


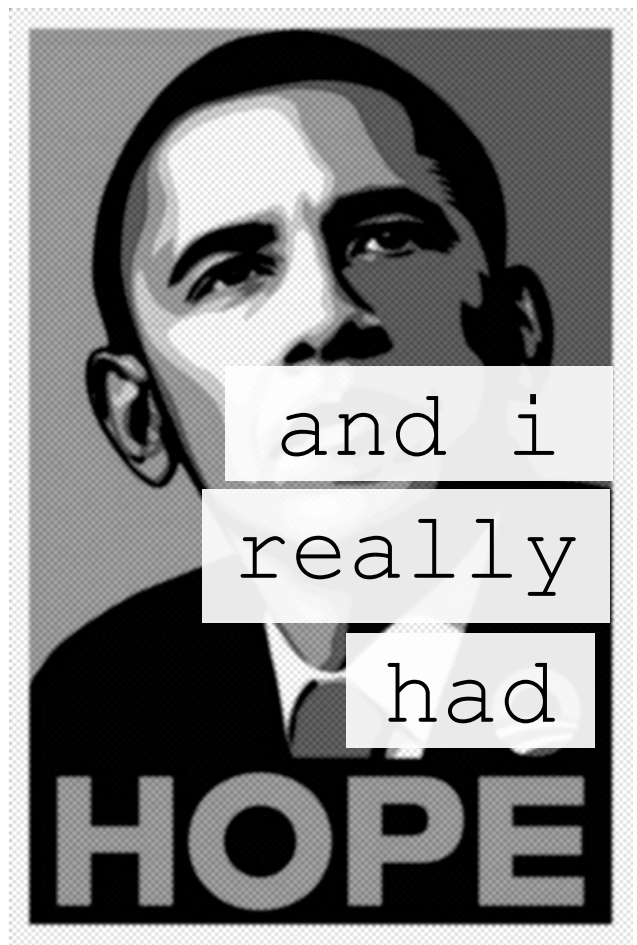
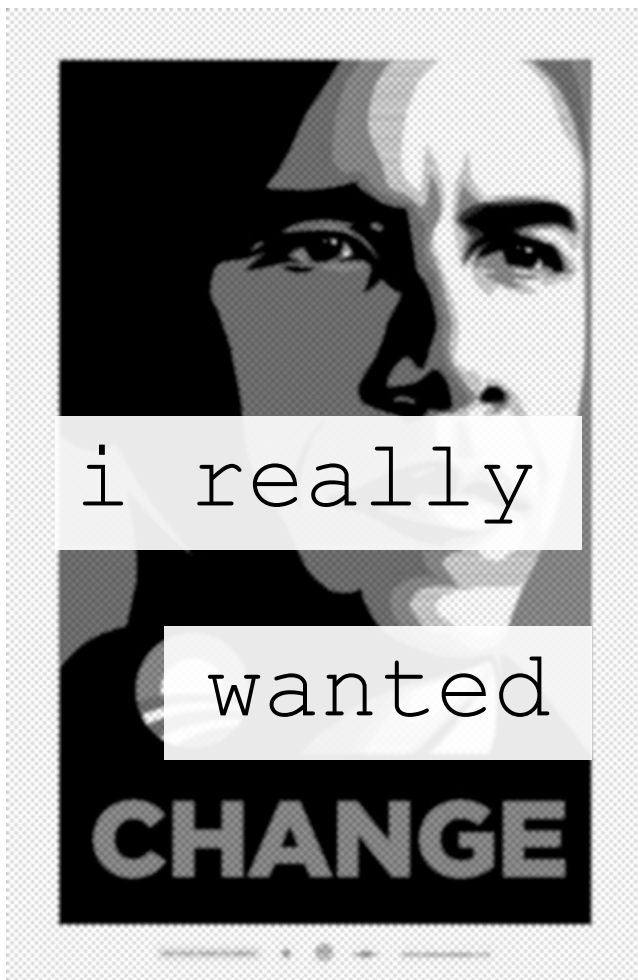


barack obama made me an anarchist

Minneapolis, February 2010



WHOEVER THEY VOTE
FOR, WE ARE
UNGOVERNABLE



instead..

i got politics.

thanks.



my politics have been all over the left.

i grew up believing that voting is a sacred act, that each individual and the bubble they fill really really counts.

that elected leaders treasure the faith that their constituents have placed in them.

and that even if they don't have time to read every letter because they are extremely busy and their time is precious (because they really have the power to change the world) the politicians we vote for, the good guys, really have our interests at heart and know what those interests are.

once in junior high, i asked my best friend if she was excited about getting to vote when she was eighteen.

"not really," she said.

"what?! you're going to go vote though, right?"

"probably not, it really seems pointless."

"jesus, kt, I'll drive you to the polls myself, then! Seriously,

there's absolutely nothing more important than voting, and no excuses at all for not going."

i think she looked at me skeptically and said, "ok."

now, I want to give her a hug and tell her that she was right and that my enthusiasm for ballots makes me wanna puke.

i grew up vocally supporting DFL candidates but preferring the politics of third party candidates. i remember the 2000 elections, when so many people that i respected seemed to support nader's politics but were voting for gore because nader had no chance of getting elected. what the fuck was up with that? and then we learned about the electoral college,



and how, holy shit, your vote isn't necessarily equal to any other joe blow's vote. it matters what state you're in, how the people around you are voting, and who represents you.

...and then we had eight years of bush.



i think in some ways, the way our country was so divided by bush stunted me in developing my own understanding of our politic reality.

more than half the country really thought this guy and his buddies were total douche bags, so hey, that was something i definitely agreed with. i recognized that we had a lesser-of-two-evils system, and the DFL wasn't anything that made me feel a burning positivity, but i still felt like partisan politics could slowly improve the world, because it isn't like revolution happens in the USA...

right?

i felt really excited when I watched obama's keynote at the DNC in 2004. the other people in the room turning to each other and saying that they hoped he'd run in a few years. he was so smooth, seemed so fresh, those piercing eyes.

i was starting to be aware of my own radical leanings during bush's second term, and the radicals I was connected with in the twin cities were all socialists. so, i guess i felt that they were who radical activists were and that was how radical action happened, and they had me working for them, trying to get a rudimentary understanding of marxism and organizing kids to protest and come to meetings about socialism as another option. socialist candidates on the ballot! writing newspaper articles! selling newspapers! it burned me out so fast. i had to get away. i didn't understand that there were other real options, that our system of government wasn't going to work because there's a socialist bubble to fill. we didn't need another political party. what we need is dance parties, but that's another phase of my life...

i was so burned out. i was like, what is this bullshit i've been up to? what did we do? i spent so many hours on the phone with kids who'd put their names down on contact lists, getting them to come to meetings planning school walkouts, getting them to take fliers and hand them out to kids, getting everyone really, really excited about what was coming next after the walkout, and then... nothing. a huge, boring, frustrating anti-climax where no one's plans for directing the energy of mobilized youth have gone past attending meetings and selling newspapers.

so i quit. i stopped going to their stupid meetings, i stopped going to protests, i stopped working on making the world a better place. i don't think i stopped caring but i stopped doing anything i believed in. i went to college. i got perfect grades, got real unhealthy, got real unhappy, thought about buying a car. i had panic attacks and a job that made me feel like a shitty person. most of the time my daily life was fine and I still knew that the world was awful for most people in it, but i mostly felt like fixing it was someone else's responsibility.

when obama announced his candidacy, i really started to love him. "oh," I thought, "this one's different!" his words, delivered with such passion and poignancy, made my heart swell. his beautiful family, the way folks got behind him who had never cared about politics because they'd never felt like the candidates represented them, that was wonderful. it was extraordinary, which I extrapolated to mean that he was extraordinary.

his campaign, the marketing, it was all about stressing difference, and i bought it, i related to that. everything about him seemed different from the other candidates. the way he spoke, the way he looked, the way he campaigned. the symbolic gestures that meant he related to the middle class, even poor people. brown skin, like me. young? me, too. beautiful? ok, me too. his policies didn't matter, really. i guess i figured that the symbolism of electing a different kind of politician would outweigh the reality of politics. he represented everything that i thought i wanted, and in the end he's still just a politician.

i never wanted to become disillusioned. the fantasy of a political messiah felt so comfortable. the rest of the world respects this country again, maybe they even admire us.
i was raised to trust the system.

i cried when he won. i was at college, in a café with a hundred of my peers, and a black man became president and i cried when he won. because i really believed that something good could happen because of it, because it was a relief.

when he was campaigning, i was deeply depressed. i guess i was having some kind of existential crisis, after i stopped trying to make the world a better place and stopped identifying as an activist. i was trying to force myself into a box in which i did things not because they felt good or because they opened my eyes or because they made me feel intensely close to other human beings, but because they were along the path of least resistance. i became a resident advisor, a fucking college hall monitor, a quasi-cop, i took a job i hated because i needed (wanted) money and thought i could handle the responsibility, and anyway it was something other people wanted. maybe i didn't know what i wanted. maybe I didn't care. maybe i wanted to hurt myself. denying yourself and making the wrong choices can be a process of elimination though, maybe. now i know that it makes me feel sick to exercise authority over other people. to have interactions where someone can't be genuine with you because you have authority over them. i learned what not being true to myself looks like and how it manifests itself in me. i thought that doing everything according to what some abstract thing called society told me was right would make me accepted or would make the people around me happy if not me.

my break-up with partisan politics happened in stages. i was figuring out what didn't work in my life and, by extension, in my politics and by further extension what didn't work about politics. once, i had an epiphany in the shower. i was thinking about how unhappy i'd been for so long and how i felt powerless about my relationships with other people. i felt worried about a look and snide comment someone whose opinion i cared about had made and worried about what I'd done to bring unfriendliness upon myself when the lightbulb moment happened. i had this realization that *it doesn't matter what anyone thinks of me*. which doesn't seem terribly profound in retrospect, but it affected me profoundly from that moment on. it doesn't matter if someone is in a bad mood and takes it out on me. what other people want doesn't have to be what i want. i am an independent entity with dreams and desires to be respected and strived for regardless of what anyone thinks is right or what they desire for me. and can't that be true of everything around us, even (especially?) in how we engage politically?

there are things i'd been doing in my life that felt distinct from politics. working as an RA made me realize that doing a job just for the money made me feel like shit and i made a pact with myself never to do it again. i don't buy things unless i feel like i have to. possessions aren't going to make me happy. having authority makes me feel sick. keeping relationships open is worth the extra work. sharing what you have and being shared with feels like an ultimate kind of love. everything is in a constant state of flux and it's ok. make your own life what you want it to look like, and do it now. the way I live my life started feeling like this conglomeration of beliefs manifesting itself in a series of ways of acting and of conceptualizing situations that seemed distinct but important.



i wasn't looking for an -ism.

but then obama was in office, and nothing changed. it wasn't magic, it was politics. that's all I can say about what happened



when he became president. a lot of nothing. i don't know what I was expecting, but i know i bought into the rhetoric and i know i was let down really hard. i felt so frustrated with him, with this country, with politics, with the whole world. i started thinking smaller, thinking about daily life as the starting point, and thinking about different ways of living. i thought of the people i knew whose ways of being in the world

i respected the most and realized that they'd been identifying as anarchists and i hadn't been listening.

a long time ago i asked her, "who are you going to vote for?"

and she answered,
"...i think i'm an
anarchist."

and i laughed, because
it seemed like a silly
thing to label yourself
*when everyone knows that
partisan politics are
the only realistic way
of affecting change.*

when she said i think
i'm an anarchist, she
meant, i'm an anarchist,
does that make you
uncomfortable?

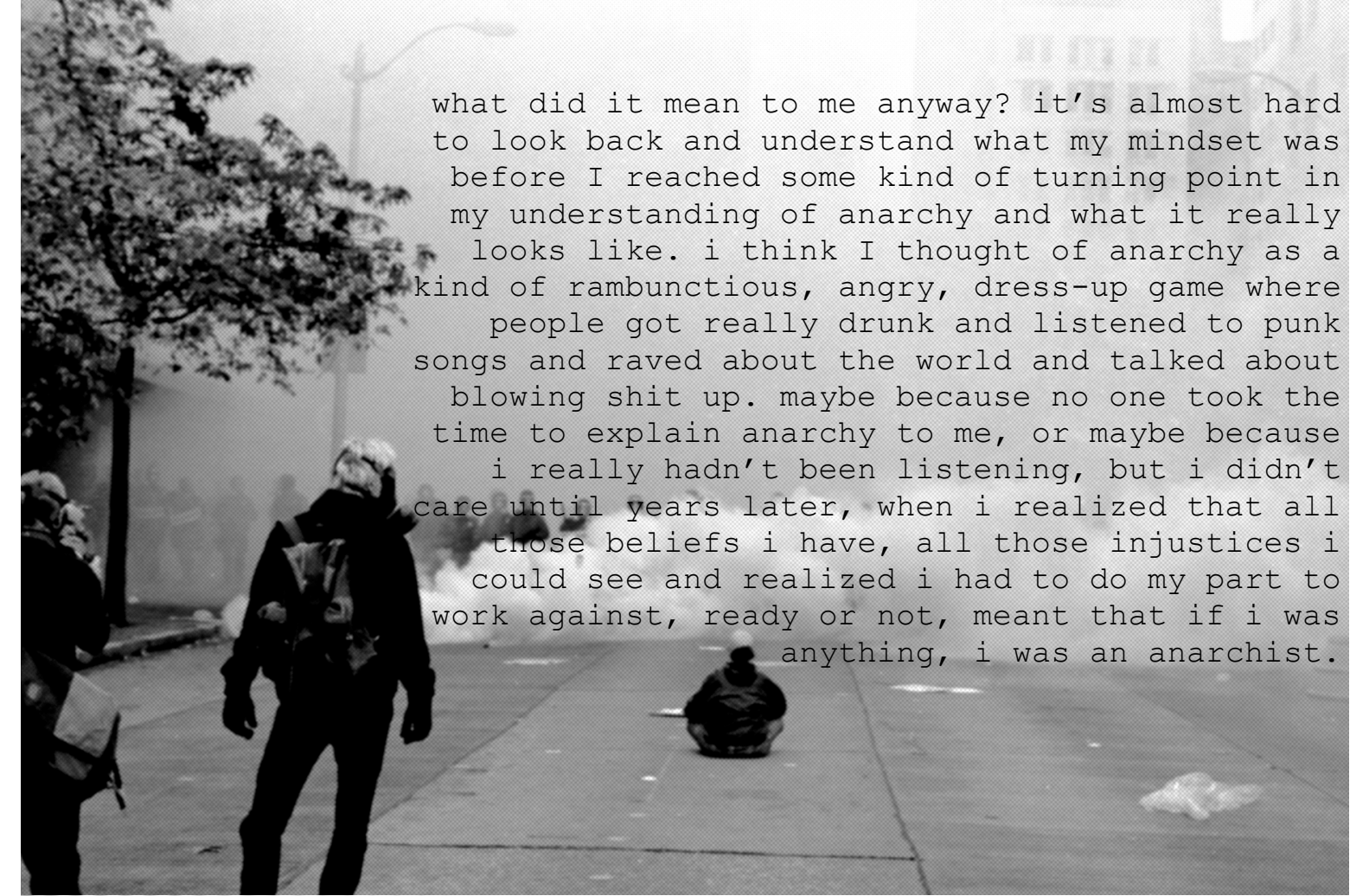
and she meant, do you
know what that means?

what she meant was, i
reject hierarchy, i
reject the idea that
someone i don't know who
i've never spoken with can represent my beliefs and desires,
much less the needs and heartache and passion and blood and
sweat and tears of 300 million people.

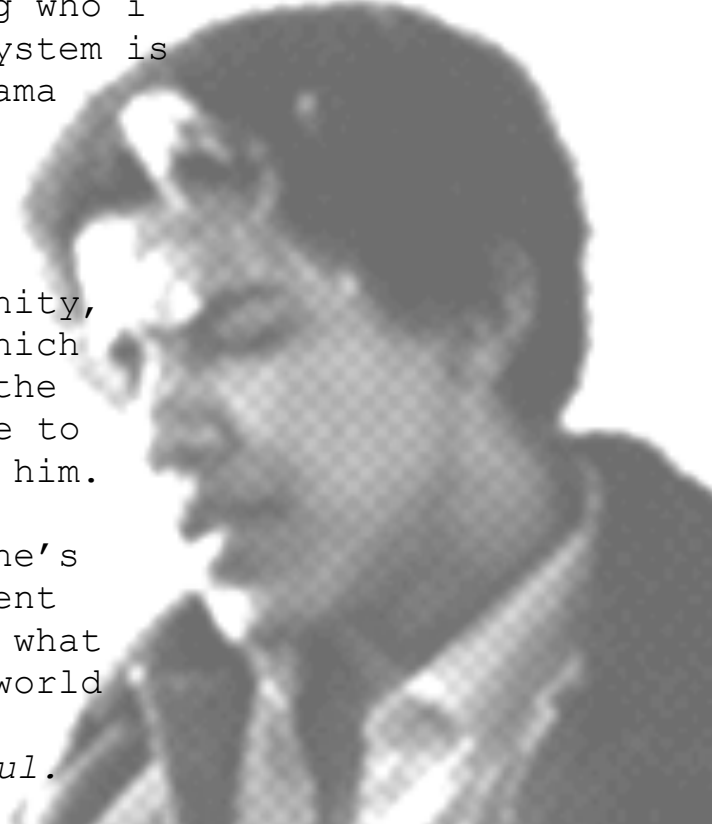


she meant, what i'm doing is living my
life the most honest way i can and
rejecting all forms of bullshit
including classism, racism, sexism,
homophobia, and other injustices, but
what i heard was, i think i want some
political chaos for no reason!

i've always known anarchists and I've
loved lots of them, but I didn't
understand identifying as something so
contentious.



what did it mean to me anyway? it's almost hard to look back and understand what my mindset was before I reached some kind of turning point in my understanding of anarchy and what it really looks like. i think I thought of anarchy as a kind of rambunctious, angry, dress-up game where people got really drunk and listened to punk songs and raved about the world and talked about blowing shit up. maybe because no one took the time to explain anarchy to me, or maybe because i really hadn't been listening, but i didn't care until years later, when i realized that all those beliefs i have, all those injustices i could see and realized i had to do my part to work against, ready or not, meant that if i was anything, i was an anarchist.



i don't blame barack. i think i still feel affection for him, if for no other reason than that his failure meant my coming closer to recognizing and realizing who i am. it wasn't his fault that the system is so far past fixing. even though obama throws money at banks, in order to maintain this broken system, even though he participates in that system that benefits so few, that divides people and disregards humanity, that supports industries against which i fight, that wages bloody war on the innocent and sends countless people to rot in prison, i still don't blame him.

i don't believe for a moment that he's innocent, but i know i'm not innocent either. i don't blame him. knowing what i've learned about myself and the world because of him,

i think... i'm grateful.