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Decomposing the Masses: Towards Armed Individuality

Flower Bomb

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2018

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Contents

Collectives, Community Empowerment, and Organizing	6
Capitalist Individuality vs Individualist Anarchy . .	8
The Right and the Left: Two Sides of a Coin Called “Identity”	10

“freedom” through formal organization, the preservation of socially constructed identity and the subservience of individuality to social groupings. My liberation won’t be found in the holy book of “The Communist Manifesto”, “Forbes Magazine”, nor “The Coming Insurrection”. Freedom isn’t a pre-configured future utopia; it is a lived experience by those who have the courage to reclaim their lives as their own here and now. In the face of those revolutionary elites who attempt to lay claim to the future with their poetic social seduction and academic expertise, I remain insubordinate.

“Anarchists are opposed to authority both from below and from above. They do not demand power for the masses, but seek to destroy all power and to decompose these masses into individuals who are masters of their own lives. Therefore anarchists are the most decisive enemies of all types of communism and those who profess to be communists or socialist cannot possibly be anarchists.” -Enzo Martucci

For me, individuality is a weapon. It is the weaponized praxis of nihilist anarchy and personal ungovernability. An individual becomes ungovernable by becoming and asserting their negation to socially constructed identities, formally organized groups, or the monolith of mass society. From this perspective, negation embodies a refusal to surrender one’s uniqueness to the confines of formal membership. This is where I draw a line between anarchy and leftism. Leftism encourages the rearrangement of constructed identities, rigid formations, and roles within a formalized social group to which individuals surrender for a “greater good” or purpose. On the other hand, anarchy as life is the decomposition of formal social groups allowing for the existential informality of individual emancipation, development, and limitless exploration. Therefore, for me, anarchy is an individualistic refusal to surrender one’s self to an over-arching power which positions itself above all.

Power structures, socially or institutionally, require the surrendering of individuality to massify their domination. The State can not exist without the individuals who choose to put on the badge and uniform. Capitalism can not exist without the subservience of individuals who make up the mass social body that reinforce its psychological and social validity and domination. Capitalism and the State require individual participation, multiplied to construct mass industrial society. I will give the leftists credit in pointing out that a massive enough worker strike could stunt industrial progress, since it is the worker - the individual wage-slave - that contributes to the life of the mega-machine. But as history has shown, a mass worker strike

is not only exhausting to coordinate, but impossible to sustain long enough to collapse capitalism. While many leftists, including myself at one point, will point out that many workers simply do not have access to inspirational radical information, I have also come to learn that many workers simply do not want to strike. For too many reasons to list here, many workers go into work whether rebellions or strikes are happening or not. A fact that is often overlooked is that people are individuals. And as individuals, some choose to rebel against their work place, and some do not.

Collectives, Community Empowerment, and Organizing

Around 2013, I set off with the aim of building community power through collectivist projects that were intended to benefit people in my hood. Everything from a radical book lending library, a zine distro, really really free markets, food not bombs, and community film screenings. The collective I was part of was vibrant and full of energy. One year, we hosted a July 31st Day of Action Against Racism and Fascism event which included film screening riot videos and clips of nazis gettin' beat down. We left our door open for people in the hallway to come join, and our tiny apartment was packed with folks who lived above and below us, cheering in excitement while watching the videos. At the end we handed out zines and flyers, and promoted a really really free market we were doin' the following two days. The next day, only three neighbors from the event showed up and chatted with us.

The day after that, they didn't come back. At the time, I tried understanding why - despite the videos, the flyers and zines, and the conversations - our neighbors, who had talked about experiencing racism in their lives, were not interested in workin' on projects with us. A one-on-one conversation with

ended. All that remains is the anarchy in becoming ungovernable through individual uniqueness.

Individuals who deviate from the normalized social order are not only bad for propaganda, but maintain the threat of inspiring other emancipations. Individuals who desire freedom beyond the limitations of political programs don't require a package-deal of future utopia. Rather than workin' now to play later, play and adventure accompany a present determination for wild exploration. Armed with a sense of urgency, life becomes a playground of individual flowering and negation to social constraint- a playground that allows free, open-ended social associations and interactions not coerced by a structural permanence.

Individuality armed with chaos finds itself as an insurgent against the social forces that attempt to subjugate it. As individuality becomes wild, it becomes immune and ungovernable to the carefully constructed programs advertised by the politicians of identity and revolution. Those self-proclaimed revolutionaries can only conceive of revolution as merely reforming the social conditions that constitute order. But some of us prefer insurrection over revolution; an insurrection that doesn't end with a new system but a life without measure. I want to weaponize chaos as an individualized attack on all governance and social order. I envision anarchy as a wildfire that blackens the civilized, domesticated kingdom of institutional and social domination. Getting free is more than just attacking capital and the state. At least for me, it also means creating your self every single day beyond society's attempts to define you as a static being.

My war is an individualist war against the right-wing and all its variations. I am at war with the materialized construction of patriarchal "whiteness", its institutions, and its politically assumed supremacy that materializes the colonial domination of industrial capitalism. My war is also against the left, and all its attempts to manufacture a future world of systematized

massified existence, but also necessary with internally breaking the shackles of socially constructed identity and crushing the logic of submission.

The Right and the Left: Two Sides of a Coin Called “Identity”

Identity politics illustrates how different identities are stratified to create hierarchical power dynamics between groups of people. Identity politics also illustrates how individuality and uniqueness are discouraged to the point of social isolation. When people act out of bounds with the socially assigned identity, they are treated as “Others”, not validated to represent an experience. Depending on the system, certain experiences are preferred and validated. For example, to right-winger A, a successful “black” businessman is celebrated and seen as the promotion of capitalism as equal and non-discriminatory. But to right-winger B, that same man is seen as a threat to the white supremacist order and therefore not celebrated. Under leftist A, that same individual will be mocked as an “uncle Tom” or a “sellout”. But to leftist B, the “black” businessman represents successful assimilation, progress and hope for other black people. Both leftism and capitalism each have divided sides. But they all, in one way or another, share the commonality of order, homogenized identities, and membership. Therefore, in one way or another, this individual can be used as propaganda to promote a system. So now lets take for example, a “black” “man” who refuses the identity and roles of “blackness”, patriarchy, and the membership as a worker. Instead, this individual refuses leftism and capitalism. What systems can use this individual as propaganda now? From a leftist or capitalist perspective, what positive aspects of this individual can be used for promotion? As far as promoting a system, there is none. The confinements of a system on a social level have been sus-

two of them a few weeks later reality-checked me: “That’s cool what y’all doin’, but, you know, we just tryin’ to do that money thing. We just tryin’ to get paid.” After a short debate about “gettin’ rich”, we departed with fist bumps and me feeling confused and defeated. “My” people in my own hood, in my own building, ain’t down with that revolutionary shit.

After a couple more years of hood-based banner drops, graffiti messages, wheat-pasting, a zine written to document and glorify the history of anti-racist rebellion where I grew up, and more community events I realized a truth that no leftist wants to hear: there is no such thing as a homogenized community to radicalize. What is a “community” when your hood is composed of individuals who each have different and often opposing objectives in life? I soon realized that the word “community” was merely a political word that often flattens important differences between individuals and propagates false unity. It is a social construct merely representing a population of people who live in a single area. Sure, we had a couple individuals here and there who were down with what we were doin’, got involved and stuck around for a little bit. But the hood was diverse. And it would be dishonest to say that they or we represented the interests of that hood. Everyone had their own individual opinions and life expectations.

I *have* seen some hood revolutionary projects that involved a large portion of a community materialize and flourish. Sometimes they last awhile and sometimes they lose membership and fizzle out. This is where my life experience started to define a difference between affinity groups and mass organizing. The individuals who were down with our shit came to us, with or without us having to propagate a program. They showed up because they saw other individuals that they could relate to. Other people just weren’t interested, despite us all living in the hood together, facing gentrification and being mostly POC.

I see something similar happening with anarchism. The same methods and appeals to the community, to the masses,

to “the people”, are energetic and heartfelt, but yielding very little results. Potluck after potluck, radical social center or radical library, all end up bein’ filled with pre-existing radicals and end up becoming social clubs rather than places filled with non-radical people living in the immediate community. Attempts to mobilize the masses through street demonstrations end up with spectators on the sidewalk and the same radicals chanting, singing or marching in the street. I watched this spike during different times. When Trump was running for election, everyone and their momma was in the streets. Radicals were out, armed with flyers and zines and radical chants over megaphones. Shortly after the election, things normalized and soon just the radicals were back in the streets doing their thing. I admit, I was there too. Marching, chanting, handing out zines and flyers to sidewalk spectators. I remember, years ago, there was an Occupy march where we took Michigan Street in Chicago. A mass of students saw us, joined in for 3 minutes, then ran back to the sidewalk with high fives and went about their day. We were still in the streets tryin’ to invite them back with popular music. With the sudden drop in numbers, the police surrounded us and escorted us to the sidewalk. What is so wack about this is that this tactic is still being attempted today by radicals. As if the first dozen times it happened weren’t embarrassing enough.

Capitalist Individuality vs Individualist Anarchy

Individuality can be conditioned and subjugated by a socio-political environment that monopolizes a narrative of life. In the case of capitalism, we’re all born into a pre-configured society that reinforces its values, roles, and ideology with the psychological force of formalized institutions. When we walk outside, we see a reality that has been quantified and institution-

ally constructed to propagate itself. Cars, airplanes, highways, skyscrapers, fast food, etc - all normalized to generate the comfort of order. Without order, without normalization, there is a chaos that breaks the silence of personal subjugation. Organization and order go hand in hand. Values, roles, and ideology are better reinforced when massified to create the illusion of normalcy. This process discourages individuality, uniqueness, and chaos, since all three pose a threat to monolithic formations. While capitalism claims to encourage genuine individualism, it is an individualism that is pre-configured to reproduce capitalism on an individual level. In other words, individuals who surrender themselves to the system of capitalism become members limited to making capitalism functional. Any individual who refuses capitalism, or systems all together, will seek an existence that contradicts the interests of capitalism. From this perspective, individualist anarchy is a refusal to surrendering one’s self to the confines of a formalized system.

Chaos is the personalized strategy of negation to pre-configured order- an order that is pre-decided by those merely interested in gaining further membership. The strategy of creating a mass society or system of order is a strategy of discouraging individuality, chaos, and uniqueness. This strategy includes presenting a one-dimensional view of individualism that is defined by capitalism. But for individualism to be unique and chaotic, it can not be limited by the confines of formal organizations or socialized constructs.

Capitalism is a social construct that requires mass participation to create the illusion of normality to maintain social order. The mass participation composed of subservient individuals allows for capitalism to represent itself by materialized institutions- all physically built by the hands of individual workers. It is true, that the working class built this world, and therefore can unbuild it as well. But this assumes there are no subtle, peer pressuring forces at work that subdue the individual. This is why social war is not only necessary against