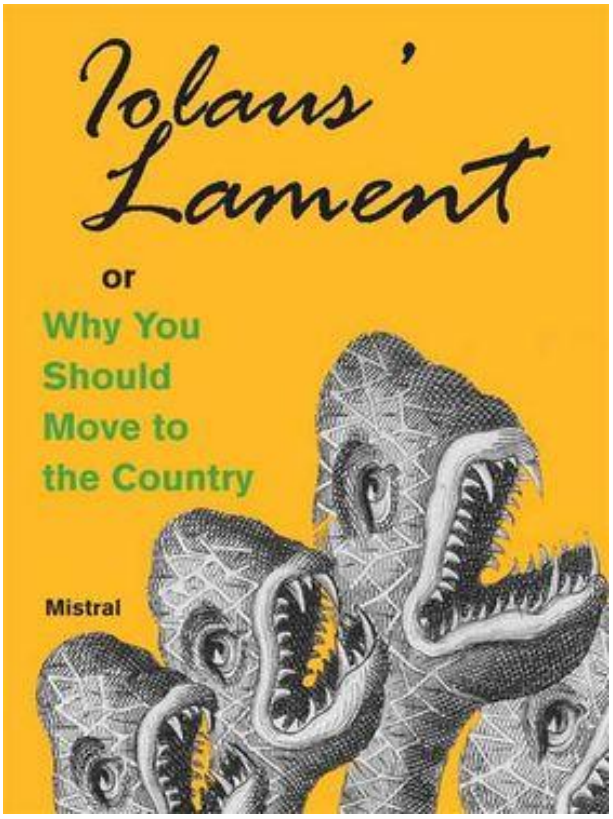
Iolaus' Lament

or Why You Should Move to the Country

Mistral



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Iolaus provided essential help to Heracles in his battle against the Hydra, his second labor. Seeing that Heracles was being overwhelmed by the multi-headed monster (the Lernaean Hydra), who grew two heads in place of each one cut off, Iolaus helped by cauterizing each neck as Heracles beheaded it.

Beginning

We deny our bodies. We deny each other. We deny ourselves to this world.

Cross the river from New Orleans and drive the highway southwest to the edge of the city, to the receding boundary between empire and the wild. The air thickens as the swamp enfolds you in its warm breath. The chemical lawns of poisoned people and cheap geometric boredom, which just a few miles back dominated the landscape, are now intrusions upon it. The swelling symphony of insects crescendos as a blue heron perched at the edge of a property line cranes her head to dark water. Spanish moss sways in a light breeze, almost dripping, over a trio of turtles on a log. Sufficiently warmed by the sun, they plop one by one into the cool bayou.

You drive, the car belching exhaust, the engine increasingly alone as its stertorous roars become faint metallic whines, as its mechanized brethren are left behind. A family in a blue SUV is the last to pass. The screaming children in the back are the eternal return of our condition.

You accelerate, the scene out your window transitioning like a flipbook: new-finished homes becoming the naked frames of future ones, then Lot For Sale signs, then the fresh stumps of clear cuts, then finally unscathed groves of bald cypress and tupelo and the homes of a kaleidoscope of creatures, from the mycelia in the wet soil to the birds nesting in snags. Fog lifts into stratus clouds, leaving dewdrop whispers on elephant ears and cattails.

Now you and the road are what do not belong—the last remaining markers of the living death; you are in a hermetic capsule looking out, a reluctant emissary of this culture. The faster you go, the harder you try to flee, the more strenuous and stubborn your resistance, the more impossible it seems to defy.

When you trace this moment, this progressive frontier, back to where you came from in the city somewhere, you realize that today's boundary is essentially the same one that delimited the crude settlement on the bank of the Mississippi River in 1718—which in the beginning only extended from the river to Rampart Street, the wilderness a great mystery beckoning beyond the wall. There are no words to describe the voracious inertia of our appetite. You realize that this is the same partition as the ramparts that were taken down after the Natchez were subdued and the marais was drained—when the fledgling settlement became a city; it is the same line as it was when the Americans came, and their development flowed upriver of Canal Street before expanding radially in unimpeded degradation—ramifying, eroding. And it is the same boundary, the same corrupted ovule, that sprouted in the Greater Antilles in 1492, Jamestown in 1607, Plymouth in 1620, Hawaii in 1778, and a thousand times elsewhere long before, when the mother countries had been wild: as when France was Gaul and tribes there fought against Caesar's incursions. The natural world splintered where profitable, and in-waiting where there is not yet a dollar to be made or power to be accrued.

And constantly surrounding, impinging, from the maws of billboards to the mouths of intimates, are the cacophonous signs and symbols declaring *Never Better!* or *A Work in Progress!* or *We Have Arrived!* and all the other deceptions, proclamations of supremacy, and self-celebrations that reverberate over the increasingly silenced wild.

It is more tangible than any ideology when your throat tightens in the humidity, more profound than any philosophy when the wipers cannot cut through the misting blur. It is so much deeper than politics when the car pulls over, when the head lowers into the hands, when you concede it is tears that fall and run in rivulets.

You sit there on the gravel shoulder, pathetic and choking on what we have done and soon will do—the limitless depth of it all. The car takes you here or there, it does not matter. This newly built home is the desert of the Fertile Crescent; this Wolmanized wooden frame is the paved forests of Europe; this real estate plot is the pasture of the Amazon; this clear cut is the soy horizon. This fecund meadow is tomorrow's photograph of what once was here and who we could have been.

Symbolic Expiation

This is for those who see what we have done and are doing to our home, to each other and to ourselves. For those who daily carry this weight and know there is no resolving it, no matter the lies repeated or prayed, the outcome of the next election or how educated or empowered the population is. For those who cannot settle with the easy justifications, the convenient explanations, the self-absolving blaming of others or the cowardly fall-backs. This is for those who know that the real answers do not lie within the parameters allowed to us, like voting, purchasing, protesting, posting and rioting.

This is for those who know that the nightmare of our culture is only deepening as the world flails. And not all of these people: among them, this is for those who are dissatisfied with our responses of irony and sarcasm, indifference, and bacchanalia—unfulfilled by the hip activism, the safe anger, and the pseudo-sacrificial liberalism.

This is for those who know that our response has been tragically weak, even laughable—the blackest joke.

This is for those who cannot escape the deep fount of sadness that is at the bottom of everything here, despite the joys and raptures that persist: old friends singing together at midnight, the improbable triumph of an underdog, the fierce embrace of a lover who did not leave when the chips were down, cool rain through live oak branches during Mardi Gras, fresh fallen snow on a dog's nose.

This is for those who feel a seething rage in their core—at the indignities we suffer under the government, at the quotidian disdain with which corporations dismiss us, at the trillions of hours stolen, the billions of lives wasted, the millions of species extinguished, the thousands of cultures extirpated—despite the serenities that somehow persist: the sweet whisper of the one you love, red wine at twilight, the tender touch of a good parent, the wave-like hush of aspens before a storm.

This is not for those who want a better oblivion. This is for those who are enemies of it. This is for those who are enemies of this culture.

I hope that I have found you, and that for now you will listen with an open mind until it is your turn, for this piece is only the next voice in a necessary conversation.

Anyone may read this, but scarcely a few would care to hear the arguments—and some would only listen to deny them unreflectively in self-protecting parries. Most would have no capacity to understand them: they would explain them away, interpret them in a way that would allow themselves to maintain a guarded integrity or, in all likelihood, they would just not care. The sweeping majority of the world cannot be educated because this culture, this civilization, is their air. To deny it would be to suffocate. Until they are forced to wake by dint of a severe alteration of circumstances, they will remain asleep, unconsciously mimicking their masters like synchronized marionettes.

This is for those who desire to wake up from this nightmare.

I am here with you.

We are all unhappy and at some time or another are overtaken by the desire to revolt, or at least exact revenge, even if it is against a petty tyrant like the movie theater manager. Right or left, fringe or garden variety, all of us carry on in varying states of political and personal desperation, vainly seeking resolution.

On the left, where revolution is the dream deferred, the image of rebellion is indomitable, but the content is not considered seriously, or at least beyond the fashionable concept or arcane theory dive, because to believe sincerely would require sacrifice and a sober accounting of the costs and odds.

What would it actually mean to be free? How might we get there?

These questions should be at the fore of any conscious community, anywhere. They apply as much here in America, one of the imperial pulses, as in Madagascar or Patagonia.

Without romance, what would it mean to be free? What would a state of freedom consist of? Food, water, and shelter independence would be primary. This stands in opposition to our present situation, which is complete dependence on others who are not of our immediate tribe for the essentials.[1] If you rely on someone beyond your immediate community for these necessities, then you are in a subordinate position, no matter the titles or functions of the institutions that envelop you, or what badge you yourself may wear. You are subject to alien needs, whims, and operating procedures. Like an infant, you depend on them. Even if you have something that the other wants, and you use that to trade for food or water or another necessity, that is unreliable. What if what you have becomes less valuable, or the other decides to just take it from you or acquire it elsewhere? Then you are left skill-less, resource-less, awaiting an etiolated death.

What is worse is that not only do we rely on an Other in our society, it is an anonymous, labyrinthine Other. Take as an example what we eat and drink: who is Sanderson Farms? Where did that hummus come from? How did it get here? This water out of my faucet? This cocktail? That flank steak? That soy dream ice cream? Each bite or sip would require a marathon investigation leading in reverse from our stomachs.[2] The Other on whom—on what— we generally depend is a tortuous network of fossil fuels.[3] In case of emergency, we may contact no one. We may wait patiently until the fuel runs out or our betters bestow us with a new kind of fuel, at which time we will accept a new food deal, same as it ever was. Or maybe there will be no new deal, the party will be over, and we will fester in the remains writing the darkest poetry.

There are no elders to consult for sage advice. Excepting the now-rare individual who still harbors skills of self-sufficiency worth the name, or ideas that originated from somewhere other than a marketing agency, listening to grandfather is like nostalgically replaying an old television commercial.

Freedom and self-sufficiency are inextricably intertwined, for freedom is not just an absence of an oppressor, but also the presence of skills and norms that will not produce the next tyranny. The ontology of freedom is too heavy to dissect here, or anywhere, really, if your business is to pursue it rather than to lay claim to its philosophical solution. Freedom and wildness here are

[1] And nearly all else, except for the basil plant on the sill that your friend Marl grew from seed.

[2] The grocery store where we bought the food. The Sysco truck that pulled into the back, the depot where they stocked the truck, the various packing warehouses where the finished product is packaged to ship to Sysco, the feed lots, slaughterhouses and corn fields that supply the warehouses, the seed crops grown in laboratories and the fertilizers manufactured…

[3] There are conflicting estimates, but on the lower end our culture uses ten calories of fossil fuels to make one calorie of food energy. Beyond waste and unsustainability, we are fundamentally eating oil.

meant to evoke a state of communal self-sufficiency that neither draws down the landbase nor renders the individual unable to change the social situation in which she exists.[4]

People who are not materially self-reliant, or who do not even have the capacity to be, discover that revolt leads only to new exploitation. It could only be so. Protests and riots, for instance, are the outbursts of spurned children; the only outcomes are no change, intensified oppression, gifts from on high, or the same rule by a different name. What more could a child ask for?

Bleating "No!," screaming it, beating in a politician's head as you shout it, means nothing if we do not have the means, the community, the skills, the mythology, to enact a different story, to live outside of this hellscape. The best we could hope for without those prerequisites would be like a situation where the kids have managed to kick out their parents: pure jubilation until the fridge is bare. Macaulay Culkin was resourceful in *Home Alone*, but his wile was only meant to bide time until Catherine O'Hara and Peter Heard returned home to restore order.

Why are mass protests and riots the bread of the left? From the Arab Spring to Ferguson, the left sings paeans to such measures. Is it the visceral thrill of the downtrodden taking it to the police?[5] Is it the adrenaline that courses when corporate glass shatters?

Why does the radical left support justice? So the authorities will mete out more equally the commodities and entertainment that occupy all of us in this prison camp? So we can more equally enjoy the fruits of this diseased tree?

What is it that we are trying to reclaim, re-establish, or protect?

What life is worth fighting for? What life is worth dying for?

What life is worth living?

What is it that we want?

Riots would not occur if the material and social essentials were distributed to the havenot-enoughs. This task would require an adjustment rather than a revolution, or a political revolution instead of a total one.

Is our aspiration for the system to dole out the same justice for the poor as for the rich? For blacks as whites? For transgendered people as cis-gendered? If this is what we long for, then capitalism, reined in by egalitarian regulation, a sympathetic directive that skims a little more surplus value off the top and distributes it downward, may be reformed to treat us so benevolently. Surely it would take struggle, but this vision is attainable within the current economic framework. Universal income, for example, would be an effective pacifier. Well-funded schools, population control, adequate mental health facilities, automation taxes, intensive police training on cultural sensitivity and accountability for rogue officers, penal reform, universal health care, sufficient housing. Enough jobs to bestow enough of us with enough purpose. Enough accessible entertainment to eat up enough of our time.

Though the economy obviously fails to do so now, it is within capitalism's purview to become the ubiquitous patriarch who trains us, serves us, and, only as a last resort, beats us more or less equally. The relatively luxurious slavery of the first world depends to an extent on the destitution of most of the third world's people—as, in general, the rich depend on workers and the wage-depressing unemployed for their wealth—but could automation, technology, stringent population

[4] Historically, the Etoro tribe of Papua New Guinea lived in harmony with their landbase. Their practice of ritualized child molestation, for instance, could conceivably be changed by a few committed and charismatic members, if some so chose, since that tribe is not so large as to snuff out the potentialities of the individual. Or a tribesman could simply leave.

[5] Is this an alternative forum for sadists for whom imperial aerial bombings on the news do not scratch the itch?

control, and a deeper commitment to egalitarianism not make this gap more palatable to enough of the population to prevent an uprising? Do we underestimate capitalism so much that we do not believe it could create a more secure position for its perpetuation? It may not do so on our impatient timeline, but surely capitalism's defenses are stouter than we suspect. Has it not already survived crisis after crisis with an almost bored confidence?

But this is not what we really want. Reforms to make the prison a better place, desirable and righteous though they may be, have nothing to do with its abolition. Fighting for justice within the system is a personal virtue that understandably helps some sleep at night on our bed of nails and undoubtedly satisfies a virtuous communal urge. (Others simply prefer a sumptuous mattress over those nails.)

What if we exclaimed that we do not want to be given anything? We may run ourselves ragged attempting to connect reform with revolution, in order to justify our noble behavior, in order to prove our righteousness, in order to forgive ourselves, but in the end they have nothing in common. Teaching disadvantaged Central American children in a public school, working for a left Democrat, serving food at a battered women's shelter, advocating for affordable housing or a wrongfully accused man—these are well-intentioned acts of goodness, but they are apart from destroying industrial civilization and forming a revolutionary community who would not, who could not, recreate the Horror.[6]

The surrogate activity of fighting for reform, for progress, does not satisfy our deepest needs, but it is nonetheless how we absolve ourselves of our role in the genocide of all that is wild—within ourselves and without. The absolution is never total, as reform work by definition can never be, but since the primary behavior is unexamined, impossible to stop, too good to stop, then it will have to do. Reform advocates are the killer who calls mom after he has murdered. On the phone he begs to be forgiven for having been such an obstinate son. He cannot, he will not, talk about what he really wants to be forgiven for, so he settles for symbolic expiation.

"I know you didn't mean it, my heart," mom whispers with tenderness. "It's okay. Shh, it's okay."

His conscience is soothed. The murders can go on, his head higher than before.

An underprivileged kid learns to read, a woman escapes a brutal man, a Latina beats the odds and is voted into congress, the United Nations secures a resolution to fight climate change: our hearts are soothed. The murder may continue unabated.

The argument that beneficent reform even weakens revolutionary current cannot be ignored, for all our reform work may be just the kinder, gentler machine-gun hand. It palliates into submission what cannot be beaten. It is how bleeding hearts are controlled, and how the lowest are lulled back to sleep.

Self-sufficiency is the kernel of revolutionary power and so should be our aim. The American Indians and their mythologies safeguarded this power, and this is why our culture felt so threatened that it did the only thing worse than killing them: it scorched the kernel and killed their gods. In the view of an enlightened empire, indigenous peoples must be destroyed so thoroughly that exterminating them is not enough. Some must be left alive, fully inculcated in the imperial ideology,[7] so they may serve as an example for any others who may consider holding resistance's most valuable, and only true, seed.

[6] Our lived experience in modern civilization.

[7] Or lobotomized into uselessness.

As long as there have been conquerors, this has been understood; a military victory is only an advantageous respite until the next battle. But make a people, make your enemy, dependent on you—their very identities built around your necessity—and you may rest well. "Them" becomes "Us". In a generation, whatever useful oppositional knowledge the defeated once held is lost, and what is passed down by their communities are vapid, vestigial rituals. "All are welcome to the annual pow wow in the Peace Pipe Parking Lot! In case of rain, the event will be held inside the Two Rivers Casino and Resort."

The greatest victory of the United States against the American Indians was in the 1877 arrest of the Oglala war leader Crazy Horse. Dressed in Union blue coats, former warriors of his own tribe led away the hero in chains.

The simultaneous destruction of wild lands and the installation of the reservation system—the refugee safety it provided—were how this culture finished the American indigenous. Albeit often in squalid conditions, the tribe's material necessities were provided by the white man as the landbase from which they had earned their keep in earlier times was hacked away by farms, railroads, and towns. By our wreck and wraith.

The capital goal of empire is to metastasize power, and in so doing to convert its subjects into frightened, self-absorbed, obedient, venal atoms. Above all, reliant ones.[8]

Ensuring total material dependence is not enough, though, because the truth of our condition, like all truths, like maples in a wood, will come to light. The truth of our unfreedom and our desperate will to be free. The truth that civilization is antithetical to life. The truth that it needs to be excised. Ideological dependence is therefore seminal as a stopgap measure.

As long as we remain subjects this tension will exist because, despite our reliance on this system, somewhere in each of us is the burning conviction that this is not how we are supposed to live. To extinguish it, no, to temper, its heat, we must be deceived from our first moment, and we must believe and repeat these deceptions. We must insist on them. We must be willing to die for them. We must believe that without them, we could not live. Ideological, mythological, and material reliance go hand-in-hand.

Around us, through us, over us, is a firmament of fiction with the role of creating, with increasing sophistication, distracting pseudo-realities. The lies that teach us to identify with this culture of living death. The falsehoods that we are above and separate from the natural world, and that it is our birthright to tame it. The fabrications that promote the very chains that bind us.

From cradle to grave, these lies must be internalized and ricocheted in all directions. Not to drown out truth as if it were a competing voice, but because the truth is indelibly embedded in our hearts, and all it would take to emerge is the briefest silence. As the present format of this culture accelerates to the impending readjustment, popularly (and optimistically) known as the collapse, we get only more frenzied, sleepless, and anxious as we murmur the lies, as we scream them, without a moment to rest.

We have arrived at an age where the odiousness of our culture is so obvious that even the system's ceaseless self-promotion is not enough to suppress the truth.

[8] Compliance is a passing consideration when you engender reliance.

The Hydra and the Rebellion Head

Contemporary civilization—this imperial, industrial capitalist culture—has taken another step to ensure its perpetual dominance. The monolith now embraces the criticisms of itself—even creates mythologies around them—while continuing the criticized behavior. This is not a weakening or a lessening of its power, but in fact a strengthening of it. The Hydra of civilization, the metaphorical creature that controls our history, present, and future, is more dynamic now. In its earliest incarnations, the manyheaded serpent only needed force and the mythology that extolled its inherent goodness, as in the divinity of kings, in order to rule a people; over time, this control evolved. While preserving its original methodology, a new head was spawned to quell rebellion by co-opting it. This technique was honed to totally subsume all rebellion, potential or otherwise.

So while the conclusions to the stories we tell each other are the same—this culture is decent and necessary—the plots have changed to teach us that our dissatisfaction with this nightmare is a roll-up-your-sleeves problem that requires our help to solve, guided by such rebels as Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and Bernie Sanders.

This monster has laid waste to all it has touched for ten thousand years and more. It must always have more, it must have everything, until every last scrap has been digested, emulsified, and disposed of in reeking heaps. It is land it eats—forests, plains, oceans, creatures. It is people it eats.

Its original heads, atop long necks attached to a grotesque, blubbery body, are Brute Force, Material Enticement, Inculcation and Entertainment. It is separate from us in that we can surely exist without it, but it is within us, entwined, entangled, mottled like a vine in a tree or a cancer our bodies have been convinced is our own flesh.

Brute Force is the anchor of the creature, situated in the middle of the five heads, connected most completely to the central nervous system. Brute Force in the West is needed now only on the fringes—in yet-tobe gentrified neighborhoods, recalcitrant immigrant diasporas, RV parks, and reservations. Sometimes in universities when the kids need a spanking. For the near-billion of rural people on this planet who are without electricity and therefore only weakly attached to civilization,[1] Brute Force is the dominant weapon—when the Hydra even gazes in their direction—to dispossess them of their land, toxify their water, and render barren their way of life in order to kill them or make them flee to a metropolis, where Material Enticement is just strong enough to make most choose that option over suicide. People are more easily controlled in a city than on the land, where they may know how to fend for themselves. With over fifty percent of the

[1] But let us be honest, also definitely attached to and dependent on civilization, through the community centers where they watch TV, the bars where the men drink, the aid organizations that prop them up, and the schools where the young are taught English. When the indigenous peoples of Ecuador play on iPads as they ride the bus, when the Bushmen of southern Africa are to be found in traditional garb only in the time-capsule tourist villages while these groups' habitats are razed, sundered, and subsequently forgotten, let us refrain from the games we play insisting that the world's indigenous peoples are merely waiting for civilization to collapse. Some are, certainly, but the numbers should not be overestimated to suit our romantic sensibilities.

world's population in urban centers, in fast-growing proportions, this is the strategy of the Hydra in places like sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and China: strip people of their land and send them to the cities. Where there must be farmers, force them to farm like factory workers for the urban masses or for the slave-animals who feed them.

In these areas, Material Enticement may be seen more clearly for what it really is—a consolation for those who have been robbed of the sacred places of which they once were part. When the freedom of living with the land is eroded, the draw of possessions strengthens; it is all that is left. The gratification we feel for each new belonging—video game, car, phone, pair of shoes—is a door prize in place of belonging. This ephemeral satisfaction is a smokescreen to replace what was lost, and this holds just as true for those who recently have been dispossessed as for those who were sold so long ago it is beyond memory. Mostly in the West but also globally, there are things to be had for many people—not just the illusion thereof—and socially-determined success requires those things, pitting us in a race to the bottom on ladders that appear to ascend. In this regard, the only difference between, say, the people of Western Europe and those of Madagascar, is the former's lack of memory of our wild ancestors and the latter's connection (though fading) to them. We all were indigenous once, and free. It is only a matter of when.

Entertainment is the unending din of sports, shows, radio, and social media. It can even be the old black and white static that television channels would emit when there was no intentional programming. It is the drone of sound that can be anything but the silence—the pause and quiet reflection— that we need to even begin to sort out reality through the pandemonium. One show is binged and is followed by another; one sports game follows another, and the next season begins on the heels of the last. Netflix, Reddit, podcasts, Facebook, Instagram, anything, *anything*, to keep us from actually thinking in the scant hours between sleeping and selling our bodies at the highest price we can fetch. This head increases in velocity and ubiquity each year, but it is the same circus the ancient Romans enjoyed.

Similarly, Inculcation looks different depending on the place but is the same content everywhere. It is the cautious, fearful parenting that habilitates us in the art of normality, lest we be killed or starve or fail. Or it is the parental cheerleading that tells us what a privilege it is to be a part of this age. Or it is the tyrannical parenting that tells us that we must be ruthlessly determined if we are to get ahead.

From our birth in the hospital's baby bank, friends, enemies, priests, teachers, artists, creators, strangers, homeless folks, rich wieners, working class heroes, and others of all extractions send volley after volley of the same nonsense but in different sound bites, justifying this way of life as inevitable, normal, and true.

The Inculcation Head is the school that teaches that *right* and *wrong* persist in this nightmare, and that they are to be respectively sought after and rejected. It is the university that teaches us that this way is natural, obvious, and permanent—and the route we must travel in order to succeed.

It is the cold scientific facts, the science of it all, that considers us separate from and above what we observe, instead of one and the same. It is the deception that we are not the prairie dogs and the rain and the grasses and the sunbeams and the water we drink, but instead that we are the reasoned experimenters observing, analyzing, and breaking down lesser subjects to be altered at our whim.

It is any message or belief that is a part of our cultural mythos that has humans presiding over the world as if it is ours alone to do with as we please—and to do with each other as we please in the process.

The Inculcation Head is the creature's sexual organ, for it is how it reproduces itself in our progeny. The Hydra's persistence in our minds, in our belief systems, is how it gives birth to itself again and again. It looms over our children, its shadow blotting out the sun, and then coughs, retches, and pukes nourishment into their open mouths as they plead from the back of the blue SUV for more, more, more!

The Hydra's newest head, its fifth—situated on the leftmost neck, if you are looking at the monster—consists of our efforts to reform the beast, to tame it, to wed it with the dull edge of contraventional morality. This facet of the creature is an integral part of it now, and without it the organism would become vulnerable, because the lies are exfoliating before us as they collide into the increasingly apparent waste and destruction. The other heads despise this one, but understand its necessity, especially in the over-developed world. This is the Rebellion Head. Co-option of rebellion is older than capitalism, but this is a new phase. Whereas previous revolutionary movements were undermined by the tactic of assimilation—the communist party or anarchist labor union exalting the workers' cause while crushing the proles—this head does not just undermine authentic rebellion by regurgitating it back to us as a safe and sanitized commodity. There is no authentic rebellion. Every supposed revolt, every radical act, is either currently a feature of the Hydra or is primed and prepped to be. The Rebellion Head presides.

So long as no one can live outside the Hydra's grasp—outside of its life support— there is no rebellion.

Since the kernel has been largely lost and forgotten—and thus our independence from the Hydra—resistance is futile. The Rebellion Head is well aware of this, so it encourages our flaccid obstinacy in clinging to this or that political program that is safely within its purview. Its modus operandi: allow dissent, let there be struggle against it, concede token ground, pretend the opponent's victories wounded it, and then celebrate the victories permanently—or until those triumphs are revealed as false or insufficient, at which time there must be more struggle. It was this way with the Suffragette movement, the eighthour workday, civil rights. Is there any modern social struggle that cannot be included in this list?

The Rebellion Head resides in Standing Rock, Black Lives Matter, Fair Trade Inc., #Metoo, #Resist. It respires in our nonprofits, community meetings, public defense, and political party anything. It feeds on our concern over detestable working conditions, the state of health care, the changing environment. Its comedy is our radical posts and theses sniping at our situation, Marxist circle jerks, communiqués from occupations, our songs mocking "the system." Its recreation is in our nonprofits where we exclaim, "The logging conglomerate agreed to spare those twelve hundred acres!"

"The city council heeded our advice and is going to take action on gun violence!"

"The abortion clinic will stay open another year!"[2]

It is slightly embarrassed but all the same satisfied when a second grade teacher in Watts uses Tupac lyrics to teach the children the value of education.

[2] All these gains—this scrap here, this shred of respect there—for fucking what?

Its orgasm is the righteous smashing of bank windows, the punching of Nazis, the removal of Confederate statues. It breeds in our radical parenting, diversity workshops, books decrying Christopher Columbus, in Harriet Tubman on the twenty-dollar bill.

It adores justice.

Whatever victories are won from these struggles become as solid a feature of the monster as any other, and we point back to this new scale or that fresh fang and excitedly scream, "Look what we did!" And our efforts only made the serpent stronger. And the serpent cackles.

From on high, verily we say: "This government knows that climate change must be mitigated!" The eyes feign humility. We cry: "Our culture is becoming aware that patriarchy needs to be undermined!" The tongue hisses gleefully. We bellow: "LGBTQ+ rights are increasingly accepted!" We roar: "More and more Americans know using the n-word is wrong!"

With the Rebellion Head pointing the way, the Hydra slithers onward, vowing never to travel this or that particular path again, so instead it squirms on a parallel road with a different name leading to the same destination. Or, trusting our amnesia, the selfsame road after an inconsequential detour. Nothing in the Rebellion Head is threatening to the monster's livelihood, and it may be true that the other heads do not even loathe their newest neighbor. The whole thing may even be an inside joke.

If an actual rebellion slipped the grasp of the Rebellion Head, the other heads would decapitate that head and poison the stump with its blood in order to get back to business as before—less dynamic, less complicated, more vulnerable, but still supremely vicious.

In the past, the other heads were enough to control a population. Teach the children the god they serve and on whom they depend. Keep them focused on this for their entire lives and reward them variously for having done so. Crush those who do not obey.

The Rebellion Head was born of the inalienable rights of governed subjects. The scripting into law of those entitlements created permissible dissent. The king, for instance, agreed to limited rights, and the people would have the prerogative to challenge him should those rights be assailed. The DNA of the Rebellion Head is the same as ever, only now the boundaries have expanded beyond our vision. The head has come into full form because the system encompasses nearly everything and everyone—by design it is this way.[3] This means that the Rebellion Head needs to consider all forms of rebellion so long as they do not transgress the inviolable precept: you depend on Me.

[3] This was most eloquently expressed in Margaret Thatcher's TINA—There Is No Alternative. The market economy is the only way of relating to one another (and to ourselves), and the conversation about this fact is over.

Identity as Helplessness

The Hydra is always in motion, on a baffling mission, dragging us behind like dogs as we play and fight with our own shadows. It never stops perfecting its domination, never stops accelerating, ever disrupting existing social relations in favor of newer, more powerless ones—evading its demise in so doing.

Because this subject is the locus of recent social struggle (and therefore the deeded property of the Rebellion Head), let us scrutinize the atoms of our social relations, our personal identities, and how they figure into the Hydra's reality. How they measure into its calculus. Identities are the non-biological ways we express ourselves to ourselves and to each other—through jobs, gender, race, class, nationality, etc.

Identities are tokens and forces of history. As tokens, they are how we express and understand our place in this world. They tell us about who we are and how we see ourselves, and also about the socio-historical moment in which we exist. For example, to appraise the identities of a white American banker in the 1960s would tell you about that man and the society in which he resided, especially if viewed in the context of other identities of that age. They are reflections of the social institutions that embed the individual.

But identities are not just static representations or historical curiosities. As forces, they are subjects in that they serve a function— they construct and re-construct the classes and categories that constitute our social moment. They are like tools to build a house: a framing nailer, circular saw, concrete mixer. They are what we use to build the institutions around us, fit to the socio-technological moment, as in the way a simple drill became a bow drill then a core, then a pump, then electric, then cordless.

More carefully: *They are what the Hydra directs us to use to build and solidify the institutions that contain us.* In the same way a framing nailer was designed to erect and fortify walls, our identities were designed to erect and fortify our separation from each other, and slavery to a system designed to benefit capital and before that any number and kind of masters.

For example: blackness is not a biological representation, but a social understanding that was created in order to position the colonized as inferior to those of the mother country. In myriad ways this was done and re-done to make the supremacy more effective in the historical moment, like when the Dutch East India company banned marriages between settlers and indigenous peoples, or when the US Supreme court declared in 1857 that "descendants of slaves were so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect;" or when in 1954 the high court's majority opinion on Brown v. Board of Education stated that school segregation was illegal. This ruling appeased equality advocates while leaving undisturbed the racial-economic underpinnings that rendered that decision dead on arrival.

This reifying of a social category was designed to justify free labor for burgeoning empires, cheap labor for established ones, and generally to atomize the exploited underclasses to prevent mass unity from below.

Similarly, whiteness is not a biological construct but a category of supremacy that served the needs of empire. The Irish are not considered white because their skin is a particular hue—though their being phenotypically lighter skinned made them a more obvious choice than blacks. They were eventually chosen to join the ranks of whiteness in order to break their class unity with blacks. Before this happened, Irish were sometimes referred to as "negroes from inside out," and blacks were sometimes referred to as "smoked Irish." It was not a simple matter of a decree on high but was instead a mélange of material, political, and ideological enticements. The effect was the same.

The examples can go on endlessly. "Chinese," "American," "Latinx," "woman:" these are all social categories that were created (or at least seized upon) by authorities in order to solidify rule of one kind or another that we subjects then internalized as defining personal characteristics. Identities go in and out of fashion, in and out of use, depending on what the socio-historical moment of our slavery calls for. Many identities are anchored by physical characteristics, in the way that being socialized as a woman used to correspond strictly to female anatomy, but as we see, these connections are increasingly nonessential. (Self-identify as you please, just choose a slot so we can tailor products to you more effectively, so we can categorize you more efficiently. The more micro-niche, the easier to sell to you)

If we agree that what we have built and continue to build is a culture of subjugation, dependence, and separation, then the "tools" we use in this culture must make separated slaves of us. Being black, or rich, or a woman, or a man, or Japanese, or American, or white—each perched on a different rung in the social hierarchy, some safer than others— is just a saleable, exploitable, exploited, and more or less expendable slot in the matrix in pursuit of the end goal: our continued servitude. Some of these identities were imposed on us to oppress, like the creation and perpetuation of blackness, and others were imposed in order to elevate, like being a man. But all are part and parcel of our separation and slavery to a monster with its own ends in mind, *each elevation difference between us serving only to further enslave us all* and to flesh out more vividly the design. Different periods of our slavery will require different identities (or the same ones but with new social understandings of them) but they will all merely be tools of our own subjugation.

All the while, individuals internalize their identities as if this were not so, as if the unhindered expression of their sacrosanct social identities is the recipe for liberation. As if unimpeded queer expression, for instance, would shine light on freedom's path. (A queer person of course should be made to feel safe and welcome wherever they go, but let us not conflate kindness and understanding with the ingredients for radical change.)

One can fantasize about identities that are liberating, tools to be of a different use entirely, but none will be realized until we dance on the bones of the Hydra, because the social identities we harbor are inextricably tied to the Horror—its past, present, and future. To believe that this identity or that identity can be altered in a way that will end the nightmare is a contrivance. We are no closer to freedom because women are socially allowed to do many of the things that men traditionally and exclusively did. We are no closer to revolution because black people have their own superhero movie. A thousand times: that women, blacks, and other marginalized groups are gaining elevation in the social hierarchy is better than the alternative in terms of dayto-day life in the Horror, but undeniably our necks still twist as we are pulled forward by the Hydra's leash.

The Hydra heads work in seamless concert to create and promote the identities that separate us from each other and our land. Every identity under the Hydra is hollow and unfulfilling be-

cause they lug us away—and symbolize a state that has already been lugged away— from who we really are and are meant to be.

Imagine a zoo. You walk around the exhibits reading the placards describing the animals inside. The Siberian tiger exhibit catches your eye, and you stop to read the curated description. *Panthera tigris tigris.* There is a moat between the bars and its habitat, where the parcel is painted a gray-white like ice, where a plastic snow-covered evergreen simulates the flora of the tiger's home, far away from Tallahassee or Buffalo or Los Angeles.

This one in the zoo breathes, he eats, he may reproduce, but he is missing vital organs.

What you see here is a new creature, despite whatever is on the placard. This is a being of the zoo itself, a zoo tiger. He is the zookeeper who feeds him, the beings who observe him for pleasure, the slop he is fed routinely, the glass that demarcates his habitat, the fake hunts that the zoo employees put on for his sullen entertainment. He is his dependence, his routinized expectations, his dwindling memories of home, if he ever lived there. Biologically, he is a Siberian tiger, with all the known anatomy and characteristics. In reality, he is a defeated shadow cast by a Siberian tiger. The evolution, the thousands of years, the ancestors, that marked his development in native lands, have been stripped to a singular body that our scientific culture maintains is the essence of this creature, the indivisible atom. When you look at this being in his encyclopedic capsule, you see a Siberian tiger, but when perceived as one piece of a holistic world, then the illustration is incomplete, morose even.

It cannot be said that this tiger is just a different species now, a whole being whose wholeness is complemented by his new place, as if the zoo is on equal footing with the natural home of the tiger. This equation is as false as saying that a slave is just a different whole than a free person. It is self-evident that a slave is a diminished being. Species do adapt and change habitats and evolve, but over eons; this natural cycle is not the same as abducting a being from his place and locking him in captivity as we destroy his habitat. Only philosophers on the Hydra's payroll could dream up such sophistry.

So it is with us. We are in a zoo manufactured by the Hydra. Everything is either managed and provided, or it is a problem to be fixed by management. Everything has been planned, drawn out, excavated, cleared, and architecturally designed for ease of use, for efficiency, to normalize our captivity. Though the header on the placards may read Homo sapiens, we are a pale simulacrum of that creature. We are the processed grain and slave-meat we are fed, the infertile cities we haunt, the workplaces or streets or schools where we somnambulate; we are our narrow dreams when we sleep; we are the ephemeral relationships we foster; we are the advertisements and churches that instruct us on how to proceed; we are the moral justifications that hold up our heads and straighten our backs; we are the oil that is at the core of all we need.

There are differences between the Siberian tiger exhibit and the one for human beings. Two signal ones. The first is that since this culture has dominion over Earth, our zoo covers the planet instead of a city parcel. But a prison is a prison, no matter the scope.

The second is that we are both jailers and jailed in this zoo, as opposed to just jailed. We are not just victims, we are also perpetrators, regardless of how we style ourselves. We by turns manage the grounds, supply the goods and fuel that run it, observe the exhibits and reside in the cages. The lunatics are running the asylum.

Pretend that the human zoo is like the animal zoo nearest you. So instead of the whole planet it is a confined space with exhibits and cages. Pretend that, as the visitor, you are also not a part of these spaces—neither abuser nor abused, you are an alien on the outside looking in, having

lowered to Earth in your silver spaceship. Pretend that there is a world outside the cages waiting to welcome back all the captives.

Enter through the turnstile under the banner that reads, "You Have Arrived!" Dispassionately observe the cages, read the descriptions written by the curator, an overeducated Yalie.[1] Pore through the narratives and accounts of each human. All these identities, all these stories, are different hues of the captivity they share. The principal value is a naturalized, celebrated, contented non-wildness, despite whatever past or present struggles brought a particular being to the cage, behind a particular placard.

This is a truncated hypothetical scenario, one that abbreviates the complexity of our social situation. All credit goes to the curator and his staff—they can only do so much with their taxpayer-funded per annum.

Take a peek at the American wing of this zoo and observe the creatures in their habitats. Stroll the planked boardwalk. Peer through each glass cell in each exhibit, which display manifold identities in their domains.

The white man may be seen on the left in a series of cells. The first captive's cell is bipartite. In the first partition he stands with excellent posture in a crisp blue suit, talking without pause to a group of female AI, who are gazing up, then giggling, at the tall man with the winning smile—occasionally they utter barely-relevant compliments through quivering silicone lips. The other room is empty: a messy bedroom festooned with sports memorabilia; pill bottles pock the clutter.

The next habitat is a brown-carpeted living space. This white man is undernourished and oversized at his computer, which is not connected to anything outside, though it is clear he believes he is on some kind of imageboard website. His typed words are projected onto a wall for you to see clearly. Much of what he writes is esoteric, but he appears to be informing others of his intellectual supremacy. Bots populate comments in reply to his: agreeing, disagreeing, complimenting, insulting, ganging up against him, with him. The back of the room contains a couch strewn with food crumbs and tissues spent by misfired semen. A photograph, likely of the neckbeard's mother, is on a shelf above the couch, as well as a stuffed panda teddy.

Next in line is a singular cell: a living quarters with a square desk, a mattress on the floor, and a Bunsen burner being used as a stove. This is a slight but ropy man with green spikes for hair. His flesh is decorated with piercings of all kinds and tattoos of dead heroes. Lines in his forehead and on the bridge of his nose suggest an absence of humor. He sits alone reading, his shoulders turned over the book, broken-spined over his patched black jeans. Posters on the wall are of The Clash, Bad Brains, and NWA. FUCK THE POLICE is written in dried, rust-colored blood on the far wall. A punk anthem plays through speakers below a false window framing a picture of a city skyline.

Going down the hallway there are a dozen more of the American white man. One with a long gray beard fastidiously cleaning a rifle; another surrounded by tables and charts, peering into two laptops, which have images of all the other cells tiled on his screen as he attempts to gather analytics on the other subjects to help him make sense of it all.

To the right as you walk are the American white female cells. You first encounter a young woman in a flowing skirt and white blouse with dark circles under her eyes revealing too much lesson planning and too many drinks the night before. She paces in front of a classroom, redirecting multi-ethnic AI students to pay attention to the lesson. She enthusiastically praises one

[1] Redundant

then tries to get all the kids to celebrate by cheering, "WORK HARD, BE NICE!" Motivational posters occupy space on the white walls, interlarded by a plethora of data-oriented charts that underscore student growth in recent test scores. Her voice rebounds off the desks, the walls, the humanoid figures, as they scream back in unison: "WORK HARD, BE NICE! WORK HARD, BE NICE!"

The following cell is the rectangular interior of a trailer home. Three pint-sized AIs sit in front of a television playing a rerun of SpongeBob Squarepants. The mother, in a black Def Leppard tshirt, smokes a cigarette as she stirs a pot of mac and cheese on the electric stove. She has her own small television with rabbit ears on the kitchen counter next to her. On its screen is a smiling weatherman pointing to a row of smiling sunshines. Every day is a miracle. The living area next to the television is littered with toys and clothes. A post-it note on the fridge reads in all-caps, "CHEDDAR, DELI MEAT, AND THOSE CEREAL RINGS THEY LIKE." Does she go to the grocery store? Does she submit these culinary requests to the zookeeper? Did she even write this note, or is this prop design? These are questions you are not meant to ask.

Past the cell of a disheveled woman in a Brooklyn-esque studio (flinging rainbowcolored paint into the shape of a vagina) is a sharp-featured woman in a gray business suit. She sits at the head of a long table of male AIs taking turns coughing and clearing their throats. HACK *beat* GHmmmMMMMM *pause KHAGHHH!* She is meticulously put together: hair sculpted back, clothes ironed stiff, fingernails in tight arcs. It's obvious she flosses. Her hand is in the shape of a hatchet as she lays out a tactical plan for the next fiscal quarter. In shadow, in the room next to this mock boardroom, is a slight male AI sitting on a couch with a darkened cell phone in its lap. It is reading a book—or rather ready to read a book when her entrance activates it—to two AI child bots sitting cross-legged. Chinese take-out containers dot an otherwise clean living area—evidence of a detail-attentive zookeeper.

The following series is the American black woman: three cells in a row with two more soon to be added to the exhibit: darkened spaces with Out of Service stickers on the glass fronts.

In the first one we see a woman who must be another corporate executive of some kind, for some company that does something. She is in a bifurcated cell like some of the others. In the unlit office is an ovular table meant for meetings. A pitcher of water is the centerpiece. AIs in suits sit in the darkness, memos laid out neatly before them. The only open seat is the one at the head of the table. Presently she is in the living area of her cage, where she luxuriates on a couch smoking a joint and listening to roots reggae. Photographs, must be of mom and dad and the family, are on an end table next to the couch. Everyone looks happy and well-adjusted. All the women have straightened hair. She is in pajamas; a slate business suit hangs in contrast on a hook on the door separating the two areas.

Next is a small cell that looks like another studio apartment in the city. Her hair frizzed out in an afro, this young woman is huddled over her phone. What she is typing is projected onto the wall to her right for easy visitor viewing. The format is meant to look like Twitter. She is passionately posting about the racism in a Charlie Brown sketch where the black character Franklin is sitting on the other side of the Thanksgiving table from Charlie and the gang. Her profile picture is of her in a defiant pose, with the caption, "I am not only what you think I am."

Last: a large linoleum room with cots bunked in the back half and cafeteria tables in the front. Female AIs are slumped everywhere, on the mattresses, sitting around the tables, chatting in low voices in loops. The subject is sitting on the edge of her bed, head bowed. The walls are cinderblocks painted beige. Next to the tables there are laminated signs on the walls: "You Are

Safe Here" is the most prominent. Also: "Abuse Hotline: 1-800-577-3645;" "Emancipated Minors Welcome." A whiteboard detailing that day's events hangs next to the door, which leads nowhere. "6:00pm: Stories of Survivors." The woman lifts her head briefly to look at you, and you are surprised because you thought that the partition between you and this cell was one-way glass. She stares deep into you, boring into you, then pulls a flask from a fold in her loose clothing and nips.

The last series you have time for today is the Latinx man. As you enter this part of the exhibit, a sign above reads, "Many More Coming Soon!" In the first is a boy who looks to be about ten years old. He wears a tattered t-shirt that says, "St. Elmo's Catholic War Eagles;" the stenciling is accompanied by an illustration of a despondent bird, most likely an eagle. What looks like a homework assignment is laid before him on a small desk: Abraham Lincoln: Our Nation's Champion. There is some kind of worksheet where he is supposed to fill in the blanks to check his reading comprehension. He sits there silently, his pencil tip broken, no sharpener in sight.

The second cell is divided in two. The darkened area is a living space with a ratty couch and a rattier Chihuahua AI barking into the void. Pizza boxes that have "VEG" written on them are scattered about: open, torn apart, empty—Pacmans striking different poses. A female AI is hunched next to the couch, on its knees, ready to be re-animated by the man's entrance. It has deep gashes and gouges all over its body. Unhealed—no capacity to heal. Beer bottles with cigarette butts in them decorate the room's big table. A portrait of the Christ is the only wall hanging. In the lit area, you see the protagonist. On his head: a white hardhat, protective eyewear and a breathing mask. On his body is a yellow splatter jacket that goes from his shoulders to his shins. He wears latex gloves that stretch to his elbows. AIs around him are in the same work outfit, performing rote tasks. Meat hooks whir about, slinging cow carcasses in varying states of dismemberment. He is coated in blood and looking stressed as the carcasses on their ceiling conveyer belt stop then go then stop, leaving only a few seconds for him to inspect each animal. When one stops in front of him, he turns it as best as he can, checks the muscle groups, runs his hands along the bloody sides and inspects where the anus used to be. He curses and growls whenever the one he is working on KACHUNKS beyond his reach, the next hook delivering a fresh carcass for quality check.

In the last cell is a man in an office surrounded by fake windows with images of palm trees outside. His hair is slicked back in shiny black lines. "Martin Perez Attorney At Law" reads the nameplate atop the leather desk. A photo in a clear plastic frame displays four female butts in thongs: "Miami Bitch." His feet are kicked back, his blue shirtsleeves are rolled up to his elbows, and his tie is loosened to the second shirt button from the top. He puffs on a thick barrel of a cigar. His head lolled back over his chair, Martin blows smoke rings that shimmy towards a framed photograph of Che Guevara's dead body lorded over by members of the Bolivian military. The other area: a beach scene. Umbrellas are opened over white plastic chairs; a dark-skinned AI with a serving platter filled with cocktails is frozen in a gleeful expression. A simulated ocean brings in irregular waves that crash on the shore then roll and foam several feet up on the sand, fizzling and popping like poured soda.

At the end of the American wing, past a dozen more identity series wards where you exit to the Canadian Annex, there is a final glass-walled cell that you need to step around. It is underlit by a fluorescent floor system, so the upper half is darkened, an eerie effect of thrown shadows. Two of the lights are angled inward at a person in a wheelchair. Tubes in tangles go in and out of this person's arms, bags of fluid draped above slowly deflating as the contents snake their way into the patient's veins. He or she wears an oxygen mask, clear but fogging up at every

breath. Medical instruments and monitors fill up the space. A computer screen blinks and beeps on a plodding schedule. Only wearing a hospital gown, this vulnerable one is completely hairless. Unseeing eyes stare straight ahead, pupils dilated to matte black discs.

The placard screwed into the exterior wall: “Differently Abled.”

The patient breathes in, exhales. Inhales, exhales.

Respires, respires, respires.

New Zoo, Same as the Old Zoo

The Hydra has brought our zoo into a new age. This is not nefarious, but rather natural for the monster and for the vicissitudes of any slavery; the form slavery takes must fit the moment appropriately. Were not actual zoos different in the 19th century than in the 18th? Did the living conditions of American chattel slaves not change from the 17th century to the 19th? Did the slavery of the American workplace not remold from the 1950s to now?

With these changes, did the patriarchy, did racism, end, or did they morph to keep pace with social reorganization and technological development? Forms change around detestable content so as to obscure the nature of the core and thus continue the abuse and exploitation. Once the form changes and a new normal is instituted, the contemporary subjects look back on the previous normal with puffed-up superiority, with head-shaking judgment, as if the people of that prior time were so ignorant in their beliefs, so weak in their willingness to go along. "Slavery in the antebellum south…what a shame that was." Tsk tsk.

The scenery is changed out for the next act in the tragedy of our subjugation.

A 1950s American human zoo would display a different power dynamic between races and genders than now. Fresh from the economic triumph of the Second World War, the American white man in that zoo would occupy the place of highest esteem, whereas in today's zoo, while still maintaining control, he would share that space (or would be forced to share that space) with women and Latinx, blacks, Asians, and other social categories.[1]

The slavery, it must be insisted, remains the same, but the format has been refashioned. It would be the same if the white man improbably became the most inferior of identities, bent and crooked in submission—as other groups have been for so long—while another, or others, rose to primacy. Marketing agencies and publishing houses would just need to print new material for us to guzzle.

As the social and material conditions that impelled the white man and his order to preeminence disintegrate, so too do the accepted stories that supported that form. No one is awestruck anymore by Christopher Columbus' intrepidity; no one believes anymore in George Washington's divinity or the righteousness of Manifest Destiny. Or at least only nitwits believe those things. Now we believe the myths spoon-fed to us by the Rebellion Head, like the divinity of the civil rights struggle and the proud magic of migrants.

But another movement in the zoological landscape is in motion at the same time varied ethnic and sexual identities are winning more comfortable cells. As civilization approaches its next reset, this greater, more significant movement—an eleventh-hour effort by the Hydra to save itself—is the fortifying of the Rebellion Head's mythology: the faith and hope in Progress.

Myths both justify and propel our social condition. They explain everything experienced by a human in a particular social order, from the moon, land, and stars to the benevolence of the chosen way of life. Mythologies carry cultures along with ease in the good times, when there is

[1] So it is on the international stage as well, where the American star wanes and the Chinese one waxes; where other players are economically developing to take a share of the pie that the United States once feasted on alone.

abundance, and nourish the people during times of scarcity until the material resources abound once again; they are the heat in a culture's winter.

Unlike many tribal societies, which do not require the eating of land and ever-deepening hierarchical power, civilization paves its own path to destruction. Civilizational myths are inherently unstable because the exploitative power of civilization's rulers both requires and is in conflict with the suffering of its subjects and the diminution of the landbase. The myths in a civilization not only have to explain, but they also have to *explain away*. This can only work for a time.

Civilizational myths may explain away why slaves are slaves, and why they will always be slaves, but at some point, the lash of the whip, the blood it draws, the anger it incites, when mixed with material undersupply, has the capacity to overcome any story told and passed down as truth. Reality presses down upon these kinds of stories with a heavier and heavier weight until life becomes unbearable. Something has to give.

The final lash on an empty stomach that causes a people to strike back in revolt[2] historically does not result in freedom, but rather in a changing of the guard that oversees the exploitation and destruction of the people and land. The forces and memory of empire, even when weakened, are typically too strong. These civilizational resets are potentially threatening to the greater order because the empire's next form has to overcome the power vacuum before the former subjects re-establish more natural, decentralized, freer forms of social life, but they are also essential because they allow a power center to play one of statecraft's finest games: change the form so the oppressive content may remain.

When the Roman gods died, Constantine co-opted the slave morality of Christianity and as emperor acted in the same way as all his predecessors but with new names to rationalize the exploitation. When the gods of divine right were killed in England and France, the gods of democracy were born. When the Tsar was overthrown in Russia, the Soviet Gods wasted little time in directing affairs. When the Tokugawa period of traditional Japan ended, so began the modern era there. When chattel slavery was abolished in the aftermath of the American civil war, the mythology of the south was gradually overtaken by a system that justifies the renting, rather than the owning, of slaves—capitalism.

Capitalism is the engine of the modern Hydra; its resolve, its tenacity, in violating social norms and biological limits in order to extract maximal value out of its subjects is unmatched in history. It is civilization on amphetamines. The myths to legitimize it can barely keep pace; indeed the history of capitalism is one of overwhelming, destabilizing conflict that threatens it at every turn. Its greatest strength is its ability to provide enough material goods to pacify its sabotaged subjects on the turbulent ride. The material power that is conferred is so considerable that this system has been able to endure[3] two wars of unmatched magnitude.

Progress, capitalism's primary myth, lays bare capitalism's contradictions, as well as those of civilization as a whole. Progress (progression) confers a linearity implying that the way things are is unacceptable. Not this, that. Not here, there—an eternal quest of cosmetic perfectibility. Did the pre-contact Talawa, Choctaw, Ojibwe or Algonquin peoples strive for the "next best thing", or believe that life in the present is misery from which we must escape, advance, or move on,

[2] Or that makes the ruling group anticipate this revolt and co-opt the spirit of rebellion with reforms from on high.

[3] Though it also caused…

or are those thought-streams functions of an unsustainable and profoundly dissatisfying way of life?

Clumsy at first, Progress centered on mere technological innovation, but this mutated as the economic dynamo matured and merged with all aspects life rather than remain solely in the wet dreams of factory owners. The Rebellion Head opened its fearsome jaws, and we ourselves became consumed with the idea that Progress in the social, political, and economic spheres would make life ever better. We need conveniences to be more reliable, easy, and efficient; we need our politics to confirm these goals; we need our economy to keep growing; we need our society to be more equitable and understanding— anything but this, so look ahead!

As the old myths of god and country slough off, as the floor beneath us rots, crumbles, and gives way, all that is left is the unwavering belief in Progress, which is accelerating with abandon. The reality is that we must breathe clean air and drink clean water, and that our planet is bending and breaking under the weight of our behavior. And we have the audacity to suggest that renewables made of rare earths, metals, and plastics are here to save us? That eating meat is the problem? That recycling is a panacea? How trivial is it when someone hypes up a political candidate, touts social media as a democratizing force, or explains how electing a black president was a fundamental improvement? How pitiful are the trending online articles penned with starry eyes about the next techno-marvel: exploration of Mars, self-driving vehicles, drone delivery, hyper-speed rail, 6g mobile networks, the new technique to clean up ocean plastic? What an age!

The strength of our hope in Progress— in its false realities—has increased in direct proportion to the proximity to capitalism's coming reset so that we continue to obey the dictates of the unreasonable without interruption. There will be a moment, if you picture the graph, where economic collapse will be obvious and undeniable everywhere, and our noses will still be at the grindstone, smiles still plastered to our impossibly naïve faces, cheerful blathering about tomorrow passing between drying lips. And we will be cosmonauts in the vantablack of space, certain that the mothership must be north or south or in some other aimless cardinal direction, for, really, all our differing ideas about Progress do not have separate outcomes; they are different means to explain that help from the Hydra is on the way, somehow, from somewhere. We differ only on whence.

Then the final lash will strike torn skin encasing growling stomachs, and actual reality will simply discard our learned, sincerelyheld social truths. While other civilizational collapses in history resulted, as aforementioned, in a changing of the guard rather than the guard's destruction, there were vacuums exploitable by movements for freedom, however narrow—e.g. the anarchist flurries in the Russian and Spanish revolutions—because the subjects of those systems were at least afforded a few crumbs of lucidity. But presently, as the goods dry up, we will grope in an unshakeable haze, unable to process what is before us; in earnest we will wonder what happened. Conspiracy theories will proliferate. If we had only used more wind power! If we had only stopped the oil companies or the Chinese from polluting so much! Blaming others, blaming ourselves, blaming cabals like the Masons or the Jews. Anything but acknowledgment that the train, which had been accelerating in the one direction, finally sped off the cliff. Anything but the admission that, all along, the tracks had been built right up to the edge. In this bewilderment, our only effort will be devising new tracks that can somehow levitate for a time beyond the cliff's edge.

This is a masterful stroke of gaslighting, which is defined as a form of psychological manipulation that "seeks to sow seeds of doubt in a targeted individual or in members of a targeted group, making them question their own memory, perception, and sanity." The term originates in Patrick Hamilton's 1938 play, Gaslight, which relates the oppressive relationship between a charlatan and his wife. Set in the late 1800s in London, Gaslight follows Mrs. Manningham as she emerges from the fog in which her husband placed her so that he could more safely look for jewels lost in a murder he had committed years prior. The common understanding of this term is that the abuser distorts the victim's reality in order to achieve a desired end: a smokescreen for cheating, the upper hand in financial matters, whatever. The victim may, as Mrs. Manningham does when she is confronted with the truth of her husband's deception, shatter the delusions and return to reality. In the play it was the clever detective Rough who foils Mr. Manningham's plot and guides the missus back from the brink of insanity.

Popularly understood, though it may be difficult, you have the ability to exit the fugue state of being gaslighted, because it is temporary and definite. Friends and loved ones may lend a hand in your escape, or perhaps it is when you are confronted with an ineluctable fact or an unprecedented lashing that you are shaken from the dais of lies. This understanding gives us hope in the day to day. And it is correct that this use of the term corresponds to one of its uses in the play. But Mr. Manningham was up to something far more villainous than simple and surmountable deception. His goal in the play was not only to provide a manipulative alibi for his late-night rummaging—blaming the dimming of the home's gaslights on his wife's delusions rather than his own activities in the attic—but to drive his wife so out of her mind that he could reasonably commit her to an asylum. Then he could do as he pleased without having to worry about her at all. Forget this single excuse or that one! "The time has come to face facts, Bella. If this progresses you will not be much longer under my protection!"

The worst fate Mrs. Manningham escapes is not some delusional mist about one subject or another—the dimming of the gaslights or the misplacement of a grocery bill. Instead it is the permanent outcome of commitment to an insane asylum; the threads of lies that snared her here and there had the possibility of becoming a web from which it would be impossible to become untangled.

We are ensnarled in such a web. Small relational deceptions can be escaped, but the grand deception that how-we-live-is-copacetic cannot—at least not without catastrophic change.

It does not feel like we are crazy, does it? But is one not most-always convinced of one's own sanity? Especially if everyone around you—and all those who came before you— believe that how we live is not crazy, then surely we must not be crazy. Grandpa Mike, war hero, was not crazy, nor were Aunt Beth of the rigor mortis posture or entrepreneurial Sam. Sober as whistles, straight as arrows, sharp as tacks!

But if we imagine you again as the alien visiting the zoo, what do you see? What do you think of us? Surely, that our way of life is built to spill and yet we act as if it will remain channeled forever. That we are loyal inmates in a system that does not give a shit about any creature including us and never did. That our time is spent sweeping our cells or those of others in acts of kindness, or dirtying up our cells, or complaining about the smell or our loud neighbor or the lack of available nutritional food. Or making love with and war on each other.

Instead of attacking the prison itself— because it is too impossible, it is too big—we flounder like fish in a water bucket. The prison is everything, so to attack it is to attack nothing at all.

We are Mrs. Manningham if the mister had had his way. He is off searching for jewels or doing whatever it is he does on his own— does it matter?—and we are left in a vast, unfulfilling world with one certainty: the permanence of our captivity.

We are so manipulated, seeded with selfdoubt, traumatized, disoriented, and psychologically tampered with that we are convinced that if there is a problem, the root of it must be our own, our body's, or this or that person's, or this or that party's, or this or that social norm's.

The new exhibit of the institution brings the zoo into the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, into our full-bloom insanity. Clasp your imaginary partner's hand as you complete today's tour, for you too are beginning to question reality. Is there anyone really beside you? If you believe they are real, are they therefore real?[4] It would be best to return home soon, far away from this madness that has a gravity of its own.

Felis Catus

In this cell there are dozens of house cats prowling around on furniture, batting at scratching posts, curled up on the floor, eating kibble, sleeping, slurping water, playing with one another. Striped, black, gray, orange, fat, skinny, all the varieties you see in households that can tolerate such animals. One of the cats, however, is different from the others. This one is over two hundred pounds and is in a blue, anthropomorphic furry suit. This costumed individual is presently licking its outstretched left leg. He—it is in all-likelihood a He given the demographics of the rapidly-growing furry community—notices that he is being watched through the clear glass of this enclosure. He slowly lowers his leg, gently, with only a small amount of suspicion, and coos: "Meow."

Orc Warrior

In the second, a mirliton of a man sits in a computer chair, stooping forward towards the screen with bony shoulders that belie his mass. "I expect in ten years we'll be uploaded into the cloud." He hits Enter. "12 years, tops." Enter. "Immortality beckons." He wears a hoodie, and, with the hood up, we can see no flesh, since his back is to the glass. It appears that he is connected to a rudimentary gaming community. On the right of the oversized screen is a chat bar that scrolls up as users comment. He clicks furiously to make the Orc character attack a group of pixels in the form of a soldier. Once victorious, the orc shakes its hips and uses the axes in its hands as props in a celebratory dance. Music plays over the speakers as the character rhythmically stomps circles around the enemy's corpse. The vegetable does not emote; he moves only his index finger to click the next move—Save. The last cell:

American Revolution

Inside is a lanky woman with gnarled blond dreadlocks that flirt with the belt loops of her hemp khakis. She rides on a metal exer-bike with wires coming from the wheel wells that lead to

[4] And other solipsistic queries. Here is another: if a tree falls in a forest and no one is around, does it make a sound? Answer: *fucking yes.*

a pair of floor lamps and two sets of grow lights. The bulbs flicker faintly when the woman slows her pedaling. The first set, positioned on metal shelving, is wired over dozens of seedlings that are reaching towards the ultraviolet beams. The room, like all the cells, is encased in concrete, but inside these walls is canvas drapery like you might see in a yurt. The curtains give the impression of a more homespun space. A garden bed raised in a wooden box is underneath the second set of grow lights. In the rows are kale, cabbage, and dwarf tomatoes. Grim determination courses through her body, sweat rolling down her pale skin, soaking her shirt that says "Bee the Change You Want to See" with a picture of a cartoon bumblebee in a black beret.

As she reaches top speed, the lights glowing brightly, a latch on the door to the cell snicks. The door creaks open a foot or so, and a hand holding a tray of food and a pitcher of water extends into the room. The hand lowers the items and places them on the concrete floor. Her legs wobbly, the woman promptly, exhaustedly, dismounts then collapses onto the floor next to the food, which she shovels into her mouth. The lights dim. Her figure wolfing the meal becomes a silhouette and then, when the lamps and grow lights shut off completely, a part of the blackness. For several moments there is just the sound of her eating before huge ceiling lights connected to an outer breaker box buzz on, and she is again illuminated.

Through the turnstiles you exit the zoo. The more distance you put between you and the cages, between you and the complicated slavery of our condition, the less compelling you find the individual stories of those inside. Nowhere in you is the urge to read a novel about the minutiae or psychology of the human relationships, the triumphant acts of charity or the devastating betrayals of the slaves inside; the political struggles to gain better purchase here or there seem threadbare, verging on risible, as you tilt your spaceship skyward.

Above the zoo, suspended like a thunderhead, is the laughing outline of the Hydra, its tentacles probing the cells and latching on before moving onto the next. Let the prisoners, the part-beings, believe whatever they want, so long as they do not violate the inviolable precept: *you depend on the Hydra.*

Ultimately, neither the reasons for nor the arrangement of the zoo—the prison, our society—are of any consequence. The past, the present—all of it is slavery in sundry designs and disguises. What the future holds for our culture after the downturn is the same model in a different outfit: we will waste ourselves in an oblivion of goods, produced and distributed by algae reactors or some other innovation that saves civilization from the cataclysm resulting from the decline of fossil fuels. New self-congratulatory myths will correspond to this next phase of our unlife.

What does it matter, anyway, who is rich and who is poor, when all are bought in? Who cares who is in charge of the boardroom: whites or blacks or Latinx or Christians or Atheists or Muslims or women or men or muskrats? In the Horror, who is above whom is a matter of taste, the flavor of the social moment. Pale-faced, addicted, and fed, some will ride deeper into the fallow realm on a golden horse, others on a mule. Still others, the spirited ones, will be skidded. So it goes.

Or perhaps some improbable social equilibrium will be reached if enough justice is meted out, and we will all ride together, deeper into the darkness, holding hands as brothers and sisters.

None but a vanishing few will remember the time when any of us were independent of the Hydra—our heads high as a result of a life lived as our own—when any of us were able to create a communal culture that could span thousands of years in a single place, becoming that place with our blood and flesh. And those few will be sought after, slaughtered, turned, forgotten, or ridiculed as obsolete.

Meantime we are distal creatures, so far from the wonderful and wondrous beings we are meant to be among the places we inhabit. The scheme for this separation is to convince us that what is distant is beautiful. Denial of the present and proximate—of reality itself.

"Anywhere but Here" is the song on repeat ad infinitum. Given the "here and now" that we endure—though that reprehensible "here and now" was created precisely for this reason—it is no wonder why we dance so feverishly to the tune.

Regardless of our chosen or given social identities, our dreams are transverse across the vanishing horizon of aspirational satisfaction. In that hip outfit, that styling car, that rare meal, that VIP night in the club, that number of likes. In that cute social media persona. In that bold, expressive person we always wanted to be. In that bar we're going to open in a tropical somewhere. In that savior we are going to meet. In that revolution we are going to have.

There are comparative variations of the Horror, some more tolerable than others: life on the coast may be better than the hip squalor of Brooklyn, both of which are better than a call center in Bangladesh or a refugee camp in Lebanon. But there is no escaping the terror of our situation.

This is an ongoing genocide of who we are supposed to be. If we consider the Platonic allegory of the cave, the shadows are slaying the figures casting them. Despite our screaming denial, deep down, no matter how many times or ways we tell ourselves we are doing the right thing, we know they are killing us.

The Perfect Morsel

Describing in such detail our integration with the Hydra—the reasons for it and the deceptions that accompany it—perhaps does too much justice to the relationship; maybe it is over-kind. Maybe it complicates what is really happening. Our half-hearted attempts at rebellion are like attempting sex after over-eating. Full-bellied, lazy pawing at one another. Too sated to really give it a full go. Perhaps it is as simple as that. For now at least, the goodies are still good enough, and we are not hungry enough to fuck.

It's like those dainty city liberals sitting at the table next to you at that unassuming new bistro, or the ones sitting next to them, or the ones who will be seated after them. At each seating, in a most slothful atonement, "gentrification" arises as a topic between unctuous mouthfuls of ramp pesto-crusted pork loin.

The best example of our life in the unreal, and how we chase the shadows of a revolt that could kill the Hydra, is the Local Food Movement. This fashion is a whimsical countenance of rebellion. It is an expression of the fantasy that "I'm aware of what our culture is doing and I'm going to do something about it."[1] It is an utterly non-threatening rebellion against our reliance on the Hydra. Like the identities we embrace, like the puerile resistance we muster, it is another pretend fight against the nipple, which is our life-blood. Like other forms of struggle within the Rebellion Head, it is most effective because it convinces us we are doing something "against the system." Many need that to explain away the horrors they experience and to justify the wrongs they commit in collusion with the Hydra.

Because what is sold as "local" is also exotic in that the menu is a packaged form of the "here" where the customer dines, it is the melody of "Anywhere but Here." Or at least it is a song on the same thematic album.

Unlike so many other identities, preferences, and trends, what makes the LFM interesting is the faint connection to a potentially dangerous idea: communities can take care of their own. The Rebellion Head knows how truly threatening a self-sufficient movement may be, so it anticipated this and proliferated a bastardized version of it in every town and city in this country as a pre-emptive co-option of our dissent. There are even towns with only a gas station and a farm-to-table establishment. "You'll find that the chicken we're serving tonight, ma'am, was locally sourced from a farm not far from here.[2] The canola oil in which we fry it comes from Canada. The flour hails from Kansas,[3] the Brussels sprouts from California, the herb blend from Sodexo, and the roasted potatoes are from Idaho. I come from Massachusetts, all the cookware originated in China,

[1] After the farmers' market, go home, sit on the couch, stream an episode, and enjoy yourself. You deserve it.

[2] 80 miles away

[3] "The flour bleaching agent was produced in Ohio, the salt from Indiana, the sugar (that's used in the flour, not in the sauce tonight, which comes from Louisiana) from Florida, the ascorbic acid and a hundred preservatives—unknown origin. The fossil fuels used to transport these materials to the mill were extracted in Canada and transported using trucks that were…" The rabbit hole only deepens, and ends only when the picture looks like an inmate's obsessive circle drawing.

and judging by the Type-A gleam in your eyes you look like an out-oftowner yourself! Enjoy your meal with us tonight at 'Here'. It's the best spot in town to eat and be eaten."

There is much ado about the LFM. Fearing us so minimally, the Hydra slung back an indolent response to our revulsion at what is mass-produced, and now we are foodies. Like pigs at a trough, we are slop-fed "local."

If your town's craft brewery is not owned by Anheuser-Busch, then its authenticity lies only in the local-ness of the ownership. What else is from that place? The hops? What of the yeast and the barley or wheat? The aluminum or glass that contains the beverage? The wood that frames the storefront? The vinyl siding, the concrete foundation, the plastic everything? The electricity that powers every device? The trucks that transport the cleaning products? The belts, hoppers, and machines? The tires on the trucks? The roads on which the trucks drive?

Whatever meager victual comes from a so-called "local source" is probably not anywhere close, and even if it is, it was drenched in far-away and carcinogenic pesticides and chemicals, either conventional or organic ones. And if all those things are actually local, then even still you won't have to look but another inch or two to see that the international economy is as necessary as ever to provide for us in the ways we socially require.

This or that menu item at best may have come from next door and was naturally grown, but an analysis of the bill of goods would reveal this to be merely a fleck of what is experienced. As the global economy continues to internationalize, any local consuming you believe you are doing only feeds the Rebellion Head and strengthens the Hydra, for now instead of you being a potential rebel against the international order by actually living locally, you are now a proud "non-participant" because your scrambled eggs came from the backyard flock of an insufferable young man. You are spared the effort of rebellion, but may enjoy "rebellion" all the same. All the taste, none of the calories.

Let's create a You for the sake of the point. A You who is vastly healthier and more locally-food conscious than your average bear. You have a small garden in the backyard and three or four Buff Orpingtons spearing grass, bugs, and non-GMO soy feed. You buy raw milk every time you head downstate to endure your family. You like documentaries like Food, Inc., instead of action flicks with Liam Neeson.[4]

Think about what you ate and drank yesterday. All the calories you consumed in order to fuel your body and mind, or destroy them, or some combination of the two. You drank coffee, fried up an egg and ate a chocolate beet muffin in the morning. For lunch it was garden salad and pesto pasta. After fighting the urge to snack, you made it to dinner where you prepared ground beef tacos with all the fixings. You indulged in a couple glasses of wine afterwards, kicked up your feet, and listened to ELO's greatest hits.

You grew the beets and collected the eggs from your hens but ordered the flour, sugar, chocolate, and baking powder off of Amazon. The hens' feed came from an industrial soy field. You oven-roasted the green coffee beans you procured from a fair trade exporter out of Nicaragua. You grew the herbs to make the pesto but purchased the oil, Parmesan, and pasta at a local co-op. The salad was all yours (though the you bought the lettuce seeds from a seed company based several states away). For supper you purchased the corn tortillas, black beans, and beef, but the other ingredients came from your garden—cilantro, onions, lettuce and tomatoes. The grapes from the wine were poisoned and chemically altered, then industrially pressed, preservative-infused, fer-

[4] Nobody's perfect.

mented, stored, bottled, and shipped to a wine distributor before landing in a nearby grocery store. Looking at this menu, what provided the vast bulk of your calories were the beans, flour, eggs, oil, pasta, wine, and beef. Of which, only the eggs were from your hands, and even that is debatable since those chickens were shipped to you as day-old chicks from Iowa and their primary caloric substance since birth has been pelletized feed from Mississippi.

The Invisible Committee's[5] comment that "it is a question of knowing how to fight, to pick locks, to set broken bones, and treat sicknesses; how to build a pirate radio transmitter; how to set up street kitchens," does not grasp the magnitude of what it would mean to be self-sufficient. Is it a mere question of this, or is the building of a community that can actually replace the state a monumental and all-encompassing task that will require everything we have and more, and then when we think we have nothing left to give, more still?

To be free from the whims of others when it comes to your food, water, and energy supplies, your community needs to be indefinitely local—actually local—and selfsufficient. Are there other ways to achieve this without having food and water sources in your clutches?

Scavenging off of others, while not a bad temporary solution,[6] is not only unsustainable—how are *they* getting *their* food—it is dangerous. What happens if they run out? What happens if they don't care for you living off their waste? Coercing others into giving you food—or begging—represents the opposite of the revolutionary project. If not that then at least it is the opposite of selfsufficiency.

The last option is the fantasy of Rudolf Rocker, Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Michael Bakunin, and other syndicalists of the 19th and 20th centuries that persists in the minds of many revolutionaries today. These anarchists imagined an international order of free communes distributing goods based on need. Having reclaimed the factories and farms of the world in the name of the non-hierarchical brotherhood, humanity would work together to ensure the common weal.

The energy expenditure alone of goods moving across countries, oceans, and through wires is as mind-boggling as the current global order. Who would fabricate the plastics? Who would mine the metals? Who would extract and refine the fossil fuels (or the fuel that will replace oil)? Who would process and transport the goods? With what materials would the transports be constructed? Who would construct them? Who would repair and maintain them? Would robots do it all? Who would build the robots, or the robots that would build the robots? Robots on robots *for what*? Why on earth would we spend our time doing such things when the land around us can provide all we need?

Perhaps at a time when manufacturing was far more local than now, the anarcho-syndicalist project was more realistic,[7] but now, with all the information we have about the impact of such activities, how is this vision anything but outlandish? The anarchists of that time were so consumed by the Marxist pipe dream of an international order—and the human supremacist (and frankly anti-human) reasoning it implies— that they did not think through the logistics of such a construct, which would replicate the coercion and alienation that dog us now. The stylized, cinematic Shangri-la of automated everything may be a feast for the eyes—a communist William Shatner courageously seated in the starship—but the amount of planning, work, and upkeep that future would require is the elephant in the room.

[5] An ultra-left collective from France who gained international notoriety for their publication, "The Coming Insurrection."

[6] Your little feet pedaling air as the rest of your body is submerged in a dumpster.

[7] Though even this is too sympathetic.

The mindset of the anarcho-syndicalists was one of city-dwellers—leeches taking from the environment without a thought of giving back; their solutions were assembled from the stance of those who know only the nipple. "An international brotherhood will take care of us instead of the prime minister, congress, or our corporatocracy."

If you think present international commerce is bloated and inefficient, wait until empowered, anti-hierarchical workers are in charge of the titanic, interconnected networks of exchange. Even if we can momentarily forget the planetary devastation, the inescapable fact is that our economy requires coerced labor for its function. Why else would anyone subject themselves to a rare earths mine, an oil field, a coal seam, a factory floor, a cargo hull, an "open work space," or a million other pointless, dangerous, or at best excruciatingly boring tasks, if not for the enticement of money, the fear of (social or material) deprivation, or both? How long might the abstract slogans of revolution keep workers in an industrial dairy facility?[8] The logistics of harnessing complex, automated technologies for general use while maintaining integrity and meaning for each and all are insurmountable. Conceiving the requisite bureaucracy alone is cause enough to erect a statue of a briefcase in a noose.

"Hi-Ho comrades, to the silicon manufacturing plant today, as yesterday! We'll heat silica and coke at high temperatures using the electric arc furnace fabricated by our brothers and sisters in Rev Scandinavia. Once we have the silicon, we'll get our other comrades in the Revolutionary Shipping Agency—once their boat has been repaired in Rev Ireland's dry dock—to transport that material to America, where it will be used to manufacture solar panels by the Rev Committee in Maryland. Once crafted, the panels will be shipped to California, where our IT comrades will plug them into the grid to power their internet servers so all citizens can connect to the internet, doing everything from managing industry to challenging sexist trolls."

To argue in response that new technologies would crop up that would save unnecessary and grueling labor is ahistorical. Were not the industrialists and even the above anarchists of the late 19th century over the moon with how much time would be saved by new-fangled technologies? Kropotkin's fascination with the timesaving wonders of the "automatic washing machine" is quaint, but whose time was saved?[9] Look down the line at all the workers who had a hand in even one machine, from the raw materials to the finished product: whose time was saved? Even if you subtract all the labor these technologies hide behind their sleekness and gleam, what does the end-consumer save time to do? The whole idea of being efficient with our time is firmly in the framework of capitalist thought. Has any innovation that has saved time for the end-consumer created more free time, or does it just create space for more, different work and commodified leisure for that person? The more efficient we are, the freer we are to slave away at something else or to consume the fruits of others' stolen time.

Technologies of this culture will never free us. Nothing in the history of industry suggests otherwise.

Let us suspend disbelief and say for a moment that this is incorrect, and that some undetermined future technological sea change would save everyone from work— that every productive activity would be automated (nothing so foolish as repairs, maintenance, design, re-design, waste, transport, etc.). Who would we then be? Since our control over our lives would be totally beyond our reach, would our purpose be to relate tedious stories, to vie for better entertainment, to con-

[8] Or in front of the computers that manage the industrial dairy facility?

[9] On a minor note, modern dishwashers, one hundred years later, don't save the user much time anyway.

vene virtually with a billion of our fellow human beings over our shared interest in vlogging, to eat as many hot dogs as we could stuff down our gullets? Our hobbies, like the exploration of space, would be the investigation of our navels. Our fantasies would be different versions of the solitary incel masturbating to pornography in the darkness.

More importantly, is the continued spoliation of Earth something we should champion, regardless of how good the ends may be for humans? Even our most sustainable technologies are made of plastics and rare earths that require fossil fuel use at different stages. All of these industrial activities operate with an infinite mindset on a finite planet—the ethos of conquerors.

What might it look like to live *with* this world? To live in a place for thousands of years without degrading it?

The only way to save ourselves from work, and to do so in a long-term way, is to emulate the Arawaks of Hispaniola before imperial contact. Be indistinguishable from your landbase, refuse unnecessary work, and pass down mythologies that teach the young how to live well. Live in vigilance against any other way.

They Will Not Change

"Quantity has a quality all its own," attributed variously to Napoleon, Stalin, and Marx, echoes the industrial mindset whose prime feature is mass, expendable bodies: on the factory floor, in the charnel house, in our entertainment venues, on the battlefield, and in our revolutions. The anarcho-syndicalists shared this social understanding and so left critically unscathed the assumption that we all must be together as a giant mass, one united federation, before there can be revolutionary force—the general strike. At present, this notion continues, but instead of the real possibility of global revolution, as there was in the days of the old syndicalists, this has become a convenient,[1] time-wasting, and scared[2] excuse not to strive wholeheartedly for a new way of living. Post, protest, pamphleteer, meet: all synonyms of "commiserate."

Moreover, this attitude is a counterfactual understanding of how change—not just a changing of the guard—begins, which is in the hearts, minds, and actions of a doomed few whose only role is to nurture again the precious kernel in their own place and time, passing it on to the next generation, whose role it will be to continue tending to that sprout in the hope that when the ripening season arrives, the sapling will be strong enough to bear fruit. If the season does not come in their time, then that generation will do as their predecessors did: protect the plant, strengthen it, and then leave it for the next generation's care. Sometimes the sprout is burned or withers, and it is up to another cadre of another age to prepare the soil for sowing again. We can only hope the successors will have written or oral history of the committed groups who failed before them so they do not have to forge ahead blindly.

For the time being, almost everyone—no matter what revolutionaries may accomplish as community builders and propagandists—will remain in the body of the Hydra as one flesh. There is nothing to be done about this. Their socialization, fear, and the short-term benefits of civilization are too great in the foreseeable historical moment. Everything they have ever known, from the pictures of their grandparents on the living room wall to their first remembered holiday, confirms the righteousness of our nightmare. There is no book, lecture, or activist event that will sever their connection to the hive mind. They are too plugged in, addicted, self-obsessed, lobotomized, well-fed, ideologically safeguarded, dispossessed of land and skills, and materially rewarded[3] to change—or even to begin change by letting in the tremendous guilt and shame they would feel should they admit their role in what we have done.

> they will not change
> even in cataclysm
> they want more of the same

[1] The goodies are too good for revolution now!

[2] Out of fear of reprisal or social disapproval.

[3] When migrant workers and homeless people, the two lowest rungs in Western society, are nourished enough and on smart phones, what is there to argue on this subject?

Think about your fellow people for a minute. Take note of those you encounter today. At the airport, on the bus, perusing the farmers' market, at school, in your workplace, the one nearest you right now surreptitiously picking his boogers. Immiserated foot soldiers of our culture, all. The glassy sheen over their eyes makes you want to demand proof of life from whomever their captors may be.

They know our way of life is murdering the planet. The facts are constantly on even the corporate news.[4] Almost anywhere you are, any cursory look beams light on the devastation. Everyone knows that our culture is so vicious that it is literally altering the climate of Earth. Everyone knows at least some of the facts of the case. The polar ice caps are melting, the oceans are inundated in plastic, two hundred species die every day, forests and farmlands are eroding into desert and subdivisions, ocean levels are rising, extreme weather events are more frequent and intense. Unprecedented die-offs of insects, coral reefs, and large fishes and mammals are jejune. Submit twenty more exhibits into evidence and the surface still has not been scratched.

And they ignore them, most often with not even a hint of thought, without the slightest shame, or even an urge to justify their repugnant behavior. They are too busy sleepily scrolling Instagram, watching music videos, shopping, working, vomiting their groomed personalities on the internet, or just generally *being excited about what new commodities* the future may hold. Those who don't ignore deny. If you press a special few thinkers beyond the shallow critiques of the present arrangement of the culture—e.g. which party is in power, corporate tax rates, school-to-prison ratio, etc.—they will offer up rote and speedy rationalizations of civilization because to honestly question it would be like asking, "Why take the next breath?"

Why waste time with any of these people? To them it is a given that industrial technological civilization must go on, it is only a matter of how. Brilliant, idiotic, somewhere between, all identify with civilization as if it were their own body. Frankly, given their total lack of survival skills, they are not to blame for so closely identifying with the Hydra—it would be foolish for them not to.

Even Noam Chomsky, one of the harshest critics you will find of our system, is terrified that climate change will threaten "organized human society", by which he means the Hydra. Whatever would we do without the august works of Hegel or Mozart? The pyramids, the gardens of Babylon, the Eiffel Tower? Protect the beast and its monuments or else we are doomed!

Our fellow people don't need to be educated, they don't need to hear the perfect argument, they don't need to grow an open mind, they don't need to "know the truth." The idea that more knowledge is required is based on the Age of Reason's education ideal—that people are rational and, if given the facts of the case, will abide by those facts.

What more facts are needed to know that our way of life is downright vile? That our culture is rotten to the marrow? What more must be gleaned from each new infringement, or all the old ones? On what subject do we need to deep dive, investigate, or research that we have not already picked through, boiled, then picked through again? What scandal, what injustice, what ignominy, must be exposed? What datum are we waiting for to be the tipping point? What tome must be written?

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that dire consequences resulting from carbon dioxide emissions are *inevitable for all life on earth*, and no one gives a shit. Environmental organizations and governments merely take that information and use it to justify solar

[4] Presumably to permit the journalists a modicum of self-respect.

panels and other halfmeasures the primary purpose of which is to keep the machines on. The US is opening up more of the western part of the country for fracking, and Brazil is privatizing the Amazon, Earth's lungs. The World Wildlife Fund estimates that 60% of mammals, fish, and reptiles have been extirpated since 1970. Do we even pretend to be aghast anymore? Is the yawn in response even audible? All we hear is the tapping on phones, all we see is the flicking of fingers, all we smell is new plastic and exhaust in the world's most boring opera— the orchestrated story of our quest to chew up daylight's hours.

And it's not like life is good for our fellow people! Their lives are wasted at jobs that have no meaning, or in unemployment glued to whatever entertainment addiction or personal drama ticks away the time.

Besides ourselves, who are we trying to convince that civilization must be abolished? The mass does not want to change and will not change, even if every truth of our condition were forced on them like the violence is on Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*. The Horror would reveal itself, and the excuses would keep pace, if not accelerate—so long as the umbilical cord keeps pumping.

Even those obtaining the most radical education are not honestly attempting change. How many children named Tree or Justice or Che or some other horseshit pretension in San Francisco, in Los Angeles, in Portland, in New York, are getting loving educations, being charmed by small farms, learning to combat racism, gentrification, and sexism, being schooled in the need to be gentle, exploring with their teachers the degradation of the planet? How many of these self-serious dilettantes then go to college, where they are more deeply indoctrinated in the ways of the Rebellion Head as they liberate themselves through sex, haircuts, and activism before joining a non-profit where they can continue the cause in a more adult and reasonable fashion? Before joining the United Nations and getting out in the field to write a damning report on the state of things? Before studying to be a doctor and joining Médecins Sans Frontières to apply bandaids to the deepest wound, or passing the bar to become an attorney for the Sierra Club, taking the good fight to the high court of the conquerors where justice may surely be found? Before managing a homeless shelter and saddling up on Calvary's cross by losing front teeth to a crack addict's haymaker?

Before depositing a paycheck and receiving I-will-look-you-in-the-eyes-for-this praise by their peers who are not so brave.

How many swirl drinks at parties, sharing their good work with their fellow inmates, solemnly soliloquizing about how unequal the conditions between the cells really are?

How many become artists and literati who by candlelight examine and re-examine, observe and observe again, create and create again the story of our culture, even as they are seen as luminaries and radicals? The next film classic you watch, or better the next art house film, look at it from this perspective: this is a story of the conqueror's culture. This is a story that was written, directed, produced, and cast by the same culture that annihilated the wild lands and people of their place, even if the creators are fringe weirdos of that culture.

If you are not predisposed to seeing the world as the pulsing goiter it has become, then this essay will not situate you properly. Nor will any other work. It matters little why[5]—despite how endlessly perplexing it is—but only a few are able to understand the situation we are in, and

[5] It is probably some combination of socialization and circumstance. Maybe genetics play a role in leading some to be the canaries in the coalmine in the same way genetics play a role in who can run fast?

of those even fewer know that something extreme must be done to address the problem. If our friends, neighbors, family, and loved ones look around at the state of things and believe that at the core, everything is okay, or broken but surmountable, or even inherently bad but that there is nothing to be done about it, then no matter our personal feelings towards these people, they are not our allies in what must be done. Having them over for dinner and discussing the need for a dramatic, life-changing response will do nothing. Best to focus on Drew Brees' phenomenal career and what a ride it has been. Or if they are so enlightened as to oppose sports, then what a revolutionary director David Lynch is.

For now, politically, most people are lost causes, and any effort we expend trying to pull in even a slice of them is a waste of time; again, this democratic tactic is built on the false premise that well-informed people "do the right thing," at least eventually. But wellinformed people don't do the right thing; they do what provides the quickest, easiest comfort and is backed by the marching orders of their culture; they do what rewards them socially and materially. They avoid conflict with the masters for all the reasons of the Hydra. As do ill-informed people. Right and left, everyone couches their behavior in moral terms to justify the path of this pestilence.

Do not misunderstand this argument as misanthropic. People themselves are not rotten or evil—our culture is. When you look at your fellow person, there is no need for anger, resentment, or misplaced superiority. She is just a sad peon of this culture, no matter how she may fashion herself. All but a small minority follow the dictates of the culture to which they belong. This does not make them wrong or bad, though it seems so when the culture is so toxic. We do not condescend to that same majority in an indigenous tribe of Bolivia or New Zealand, shaking our heads and wondering why most of those tribesmen are such sheep. For a culture, any culture, to perpetuate itself, its people must follow with blinders on.

When the Hydra falters, if our revolutionary example is strong enough then these same people who flutter around us like halfdead moths will be who we must look towards as the need for the revolutionary role diminishes. After they make the shift to our way, they will be noble healers, leaders, devotees, warriors, storytellers, lovers, problem solvers, comedians, and givers, playing a variety of critical roles in what will be a healthy, defensible culture. Those same roles in our present cultural state are frivolous and shallow. Repellent even. Given the circumstances, it is emotionally difficult to watch their featherbrained fervor and not wish them ill. But we must understand that if most, or even many, were able to see a viable vision of a revolutionary social future, then it would have already been enacted. The 99.9% just need a different play in which to engage their roles, a new format in which to express their skills and personalities. And then it will be time for us to take a back seat to learn from their strengths. It would be an honor then to be spectators, watching them strut and fret their hour upon the stage.

In the meantime, the mass must be ignored so we can get about the business of community building with those who have the courage to see what is directly ahead. Let us show them the way so we can create a small but shining inter-generational example that will be the cocoon for the next order in due time. Every revolution in history has required this, and the one that may come will be no different. If the example is powerful enough, then many will join, no matter who they are now. We must not be resentful toward our fellow people when they do come—however late— but instead welcome them home as our prodigal sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters.

Walking Unbound

The Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta wrote,

> "*…a man whose limbs had been bound from birth, but who had nevertheless found out how to hobble about, might attribute to the very bands that bound him his ability to move, while, on the contrary, they would diminish and paralyze the muscular energy of his limbs.*" Malatesta was right in that we believe that there is no other way to walk; we believe we were not meant to walk on our own strong legs, and that instead to locomote (to live and get on) we require the aid of external forces.

But it is not a simple matter of removing those bands, straightening our backs, and advancing. We lack the requisite skills to walk without the "bands" of corporations and their government lackeys. At present we actually require those bands. Shut off the power and watch us squirm.

Harangue the institutions around and above us,[1] but remember that we have only learned to walk, to eat, to drink, and to live through the means they provide us in every waking hour. We can pillory the hierarchical, oppressive structures and the brains that populate them, but these corporations, these entities, are what give us the internet, clothing, concrete, your lunch today, my drinking cup and the water inside it, your cat's vaccinations, the walls and insulation that protect you from the weather, and so much more that we take for granted but that we will actually need to consider as we teach ourselves to walk on our own debilitated legs.

Attacking capitalism without self-sufficiency is like an infant refusing the nipple. Until the baby grows up and learns how to take care of herself, the mother must live or else the child will die.

The Hydra does well to keep us in this infantile state, to ensure our continued dependence on it, and thus to maintain its control, no matter what it takes. No matter our bluster, our cries, our protests, it knows we will not commit suicide to kill it; so long as we are dependent, we are not a threat.

Oppression is the disabling of another's agency. With a dizzying assortment of means, this is what the Hydra does, and what we do to each other, aping the Hydra.

What do we want, and why are we so afraid to go after it?

What is more important, our fashionable and anemic attempts at self-sufficiency, or actually becoming self-sufficient? Spending our hours making our crutches or wheelchair more comfortable, or learning how to walk unbound?

What is it that we ultimately want?

Is our goal to grow organic tomatoes in our backyard for a delicious salad or to farm and hunt for our calories? To drink water that the municipality chlorinated and fluoridated and can shut off at any time, or to drink water from our own well, lake, pond, or creek? To eat someone else's

[1] Smash their windows, hurl bags brimming with human feces at their executives, etc.

trash then smush our buttcheeks against a fancy restaurant's windows, or to eat our own good food and then smush our buttcheeks against a fancy restaurant's windows?

Is the scope of our justice to beat from pillar to post those who are not angelic in the ever-shifting morality of identity politics? Is the level of our righteousness determined by how many Nazi nobodies we punch? Does our high court reside in social media, where our enlightened officers hunt down microgressions wherever they might be found? Is our sense of what is right so frivolous, selfserving, and impulsive, or is it aimed long, slow, and true at stopping the motherfuckers who are destroying this world?

Will we express ourselves on the internet or with the natural world? Will we manifest our flaming desire by holding an art event to support a faraway cause, or will we do so with our own blood, sweat, and tears? Do we want to fulfill ourselves by dressing and looking however we want, fucking whomever and however we want, or can we be fulfilled by mastering skills that will actually help our tribe stand up straight?

Do we want to use our brain power to hold opinions about current political travesties, to scrutinize the age through the lens of Hegel, to memorize the pronoun preferences of a room full of activists, or do we want to actually begin the mentally and physically arduous, self-sacrificing, and likely multigenerational project of revolution because none of that shit has anything to do with what needs to be done?

Is this culture, this life, really what we want? A tyrannical and destructive social arrangement but with universal health care, legalized marijuana, and proper drug rehabilitation? This society but with alternative energy? This civilization but with fair wages for all? This agony but with a well-educated populace? This torment but with freedom to have an abortion? This excruciation but the 99% instead of the 1%?

What do we want? More women and minorities represented in government so they can do the same shit their apparatchik predecessors have been doing to us all along, but now with Diversity®? What do we want? Streaming shows exploring the progressive and self-lauding sexual and racial landscapes?

What have we become that these are even questions that must be asked?

Conditions have deteriorated to crumbs when one pines for the situation in which the American Indians found themselves between the 16th and 19th centuries. They were a part of the land and had developed mythologies to live sustainably with it for thousands of years. By and large they did not take more than was needed. When they had to take something, they respected what was taken.[2] To live in a biodiverse place for over 12,000 years, it could be no other way.[3] An anal-

[2] This was generally the case, but there were possible exceptions: tribes like the Fox of the Great Lakes, who were said to kill every animal in sight during a hunt because they believed that if left alive they would tell others to stay away from humans at all costs and so threaten the tribe's livelihood. Some of the Polynesians ravaged their landbase in the name of trade. Being indigenous does not render one beyond critique. Nevertheless, if we know archaeologically that a tribe lived in a place for thousands of years and that the landbase was intact upon imperial contact, then we can deduce that they lived well enough.

But what to make of this alleged practice of the Fox?

Maybe it is simply not true. Maybe their numbers were so small that it did not lead to drawdown in an area. Maybe this was a practice taught by European trappers that the tribe internalized. Maybe it was a practice of overtaking that crops up in any human organization that cements in some and not others. As mentioned, in a human-scaled society, rituals of violation can be fought against by a few. In our Hydra-directed society, turning the ship is hopeless.

[3] And in five hundred years we have laid waste to nearly all that was right and beautiful, leaving a National Park here, a copse of trees there, a pond farther afield where the rich can lodge.

ysis of their destruction at the hands of empire reveals that there was no hope for a successful resistance against the Hydra. Militarily, it was impossible: the glorious rout of the seventh cavalry in the battle of the Greasy Grass in 1876—arguably the greatest victory against Americans or Europeans by indigenous forces—only led to a swifter annihilation of the Sioux and others. Diplomatically, it was, again and again, decade after decade, the same result, except with this method, the Indians could not claim to have killed a few whites in the process of their own ruination.

This bears repeating.

Even though resistance for the free American Indians had a near-zero chance of success, the stakes now are so abysmal that to be in a situation where there are even odds to consider would be an improvement. Our home is reeling, only a dwindling few people (mostly indigenous) across the world still know how to live with the land—and in America that number is only slightly better than nil—and the ones who should be doing something about it are using their time to promote gradualism through the ballot box and the plucky idea that gender is fluid.

The only advantage we hold that the Indians did not is the massive readjustment of our world system that will occur in the near future.[4] It is with this advantage—that the rapacious activities of the Hydra will lead to at least a temporary dead-end for civilization— and with this advantage alone that we can still tend to hope's meager flame.

The likelihood of capitalism falling, of our culture collapsing—after the readjustment that is undoubtedly approaching—is minimal. When fossil fuels become scarce, the Hydra will be severely weakened but will work tirelessly to find a way to use, for example, phytoplankton, to keep the machines running. It will employ a thousand new technologies to keep us enslaved, preferably like happy infants. Perhaps it will be worse than now and the next phase will not only strip our abilities to manage ourselves more than they already have been, but will empty the very thoughts that maintain the possibility of revolutionary self-sufficiency will be emptied as well. Pondering the overwhelming likelihood of our deeper future oppression is heart-rending.

What, then, is to be done?

If we believe in the necessity of a revolution that will not reproduce the Hydra, then the starting point must be the creation of communities who know how to take care of themselves practically, emotionally, and spiritually.[5] We must become native again. This is the sine qua non of a successful revolt. Only then would it make sense to fight the powers that today keep us alive like comatose patients on life support. The only good thing about the Hydra's persistence is that we have time—though how much is unclear—to begin this process.

Open attacks against industrial infrastructure should not be discouraged, but until the resources run dry, these are suicide moves. If some simply cannot tolerate the state of things, or if they are on their last legs and this is their only recourse, then by all means they should carry out attacks against industrial infrastructure or its figureheads. Perhaps bold assaults would be good advertising for the cause since courageous actions have the capacity to inspire, but we could hope for nothing more at this time. The only thing that will derail the train of our culture is the depletion, or the imminent depletion, of its fuel, a resource too precious to the Hydra for us to assail it safely or effectively. Once the train is derailed, we need to be strong enough to pounce

[4] Near-ish? There is no consensus on peak oil that is publicly available as of this writing, due to new technologies that are able to extract oil where corporations previously could not.

[5] Or allying with indigenous peoples who truly do know how to do this.

on the survivors of the wreck, celebrating all who join us, mercilessly slaying[6] those who dare oppose, and leaving to die any fence sitters.

Do not confuse the notion that it is mostly unwise to attack now with an advocacy of pacifistic resistance. When it comes to the struggle against the Hydra, there is no morality to which we should cling. If it were as simple as decapitating the Hydra, of course this is the first action any of us should take. And violently, swiftly, with no quarter given. There may come a time to do this, and we can only hope it arrives sooner than later.

Any murder, deceit, subterfuge, sabotage, or devious act may be necessary in the fight to slay the serpent, though these practices we should not tolerate in our own tribes— in how we treat one another. At stake is the destiny of Earth; tribes have practiced this within-without moral dichotomy for millennia.[7]

Anyone who advocates for morality from inside this culture is a hypocrite or a fool. This, the culture that has murdered forests wherever they stand. This, the culture that has poisoned every body of water on this planet. This, the culture that destroys indigenous peoples and triumphantly celebrates itself at every turn?

How can we keep from laughing when we one asks us to hold a moral compass in this neck-deep bog? How does one summon the audacity to frown on our fellow people who commit petty offenses—like embezzlement or not returning shopping carts in the Meijer parking lot—or, worse, who crusade for the downfall of this culture using any means necessary?

The only morality we should cling to, beyond our oath of mutual aid to our brothers and sisters, should be in response to the question, "Does this action, this behavior, this ritual, this strategy, help us in the long-term fight against the Hydra and towards self-sufficiency?"

If we believe that we convey an important seed into the future, then we should be unafraid to project ourselves. The seed we carry is the eternal fight against the Hydra and its reconstitution in any form, because once defeated, the many-headed serpent does not die, but instead it hibernates until the next opportunity to metamorphose.

[6] Eating? Sure!

[7] For example, being ruthless and stingy traders with fur trappers, or brutal with one's enemies, while living in communal harmony with one's own.

The New Social Contract

> *The nature of the true revolutionary excludes all sentimentality, romanticism, infatuation, and exaltation. All private hatred and revenge must also be excluded. Revolutionary passion, practiced at every moment of the day until it becomes a habit, is to be employed with cold calculation. At all times, and in all places, the revolutionary must obey not his personal impulses, but only those which serve the cause of the revolution.*
>
> –Sergey Nechayev

If you accept two of the premises of this piece, first, that freedom without self-sufficiency is slavery, and second, that using direct action at this point to attack the Hydra is like a pawn squaring off against a queen, then what is to be done? As stated above, it is not unreasonable to recommend bombing police stations, dismantling industrial infrastructure, and assassinating economic and political leaders in order to inspire others. Revolutions throughout history have used these tactics successfully. But while these moves should not be dismissed—and certainly will need to be used at some point—there are so few of us that to waste precious revolutionary lives now would be ill advised. The gamble that suicidal acts would reproduce ourselves through inspiration is too risky. Ted Kaczynski rots away in a cell with hardly a comrade to name.

If we aim to kill the Hydra, the smartest stroke is not always with a sword. When that time comes, we will know, but, despite the fragility of the monster, it is much too strong for this now. Those lives would be forfeit.

Do we not remember the ten years Jeffrey Luers served when he committed minor arson in 2001? Or the dramatic military response involving a fleet of attack helicopters at Standing Rock? There is no greater enemy to the Hydra than those who directly oppose it. Communists, Socialists, Democrats: all these recuperators may be enemies of one faction or another, but all they want is to control the machines. Those who wish to abolish them are the only specter that haunts the Hydra's nightmares. When and only when we are strong and independent should we consider attacking a weak spot.

We cannot pretend that this moment is like when the Nez Perce decided to fight against the white man, or when the CNT/FAI took up arms against Franco, or when the EZLN made their stand on New Year's Day. Most moments on the secular timeline of history are not so dashing. This does not mean the moment is any less urgent, it just requires different movements. The level of commitment required will still be total; our fervor must only be rivaled by groups like the Taliban, who give the entirety of their beings to their cause, wretched as it may be. Unexciting, our moment calls for calculated preparation and planning.

Linking up and then becoming intertwined with others is the first step. There are many who are linked already in activist groups, on the internet, on the streets, in squats, and in workplaces. Alternative communities exist already, and if you are not a part of one, they are not hard to join or to start your own. Especially if you are in a city, a few hours of work a week is more than enough to start a healthy discussion group or club.

How we leverage these connections will be the mark of this movement. We need to create working models of communal living that will become our home front—what we are fighting for—as well as examples for comrades elsewhere to follow. With equanimity, this can be done legally and without interference from the police.

Embark on a once-in-a-lifetime adventure, a leap of faith, with your lover, your family, your group of friends or by yourself, just to start. People you trust and who share the belief in the revolutionary kernel.

Save up and leave the city, where *by design* it is immensely more difficult to be selfreliant. Whether it is the difficulty of access to free, clean water, the dearth of space to grow and raise your own calories, the police presence and surveillance, the crush of complaint-prone neighbors, the high price of rent, the illegality of hunting or providing your own heat, or the complete absence of the natural world, the metropolis offers nothing that a revolutionary community now needs. What will be missed: the carefree conveniences, the restaurant and bar options, the ease of expendable acquaintances who are as much enemies as friends,[1] the haute couture,[2] the kinds of jobs that require only a pulse. That is to say, things that don't matter.

On a personal level, you will likely find life outside the city more fulfilling than the cockroach life of urban eking. It is conceivable that one could be self-sufficient inside of a city, but given all the above-listed disadvantages, why choose that option? Look at the cost-space differential. The median price for a 1,000 square foot apartment in Chicago is well over 200,000 dollars. One thousand square feet total—no yard. Two- and-a-half hours by car out of the city, in Stockton, you can buy ten acres with a house for 57,000 dollars. It is probably not a good house, but it would keep you dry and warm with a woodstove. And Chicago is one of the more affordable large cities in the country.

How much money do you have saved now? Are there only two hundred dollars in your checking account? How about you and four other comrades? A thousand dollars? What if you and your friends decided two years in advance that you would stop going to concerts, drinking, buying clothes, taking vacations, smoking weed, watching movies, renting internet, using the air conditioner, and driving or taking public transit? What if you downgraded your apartment? What if you declared bankruptcy on your debt? What if you spent your free time working another job? Could five resolved people not save up 60 thousand dollars in two years? What is the level of desire? What is the level of commitment? What better way to test the mettle of your camaraderie?

Since this is to be a long-term project, settling in below sea level, on an ocean coastline, in a drought-prone area, or in a highfrequency disaster zone is inadvisable.

Before the move, make forays in all directions at least twenty-five miles from the nearest WalMart,[3] where there is wildlife and fresh water. Choose a place that is beautiful and inexpensive, where there are still farmers. Go to the bar[4] and drink with the locals, seek information, ask questions about the place's history and future, where jobs might be found, where good land may be for sale or rent or used for free, and by god do not talk about revolution or why you do not believe that Jesus Christ is Our Lord and Savior, no matter the gentle tug from the second drink

[1] This is a paraphrase of a savage and subtle takedown that Rachel Carson makes in *Silent Spring*.

[2] Art of this culture only displays the frivolity and despair of life in the Hydra.

[3] This is a good rule of thumb in America, borrowed though modified from a pair of Vermont homesteaders. Most settled places that far from a WalMart are cheap and historically agricultural.

[4] Hopefully it has a great name, like *The Back 40*.

or the wrenching pull from the fourth. In terms of what needs to be done, these are masturbatory philosophical burps.

Once you find a suitable location, if you have money, rent an apartment or a farmer's trailer for a season or two while you search for a more permanent location. If you do not, keep your eyes on Craigslist, knock on doors, keep going to this area every time you have off from your city job and talk to farmers, telling them you are willing to work and are excited to live in this great place.

Find an income stream to get you started—preferably one that is off the books and where you are able to learn farming or building skills—and, after dedicated research, purchase a plot or get a land contract on one. If you are respectful, an aging farmer will let you use fallow land at no cost at all. His heirs are in the city somewhere eating artisanal sandwiches. They don't give a shit about farming. He will probably give you his farm when it comes down to it; better that than to his own errant flock or a soft-palmed subdivision developer.

In your property search, the goal is to check off as many of these as possible: fresh water, hardwoods, open pasture, lots of acreage, privacy, zoned un-restrictively, farmer neighbors, low cost per acre, far from encroaching development. One or several of these may need to be sacrificed for cost. If you are considering an eighty-acre plot with a creek at the end of a dead-end, that may check most of the boxes, but what are the annual taxes? Will you have to work a job for so many hours that you will be off the property for most of your time? If purchasing ten acres off a highway means that you would have to work off-property comparatively little, go for the latter option. Down the road, as you make more connections, more property opportunities will arise.

Once settled, it will be time to begin the task of building what the revolution will fight, stand, live, and die for, in the vein of the diggers in England, the sherry producers of Andalusia, and the Zapatistas of Chiapas, but fit to our age and circumstances.

Unlike the erstwhile American natives, this example will require the creation of an autonomous zone as opposed to a defense of one that persists. Let the indigenous peoples of the world continue their fight with their advantage.[5] Our independence has been dismembered and must be recovered using all available resources, for if a nexus of self-sustaining communities is going to be the foundation of a future attack against the Hydra, there needs to be many more than the somehow-still-remaining self-sufficient indigenous tribes. With the acquisition of land, we will be able to do this with legal cushion. The task will be hard enough without the state bearing down and conducting dawn raids on our compound, making Branch Davidians of us all while we are still trying to figure out how to heat with wood.

What our communities look like will depend on where they are geographically and climatically, and what personalities are involved. Find your place and get dirty. There are hundreds of great books on homesteading, permaculture, farming, hunting, trapping, and old indigenous practices that are an internet search or library visit away.

What should our practices be? How should we live? Place and personality-related differences excluded, there are community goals towards which we should collectively aspire if these com-

[5] Lest the struggles of still-autonomous indigenous peoples seem unimportant to this essay, it must be said with great emphasis that these struggles, though marginal, are real, of consequence, and should be supported. The best way to support indigenous groups is not by donating money or being captivated on an adventure-tourism expedition to their home, but by taking their example and bringing their struggle to your life, in your place, in your way. Which is what is advocated for here.

munes are to be bulwarks against the Hydra. While they will be listed and explained discretely, they are deeply inter-connected.

Start Healthy, Stay Healthy

Start this project with people who are strong and healthy and do not have so much baggage or emotional fragility that they will be liabilities in the days, months, and years ahead. Beware of perennial victims, those who are unreliable, and those who do not listen. If someone does not have their shit together now, how can they be expected to be up to the task in more difficult situations?

We need not be programmatic about this, but this task is going to give a new meaning to Herculean. Stay connected with comrades of all stripes, but go into this intimate mission with those who are tough, keen, self-critical, hard-working, and loyal. When NASA sends astronauts beyond the stratosphere, there is a reason why they only select those who are mentally and physically outstanding. Consider the value of a hip, photogenic comrade who says all the right things but is nowhere to be found when it is time to work. One thousand of this kind are not worth one quiet, devoted, worker bee.

There may be notable exceptions that fly in the face of this coarse filter, like the former back-to-the-lander who has vast knowledge but who is elderly, the paralyzed comrade who is like an encyclopedia of anarchist history, the autistic friend who puts in onehundred-hour weeks without a whisper of complaint. Frailty or incompetence are not necessarily permanent conditions, but they are debilitating pathologies of this culture; they are how the Hydra prefers us.

Staying healthy is equally important. Do away with bad food, avoid routine drinking and smoking, keep fit, respect your body, and the bodies of your comrades like you respect the land and the communities who live there. You will find that along with the physical benefits of living healthy, there are emotional and social ones too. People will fight less and get along better because they will be of sound mind. No more four am squabbles about who made out with whom at the bar.

Blend In

Especially at first. Remember, the people around you are your resources, too. Among rural people, there is a treasure trove of information about the weather, the history, the native flora and fauna, how to use tools, who may be of best help, where to hunt and fish, how to field dress a deer, how to repair a tractor, how to handle a rifle, who may let you borrow machinery. These relationships need to be leveraged as much as possible for as long as possible. People in the country, whether they voted blue or red, are socially conservative. They don't care about the city; they dislike the attitudes that come with it and respect hard, physical work. Any real efforts you make will come back: outside cities, some of the old ways remain.

As everywhere, if you look, talk, and walk like their tribe, folk will be more inclined to see you as a friend and help you, no matter your race or sex.[6] They prefer certain attitudes, values, and

[6] A white farmer in the Midwest might find it unusual if, for instance, a gay black woman came out to the country to farm there, but it is difficult to believe that that woman would be rejected by the community if she arrived with determination and grit. We can make assumptions and write legitimate critical pieces about the -isms that plague this

behaviors. Out here, take your city fashions and burn them. Wear cheap and look conservative. Cut your hair, cover your tattoos, take out the bone in your nose, and forget that you are an artist and selectarian in matters of taste. Play your traditional gender role, eat meat, drink Bud Light, pretend like the chorus of that Kenny Chesney song about your tractor being sexy really hits home. Take a shower so you don't smell like the revolution. Practice not saying the words "patriarchy" or "white" for a day. Step outside of the "you" you have cultivated, or rather *the "you" that has been cultivated for you*, and you will find that little has been lost.

These are trivial considerations since these fashions, these identities, are commodities we have unfortunately internalized as personal virtues. We are always wearing costumes; they may as well have purpose. Is the goal to look cute or to build a commune using every available resource? Is the aim to murder-by-words a climate change-denier's argument, or to mine that woman for every bit of useful information she has? Blend in when it comes to issues that do not matter, and you will have a leg up. When you walk away from a neighbor you just lambasted for wanting a wall on the southern border with Mexico, you leave with nothing but their long-term resentment. If you let that nonsense go unchecked and change the subject to splitting wood, you may leave with a hydraulic wood splitter he will let you borrow for the season.

Perhaps it is important for you not to think of all this as just cold calculation. Think about your friends or family right now. Are you politically aligned with them? How do you get along, then? By being kind and reciprocating their kindnesses, focusing on what you have in common, and not over-discussing your differences. Why can this not apply to country folk? Do you not have a friend who feels that the election of Barack Obama was a signpost on our good path? Do you not have an acquaintance who only thinks about new music and nothing remotely political? Do you not have a confidante who has an idée fixe about one mundane issue or another, like veganism or carbon sequestration? Are you one of the left's anomalies and have a conservative friend or two? How do you manage to remain connected with any of these people while not sharing all their idiosyncrasies? Are we so pure of heart that we cannot imagine cavorting with those who don't adhere to the laws of our sect? (Really, who is "our sect?")

Just like with your unaligned friends, you will find plenty in common with your rural neighbors. Meet Ms. Anna. She is wearing a MAGA hat every time you see her. With her husband she manages a twenty-seven-acre apple orchard that they drench in pesticides. She has a racy sense of humor and is an excellent storyteller. She knew you were down and out when you first moved here so she offered you under-the-table work cleaning her barn for twenty dollars an hour. Her shoulders emanate strength.

Meet Tom Danzen, whom you nearly call Ted Danson whenever you run into him at the hardware store where he works. He is a card-carrying member of the NRA, thinks abortion is murder, and showed you how to repair a chainsaw over beers on a couple Saturday evenings. You both like Peter Tosh and once danced to Ketchy Shuby.

Here is Susan, Mrs. Ted Danson. Her overriding quality is the desire to feed everyone around her. From the moment you met her she has plied you with cupcakes, blueberry pie, finger sandwiches, maple sugar, and an assortment of other treats. Her cheeks flush to a subtle pink when

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country, but in America in 2020 if you look a farmer in the eye, are kind, and show humility and respect, you could be a green creature from Neptune and they would welcome you with open arms. Small farmers are a dying breed. They have been denied the opportunity by Big Ag to reproduce their trade, so the sight of new blood is a welcome one. There are many black, Latinx, and female farmers in the countryside, too, if you would prefer, but they have far more in common with white farmers than they do their city counterparts.

she sees you savor the first bite of the culinary gift of that day. Most of the men in her family are war veterans; she takes the fourth of July seriously, and is flabbergasted by anyone who opposes the fine foreign work of our soldiers abroad.

In your heart, your private moments, in the community you build, you will show your brilliant hues. It goes without saying that if the civil war of our nightmarish fantasies breaks out and some of these folks join the fascists that we will endeavor to, say, slit their throats while they sleep—probably using skills we learned from them while hunting. Until then, as a revolutionary, you must be tactical and hold the goal before your personal preferences. So much the better if you can enjoy yourself and those around you along the way, despite their peccadilloes. You have some that they have to overcome, too.

There may be other, alternative neighbors in the area besides white-bred conventional farmers, like Indians or Amish (or their luddite brethren). Among these groups there will also be a repository of valuable information, with limitations. In native groups there will still be individuals practicing the old ways of food harvesting, home-building, and weaving, but romance and well-wishes aside, they are few and far between. Seek them out as you would any rural neighbor with helpful information. You will be able to speak more freely with them, though, and perhaps this will be the basis for a true, deep alliance, since the only reason why there are so few of them practicing the old traditions is because our culture destroyed them, and relatively recently. There is the possibility of communing with those rare native communities who do have intact elements of self-subsistence, but they may not want help at all—they certainly owe you nothing. Their sincere respect might only be earned when your project is worth its weight.

The Amish or Mennonites will likely be less inclined to help you than any other group since their communities are insular, but if you can find an inroad, there will be a cornucopia of pre-fossil-fuel building and farming techniques to learn. While their Christian traditions are patriarchal—and many of their rituals abhorrent—this far into the 21st century they manage a healthy balance with the lands they tend. They are not ravaged by addiction. Their families and communities are healthy. This is a magnificent cultural feat, and they should not be dismissed for infractions against the Church of the Left. If civilization were to collapse, many Amish would be even stronger than now. That is not to be scoffed at. They are a settler culture, so an alliance might be dubious, but for their wealth of knowledge alone they should be sought out.

Get elected to the city council, have a cup of coffee every morning in town, throw annual bonfires where the women smear menstrual blood on the men's faces as a sitar quartet plays David Bowie (checking in to see if you are still paying attention), babysit, coach the little league team. And put a smile on that face!

Self-sufficiency

The set of skills to survive and thrive on your own are multitudinous; if we imagine an entire community, they must be spread out among the members. They include but are not limited to midwifery, trapping, fishing, hunting, healing, spinning, butchery, firebuilding, home-heating, construction, knitting and weaving, forestry, permaculture, cooking, mechanical repair. Acquiring these skills takes time and discipline; you must persist through repeated failure.

It will be next to impossible for the first few years to exist without fossil fuels, if that is even desirable in that time. Having the tools, the building skills, and the resources and materials to

live without oil is what is important. Use the chainsaw to fell on a daily basis, but have a crosscut saw with a manual tooth file in the barn, and use that occasionally. There is no use in being atavistic for the sake of it—we should use the resources available to us while they are still here.[7] This could be an essay unto itself, but let the subject rest with this for now: if you have the land, the resources, the preparation, and the know-how to survive well and for a long time without the Hydra's input, then taking daily shortcuts to accomplish tasks—whether it is driving a beat-up pick up truck to work or using an excavator to put in a concrete root cellar—should not be intellectually burdensome. Let us not be ideologues. If we have a head start, in preparation and skill, then in whatever collapse may come, our creativity will thrive; we will be light-years ahead of most others.

Fellowship

Learning how to get along as family might be the most difficult goal. This is a skill-set that has been largely lost—this is also by design; the Hydra empowers, idolizes, and fetishizes us as individuals instead of as collectives. When it comes to long-term relationships, how do we learn when it is best not to make a stand, but to understand? How do we respect ourselves and others in a way that creates strength in us and between us? How do we control our tempers and temper our judgments? How do we heal each other emotionally, sexually, socially, psychologically, and spiritually? How do we firmly communicate that lashing out, projecting, manically flailing, or becoming apoplectic over minor infractions are signs of weakness?

Major crimes like rape and murder should result in exile at this stage and, when we actually have autonomy, perhaps castration and death,[8] respectively, but despite what we see on the news, these violations will be exceedingly rare if we live well. But how will we deal with misdemeanors and small violations that happen with some frequency? A drunken comrade punches another? A spurned lover steals from his rival? A simmering tit-for-tat conflict carries on endlessly? How do we set boundaries with an overambitious man while also letting him know he is loved? How do we encourage a timid, insecure comrade without inflating him with lies? How do we toughen a weakling while also cheerleading?

Kindness needs to be our watchword, and giving our most valued currency. When a boundary is overstepped, we need to respond firmly, but lovingly.

It is not sexy or thrilling, but the building of long-term relationships will be as difficult as anything we do and will require even more fortitude than, say, slaughtering a lamb you raised.

The new social contract needs to be built from the ground up, and by consensus. Laws need to be made not on paper, but in our hearts—internalized and immutable, like a devout faith.

Reproduction

Literally and culturally we need to reproduce ourselves.

[7] This may also be a practical matter too. To pay taxes and insurance on the land, and to buy goods when you need them, you will need to make money. Selling firewood that you cut with a crosscut saw would be a monumental waste of time. Same with using hand tools to build your home when you have to go to work every day.

[8] Cold-blooded murder. But what about a murder of passion committed by an individual who does not have a violent history—her husband has sex with another, and she kills that person? These are difficult problems that autonomous communities must deal with. Presently the state handles them for us.

If a child of this culture's time is spent with more or less stable parents, with more or less stable employment, at a more or less stable school, then as a properly massaged and packaged product of our nightmare he will emerge from the cocoon of childhood looking as you would expect him to: narrow, uncreative, and excited about purchasing things in exchange for his stolen time.

The most powerful way to reproduce an idea is to raise a child with it.

The notion that we should not have kids because humans have overshot their carrying capacity, or because it would increase one's carbon footprint, is a mechanical way of thinking. It is literally suicidal. Plumbers, writers, politicians, bankers, farmers, factory workers, the unemployed, and addicted, all the people you see on the street who might as well be on the back of a milk carton they are so lost, are all having children. They are being fruitful and multiplying. Let us look at them and shake our heads judging, since the world does not need more people, in general. What the world does need, though, far more than shorter showers and fewer automobiles, are revolutionaries who were raised to end this culture. No, who were raised to found a new one. There cannot be enough of us, in fact. Adopt children, bear children, help raise others' children, whatever. Probably best not to abduct.

Knowing that our greatest power is in the next generation, we should be intentional and disciplined in how we raise our kids. This was a cardinal tactic of the Catholic Church, one of the most powerful institutions in human history. An ideology is much more embedded in a person when he is raised with it rather than if he converts to it later in life. Late at night, when no one is around, how many Catholics-turned-Atheists fend off moments of fear of the inferno? "Give us your children, and we will give you adults who are terrified of hell and will seek heaven." Why would we not raise our kids similarly, but with our values instead of their decrepit ones?

We should raise our kids to perpetuate our communities, to hate this culture, to love the wild, to reject masters, to be unquenchable in their curiosity, to stand up for themselves and their loved ones.

At all costs, we should keep them away from schools, the child factories, where they learn the bigotry of low expectations, the internalized oppression of their moronic teachers, the commodity-driven peer pressure of zombie kids, and mass-produced critical analysis. The total immersion of the school day damages their personalities as it did so many of ours. School is one of the institutions of the Inculcation Head, and we should not forget it. School is where children learn to love the Hydra.

Their time should be spent with us instead.

Instead of sitting at a desk learning how to be bored—or, in a more progressive school, in a circle on a lawn learning how to be bored—our children should walk beside us in our daily lives. When we are in the field tending to the garden or herding sheep, they should be right there. When we write essays and read books, let them sit with us and learn to weigh in intelligently. When we calculate finances or use the Pythagorean theorem to make a straight garden plot, let them hold the pencil. When we spin wool, sew clothes, hunt deer, build a shelter, make soup, watch the weather, pick bugs off of grapes, harvest maple sap, and collect kindling, they should be there, witnessing and participating in all the wild and earthly magic.

Instead of parroting the latest song about the joys of sex with a stranger, our kids should sing of the frogs and the rain, July wildflowers, the melodious howling of coyotes. They should sing about the powers of friendship and loyalty. They should sing as one about the need to protect the land, the water, the sky, who are just us in another phase. They should sing about the victims of our enemy and our burning desire to destroy its pith.

Rather than reading presidential minibiographies or anecdotes extolling the greatness of this legal battle or that one, they should be versed in the tales of native peoples, of anarchists and communists, of the animals and plants around them and elsewhere.[9] Instead of knowing the dates of Brown v. Board of Education and when the army of Northern Virginia surrendered at Appomattox, they should know March 18th, 1871, November 7th, 1917, May 2nd, 1968, January 1st, 1994.

Instead of going to the Holocaust museum where kids take notes on the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis, or the AV room where they will be tested on a documentary about the civil rights struggle in the south, let us go to a factory and watch the workers behave like machines; let us go to the worst street in the city and meet the addicted and insane. Let us take our kids to the closest subdivision or clear cut where there used to be woods, to the Home Depot where not so long ago there were pastured cattle, to the wretchedness of a confined animal feeding operation; let us go to a corn field where there used to be habitat, to the coast where oil patties still lap up on shore from the last spill. Let us teach them who is responsible, and why. Let us sit on the beach and hold hands, contemplating the madness with them. Let us weep over the loss. Let us speak of redemption.

Instead of going to the movies or watching sports on television for entertainment, instead of packing up the car to go to a glum bowling alley, instead of going shopping at the mall, let us stay home and build tree houses, dance like butterflies, put on a play, make clover necklaces and crowns, nap in a puppy pile by the creek.

Instead of spending their precious free time playing videogames or saying horrible things to each other on the internet, our children should play freely in the woods and fields, at the lake, or on the pond. They should be tuned in to themselves and to each other, not in to the internet. They should learn to fight face-to-face, and to resolve disputes in the same way.

Instead of praying to the irrelevant god of a nomadic tribe from the Levant, we should bow our heads with our children and give thanks to all the hands who prepared the meal, and to all who gave their lives for it. We should pray to the land to whom we belong completely. We should pray for the end of this culture.

It is true that families who pray together stay together, for it is a display of a deep ideological unity that even this world has difficulty shattering. We should not despise prayer because it reminds us of the zombies' religion. We should embrace it to give respect to whom and what are owed respect, and to remind us with regularity the profound loftiness of our ideas and goals.

Money

The Back to the Land movement that began in the 1960s took the necessity of income and financial planning perfunctorily, which prematurely ended many communities who otherwise might have stood the test of time. Too much time was spent quixotically celebrating the minor freedom to which they had absconded rather than creating a feasible long-term model. While we need to enjoy the freedom our land provides, and to take time to enjoy each other, it must be clear that economic survival is a top priority. Refusing this job or that one because it is redolent of capitalism is childish. The revolution, whatever that means, has not yet come; pretending that it has misses the point. There is no getting around it: we will need money. Money to pay taxes,

[9] We should not exclude knowledge, of course, but learning always has a bias, acknowledged or not.

money to buy tools and materials, money to buy a car, money to buy clothing, money to buy food—especially at first— money to buy guns and bullets, money to buy gasoline, money to pay the electric bill. When you eat all your meals in and harvest most of the calories from your own property, you do not need much money, but you still need enough to function to keep the sheriff away. Of course we are ultimately against any monied system, but we need to be goal-oriented and sharp. It does not sully our pure hands to earn money.

The new farming movement, led by "high priest of the pasture" Joel Salatin, promotes ways to farm sustainably that also can make money. Salatin is no revolutionary, but there is much to learn from his life's work. Earning cash by selling good meat and vegetables would be a great way to capitalize on what we will be doing anyway, and to reduce the necessity of daily driving and servitude to a bullshit job with a bullshit boss, like our dear old friend, the movie theater manager.[10]

Minimizing the life-hours we spend having to make money requires organization, ingenuity, and disciplined budgeting. Collectives can have regular streamlined meetings about what is needed on the farm, and also what would be nice to have if the money is there in the future. Who is the best at number crunching in your collective? Let that person be the boss and expert in this field, and she will do the grunt work of figuring out how much needs to come in (with significant cushion—always have margin), based on the by-consensus financial meeting.[11] It might be possible that only one person needs to go in to town to work as a cashier at the grocery store while the others labor on the property. It is a matter of what needs to be done. Earning money in capitalism is repulsive, but we need to overcome our "private hatred and revenge," our "sentimentality," in the name of the greater cause. Breadwinning should be done legally, and what is Caesar's should be rendered unto him for now. Staying above-water in matters such as these ensures we do not garner unwanted attention from the police or the state.

We do not need to waste money at the movies, at restaurants, on fancy clothes, on fitness centers, on charities, on bars, on events, on brand new cars, gadgets, or anything of that sort. Even when you consider all the things we will need money for, in the current economy it is usually feasible to make your way and even save if you do not spend your money on treats and trinkets.

Interconnectedness

While most of our life in the country will be spent with each other and our local community, it will be important to stay up to date and in touch with other collectives who are doing the same thing, or indigenous groups who have been doing this for thousands of years, especially groups who are close by. While not the most important task of our community, and certainly the one of these we will use the least, maintaining contact with comrades to share best practices and keep our ear to the ground for world events should be something we do on a semi-regular basis.

Having *New York Times* updates ringing into the phone or scrolling daily through subreddits is unnecessary. We don't need to text each other every time an Athenian anarchist blows up an ATM. Avoiding these technology time sucks, these addictions, is going to be a recurring topic

[10] Let's call him Klarv.

[11] Make anarchy work in the real world: employ consensus-based decision-making when feasible, but also allow individuals to take responsibility for specialized tasks when consensus becomes cumbersome, as it is wont to do.

in the community. If a choice must be made between being totally unconnected and connected, the former is better, though moderation should be possible for most people. Time is much better spent in the garden, in the barn, reading a book on homeschooling, etc.

Self-defense

Self-defense is a cornerstone of sovereignty. There is no sovereignty without food sovereignty, but there is also no independence without the ability to defend oneself. Even if you can sustain yourself with calories from your own hand, what is to prevent another from taking what you have? What is to prevent the government from doing so? Are we to learn how to farm and hunt in order to cut ourselves from the state's umbilical just to call the cops when we feel threatened? Psychologically, self-defense is also about taking power back that has been taken from us. Through different means we have allowed the state to monopolize the use of violence. We must empower ourselves not just through the preservation of our land and the health of our community, but with knowledge sets of personal defense as well as of war.

Women, men, and children (when they are old enough) should learn martial arts, gun safety (and gun maintenance, repair, and use), and other disciplines that suit their fancy. Everyone in the community should have a foundational knowledge of self-protection so that every link in the chain has a base strength, in the same way that each link should have at least a rudimentary knowledge of gardening, hunting, building, gathering, and healing.

On an individual level, a person who is strong and knows how to defend herself will not so easily be trampled by others, and will be more likely to be respected in other areas of life as well. Someone with a calm, confident strength about them is indeed someone to whom others will listen.

At one point or another the fight against the Hydra will necessarily require force. The simultaneous destruction of its monopoly of force and the rise of a counterpoising force or set of forces will be the order of the day. Once the other heads have failed, no holds will be barred as the head of Brute Force ascends again to primacy; let us not cripple ourselves with a pacifistic ideology that the Hydra will undoubtedly not employ. Committing acts of violence or sabotage when the time is right will not spoil or taint us; this notion only gives ground to our enemy.

Love is not enough.

Non-violence as an ethos demands a convenient distortion of history. Were the Jews who fought back in the Warsaw ghetto compromised by their tactics? Were the Vietcong ideologically sullied by their resistance against American forces? Were the South African freedom fighters successful despite their use of force? Were the millions of women in one situation or another misguided for successfully using force to fend off their rapists?[12]

A caveat: self-defense should be our quietest skill set. Gun-toting rightwing vigilantes often have the full backing of the state, with politicians in government sharing many of their ideals and lifestyles. We do not have this luxury—nor do we desire it. We do not want to give the state a reason to destroy us before we become powerful.

What would it be like to live in a community where each is honestly and truly dedicated to the other? What would it be like to love, but also to demand? To respect but to expect? What

[12] There is too much to say here. Peter Gelderloos in *How Nonviolence Protects the State* and Ward Churchill's *Pacifism as Pathology* are two fabulous works that discuss these points and others at length.

would it be like to have to face each other when there has been a violation, when a wrong has been committed, and to punish, and to forgive? What would it be like to live one for all, and all for one? Put down this essay and pause a moment. Reflectively repeat this: *one for all, all for one*.

These notions, romantic and perhaps even easy to imagine in fiction, become muddled and difficult when considering an actual group living in this way, in this world. For those in the West who were raised after the failure of the Baby Boomers, irony and sarcasm are our generational lodestars. We have been taught that to believe sincerely, to practice dedication and not just flirt with it, is to be a sucker. This may be the stumbling block that trips us when we are looking at far larger barriers. We must know that this inability to believe wholly in something—our reluctance to jump in with two feet, the lead-laden bags of cynicism we tote—was fabricated all along by the very nefarious forces we reject.

Until the Hydra is killed, no one is outside the prison. When the proverbial alien stops by our cell to observe us, let us be like Andy Dufresne in *The Shawshank Redemption*: unassuming, polite, and willing to lend a helping hand. But when the zoo is closed, we should spend the evening hours slowly chiseling a tunnel out of the cell, hiding our efforts once daylight comes again, waiting for the big storm when we will make our move. Through tunnels of shit we will maneuver as thunder rattles the institution to its foundation. The warden's doom will be a fait accompli by our hand as we wriggle out, emerging at the end of the sewage tunnel, feeling the warm rain on our skin.

Multiversal Struggle

If we shed the noxious belief that human beings are in any way superior to other beings— we are not at the apex of the Great Chain of Being or the last word on evolution —then what is our place here? Perhaps the quest for freedom and self-sufficiency is a way to restore a natural order to the cosmos, or at least in our corner of it, where we may resume our slot in the symphony of the firmament among others rather than against them —rather than fighting tooth and nail for our pretentious and preposterous understanding of ourselves.

As humans, as beings, we are just protoplasmic motes composed of increasingly and infinitely smaller motes; conversely, as our bodies gather, we constitute increasingly and infinitely larger ones. We are discrete bodies but knitted inextricably—and interchangeably as we transition from body to body—with the limitless energy stream that binds us all as one. Each body has unique qualities, like a mole rat's aptitude in burrowing, the pancreas' ability to regulate blood and sugar levels, our capacity to fashion tools, the ATP molecule's efficiency in energy transport, or Pluto's reign over the Kuiper belt; each body's traits are the synergistic sum of its smaller motes and, concordantly, part of the greater whole it forms with others. A whirling Godstream of integrating and disintegrating energies. Touch your skin—a smaller mote with its own qualities who also is a part of the larger being that is you. Regard yourself, a human being—your body with its own qualities but also a part of the larger beings of your community and habitat.

This bodily form is a tangible, transitory one channeling the Godstream. As do all the other bodies.

Getting smaller, our human bodies are constituted of tissues, bones, and organs, who are communities of cells, who are communities of organelles like the Golgi apparatus,[1] who are made of molecules, who are clusters of atoms, who are composed of electrons, protons, and neutrons, who are made of quarks,[2] and so on.

Getting larger, as our bodies merge into others, ours are part of communities and habitats, who are part of the land and waters and sky, who make up Earth, who is but one protoplasmic mote of the solar system, who in turn is a single member of a galactic tribe of stars, planets, planetoids, asteroids, and dark matter, all of whom and more are merely one in the vast community of the universe, who is merely a single mote of the multiverse…

One trait that separates our species from others on this planet[3] is our creation of the Hydra, a social institution that treats us like a virus treats a host species. Given that no other species we know of has done something so suicidal, it would not be a reach to suggest that, if anything, we are inferior to other beings, for this reason.

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[1] Just a great name

[2] Which at the moment are the smallest-known bodies, but does anyone believe this will be the final say? Molecules were once considered to be the smallest particles, then we were wrong and it was atoms, until again we were wrong and protons, electrons, and neutrons were the smallest. When will be the new discovery or paradigm shift revealing quarks to be just the next in line?

[3] If we exclude our immediate predecessors, about whom we know too little to be certain.

The origins of the Hydra are murky. Maybe we will never know why civilization came to be, beyond the anthropological facts that may become clearer with time. One may speculate that the agricultural revolution twelve thousand years ago was the institutionalization of trends that naturally come about in human communities, and that the 18th century's industrial revolution was a deeper, thicker, stronger setting of those trends—centralized political and administration structures, hierarchical ideologies, depersonalized systems of knowledge and material distribution, class divides, and property ownership. Those concretized tendencies, which may change shape but retain the same content, are the Hydra in full flesh. It may be that the mythological monster is latent in our DNA, awaiting the right geographical, social, and climatic conditions to thrive.

History tells us that the Hydra is not an anomalous phenomenon but was independently spawned in multiple human cultures from the Fertile Crescent to Central America, slowly coalescing into the multi-faceted, global creature it is today.

Astronomers have recently validated what has been obvious to those unfastened to the idea of human supremacy: Earth is not a special snowflake; it is a life-sustaining planet like a quadrillion, a quintillion, a sextillion, others. Considering the unfathomable size of this universe, we may safely claim that there might be a spectrum of life forms, communities, and biozones that is functionally infinite. When scientists are finding signs of water and seasonal variation of methane levels that potentially point to life on Mars, our next-door neighbor, this point is nigh irrefutable.

Weighing these considerations, and that *h. sapiens* cannot mathematically be a unique species in terms of our intellectual capabilities or otherwise, it is highly probable, bordering on definite, that many other species beyond this planet have created the Hydra or something like it independent of each other— as we have done here—and that that monster, too, ravages them, salts their landbase, and extinguishes every other community who stands in its way. Maybe in only one in a hundred, or one in a thousand (or a million, or a billion) of life-sustaining planets does there arise a species like ours who has the capacity to spawn a socio-cultural entity so deeply antithetical to life. Or maybe on every habitable planet there eventually comes a species like ours with this tendency.

Supernovas, blackholes, meteor showers, geological shifts, planetary orbits, solar systems, and life energies blotting in and out are a few of the natural motions of celestial beings; they are orchestral movements of the body of the multiverse—a rough name here given to the mote-constituted sum of all the universes and dimensions. The Hydra may also be viewed as one of these movements, ever-tied with the life cycle that erupts, flows, ebbs, and goes dormant before erupting again in this dimension, this galaxy, this solar system, or that one, or that other one.

On a metaphysical level, we can look without judgment at the Hydra as it slithers across spacetime, dispassionately understanding that it is a part of it all. Perhaps it is like a dying star or a planet who has run its course—for there to be light, there must be darkness. That the Hydra eradicates biodiversity and depletes planets may be as important as any other karmic motion in the cosmos for reasons we are too limited to comprehend.

But a species, a life form, will struggle for life till its last breath, resisting its doom with all its might. As it drowns, it thrashes and gasps for the next inhale, then the next. It does not have the luxury to observe its termination with Zen-like detachment. To do so in fact would be to hasten its annihilation, which goes against the impetus of life as we observe it, as we know it. To couch it in moral terms, it would be wrong not to struggle as we fight for our last breath.

Perhaps it is true that the Hydra is as natural a force as a supernova, and that it is merely playing out its instinctual role in the way a catfish feeds from the bottom or a goat munches on brush. But for us, for those who embrace our instinctual role and therefore do not personally identify with the Hydra—which has been draining us, killing us, from the start and from within—we must fight for our own lives and for the life of our landbase, which we need in order to live *wholly*, before it is too late, before our slavery becomes more permanent. It is only right.

As revolutionaries, our struggle is about health—for our own bodies and as many up and down the line, smaller and larger, over whom we have any control. The health of our bodies, down through our tissues and organs and internal bacterial communities, is our concern. Up through our family, tribe, society, habitat, and planet, our bodies and all the greater bodies of which they are a part, are also our province.

In our realm of control, or potential control, we must assert ourselves. Eating good food, breathing clean air, and drinking water that nourishes us, while nourishing our relationships with others in our human and natural communities, is our prerogative. The Hydra is a wall between us and ourselves, us and our communities, in this effort. At the bottom of everything, the Hydra prevents us from being well. So began this essay with the initial questions: what do we want and how do we get there? Health and freedom. Kill the Earth Hydra.

This is an intergalactic, multiversal struggle in which we are engaged, and we likely have allies and enemies across the cosmos. Though we do not know them yet, and maybe will never,[4] we can be reasonably sure that across planets and galaxies different Hydras and their lackeys press on, conquering cancerously, and that uncivilized forces oppose them until those rebels are killed or subsumed.

Considering the index of evidence from this planet, it seems likely that when a Hydra fails, reverting back to dormancy, it will be because it collides with an unsurpassable limit of its own making, like the destruction of its home planet or the extinction of its host species, rather than in war, rebellion or in some crisis after which it will quickly reconstitute. It is just too efficient, too deadly, too skilled— the odds are too stacked in its favor—for it to fall in a non-terminal event.

But in a trillion histories of the Hydra, from Earth to those many light years away, is there one in which uncivilized forces destroyed it before their home planet was annihilated, they themselves were killed, or the civilization left its origin planet and expanded? One in a septillion? Perhaps it is more often than this that revolutionaries, natives, whatever the rebels might call themselves, defeat the many-headed serpent and are able to live on without it. This is the example, or the hope of an example, or the imagination of an example, to which we must cling as we devote our lives to our own health, to that of our comrades, and to our landbase—as we give all we have to defeat this monster.

When environmental collapse, nuclear holocaust, or the fall of the fossil fuel economy comes, we must be strong enough to strike while our Hydra is wounded. In the meantime we need to gather strength so we will be able to deal that deathblow, because at the moment we could not even lift the sword—even if we could it might end up being in the name of the Hydra. In our infinitesimal cranny of the multiverse, the stakes could not be higher. Excluding the possibility of a meteor strike or attack from a Hydradirected alien civilization, the basic outcomes here are not numberless. Either Earth's Hydra will rebuild its strength after the impending crisis,

[4] If we ever meet them, it will be a sign of our failure, theirs, both of ours, or, at the least, a new phase of struggle that signals we have backpedaled a long way from where we are now.

reconstituting itself in such a way as to continue to pull us and the planet limping along; it will totally destroy the planet and everyone on it, including itself; or it will destroy the planet but leave with a few of us in ships to conquer other planets—or some variation of those three possibilities. Or we will defeat it and be able to salvage what is left here. And begin to heal.

Admittedly, it is fanciful to believe that even though the Earth Hydra has won again and again—conquering more and more, solidifying its rule, spreading everywhere, being defeated nowhere—now could be the beginning of its end, regardless of how tumultuous the impending environomic collapse will be.

It comes to the ultimate if unasked question of every philosophical treatise written under the heel of civilization: pourquoi ne pas se suicider? It is comforting to imagine suicide when contemplating the weight of it all—the roiling sea of miseries associated with contributing to and living in this culture. When you hold the weight of our fettered past, our denied present, and the likelihood of our perpetual confinement, it is soothing, addictively so, to flesh out the scene: the cold steel in your mouth and metallic tang on your tongue; dark, viscous wine warmly swimming through you as Neil Young's After the Gold Rush swells and fills the room; out the window, white cloud wisps flutter over the oranges and pinks of sunset that are painted over a field of blue; your last thought conquering all is of her smile holding nothing back, her love so impossibly beautiful; the trigger depresses, the hammer drops onto the bullet's primer, the gas expands and propels the bullet through the barrel and then your brain, which explodes with finality in a red blossom on the wall behind you.

But our cause is not about the individual and her personal preferences, desires, and escape-vents. For a revolutionary to take her own rare, precious life would be to subtract from our already paltry number. With a whole heart, with every fiber of her being and regardless of her needs, the revolutionary individual must give herself to her beloved, to her community, to the next generation, to seven generations from now. If it comes to it, how she personally identifies, what pleases her, what she loathes, should be subordinated to the cause in the way a parent should prioritize her child's needs over her own.

The notion that Revolution® must emanate from the individual, or that one should not desire a revolution unless there will be dancing, as the Emma Goldman bromide goes, is a still image of you looking conceitedly into the mirror, imagining the sexier, more charming and charismatic, less inhibited version of yourself—who is looking back at you like a succubus. This is a phantom revolution, a fetishism of the commodified self, a reflection cast by the ever-looming economy. This version of you is like the personas who daily prance in the Neverland of social media—sucking in as they get ready for a night of excess, feverishly documenting the laid-back vacation, posting the perfect moment in which they could never immerse themselves; the better version of ourselves is there for us to behold but ever out of reach, foiled at every turn.

The gorge between yourself and who you would be in a freer society will not be bridged by dancing, wit or your number of followers, but by a tactical, intentional, communal, and multi-generational effort. Dance as you please on the other side, or on this side when you need to refill your cup, but let us not equate personal satisfaction with what must be done.

So put your ear to the ground and listen to the uninterruptable march, steady as ever.

Tick.

Tick.

Do not turn away—though even if you did, nothing about it would change. So listen then. Be gentle, be still.

Tick.

Listen.

What will you do with this body, with this mind, that in this phase of your existence is able to comprehend fully this dire predicament?

Tick.

One miniscule span of time is your only chance in your human form, which is the most capable of fighting the Earth Hydra. When you die, in the next phase you may be a root system, a mycelium, a sycamore, a mouse, an amoeba, a flagellum, a collection of cells comprising a claw or the eye of a salmon—your consciousness doubtless still as important a part of the Godstream as now but expressed as a different specificity, or fractured into a multitude of specificities, with different attributes.

To fight the Hydra, this is your chance, this is our chance—to chip away at the manywalled Horror and not to look away, cower, or be distracted. It nears midnight, but the heart beckons still—fighting fatigue, the weights of routine and history and more immediate needs—ticking with the cicadas and the pines, the shimmering stars, the frenzied chorus of coyotes.

Tick.

The ticking is not only a countdown to your eventual death, it is a call, a song, a summoning, to join your family once again. The ticking, all your living family members intoning the hymn of the Sirens—the metronomic bass of crickets, the obliging breaths of your sleeping companion, the waves dutifully dissolving into the sand, the maple seeds whistling ever-so-softly as they pirouette to the soil, the blue heron alighting on the log with the sun-drying turtles, all our fellow inmates biding time and our unknown-but-assuredly-there comrades across galaxies in the vortex of spacetime. And the dead sing, too, their voices resonating still, harmonizing all they have lost into the background of the unceasing melody—all those murdered by our way of life, from the extirpated flora and fauna in every region to the poisoned fields and seas to friends and loved ones lost in or to their addictions—pleading for us to return to the place where we once again may become native, where we once again may become whole. To the place called home.

My sister, my brother, I am holding your shoulders and I am looking at you straight on with everything in my soul: let us face our enemy without delusion and against stunning, withering odds. If there was ever a chance, or has been, or will be, why not now?

With a deep and abiding love,

Iolaus

Where the denial ends, the wild floods in,
returning us home.

About the Author

The author is a small farmer in Northern Michigan.

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