

AFFINITY

issue #2: violence



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This here is the second issue of Affinity, an irregular zine providing space for critical reflection and analysis of strategies for resisting the dominant culture. In this issue, we present three perspectives on violence.

We want the words presented here to form part of a conversation, not a one-way communication, and therefore strongly encourage people to respond to what's written, or contribute articles of their own, which can be published in future issues.

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of the woman who kills her rapist is not the same as that of the prison guard who tortures an inmate.

Finally, I wanted to briefly address the relationship between patriarchy and violence, in particular the argument that by advocating violence or engaging in acts of violent resistance we run the risk of reinforcing the domination of men and promoting aggressive, competitive behaviour that values typically masculine characteristics and therefore alienates women. Whilst I certainly share a desire to actively challenge patriarchy in our movement, and those who use violence to reinforce their position in the gender hierarchy should certainly be called on it, I don't agree that violence itself is to blame, or for that matter is inherently masculine. The argument that the use of violent tactics reinforces a macho culture that values men more than women runs perilously close to accepting the conventional stereotype of women as somehow more passive, gentle and akin to non-violence.

This process of freeing ourselves from dominant moral codes also allows us to start to move beyond the often unquestioned assumption that violence is only ever justified when undertaken in self-defence. It allows us to begin to consider the usefulness of violence as a means of attacking the systems and institutions that act as instruments for civilisation's destructiveness. In this way we are able to give ourselves the initiative instead of waiting for the state to act. We shouldn't always wait for them to bring the fight to us. We need to embrace the urgency of dismantling their mechanics.

In place of a conclusion, there are just a couple of points that I wanted to touch on to finish off.

Firstly, when we use the term violence, we must be aware that this is not a singular, amorphous absolute. It is a word that encompasses a wide variety of ways of acting/thinking/relating that should not be considered the same. The vast majority of the acts of violence carried out in our current society are horrific, from the whole-scale destruction of the nonhuman world to the horrendous levels of violence inflicted on our bodies through the various oppressive mechanisms of the dominant culture, physical, sexual, economic, psychological etc. But there is no reason that this should lead to a dismissal of all violence. The violence

1.

Violence is written on my body, chipped bones from bats and batons, scars from whips, belts and knives, messages from the past sent to remind me that there is no getting away, there is no escape, that violence occurs daily and that it cannot be escaped by denial or forgetfulness. The beatings that my parents expressed upon my body, the rapes on my person that my grandfather carried out, the homelessness and drug addiction that capitalism subjected me to, the days, months and years of my life the state took away when they put me in prison for trying to survive in the only manner I knew, and the unrelenting domination perpetuated by this culture means that violence can never be an abstract thing. It can be an effective tool, it can change function, identities, behaviour. In my life it has changed the way I lived on numerous occasions, it has shaped the person I view myself as and changed the how and why of what I do in this world.

In many cases one instance of violence has led to another, has led to another, has led to another, and with each instance this culture supplying the willing means to respond with further violence. My grandfather raped my mother, which gave her further motivation to beat and molest me, my grandfather raped me, and the behaviour of him and my mother

had a close relation to me reaching for solace in crack and crystal meth, which led me to escalate the thieving I was already doing to feed myself, often violently; this in turn led to being sent to prison on a number of occasions, each one as violent as the next.

This is not an essay that is arguing against violence, although no doubt the more myopic reader may read the paragraph above as an example of how violence can only lead to violence. But the other paragraph isn't merely one that describes a simple version of how violence has intersected with my life, it's a paragraph that describes how violence has swallowed this society and its culture up whole. The chain of events does not start with my grandfather, it starts (and ends) with the society and culture in which he was raised, and the one in which his parents were raised. It's one that rewards those who are willing to dominate others, it encourages greed, and it can only ever be violent. That's why we should kill it, with our hands and fists, with our bricks and sticks we should kill it. Its death will be violent, perhaps excruciatingly so. We need to begin here and now, which is our only choice unless we want to wait until it's too late. And it will be too late, for millions it already is, for millions their lives have already entered the realm of the experience of systematic destruction of populations. Those of us who can read zines like this are amongst the most privileged on the planet, because we can deny or

appropriate behaviour. But a clear distinction should be made between morality, i.e. the moral codes established as part of and in the interests of the dominant culture, and ethical principles that are formulated by free and autonomous individuals and/or collectives.

Freeing ourselves from the constraints of the dominant culture's morality allows us to consider violence on our own terms. The question then becomes not one of violence vs. non-violence, but what the most appropriate strategy or tactic is given the circumstances. Whilst of course there are non-violent forms of resistance that are immensely valuable and effective (writing letters of support to prisoners for example), what such an approach helps to avoid is the creation of a culture of resistance that excludes violent tactics and which therefore acts to strengthen the power of the ruling order. Such a culture of non-violence legitimises the state's monopoly on violence and strengthens the state's modes of democratic control. Resistance that dogmatically remains non-violent then begins 'to play the role of a loyal opposition in a performance that dramatizes dissent and creates the illusion that democratic government is not elitist or authoritarian'.¹

¹ Peter Gelderloos, 'How Non-violence Protects the State'

oppression, and destruction of the human and non-human world. Our unavoidable insertion in the chain of industrial production and consumption directly implicates us in this violence. Having recognised this, we must then consider the potential for inaction to constitute violent behaviour.

Given that our most basic interaction with this society implicates us in the violence on which it is based, it becomes meaningless to engage in a moralistic debate that pitches violent against non-violent resistance. Recourse to morality when discussing tactics and strategies traps us within the dominant culture's control mechanisms. The established moral code of our society has been created and adapted to suit the needs of the powerful against those lower down in the hierarchy. Whilst upholding the violence of the state and capital, it disempowers the rest of us by delegitimising acts of violence undertaken by individuals acting autonomously of those forces (particularly when such violence is directed up the hierarchy). Instead of tying ourselves down by focusing on the supposed moral considerations of utilising violent or non-violent resistance against the dominant culture, we should instead be discussing how to best channel the violence in which we're already complicit as a means for bringing about radical social change. Such a discussion should certainly include ethical considerations as to what we consider

intellectually polemicise ourselves out of doing anything at all. Unfortunately, for the most part we choose to do just that, at best we sign petitions, buy fair trade, have free parties, lock ourselves to gates and tend to our allotments, all of which are protected by the continued violence of our culture and society against millions and millions of other people.

If we are to step up, if we are to take stone in hand and smash it into the body of this society and its culture, then it will be an act of violence. If it happens today, tomorrow, over and over again for the next ten, twenty plus years, it will violently disturb many, many people. People who refuse to admit to the horrors that have occurred at the behest of this society of capitalism, domination, exploitation and greed, are going to be forced into living in a world where they have lost their privilege, their wealth, their capital. They might not be happy about this, they might try and keep what they have. They might fight to maintain borders which exclude people, they might fight to maintain the domination of countries where natural "resources" are thick. They might fight to continue to rape, steal and plunder everything they can. This fighting might include millions of surveillance cameras around the poorest neighbourhoods, it might include the incarceration of those who have the least wealth and capital. It will almost certainly include

spending more money on weapons than on schools, and just as likely is that their fight will include a police force whose goal is to protect property before people. It could include using the badly funded schools to spread the culture of violence and encourage a society of domination and abuse, by explaining away all of the world's horrors as unconnected to the lives of those who aren't living intermediately through them.

We need to be violent towards these people, we need to be violent towards them now. We need to destroy the instruments they use, prisons, schools, police stations, bailiffs, banks, courts, elections, telecommunication networks. Violence is an effective tool, it's not the only effective tool, but it is effective and if ever we needed effective tools it'd be now. The violence which was etched upon my body must now be used against this society and its culture which is killing us. And this needs to happen ten million times over. I have no qualms about using the violence at my own disposal to force those who dominate to stop. Well, that's a lie, I have qualms in the form of fear of the repercussions for myself, but I recognise them for what they are. They're the cops in my head saying that my actions will come back to haunt me, that they won't achieve their intentions, that I'll be caught and throw my life away, that there must be another way. There isn't another way, my intentions are to do as much as I can as often as I can to bring this society

centres. It can be found in all processes of production, the conversion of living things into dead objects. It can particularly be found in the mode of operation of industrial civilisation, the physical repression and constant threat of violence upon which the power of the state and capital depends. It can be found in any and all of the institutions of our current society, the system of wage slavery, the prison-industrial complex, institutional schooling, industrial (and increasingly privatised) healthcare etc. The systemic violence we suffer at the hands of such institutions is internalised and replicated in the way we relate to each other in our more immediate relationships, manifest in the huge levels of domestic violence and abuse, the horrifyingly high incidence of rape and low levels of accountability for perpetrators, gang culture etc. Thus social peace is an illusion intended to mask the violent reality of everyday life in our culture.

The central role that violence plays in the mechanics of civilised culture means that our very participation in society entails our collusion in it. There is therefore a somewhat sobering validity to the suggestion that a life of non-violence is impossible in this culture. Such a perspective must also entail a broadening of the parameters of what constitutes violent behaviour to include inactivity. The dominant culture is fundamentally dependent on systematic and widespread exploitation,

of the existence of social peace. We are conditioned to perceive violence as a way of acting and relating to each other that occurs when the accepted parameters of social relations break down, an irregular outburst that signals a rupture with the otherwise smooth, peaceful functioning of society. What such conditioning attempts to achieve is the concealment of the everyday violence that runs through the very core of our society, the violence upon which the smooth functioning of our political and economic system depends. One of the first steps towards unshackling ourselves from the ruling order's perceptual constraints is to explicitly recognise the existence of this systemic violence and its diffusion into all corners of our society. It is only once we have uncovered and faced up to the violent reality of our current situation that we can engage in an honest and unburdened discussion about the role of violence in resisting the dominant culture.

When we remove the conceptual veil of social peace and examine the underlying mechanisms of our society in all their brute ugliness, we can bear witness to the systemic violence that accompanies their functioning. The roots of this violence can be traced back to the initial processes of civilisation, the forcible separation of people from their land through their relocation into cities and the inevitable violence involved in extracting and importing resources into these metropolitan

down; to not do so would be to fail in my intentions. I am already haunted by the violence etched on my body and the lack of action which has followed it.

I signed a petition last week, it was a perfectly reasonable petition asking for things that we should never have to ask for. Two thousand people had signed it. I wondered about how many people have signed a petition asking for something that we shouldn't need to ask for, Dear Sir/Madam, Please don't send this man back to a country where he'll be tortured. To whom it may concern, please stop poisoning drinking water. Dear Member of Parliament, Please stop bombing children. Dear C.E.O, Could you please stop exploiting the land around you and everyone you can. There must be hundreds of thousands of people who have signed petitions like this, and I wonder what would happen if each of them took it upon themselves to violently attack one aspect of this society and its culture. At the very least it would have greater effect than every single petition ever signed. And to be effective is the goal.

2.

It's time we started kicking some ass

I've got a problem with violence. The problem is that, even though the system inflicts violence everywhere, every day, people seem to be reluctant to use violence in trying to stop it. I just think that if we're going to be imprisoned, humiliated, enslaved, starved, exposed to toxins, raped and slowly killed of boredom we should put a bit of feeling into fighting back. I don't want my resistance to consist of yet more unthreatening entertainment for the powerful. I want business as usual to stop. I want to fuck them up.

Unfortunately there are a lot of people out there who seem to have forgotten that anything good that exists in today's society has been achieved through the bloody struggles of those who resisted before.

Instead they think that ending violence and oppression is just a matter of self-will and that if they act non-violently the whole world will become non-violent in imitation. They think that the man will suddenly find a heart (that has mysteriously been absent up till now) and be consumed with guilt about all the wrongs that have been done. This is all narcissistic, wishful thinking that has no grounding in reality and is,

namely the innumerable amounts of carcinogens and toxins spewed out by industrial processes that have permeated our whole environment. Our water, our air, our food. We never thought of directing our anger towards the people who were responsible for polluting our bodies to the extent that cancer has become such a common illness. We never thought of this because we have been so heavily conditioned to ignore or simply not see altogether the violence on which the machine runs (and yes, spewing carcinogens and toxins that are known to cause cancer into the environment in the service of producing unnecessary consumer goods that we are conditioned to want by the advertising industry IS violent). Had we worked to break through such conditioning, we would have been able to direct our anger toward the true cause and started to see what we could do about it. Instead, we railed against an unjust fate and felt powerless because of it. And everything just carried on as normal.

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Perhaps more than any other topic, the discussion of violence comes laden with a whole host of assumptions and baggage inherited from the dominant system's codes and laws that have seeped into our consciousness and indelibly shaped our perception of the world. One of the central myths utilised by the ruling order to bolster its power is that

3.

The article below presents some thoughts and reflections on the issue of violence from a relatively distanced and analytical perspective. However, arguments that forsake the personal and subjective run the risk of becoming separate from our lived experience. With this in mind, I will talk briefly about an example from my personal life that may help to illustrate the points made below and provide some kind of reference or anchor for the more abstract considerations presented here.

A member of my family recently fought a year long losing battle against cancer. It started in his throat, then spread to the rest of his body, attacking his body until he was a thin, gaunt, pain-filled shadow of the person he once was. Throughout this time, from the point of diagnosis to the agonising final days, our attitudes and feelings towards what was happening were similar to those you would have to someone who had suffered a terrible accident. It was simply unfortunate, and there was nothing more to it than that. What was never considered, or at least never discussed, was what caused this suffering (or even whether there was a cause). Our anger and remorse were loosely directed against some notion of the injustice of fate. We never thought of looking into what actually caused his suffering, and the suffering of countless others,

unfortunately, a recurring obstacle for those whose resistance is more serious.

The worst hypocrites are the liberals who pretend their fair trade, energy saving, ethical investment lives are free of coercion. Where the fuck do you think your iPhone was made? In an open plan office where everyone's sipping lattes and flirting with each other? No, it was ground out of some poor migrant worker, so desperate for their meagre daily bread they were willing to sell their health and old age away to the sweatshop. By demanding such gaudy trinkets as part of your stupid lifestyles you're giving a helping hand to the violence. So don't get on your moral high ground and tell me not to hit back. Does a brick in a cop's face really do as much damage as the Apple concentration camps in China?

All consumer goods have a history of violent exploitation and dispossession behind them, whether it's the sickness of industrial farming, mining on lands stolen from exterminated peoples, forced labour or destruction of ecosystems. These processes are necessary for the continuation of a capitalist system that most people in the global north profit from in some way. Certainly we play along with it most of the time condoning and participating in its violence. Because the worst

excesses of this violence take place far away from our relatively comfortable lives we can make believe that it's nothing to do with us. We send some money to help the victims of an earthquake or a cyclone and say we've done our bit. This is a warped fantasy world we've created to keep out the nightmares.

Of course the violence comes closer to home as well. The police make sure that we obey and crack heads and imprison us if we don't. There are prisons to stifle us, tags to shackle us and cameras to make us afraid of what might happen next. There is constant surveillance to make sure we only get what we are 'entitled' to. We are beaten and raped by our families, exploited and humiliated by our bosses and have our desires frustrated by pious patriarchs.

I, like many others, long to be free of this systematic violence. But, unlike dogmatic pacifists, I am realistic about what it's going to take. I realise how much I profit from the violence that is done in my name. I realise that I could have an easy life and just write letters and hold placards that offer no threat whatsoever to the system. But that isn't enough for me - I really do want to be free. And that means I really do have to hit back, hard, now with whatever weapons I have available to me.

No one stops beating you because you ask nicely. They stop beating you because you strike back. It's time we stopped wringing our hands and started kicking some ass.