand, both make a second move, one that attempts to remedy this gap in worldview with the positing of another worldview, albeit one based in the failure of the former. Within both argument there is the positing of another future, but in an odd sort of way. What takes the place of the definitive declarations of future events that populate almost the entire corpus of revolutionary theory is an open space, and then the positing of the persistence of this open space, the lack of hope in the future, with a declaration of approach toward this lack. In this the openness of the future is declared, through the death of the former worldview, and then replaced with the declaration of the constancy of this condition. In this replacement the very structure of the concept of worldview is reconstructed, through a reading of the past, the interpretation of present moment and the declaration of a future that follows from these moments which motivates a conceptual practice of actual activity.

In the concept of the abortive future the crisis of worldview is opened, a gap that opens in the very attempt to conjoin temporality into a singular narrative. Within this conceptual collapse the concepts of the past, present and future are able to become open possibilities. The conflicts within

so-called political groupings emerge not at the moment of the collapse of worldview, although there are definitely many that attempt to hold on to the previous way of making sense of things; and, we have seen much of this with the persistence of platformism. Rather, the primary conflict emerges over the space created by the open conflict. Within the above texts Letters was more clearly attacked, with some going so far as to issue threatening Youtube videos targeted at the journal. This rejection, which can be clearly seen as a reaction against the project within the context of the moment when many anarchists in the US felt that they were gaining ground, is less a rejection of the arguments in the journal itself, which were often very well crafted, and more a rejection of the concept of the present and future that were being proposed. Though this rejection was often based on misreadings, or non-readings, and less on careful analysis, the conflict arose not through the argument that the anarchist worldview was based in concepts that had failed to come to fruition in any meaningful way, and more based in the concept of disengagement that was being proposed. This rejection is only possible, on a purely conceptual level, to the degree that there is a futurity posited within the pessimist conclusion. In other words, the conflict does not arise from the critique of the “anarchist project”; but arises from the attempt to draw a conclusion, to close the gap opened in the implosion or crisis in worldview, and to impose another worldview in that space, one of the persistence of the impossibility of concerted revolutionary activity.

## **ABORTIVE FUTURES AND THE IMPASSES**

What we have seen in both post-structuralism and the pessimist turn are attempts to compensate for the collapse of worldview, while attempting to maintain a position outside of the tendency to construct worldview, or to understand the totality of existence through the concept of meaning.

When we speak of meaning here we are speaking of it in a Kierkegaardian sense. Meaning, in this sense, is the inscription of necessary, universal meaning to the moment, and then the attempt to posit some material immanence to this meaning, to make the claim that this meaning is necessary in the moment itself, rather than just existing as some attempt to make sense of the moment without being able to embody or encompass the moment itself. In other words, within this attempt to move beyond the construction of worldview we find two specific moves occurring, something very much a kin to the moves that occur within Schmitt, but which diverge from the Schmittian conclusion in a profoundly different direction. On the one hand, within the pessimist turn, we find the very concept of action being torn away from the notion of some causal future, that we can act to form the future in some definite way, causing the collapse of the assumption of given presents and necessary futures. In this rejection of the concept of the necessary future departing from a given present, we come to separate the notion of the present from certainty, separate it from the future, and collapse the structure of thought that formed the foundations of modernism, that we can somehow predict or determine the future through some sort of virtuous action in the present. Beyond just imploding the concept of the promised exalted future, this formation separates the present from the future in definitive ways.

On the other hand there is a recognition, in the post-structuralist, of the impossibility of making sense of things in absolute ways, in ways that are either understood between people in the exact same way, true, outside of history and persistent. With these moves we come into contact

with another possibility, one that is based on departing from a position, not of attempting to close the possibilities opened up through the implosion of worldview, but one that is capable of taking the impasse as a point of departure.

Now, it is clear, that in both the post-structuralist and pessimist moves there are clear failures. Post-structuralism collapses into a sort of inaction, in which we assume that our conceptual critiques are enough, while the pessimist conclusion falls into the most vague attempts to still posit a future, just a future that occurs regardless of the actions that we take in the present. But, to understand these failures we have to understand the roots of these failures, roots that lie in the very same dynamics that structure the critique in the first place, a reliance on a connection between some conceptual framework and the concept of action. Within the pessimist turn action becomes either impossible or merely symbolic and aspirational not because we are actually separated from projecting futurity in the conceptualization of action, we always project some sort of futurity in action, even in the most simple ways. Rather, the ability to act is abolished to the degree that we cannot connect this action to the achievement of the future. It is a lament rather than a recognition, a lament of the ability to attach a conceptualization of the past and present to a concept of the future, and then use this conceptual universe to frame the totality of action, to inscribe a conceptual universe in action, or to make action the symbolic expression of some sort of conceptual framework. Within the post-structuralist milieu the inability to act, for many thinkers, or to only act conceptually, derives from the latent reliance on some sort of conceptual grounding for action, some sense of justification; a reliance on an ethicality of action. This reliance on ethicality exists alongside a discourse that makes this same ethicality, this same attempt to ground action in a Kantian noumena, an impossibility in itself.

It is within these dynamics that we continually end up within an infinite repetition, an attempt to compensate for the necessary failure of theory to encompass the moment in its entirety, to encompass the materially particular within the transcendently conceptual, the unspecific, the general. From the “red vs green” debate that occurred in the early 2000s to the current discussion of where to depart from the failures of Occupy and the near total collapse of the anarchist milieu in North America into a dynamic of disparate one off actions, “in-fighting” and snarky comments on Anarchist News, we have watched this process play itself out again and again; and there are no shortage of examples of this within anarchist history. It is important to recognize the roots of this dynamic, the fight not over the collapse of worldview, but over the attempt to determine the terms of its reinscription, to determine doctrinal direction. Outside of the assumption of some sort of mythological unity that forms the concept of the anarchist “movement” in itself, this tendency, this infinite repetition, is borne out of the attempt to ground action in some universal narrative. It is within this attempt that we fall back into the worst forms of activism. Within this dynamic the world becomes framed as nothing other than a symbolic space, one that is the product of concepts, with the moments of engagement themselves being nothing other than illustrations of this conceptual consistency. In this we remove ourselves into a noumenal space, one in which everything is reduced to the symbolic, and then lament the inability of action to impact material conditions. This endemic is not the symptom of some intractability of the moment, or something like this, but a result of the inability to recognize the particularity of the moment itself, the inability to know all possible things about all possible moments, the impossibility of actually making sense of anything in certain ways, or finding some universal grounding for action within conceptual justification.

In other words, to escape this endless cycle is not a question of determining some new “strategy”, or conceptual narrative that will exist under the conceptual term “strategy”, but rather a process of abandoning the concept of the answer, the narrative, doctrine at all, and to begin from a different place. It is possible to separate the conceptual operations that create a notional distinction between what we identify as the enemy and those we identify as friends, or to identify concepts that we have some speculative affinity for, without either attempting to argue that this expresses the totality of all possible things, is anything other than provisional and speculative, or that this provisional and speculative framework should dictate the terms and activities that are engaged with and in throughout an attempt to eliminate the enemy. Rather than attempting to legitimize action in certain narratives we must depart from the impossibility of this, from a critique of the ways that this reduces action to the symbolic, to activism, and to begin to conceptualize a way to think the unthinkable, to make sense of action in ways that take the notion of sense as utilitarian, as more or less effective in leading to some result that we understand to be conceptually important in some speculative way. In this we come to respect a necessary separation, an infinite distance between the conceptual and the material, and operate within the limitations of conceptuality, while maintaining the space for this conceptuality to shift, as it necessarily must, without either eroding the grounds for activity, which is always based in provisional speculation, or leading to some catastrophic struggle over the attempt to impose worldview as some sort of fictional political vision. In other words, the question being raised here is not the question of concepts, which always necessarily function as mechanisms of attempting to make sense of things, but is the question of prefiguration, and the tendency toward prefiguration as process of legitimation for action and attempt to process through strategic questions from the assumed point of departure of prefigurative worlds. To escape this process of the injunction to reimpose conceptual worldview, claim a conceptual-material fusion, and then to structure our point of departure for activity from this symbolic space, where the world is replaced by the assumed legitimacy of the concept, is not a question of a new framework outside of this tradition, but, rather, a question of what occurs if there is no framework that can be posited in a definite way, if we always act from a point of speculation, and nothing but speculation.

All around us many of those that identify with being within the radical milieu are searching for answers, some going as far as to forgo conflict and embrace the most absurd forms of new ageism. Others have abandoned any concept of the future at all, arguing, quietly, that if the future that they envision cannot come to pass then conflict is useless. Both attempts are grounded not in the process of the collapse of worldview, but in the failure to embrace the possibility and dynamism that this collapse allows, of course at the cost of a pseudo-religious modernist narrative of moralism and certainty. We have been asked, as this project has progressed, what the right posture toward action is, and have been criticized for not providing an answer to this question. The question is assuming a whole universe of concepts in its very formulation, but, simply, is assuming that the answer is even possible; that there is some conceptual form of making sense that can encompass the complex contingencies of particular and dynamic moments. This clearly leads to an issue, not for the inability to provide something that passes for an answer, but for the assumption that the role of the written text or the public group is to either provide such a thing, or to operate along the lines of supposed answers. Not only will we not pretend to be priests, to know some unique truth about the world, but also because there is no answer to that question, no way to fulfill that demand in any justifiable way. We have nothing to teach anyone, we have nothing special to say, except to possibly point to a route of egress, a route of escape, and that

is all that any of us can possibly do. This will not be able to be judged by its truth value, but only to the degree that it actually leads to an actually effective escape in itself. It may be that the future is not only not knowable, but that the very attempt to ground some concept of activity in a generalized and atemporal notion of the future is the very thing that prevents analysis from functioning as something other than a discursive form.

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Retrieved on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021 from libgen.rs  
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