

If You Feel Sympathetic, Intoxicate Yourself

We Don't Need Prisons

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The other day a friend invited me to check out an anarchist event, something I hadn't done in a while. The theme was abolitionism. Prison abolition. It was fantastic. Its content, to be sure, but its density especially. The soundproof basement was packed, packed, packed to the brim with nearly 30 anarchists. And so started the 4½-hour event.

Break Through, Amplify!

Gradually I start to feel the heat of the collective. The radiating heat, heat, heat – that heat is coiling up and the oxygen gets increasingly thinner. I can't breathe. Huffing and puffing, huffing and puffing, I'm in agony. But as the agony peaks and my consciousness goes beyond it and zones out, I start to feel better by and by. The self melts away and disappears. Zero.

Then a photograph of a prison in Indonesia. Dozens of people are crammed into a single cell, packed tightly together. My body starts shaking with anger. I can't tell the dividing line between myself and the other person. How dare you put human beings in a fucking cage! It's terrible, I'm pissed, I want to break out of prison. We're all prisoners. We resonate with each other.

A strange fever puts me in a delirium and my head is blowing up. The mind explodes. It breaks through the cage of my individual self and splatters outward. It resonates with others. Step out of all enclosures. Amplify.

Oh, how many years has it been since I felt like this, with so many of us densely packed together as the air was thinning out? My friend mutters after the event and his eyes are shining. Seeking to be smashed into pieces, we willingly jump into the opening gap. All masochists.

The Power of Intoxication

Well, sometime afterwards, I suddenly remembered Kotoku Shusui's remarks on writing. Shusui was famous not only as an anarchist but also as one of the finest literary stylists of his day. Shusui once wielded his pen to define what a great writing style is. Why don't I quote from it:

“The purpose of writing is not merely to convince the readers but to inspire them; it's not sufficient to make them sympathize but rather must intoxicate them; it's not sufficient to elicit praise from them but rather must finally assimilate them” (“The Three Requirements of Writing”).

Good writing doesn't mean the author arguing down the reader. If so, that's just a person in power giving orders from above. Nor is it about gaining popularity and sympathy by getting a lot of likes. If so, that's just putting the reader into voluntary submission. Either way, the reader is made to submit to the order of the narrative constructed from the outset by the author. That's domination. How can we leap over such narratives and give birth to imagination unintended even by the author?

The author and the reader. They become one as they forget the distinction between the self and the other. While reading the text, you forget yourself and directly connect with the author. Of course, the two are different and can't be perfectly one. But as the reader possesses the author and dashes to the limits of the author's thoughts, eventually the reader starts speaking the kind of things neither the self nor the other would say. You can't tell who is speaking anymore. Body of zero.

Although there is no subject, the mouth doesn't stop moving. You have no idea why because there is no subject. Somebody starts thinking with dead certainty things nobody can make sense of. You want to get even more out of control. There's no free will at work. You don't have any choice. Things start moving naturally on their own.

Shusui's role model as a literary stylist was his teacher Nakae Chomin so he must have had in mind the militants of the Freedom and People's Rights movement who spontaneously rose up after listening to Chomin's words. Take the case of Miyazaki Hachiro who dreamed of building a commune and lost his life, although Chomin didn't go so far as to say that. You're going to die if you commit armed insurrection now. But even if you know, you can't stop it. You accelerate the power of life as if possessed and, before you know it, you bypass death. Shusui called that "intoxication." I want to run faster.

Prison Break

But what was Shusui fighting with such power? Earlier Shusui criticized imperialism. I'm running out of my word limit so let's just look at the etymology of "imperialism," which is "imperial." "Im-" means "within" and "-perial" means "to set something in order." A collective that is deemed the enemy or evil is subdued by force and enclosed within one's order. Then they are subjected to a hierarchy that is set in order. You are immature, lazy criminals. Be grateful you're even allowed to live. Work even if you die like a slave.

Is that any different from police power today? Thrown in jail, you are slave labor, robbed of human rights as a criminal. It's the prison industrial complex. Or you're told you can't live without earning money and are enclosed by your company and family, forced to serve your master like a slave. The entire society is a prison. The city is a jail whose name is freedom.

I want to run away. Let's first get out of the cage of the self, conditioned to the slave life. We, who have accepted the hierarchy of this society and are set into the order of being above or below. Compress us real, real tight. Destroy the distinction between the self and the other, get out of control and explode massively. Annihilate yourself. Rejoice in the body of zero. I want to shatter outward into pieces. Our prison breaks. Unleash collective masochism. We don't need prisons. If you feel sympathetic, intoxicate yourself.

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