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Summer 2003

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Between Analysis and Vision

Moving Beyond the Theory-Practice Dichotomy

A. Morefus

Summer 2003

I am cruising currently, right now. I am cruising because I have dedicated myself to all that is creative and destructive in my life, right now. And I am equally in love with every aspect of my life, and all the ingredients that have caused me turmoil and all the ingredients that have caused me glory. I am the living whispered warning in the Roman general's ear "glory is fleeting", and in that verb, that active verb, "fleeting", there I live; there I reside in this moment. I have dedicated my life to the idiom, "I don't know", and I am in love with the frantic chaos of this limitless universe.

- Timothy "Speed" Levitch, *The Cruise*

Pointed threats,
they bluff with scorn
Suicide remarks are torn,

from the fool's gold mouth-piece,
the hollow horn,
plays wasted words,
proves to worn,
that he not busy being born,
is busy dying

- Bob Dylan, It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)

As anarchists desiring to be relevant outside of the mostly insular academic journals or often sectarian theoretical discussion groups, it is important to openly explore the space between *analysis* - *the critical look at the entanglement of systems, institutions, and circumstances which have brought us to this point* (i.e. civilization), and our own personal and communal liberatory *visions* - *the world we are trying to create* (i.e. a return to wildness). This is an acknowledgment of the complex and multi-faceted nature of any political or social movement, the space it inhabits, as well as the interpersonal relationships which develop within and outside of it. Some level of reconciliation with the conflict between our own unrestrained aspirations and the world we live in must occur before we can proceed in changing ourselves or the condition in which we dwell. This is not a support of compromise as a method of action, or a "let's wait till later to fight" attitude, but instead a mediation of the infinite directions and obstacles we must navigate around and through. I am not speaking of what has been described as "anarcho-realism", for that implies a denial of subjectivity and also usually entails "playing their games" or "selling-out" as a model of social change, thus putting it into direct conflict with anarchy. In order to be effective and in tune with the process of change, however, it is important to prioritize fluidity and flexibility over rigidity and purity, and to understand complexity as something which contains contradiction.

For a qualitatively different world, it is helpful to synthesize the positive aspects of previous attempts at creating liberated societies or circumstances, to learn from past mistakes, and most importantly, to go beyond, or apart from, prior methods. Moving along ideological lines has proven to be only good at superficially unifying mass populations, and is ultimately limited by its homogenizing process and disconnection from individual realities, as well as its lack of relevance to the larger political context. We must step outside of the two segregated, linear, and illusory models of social change: 1) *The development of a perfect critique along with the deconstruction our own social programming and conception of “flawless” interpersonal relationships in order to sometime down the road “fight the revolution”* or 2) *“Fighting the revolution now” and then later dealing with the damaged survivors’ bodies, hearts, and minds (the “we’ll figure it out later” approach)*. Both are limited and dangerous models to work from. Limited, in the sense that one cannot happen without the other; they must be organically intertwined along with many other priorities. Dangerous, because we will never get to the stage of physically dismantling the apparatus of control and its institutions if we are exclusively inwardly focused; and equally dangerous, because as damaged and pathologically socialized beings, we will reproduce unhealthy and dominating patterns, ultimately recreating an unqualitatively different society.

Presentation style can be problematic when exploring methods of social or personal transformation. Even though some seemingly static or factual information may be relatively fixed, it is important to be clear that all analysis is obtained through various social filters and particular biases. For our personal or communal visions to remain non-ideological, they must be presented in an organic and subjective way. It is always good to avoid painting ourselves into boxes, yet at the same time, not be too ambivalent. For instance, there are times and places to use “short-hand” or “lingo”, such as the numerous prefixes an-

archists tend use in order to give a general priority in terms of their analysis or vision (i.e. green, red, pink, insurrectionary, etc.), but ultimately these are restraining and often make things less apparent, rather than actually helping to illustrate complicated perspectives. Therefore, it is good to be limber in how we explain ourselves, depending on those we are in contact with, having a situational description. This is not to say we should “dumb things down”. Aside from that being an elitist attitude, it is usually not good at doing anything but alienating people. Nor should we be chameleon-like, and try to be what flows or fits within a specific group or clique. It is more honest and effective to relate to others’ lives and specific circumstances, or give examples of how you integrate your perspective into your everyday life. It is also much more favorable and less dictatorial to raise questions rather than to give answers. Of course, direct communication is preferred over mediated and impersonal modes of expression/connection like Internet posts. Finally, when discussing or presenting ideas or concerns with others whom you respect or wish to work with on any level, it is always important to be able to separate criticisms and internal discussions from denunciations and self-righteous posturing, unless your only goal is to be *right* or *pure*.

When we actually get down to the discussions of what is to be done, within the context of our small de-centralized groups, and the larger political and civilized realm, two limiting factors must be taken into account: our *physical needs* and our *psychological state*. Both are direct factors on the pace and scope from which we can bring about change, and both deserve considerable and honest thought before, or at least in the discussion of, developing projects or immediate objectives. We all need to eat. We all need shelter. Within the capitalist system (and we can pretend that we are not, or make it our primary focus to not be dependent on it) we need a small amount of money, both for personal and communal survival, but also to sustain most anarchist projects. We should be cautious when criticiz-

flattening situations, or standardizing responses. Flexibility is the key to avoiding stagnation of ideas and activities. Whether ideological or physical, it is important to think outside of our (or their) boxes, however radical we think our ideas are; it is the only way we may grow. Yes, there are times to draw lines, to place limitations or borders around things, but these should be temporary and consensual black and white directions and activities in a larger sea of gray. The gray line is what holds us together, and at the same time, respects individuality and the moment.

Create, live, and experience anarchy now!

The problem that confronts us today, and which the nearest future is to solve, is how to be one’s self and yet in oneness with others, to feel deeply connected with all human beings and still retain one’s own characteristic qualities

- Emma Goldman, The Tragedy of Woman’s Emancipation

But I am not finished. I seem to be residing within a borderland that is not a place of trauma and stress – but not yet a place of healing. Some symptoms hang on, and there is a feeling like on a rocky shoreline... The last stretch of the journey is as trying as was the beginning, I have accomplished the bulk of the inner work, and yet I am still grappling to believe. After a lifetime of knowing only the psychic fragmentation that has protected me from the truth, to become true to myself lies within vision – and yet seems beyond reach.

- Chellis Glendinning, Off the Map

food such as some forms of permaculture, which are outside of the traditional methods of agriculture and in tune with natural processes. This is often done alongside learning primitive skills and with the understanding that there is a certain level of domestication involved in growing food (but certainly far less than eating tofu at vegetarian restaurants). For many, this is one of numerous possibilities in a temporary transition, which can occur during a natural and human encouraged re-wilding process.

If we remain only in the analysis or visionary realm, never getting our hands dirty or touching the ground, we will go nowhere. We cannot be limited by only looking back or forward, and we must certainly do more than just look (analyze/criticize/theorize). We must be willing to make mistakes and experiment. Anarchy is alive and organic and situation oriented. It is a process, not a historical framework, theoretical game, or utopian endpoint. We must attempt to effect the physical plane and make anarchy now, even if it is not complete or immaculate. It is in the process that we experience anarchy, not in the idea or as a conclusion. The connection between anarchism and the decentralized forms of feminism can be seen as a positive example of the withering of a seemingly overwhelming gap between analysis and vision, by being rooted in the everyday life. Within anarcha-feminism, there is often a harmonizing of analysis and vision through daily activity and the meeting of the essential needs of individuals and their communities (i.e. community childcare, women's healthcare, support groups, self-defense) and the overcoming of the obstacles of Patriarchy. D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself) culture is a more general positive example of this dynamic, yet it often lacks the more overt political nature. If the idea of "Revolution" is to retain any meaning, it needs to be situational in orientation, rooted in the personal desires for liberation, and also be relating to the context in which it resides. It is a living and breathing phenomenon and it is never complete. In general, it is good to avoid

ing this aspect of other anarchists' lives. Pulling away from the system is an essential part of an anarchist trajectory, yet we are all somehow dependent on it, and to dwell too much on the hypocrisy of this will get us nowhere. It is good to be conscious of this, and try to lessen our dependency through re-appropriation, self-sufficiency, and simple living, but until the capitalist system is thoroughly destroyed, we are all somewhat reliant on it. This is a major factor in their control mechanisms. Also, we need to keep in mind, that we have all been severely damaged by the domesticating processes of the dominant culture. We have all been socialized with fucked-up roles, keeping us in a perpetual state of misery and subservience to, and for the benefit of, the system, keeping us at odds with each other. Many are not psychologically or emotionally capable of participating on certain levels. How can we learn to accept limitations, and also work to decrease or compensate for them? The healing process is always ongoing. It is a significant element of the revolutionary process, not a before or after project. Compassion is an important component often lacking from radical scenes and this absence stifles healing and growth. We must figure out how to reconcile that we are all at once victims and victimizers, colonized and colonizers, healers and perpetrators. We can in no way be condoning of abusive or dominating behaviors, which must be dealt with firmly in accordance to a group's processes, but they also need to be acknowledged as symptoms of a larger colonizing and domesticating system. This pattern must be broken. Privilege is yet another factor to take into account when developing strategies or projects - our privileges or societal status as individuals or groups, in relation to others. Yet, this should not be seen as a limiting aspect, but more of a factor to be examined and carefully thought about in our interactions with those around us. Too often, all of these factors provide redundant restrictions on our actions and our dreams, rather than being places from which our rage and momentum can develop.

Often, people's response to the limitations placed on the development of liberated communities is to carve out "autonomous" spaces on the fringe of society. While there is an important element to this, as a relatively "free" space to create healthier dynamics, to move outside many of capitalism's restrictions, or as a stronger position to fight the system from, it often becomes a "vacation-land" and escapist dreamscape. Escapism is not a preferable route to take for many reasons. It neglects to account for the inevitable co-optation and engulfing process by the apparatus of the system, or the limitations placed on "escapist" projects which may not be as apparent at their inception. These projects may be helpful in providing isolated experiments in dealing with specific problems or in practicing certain skills, but are ultimately lacking in their connection to the larger context of reality, which makes them inherently artificial, possibly useful, but contextually vacuous. Without also being connected to projects aimed at undermining, dismantling, or destroying the system, they often cash in on certain privileges, rather than using them to combat the system. They make revolution only half way, and often not at all. (*...And to regress, or be just a little reactionary, for just second... I get pretty fuckin' tired of those "who are no longer political" or "just living their lives" judging or even commenting on people or projects still continuing on in resistance. It is understandable why some would lose hope in the prospects of the tremendous project of all the dismantling that is needed, but you cannot be outside and inside whenever it meets your convenience or safety. Anarchy is not a past time, intellectual game, or a social club!*)

Everything we do is, in some way, a compromise of our unalienated desires or liberated goals, and all is muddied with the unhealthy and confining context we live in. Nothing is pure. Inactivity and taintlessness may be a sanitary response, but what does it actually get us but self-righteous satisfaction, nothing we can actually touch or feel. This does not even take into account the fact that we are all, on varying levels, complicit in

the systems of domination, and therefore, purity of ideas is virtually meaningless. For us to move towards a revolutionary situation and a more healthy social condition, we need to come to grips with this fact. Meanwhile we should openly critique or understand the reformist or symptomatic projects we, or others, are involved with; in fact, this is a necessary process in any evolving group or movement, but not along absolutist or ideologically pure lines. There are many important anarchist projects which are not insurrectionary in nature, that are not directly attacking the apparatus of the system. These are important, however, in the creation of insurrectionary situations or revolutionary conditions. They should be seen for their value and also their limitations. There are numerous examples of what could be termed "reformism from a revolutionary perspective" (outreach, education, conferences, info-shops, publications, prisoner support, community spaces, mutual aid networks, gardens, etc.). However, there are some important and honest questions to ask ourselves or others when developing these types of projects: *What are the goals? What do they offer an anarchist community or movement? How are they organized? Are they flexible? Are they meant to be permanent? Do the inherent compromises outweigh the positive effects? Are they supporting, running parallel to, or moving away from the system? Can they support or compliment, or are they in conflict with or limiting, the possibility of insurrectionary moments? Is their creation needed to move towards a revolutionary situation? Are they restricting the movement towards a revolutionary situation?* For example, we need to obtain our physical nourishment from somewhere. Some anarcho-primitivists take a more absolutist approach in stating that the only appropriate skills to be learning in this regard center around hunting and gathering. While many primitivists and green anarchists agree that this form of subsistence is ideal, preferable, and least dominating, the fact is, this is almost impossible at this time for most people. The reconciliation for many is to learn methods of growing