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Rough Portrait of a Common Agro-Nihilist

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2021

> The name “agro-nihilism” came about as a joke between friends while we were starting to organize our life on the land. Some of us ironically picked the term “nihilism” to signal that we were coming out of our addiction to the pleasure economy of the city: with bohemian life, the post-industrial aesthetic and all the “radical”, “underground” or “avant-garde” productions that “exciting” cities excrete. We spent that summer joking about it and “No one said agro-nihilism would be easy!” became the standard reply whenever one of us had something to complain about. But after some time, those of us still living on the land decided to stick to this identity, or let it stick to us, because we saw that, beyond its comical potential, it can also slightly disturb; and we do like unsettling comedy.

> In my – meagre – experience, Western contemporary nihilism, which is a resolutely urban affair, is often individualistic, militaristic, macho and arrogant, in short, often keen on phallic ecstasies. It therefore easily becomes an ultra-orthodox dogma that rejects every other kind of political experiment as being “too civil”. I thought

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it amusing to pervert the humourless and self-important aura of ultra-urban “nihilism” into something self-ironic and ambivalent, playful and gregarious, something suited for our current projects. My depraved nihilism leaves behind the carceral Luna Park of the city to invent games about autonomy on the land. So, here it is: “agro-nihilism”.

> A philosopher called Zizek argued that a crack in the dominant reality happens when, in a situation where they are forced to choose, the subject does not go for any of the available choices but for something else, for a choice that initially seems impossible. This “impossible choice” changes the coordinates of the situation, the framework of the imaginable. Zizek illustrates this “impossible choice” with a scene from the 1990s film “The Usual Suspects”, the shocking moment when Kayser Soze, blackmailed by enemies who are holding his family at gunpoint, actually shoots his family himself; and then dedicates his life to going after his enemies and eliminating them all. The idea would be that, by cutting loose from the precious object used by the enemy to block them, the subject gains the space to act. My agro-nihilist “impossible choice” is nothing dramatic like Soze’s but consists in cutting loose from the Spectacle, by which I mean the mesh of disciplinary apparatuses that, in the bourgeois order, produce enjoyment and identity.

> The Spectacle shapes and controls the way one sees, feels and enjoys; it teaches us how to be (desirable) and how to desire. Within the Spectacle, people’s passions are elicited by remote things, things glimpsed from screens or printed paper, from plush chairs and sofas, in living-rooms, theatres and amphitheatres, art galleries and museums. Political struggles in the parliament, the operations of governments and corporations, elections, faraway conflicts, art, formal education, fashion and entertainment: all these are Spectacular productions. The passion for events so distant from one’s daily practices that they become abstractions; the obsessive duty to keep oneself “informed” and to “participate” without really participating in any of the processes that shape

one's immediate reality; the lack of control over the production of the basic elements of one's life (food, energy, shelter, ecosystem, conviviality, imagination, fantasies, desire, enjoyment...) are, in liberal-capitalism, the main traits of the "educated citizen". In other words, the perfect liberal citizen is one always "informed about what happens in the world" while lacking any autonomy in what concerns their life practices, a sort of chien savant guessing numbers in the circus arena of the Spectacle.

> Since, among other things, my cutting loose from the Spectacle means exiting the urban economy, it also involves giving up the (enjoyable) duty of saving the oppressed and perfecting society or the world. The traditional activist scenario is that the enemy – the State, capitalism, imperialism, corporations, the elites, etc. – holds "society", the "oppressed" and the "future" in their grip; on top of everything, this prisoner suffers from the Stockholm syndrome. The activist's heroic mission is to save the hostage both from its captivity and from its infatuation with its "captor", which will automatically send these freed subjects on the path of freedom, revolution, fulfillment etc. If we create our tactics and practices within this script, at the same time suffocating and adolescent, no wonder we end up drunk on the cocktail of self-importance, rigidity, bitterness, resentment, exhaustion, despair, ennui, etc. that activists call "burn-out".

> Renouncing the precious object ("society, the world, the oppressed," etc.) meant that I freed myself from the duty to perform "useful", "relevant" and "successful" actions and that I also found myself free of the guilt and boredom associated with such duties. It gave me some space to breathe, created an opening in my reality through which, for the first time in a while, could be glimpsed some exciting experiments in "being otherwise".

> "Society" should NOT be protected. It cannot be improved either, since it is nothing but the name given by liberal experts to the complex concatenation of nation-States, modern disciplines, governing technologies, imperial power relations and bourgeois

morality and desires. As such, if one stands against capitalism, imperialism, the bourgeois regime or however you want to call it, they must of necessity be “anti-social”.

> As an agro-nihilist, I am OK with the fact that my actions might or, most probably, might not block the bourgeois regime’s course towards perfecting mass docility, the “considerate concentration camp” environment and mundane cruelty. Nevertheless, my agro-nihilism remains profoundly antagonistic to the dominant reality because I aim to derive my enjoyment from life-forms and practices that this dominant reality considers toxic.

> My agro-nihilism leaves behind the stultifying confines of consensus reality, that is, the duty to consult with the most conservative members of society so as not to put at risk their lifestyle or threaten the current order of things (which is actually the same thing)¹.

> As an agro-nihilist I know that there is no “ultimate discovery”, “truth”, “authenticity”, “blooming” or “resolution” when selfhood is concerned. The self-contained, unitary, coherent and unchanging self is a modern fantasy; what we call the “self” is actually a constant, often obsessive movement between nodes of anxiety and ecstasy that we only dimly understand. Agro-nihilism tries to navigate this nodal archipelago without sinking in the tar pit of trauma or getting stuck in the libidinal whirlpools inherited from our parents and educators.

> Agro-nihilism exits the economy of relevance and visibility of contemporary capitalism. If nothing of what we do can be used for making bourgeois society a better place; for being broadcasted on the screens of the Spectacle; or for turning ourselves into “better people” according to the bourgeois codes of worth, well, then our agro-nihilism can be considered a success.

¹ For the discussion of consensus reality that inspired this stance, including the dilemmas related to critiquing “consensus” while it still constitutes a political pillar of our anti-patriarchal struggles, see Crimethinc’s “Terror Incognita”.

> As an agro-nihilist I maintain the classical nihilist disdain for heroes, mentors, patrons, leaders, institutions, moral codes, representative democracy and social order; I immediately become alarmed whenever confronted with the productions of authoritative apparatuses of knowledge-creation and truth-ascertaining; and, of course, I refuse all grand political narratives, traditional power relations and “natural” or “self-evident” identities. Maybe agro-anomism would have been a more appropriate term, since what I contest is the nomos itself; but it’s less fun. And actually, who cares about appropriateness?

> I know, all this is easier said than done; but no one said agro-nihilism would be easy...