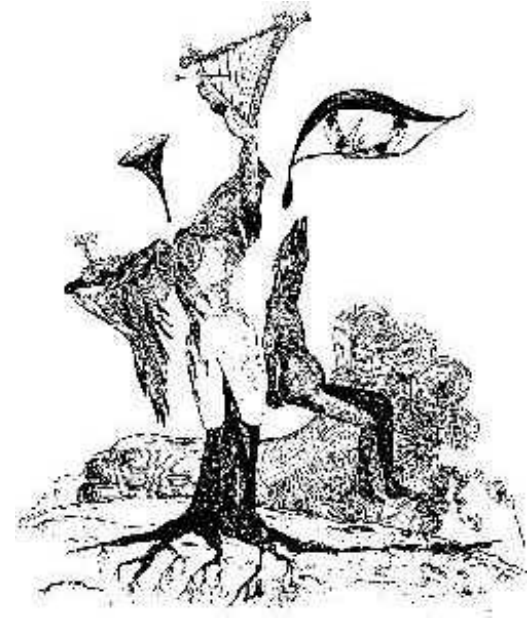


Willful Disobedience

Selections from Volume 4



***Theory and analysis for discussion, debate and
development of an insurrectional anarchist
project***

Venomous Butterfly Publications
818 SW 3rd Ave., PMB 1237
Portland, OR 97204
USA
acraticus@angrynerds.com

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surging experienced by Bruno and other so-called heretics, to bring it under control of the newly rising capitalist order. Here we find the justification for ever-increasing technological development leading to industrialization, Taylorism, cybernetization and on to the latest intrusions of technology directly into our bodies.

If it is an error to think of bourgeois ideology as centering around the individual, it is equally wrong to see the central problem of capitalism as being that of excessiveness, of a lack of limits. This is an example of a very common error in analysis, mistaking a symptom for the source. It is certainly true that capital expands itself into every corner of the world, but it is necessary to recognize what this system is in order to understand the significance of this expansion and recognize what needs to be attacked. Capital, and in fact civilization in its totality, is an ever-expanding system of limitations, an attempt to bring everything that exists under control.

Thus, the revolt against this system is a refusal of all limitations. And the refusal of limitations is also the refusal of renunciation, self-sacrifice and obligation. Marx and many other early communists wanted a scientific revolution that occurred in accordance with a rational historical development. Many present-day “radicals” want a revolution based upon the renunciation of “privilege” on the part of those who are supposedly less oppressed and the sacrifice of their energy to the causes of those supposedly most oppressed. Bakunin, however, recognized that only the unleashing of the wildest passions of the oppressed and exploited could truly create a force capable of tearing this society down.

But the unleashing of our wildest passions requires the rejection of every vestige of Christian and bourgeois morality, of every limitation imposed upon us by external and internal ideological police. In the struggle against domination and exploitation here and now, we are facing a global order that grants no quarter in its insistence upon conforming everything to its mechanized, measured rule. To place any limits on ourselves, to renounce anything, is to lose everything. Once again, the principle that the means must contain the end applies. Against civilization’s greeting card sentimentality, channeled and commodified wants and measured calculations, it is necessary to unleash passions, desires and reasons that know no measure and recognize no limits and, thus, cannot be bought off.

to which it can be enforced, it is a limitation through which the rulers of this society are able to control those they rule.

And from these combined limitations of political power and property spring further limitations: work, domestication, technological systems, industrialism... Work is coerced activity. No one denies that it is necessary to carry out some sort of activity, to make exertions, in order to create our lives and weave them together in a way that pleases us, but this is not the same as work. Work is forced upon us when those things that we need to create our lives are made inaccessible to us by others – the owners or controllers of social wealth. In order to get back some of that which has been taken from us – usually in a form over which we have no control, we have to give over the greater part of our time to the projects of those who rule us, projects that have as their ultimate purpose the continuation of the social relationships of power and exploitation.

From the moment civilization began, it has been developing technological systems for expanding its control. Control, of course, operates through the limitation of the capacity of that which is controlled to act or function on its own terms. Thus, contrary to the way in which they are frequently perceived, technological systems have not developed in order to broaden human capacities, but in order to limit the autonomy of both the wild world and human individuals (who as such are always potentially “wild”) in order to enforce power. Every technological development ends up practically limiting the relationships possible among living beings and between living beings and their environment by channeling these into increasingly homogenized and rationalized modes of activity and interaction.

The chatter about bourgeois society placing great value upon the individual is ridiculous. The “individual” of bourgeois society has always been a mere cipher with nothing individual about it. In fact, bourgeois society placed its greatest value – at least in the ideological realm – upon reified Reason. Beginning in the Renaissance, the ideology that nature and society, and therefore also the individual, should be subjected by every means necessary to the dictates of Reason. Individuals such as Giordano Bruno, who saw a universe permeated with passionate life that flowed and surged beyond the limits of Reason and Religion, were looked upon as heretics and sometimes faced the stake. For this reified Reason, no longer a tool of living individuals but rather a power over them, was essentially mechanistic and its aim was precisely to limit the wild

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ON PROJECTUALITY

“Anarchism... is a way of conceiving life, and life... is not something definitive: it is a stake we must play day after day. When we wake up in the morning and put our feet on the ground we must have a good reason for getting up. If we don't it makes no difference whether we are anarchists or not... And to have a good reason we must know what we want to do...”

—Alfredo M. Bonanno

Perhaps one of the most difficult concepts that I have tried to express in *Willful Disobedience* is that of anarchist projectuality. The difficulty in expressing this concept does not merely stem from the fact that the word is unusual. Far more significant is the fact that the concept itself stands in total opposition to the way in which this social order trains us to exist.

In this society, we are taught to view life as something that happens to us, something that exists outside of us, into which we are thrown. We are not, however, told that this is the result of a process of dispossession, and so this alienation appears to be natural, an inevitable consequence of being alive. When life is perceived in this way, the vast majority of people simply deal with circumstances as they come along, for the most part simply accepting their lot, occasionally protesting specific situations, but in precisely those ways that acceptance of a pre-determined, alienated existence permits. A few people take a more managerial approach to this alienated existence. Rather than simply dealing with circumstances as they come, they seek to reform alienated existence along programmatic lines, creating blueprints for a modified existence, but one that is still determined in advance into which individuals must be fitted.

One can find examples of both of these tendencies within the anarchist movement. The first tendency can be seen in those anarchists who conceive of revolution as an event that will hopefully eventually happen to them when the masses arise, and who in the meantime face their life with a kind of pragmatic, circumstantial immediatism. A principled anarchist practice is considered “impossible” and is sacrificed to the amelioration of immediate conditions “by any means necessary” – including litigation, petition to the authorities, the promotion of legislation and so on. The second tendency manifests in such programmatic perspectives as platformism, libertarian municipalism and anarcho-

AGAINST RENUNCIATION

*The revolt against civilization will be expansive
or it will not be at all.*

Despite nearly two centuries of theoretical and practical experience and several decades of critique specifically aimed against them, christianity and its pallid offspring, bourgeois morality, continue to rear their ugly heads in revolutionary anarchist circles. New ideologies continue to arise calling for self-sacrifice and renunciation. Whether they wrap themselves in the cloak of anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-speciesism, the refusal of privilege, radical environmentalism or any of the myriad of disguises available to them, these calls to limit oneself in the name of social transformation must be recognized as counter-revolutionary, because they are chains placed upon revolt.

Calls for self-limitation are always presented in the fine-sounding rhetoric of compassion or in the stronger language of obligation. In either case, it is the language of morality, and as revolutionaries, we need to recognize that the limits imposed by morality are always limits placed upon our capacity to fight against this society. This may be more fully understood if we remember that the society in which we live – the society of domination and exploitation, of property and social control, of domestication and measurement – is based precisely upon limitation and its acceptance.

Power and property have gone hand in hand since the beginning of civilization and exist through the imposition of limits. The power to rule requires the existence of methods for controlling the activity of those ruled. These methods involve limiting the activity of others through varying combinations of coercion and manipulation. If one of the main reasons to establish one's rule is that of controlling property, property is equally one of the means of extorting compliance from those ruled. This is because property itself is perhaps the fundamental limitation. Property exists only through the exclusion of all except the so-called owner and the power (i.e., the state) that grants and enforces property rights from access to that which has been defined as “property”. This exclusion, of course, depends on the capacity that exists for enforcing it. But to the extent

nature's optimal conditions in order to obtain the artificiality necessary to build even the freest of societies.

Certainly, the exponential growth of illness in a free society where artificiality between individuals would be reduced to the strictly indispensable, would not be comparable to that in a society based on exploitation, such as the one in which we are living now. It follows from this that the struggle against illness is an integral part of the class conflict. Not so much because illness is caused by capital – which would be a determinist, therefore unacceptable, statement – but because a freer society would be different. Even in its negativity it would be closer to life, to being human. So illness would be an expression of our humanity just as it is an expression of our terrifying inhumanity today. This is why we have never agreed with the somewhat simplistic thesis summed up in the phrase “make illness a weapon”, even though it is one that deserves respect, especially as far as mental illness is concerned. It is not really possible to propose to the patient a cure that is based exclusively on the struggle against the class enemy. Here the simplification would be absurd. Illness also means suffering, pain, confusion, uncertainty, doubt, solitude, and these negative elements do not limit themselves to the body, but also attack the consciousness and the will. To draw up programs of struggle on such a basis would be quite unreal and terrifyingly inhuman.

But illness can become a weapon if one understands it both in its causes and effects. It can be important for me to understand what the external causes of my illness are: capitalists and exploiters, State and capital. But that is not enough. I also need to clarify my relationship with MY ILLNESS, which might not only be suffering, pain and death. It might also be a means by which to understand myself and others better, as well as the reality that surrounds me and what needs to be done to transform it, and also get a better grasp of revolutionary outlets.

The mistakes that have been made in the past on this subject come from a lack of clarity due to the Marxist interpretation. That was based on the claim to establish a DIRECT relationship between illness and capital. We think today that this relationship should be INDIRECT, i.e., by becoming aware of illness, not of illness in general as a condition of ABNORMALITY, but of my illness as a component of my life, an element of MY NORMALITY.

And then the struggle against this illness. Even if not all struggles end in victory.

syndicalism. These perspectives tend to reduce revolution to a question of how the economic, political and social institutions that control our lives are to be managed. Reflecting the methods by which people cope with alienated existence, neither of these methods actually challenges such an existence.

Anarchist projectuality starts with the decision to reappropriate life here and now. It, therefore, immediately and forcefully exposes and challenges the process of dispossession that this society imposes and acts to destroy all the institutions of domination and exploitation. This decision is not based on whether this reappropriation is presently possible or not, but on the recognition that it is the absolutely necessary first step for opening possibilities for the total transformation of existence. Thus when I speak of anarchist projectuality, I am speaking of a way of facing life and struggle in which the active refusal of alienated existence and the reappropriation of life are not future aims, but are one's present method for acting in the world.

Anarchist projectuality cannot exist as a program. Programs are based on the idea of social life as a thing separated from the individuals that make it up. They define how life is to be and strive to make individuals fit into this definition. For this reason, programs have little capacity for dealing with the realities of everyday life and tend to confront the circumstances of living in a ritualized and formalized manner. Anarchist projectuality exists instead as a consciously lived tension toward freedom, as an ongoing daily struggle to discover and create the ways to determine one's existence with others in uncompromising opposition to all domination and exploitation.

So anarchist projectuality does confront the immediate circumstances of an alienated daily existence, but refuses the circumstantial pragmatism of “by any means necessary”, instead creating means that already carry the ends within themselves. To clarify what I mean, I will give a hypothetical example. Let's take the problem of the police. We all know that the police intrude upon the lives of all of the exploited. It is not a problem that can be ignored. And, of course, as anarchists, we want the destruction of the police system in its totality. A programmatic approach to this would tend to start from the idea that we must determine the essential useful tasks that police supposedly carry out (controlling or suppressing “anti-social” behavior, for example). Then we must try to create self-managed methods for carrying out these tasks

without the police, rendering them unnecessary. A pragmatic, circumstantial approach would simply examine all the excesses and atrocities of the police and seek to find ways of ameliorating those atrocities – through lawsuits, the setting up of civilian police review boards, proposals for stricter legislative control of police activity, etc. Neither of these methodologies, in fact, questions policing as such. The programmatic methodology simply calls for policing to become the activity of society as a whole carried out in a self-managed manner, rather than the task of a specialized group. The pragmatic, circumstantial approach actually amounts to policing the police, and so increases the level of policing in society. An anarchist projectual approach would start from the absolute rejection of policing as such. The problem with the police system is not that it is a system separate from the rest of society, nor that it falls into excesses and atrocities (as significant as these are). The problem with the police system is inherent to what it is: a system for controlling or suppressing “anti-social” behavior, i.e., for conforming individuals to the needs of society. Thus, the question in play is that of how to destroy the police system in its totality. This is the starting point for developing specific actions against police activity. Clear connections have to be made between every branch of the system of social control. We need to make connections between prison struggles and the struggles of the exploited where they live (including the necessity of illegality as a way of surviving with some dignity in this world). We need to clarify the connections between the police system, the legal system, the prison system, the war machine – in other words between every aspect of the system of control through which the power of capital and the state is maintained. This does not mean that every action and statement would have to explicitly express a full critique, but rather that this critique would be implicit in the methodology used. Thus, our methodology would be one of autonomous direct action and attack. The tools of policing surround us everywhere. The targets are not hard to find. Consider, for example, the proliferation of video cameras throughout the social terrain...

But this is simply an example to clarify matters. Anarchist projectuality is, in fact, a confrontation with existence “at daggers drawn” as one comrade so beautifully expressed it, a way of facing life. But since human life is a life with others, the reappropriation of life here and now must also mean the reappropriation of our life together. It means developing relations of affinity, finding the

ILLNESS AND CAPITAL

by

Alfredo M. Bonanno

Illness, i.e., a faulty functioning of the organism, is not peculiar to man. Animals get ill, and even things in their own way present defects in functioning. The idea of illness as abnormality is the classic one that was developed by medical science.

The response to illness, mainly thanks to the positivist ideology which still dominates medicine today, is that of the cure, that is to say, an external intervention chosen from specific practices, aimed at restoring the conditions of a given idea of normality.

Yet it would be a mistake to think that the search for the causes of illness has always run parallel to this scientific need to restore normality. For centuries remedies did not go hand in hand with the study of causes, which at times were absolutely fantastical. Remedies had their own logic, especially when based on empirical knowledge of the forced of nature.

In more recent times a critique of the sectarianism of science, including medicine, has based itself on the idea of man’s totality: an entity made up of various elements – intellectual, economic, social, cultural, political and so on. It is in this new perspective that the materialist and dialectical hypothesis of Marxism inserted itself. The variously described totality of the new, real man no longer divided up into the sectors that the old positivism had got us used to, was again encapsulated in a one-way determinism by the Marxists. The cause of illness was thus considered to be due exclusively to capitalism which, by alienating man through work, exposed him to a distorted relationship with nature and ‘normality’, the other side of illness.

In our opinion neither the positivist thesis that sees illness as being due to faulty functioning of the organism, nor the Marxist one that sees everything as being due to the misdeeds of capitalism is sufficient.

Things are a little more complicated than that.

Basically, we cannot say that there would no longer be such a thing as illness in a liberated society. Nor can we say that in that happy event illness would reduce itself to a simple weakening of some hypothetical force that is still to be discovered. We think that illness is part of the nature of man’s state of living in society, i.e., it corresponds to a certain price to be paid for correcting a little of

apocalyptic faith including the ideology of collapse. It means that our practice of revolt starts from our own dream of the world we desire and our own understanding of how the present world stands in our way, an understanding that we sharpen through analysis and critique in order to better attack this world. Because if we start in this way, from ourselves and our most revolutionary desires, we will see the need to stretch out our hand, grasp every weapon that we can truly make our own and go to the attack against this civilization based on domination and exploitation. Because there is no guarantee that this monster will collapse on its own. Because even if it eventually does, in the meantime we would be living in mediocrity and misery. Because only by learning to actively create our lives for ourselves, developing ways of living that are absolutely different from those that we have experienced up to now – something that can only be learned in revolt – will we be able to guarantee that the end of this civilization will not lead to even worse horrors. Because this is the meaning of taking responsibility for one's own life here and now, this is the meaning of revolutionary responsibility.

accomplices for carrying out our projects on our terms. And since the very point of projectuality is to free ourselves here and now from the passivity that this society imposes on us, we cannot simply wait for chance to bring these people into our paths. This point is particularly important in the present era, when public space is becoming increasingly monitored, privatized or placed under state control, making chance meetings of any significance increasingly impossible. This desire to find accomplices is what moves me to publish *Willful Disobedience*. But it calls for other projects as well. Taking back space – whether for an evening or on a more permanent basis – for meeting and discussion, creating situations where real knowledge of each other can be discovered and developed, is essential. And this cannot be restricted to those who call themselves anarchists. Our accomplices may be found anywhere among the exploited, where there are people fed up with their existence who have no faith left in the current social order. For this reason, discovering ways to appropriate public spaces for face-to-face interactions is essential to the development of a projectual practice. But discussion in this case is not aimed essentially at discovering a “common ground” among all concerned. It is rather aimed at discovering specific affinities. Therefore, discussion must be a frank, clear expression of one's projects and aims, one's dreams and desires.

In short, anarchist projectuality is the practical recognition in one's life that anarchy is not just an aim for the distant future, an ideal that we hope to experience in a far away utopia. Much more essentially, it is a way of confronting life and struggle, a way that puts us at odds with the world as it is. It is grasping our own lives as a weapon and as a stake to be played against the existence that has been imposed on us. When the intensity of our passion for freedom and our desire to make our lives our own pushes us to live in a different manner, all the tools and methods offered by this world cease to be appealing, because all that they can do is adjust the machine that controls our lives. When we make the choice to cease to be a cog, when we make the choice to break the machine rather than continuing to adjust it, passivity ceases and projectuality begins.

FOR A WORLD ABSOLUTELY OTHER

Life unbridled, a venture into the absolute other, requires the total destruction not only of 'my' work, but of the very concept of work and economy as the basis of human relationships.

—Jean Weir

If the anarchist project can seem incomprehensible to those who have learned to accept the necessity of being ruled, who have learned to prefer security to freedom, that project understood in its totality, as the complete overturning of all social relations based on obligation and compulsion, can even be incomprehensible to many anarchists. The idea of the destruction of work is frequently met with incomprehension. And this comes in more than one form.

The most frequent form of incomprehension I have encountered when I have spoken of the destruction of work is that which simply exclaims: “But we have to eat!” In certain ways this reaction is quite similar to the response to the call for the destruction of prisons, cops and states which cries: “But then rape, robbery and murder would run rampant!” It is a response that stems from habit – we have always lived a certain way. Within this way specific institutions are said to fulfill specific needs – thus, work and the economy are the institutional framework through which food is provided *within the present system of social relationships*, and we know of no others (except by rumor). So the thought of a world without work evokes visions of starvation precisely at the point where the capacity to dream stops.

Another form of incomprehension involves confusion over what work is. This stems in part from the fact that the word can be used in ambiguous ways. I may, indeed, say that I am “working” on an article for *WD* or on a translation. But when I am doing these things, it is, in fact, not work, because there is nothing compelling me to do them, I have no obligation to do them; I do them solely for my own pleasure. And here is where the basic meaning of work and its destruction becomes clear.

Work is an economic social relationship based upon compulsion. The institutions of property and commodity exchange place a price tag upon survival. This forces each of us to find ways to buy our survival or to accept the utter precariousness of a life of constant theft. In the former case, we can only buy our survival precisely by selling large portions of our lives away – this is why we refer to

require one to hone one’s critique so as to know where, when, why and how to effectively attack it.

A belief in an inevitable collapse not only legitimates defensive reformism and survivalist escapism, it actually makes them the most logical practice. But since this collapse is not present reality, but a mere prediction – which is to say *nothing*, or at least nothing more than a thought in some people’s heads –, then we have to ask ourselves if we want to base our practice on this nothing, if we want place our wager on this.

If we recognize history as the activity of people in the world, rather than as the use of the past or the future to justify the present, then it becomes clear that every break with the present, every new beginning, transforms all time. Thus our struggle happens now, and it is a struggle against *the present*. It is, in fact, a game in which we place our lives on the line, putting ourselves at stake, and this is the essence of revolutionary responsibility – taking responsibility for one’s life here and now in open conflict with this society. In this perspective, the potential for an economic, social or ecological collapse is part of the challenge we face, part of what we are staking ourselves against. But since it is *our lives, our selves*, that we are staking, the way we choose to face life – our desires, our passions, our principles, our personal ethic, all that makes each of us unique – cannot simply be laid aside in order to “save the world” from a predicted collapse. (Nor can we simply hide from it.) The wager is precisely that we will overturn this social order that may be heading for collapse by living and fighting on against it *on our own terms*, refusing to compromise. The moment we turn to petition, negotiation, litigation, legislation or even mediation (i.e., accepting representation of ourselves in the mass media), we have already lost the bet, because we have ceased to act on our own terms, we have allowed a “higher” value, a moral valorization of Humanity, of Life or of the Earth, take precedence over our own lives, our own humanity that resides precisely in our individuality. It is precisely this moralism, based in an ideology of despair that leads us to sacrifice ourselves, our own dreams and our own principles, and thus transforms us from insurgents and revolutionaries into reformists, into voters, petitioners, litigators... pathetic beggars.

In speaking of revolutionary responsibility, I am speaking precisely of this willingness to place oneself on the line, to stake one’s life on the possibility of a revolutionary rupture that we create. This perspective stands in absolute opposition to any form of

movement and in indigenist* movements. Of course the defensive nature of the struggles of indigenous people is quite understandable, considering that as cultures, they really are facing their end. Nonetheless, the tendency of defensive struggle to fall into reformism is very clearly manifested here as indigenous struggles so often fall into the demand for rights, official recognition, property (in the form of land rights) and the like. And for anarchists who claim to want a revolutionary break with the present, uncritical support for these struggles is itself a compromise, an embrace of what is merely the latest, most fashionable version of third-worldism.

The escapist tendency sees in the predicted collapse *liberation* from civilization. Since this collapse is inevitable, there is no need to take specific action against the institutions of domination and exploitation that form this civilization; there is no need to strive for a break with the present world, for insurrection and revolution. Instead one can simply go off into the wilds and give oneself over to developing “primitive” skills in order to prepare oneself for the coming collapse and let the rest take care of itself. Of course, I support people learning any sort of skill that can enhance their capacities for self-determination and self-enjoyment. The problem with this perspective is not in choosing to learn the skills, but giving up a practice aimed toward the revolutionary destruction of the present social order based on a faith in its inevitable collapse.

It should go without saying: the apocalypse is a matter of faith, not a proven fact; the collapse of civilization is merely a prediction, one possibility among many, not a certainty. What we are facing *now* is an ongoing train of disasters that impoverish and devastate our lives and the earth. Assuming the inevitability of collapse is an easy way out. It permits one not to face the *present reality*, not to place oneself in conflict with the existence we are living here and now. If one sees civilization as the enemy, as the source of all of our problems, by assuming its inevitable collapse in the near future, one relieves oneself of any responsibility for attacking it and attempting to create a revolutionary rupture to bring about its destruction while opening new possibilities for living – a responsibility that would

* I say “indigenist” as opposed to “indigenous” because I am referring at least as much to the support movements of non-indigenous radicals as to the movements of indigenous people themselves.

work as wage *slavery* – a slave is one whose life is owned by another, and when we work, capital owns our lives. And with the world domination of capital, increasingly the totality of existence is permeated by the world of work – there is no moment that is our own unless we ferociously rip it from the grip of this world. Though it is true that wage slavery cannot be equated with chattel slavery, it is also true that the masters of this world, in referring to us as “human resources”, make it very clear how they view us. So survival with a price tag is always opposed to life and work is the form this opposition takes.

But theft (and its poor cousin, dumpster diving) does not in itself free us from work. “Even robbing banks or reappropriating goods remains within the logic of capital if the individual perpetrator of the deed does not already have their own project in motion” (Jean Weir). And here is one of the most common misunderstandings of an anti-work perspective: confusing the avoidance of having a job with the attack on the world of work. This confusion manifests in a practical emphasis on methods for surviving without a job. Thus, survival continues to take precedence over life. One encounters so many people now within certain anarchist-influenced subcultures, who know where all the dumpsters, all the free feeds, all the easy shoplifting stores, etc. are, but who have no concept of what to do with their lives beyond surviving on the streets. The individual with a clear idea of her project who, for example, chooses to take a job temporarily at a printers in order to learn the skills and steal as much material as she needs to start her own anarchist publishing project – quitting the job as soon as his projectual tasks are accomplished – is acting far more pointedly against the world of work than the individual who spends his days wandering from dumpster to dumpster, thinking only of how he’s avoided a job.

Work is a social relationship or, more precisely, part of a network of social relationships based upon domination and exploitation. The destruction of work (as opposed to its mere avoidance), therefore, cannot be accomplished by a single individual. One who tried would still find herself trapped within the world of work, forced to deal with its realities and the choices it imposes. Nor can work be destroyed separately from the complete destruction of the system of social relationships of which it is a part. Thus, the attack against work *starts* from our struggle to reappropriate our lives. But this struggle encounters the walls of the prison that surrounds us *everywhere*, and so must become the struggle to destroy an entire

social world, because only in a world that is *absolutely other*, what some have called a “world turned upside-down”, will our lives ever truly be our own. Now we can snatch moments and spaces – and indeed this is necessary in order to give us the time to reflect upon what *we, as individuals*, really want to do with our lives. But the task remains before us of breaking down the prison walls.

In fact, the anarchist insurrectionary project, whether thought of in terms of work, the state, the family, the economy, property, technology, religion, law or any other institutions of domination, remains the same. The world of domination is one. The institutions form a network, and one cannot escape through the cracks. We must destroy the net and adventure into the unknown, having made the decision to find ways to relate and create our exist that are *absolutely other*, ways that we can experiment now, but *only in our struggle to destroy this world*, because only in this struggle can we snatch the time and space we need for such experiments. And in speaking of a world that is absolutely other, there is little one can say. When asked, “But if we destroy work, how will we eat?”, all one can say is, “We will figure that out as we go along.” And, of course, that is not satisfying for those who want easy answers. But if our desire is to make our lives our own, and if this requires a world that is absolutely other than the social world in which we live, we cannot expect to have the words for that world. Where would we find them here, where even the primitivists must resort to economic comparisons and an accounting of hours of work to valorize their utopia? As we destroy the old world and experiment with new ways to live, the words will come, if they are desired. Their shadows are sometimes visible in poetry, but if we realize our lives poetically, will we even still desire the words?

involving large-scale devastation of the fabric of life on earth, the apocalyptic vision tends to move them to despair, and thus to desperate action. The attempt to preserve the fabric of life as civilization goes down becomes the primary motive of their activity. It must be preserved at any cost – even that of our principles, even that of our dreams...

But the problem with apocalyptic thinking is that it is always an act of faith. It assumes the inevitability of the impending end, and makes its decisions on the basis of this belief. In making a prediction about the future the basis for action rather than the present reality one confronts and one’s own desires about how one wants to live, it gives the struggle against this world an ideological basis. Of course, such a basis has one advantage, it makes it much easier to make decisions regarding how to go about one’s struggle, because this ideological limiting of possibilities to one to some extent already makes these decisions for us. But this deserves a little more examination.

Placing one’s faith in an inevitable future, whether positive or negative, makes it very easy to make some sort of accommodation with the present. If Marx’s belief in the inevitability of communism led him to justify industrialism and capitalist exploitation as necessary steps on the road to this end, the ideology of inevitable collapse ends up justifying a *defensive* practice in response to the devastations caused by the ruling order on the one hand, and an escapist practice which involves largely ignoring the reality we face on the other.

The defensive practice that develops from this perspective springs from the recognition that if the trajectory of industrial civilization is left unchecked it’s collapse would probably lead to such environmental devastation that life itself would be threatened. So the sort of action to be pursued is that which will protect the few remaining wild places and non-civilized people that currently exist and to limit the damages that the operation of the industrial/post-industrial technological systems can cause in order to lessen the devastation of the collapse. Such a logic of defense tends to push toward a reformist practice involving litigation, negotiation with the masters of this world, proposals for legislation and the acceptance of representation in the mass media in order to appeal to the masses. This tendency can be seen both in the radical environmental

WAITING FOR THE APOCALYPSE:

The Ideology of Collapse and the Avoidance of Revolutionary Responsibility

*If the question is not that of how to **make** revolution,
it becomes that of how to **avoid** it.*

There can be little doubt that we are living in frightening times, times in which it is easier for those who can to simply bury their heads in the sand and go on as if everything is fine. Environmental degradation, social disintegration, increasing impoverishment in every area of life – the entire array of the consequences of a social order that is monstrously out of balance – can easily lead those who think about it to believe that an end of some sort is on the horizon. It is, therefore, not at all surprising that apocalyptic perspectives have arisen on many sides and are certainly no longer limited to religious fanatics. One of the versions of this apocalyptic ideology is that which foresees the collapse of civilization within the next few decades, brought on ecological, social and/or economic breakdown. It is this particular form of apocalyptic thought that I want to deal with here, because it is in this form that one most often encounters it in anarchist circles.

Those who hold to any apocalyptic view may view the coming end with either hope or with despair, and this is true of the ideology of collapse as well. Some of the anarcho-primitivists who adhere to this belief look at the collapse as a great opportunity for reinventing primitive ways of living free of the institutions of civilization. A few even seem to take delight in the suffering and death that would inevitably accompany such a collapse, apparently forgetting that this suffering and death would not be likely to recognize distinctions between rulers and ruled, between domesticated and wild, between civilized and “primitive”. Furthermore, they seem to ignore the fact that those who have controlled power and resources up to now would certainly continue to try to do so as the world collapsed around them, most likely resorting to the same sort of techniques as warlords in Somalia or Afghanistan have used, but on a much larger scale with much more destructive weapons.

Some radical environmentalists seem to have a somewhat more realistic conception of what this collapse would mean. Recognizing that a collapse of civilization at this point would certainly be brought on to a large extent through a major ecological breakdown

WATCHING BIRDS

Peter Porcupine wonders why birds have so much fun
(Reprinted from *Here and Now*)

Looking out my window, or taking another break from digging the allotment, birds are always visible. The thing about birds is that they seem to have a lot of free time. Crows, in particular, hang about the air indulge in delinquent acrobatics, make a lot of noise and rarely seem to spend much time ensuring their preservation. Similarly round about the evening a hedge sparrow will start a piercing and delightful song and its persistence will invite the human – all to human question – ‘What’s it for?’ Well what is it for? Why do we catch birds doing do much that makes no sense in evolutionary, preservational or reproductive terms? The hedge sparrow which bursts into song does so long after the chicks have fledged, at times of ridiculous abundance on the plot, such that the fruit rots on the branches when not harvested by human hands and bugs and grubs enjoy an exuberant proliferation. The crows are quite visibly playing, there is no other word for it. I’ve seen other birds do the same, lapwings flying upside-down, eagles faking a stoop, tits so engrossed in an argument that they have come tumbling to my feet without oblivious to any danger.

And yet when I turn to a birdwatchers’ textbook or visit an R.S.P.B. visitors’ centre, bird behaviour is explained primarily, if not exclusively, in survivalist terms. They do X in order to secure Y in the struggle for survival. Watch any of the fascinating nature programmes on the box and you can guarantee that the life of the animal is explained entirely in terms of survival mechanisms. It doesn’t matter whether the underlying ideology of the programme is promoting the selfish gene, evolutionary psychology or even, I have observed, cost-benefit analysis, animal lives are routinely reduced to function. Everything is given a reason and that reason ultimately comes down to a utilitarian interpretation – each manifestation of the form of a living creature can be explained in terms of its function. Hedge sparrows sing in order to delineate territory (despite the fact that no territorial imperative pertains), crows play in order to hone their hunting skills (when did you last see a crow kill anything?), lapwings fly upside-down in order to scare off potential predators (what predator is alarmed by something as ungainly and misdirected as an upside-down bird?). The explanation pales in the face of the activity it purports to describe. Science

brings a spanner and wrench view to actions which in their particular nature defy functional analysis.

Of course science is not wrong. Or rather it is only as wrong as the medical textbook which describes the human act of love as the behaviour necessary for the perpetuation of the species *homo sapiens*. It is just inadequate. Fixated by the big picture it obscures the detail in the little ones which make everyday life everyday living. Anyone who bothers to watch anything alive will be struck chiefly by one thing. That is its incredible exuberance. I took my ten month old daughter to Bempton Cliffs near Flamborough Head in Yorkshire, near the end of the breeding season when the seabirds are just putting the finishing touches to their terrestrial existence before embarking on the long winter sojourn at sea, and she couldn't contain her delight at the furious activity going on beneath her. As far as I know she had little idea about what she was looking at and listening to but her response was immediate, happy and untutored. She knew exuberance when she came across it. At her birth some friends sent us a quote: "Man is born to live, not to prepare for life" (Boris Pasternak). If contemporary naturalists were to be believed present life is only a preparation for the future, and every individual only a cipher for forces an imperatives whose connection with the individual is practically arbitrary.

Why is any of this important? Well one thing that is disturbing about the plethora of nature interest programmes is the relentless imperative to fit nature into human systems of thinking. Thus some ecological thinking veers dangerously close to imposing economic thinking on life. Everything is seen in terms of input/output equations, almost as if an animal were the quintessence of the enlightened self-interested individual. Nature ends up purely as a zone of scarcity requiring astute management of resources. But perhaps what I find most worrying is the vogue for evolutionary psychology as a means to explain human as well as animal life. It is almost as if we are softened up for this (not so) new explanation of our crises and problems, by the vigorous promotion of the idea of the animal as essentially a set of adaptive functions. Now that anthropocentrism is out of fashion it is an easy step to start to explain human activity through the science that claims to explain animal life, or as it would say, behaviour. Not wanting to claim any special theological place for human beings, we are exhorted to view ourselves through the lens of the zoologist. That lens leads us down the path of accepting that all characteristics are the result of

relationship, it is likely to be purely mechanical and ritualistic, certainly not a moment of abandon in the other.

And of course, there are those who simply feel that they cannot maneuver through this sad, impoverished climate, this destitute environment of artificial and fear-ridden relationships, and so do not even try. It is not a lack of desire that compels their "abstinence", but an unwillingness to sell themselves and a despair at the possibility of real loving sexual encounters. Often these are individuals who have, in the past, put themselves on the line in the search for intense, passionate erotic encounters and have found themselves rejected as a lesser commodity. They were wagering themselves, the others were buying and selling. And they have lost the will to keep wagering themselves.

In any case, we are, indeed, living in a society that impoverishes all it touches, and thus the sexual as well. Sexual liberation – in the real sense, that is our liberation to explore the fullness of physical erotic abandon in another (or others) – can never be fully realized within this society, because this society requires impoverished, commodified sexual encounters, just as it requires all interactions to be commodified, measured, calculated. So free sexual encounters, like every free encounter, can only exist against this society. But this is not a cause for despair (despair, after all, is only the reverse side of hope), but rather for subversive exploration. The realms of love are vast, and there are infinite paths to explore. The tendency among anarchists (at least in the US) to reduce questions of sexual liberation to the mechanics of relations (monogamy, non-monogamy, poly-amory, "promiscuity", etc) needs to be gone beyond. Free sexual expression has room for all of this and more. In fact, sexual richness has nothing to do with either mechanics (either of relationships or orgasms) or quantity (capitalism has long since proven that more and more effective crap still stinks like shit). Rather it lies in the recognition that sexual satisfaction is not just a question of pleasure as such, but specifically of that pleasure that springs from real encounter and recognition, the union of desires and bodies, and the harmony, pleasure and ecstasy that comes from this. In this light, it is clear that we need to pursue our sexual encounters as we do all of our relationships, in total opposition to this society, not out of any sense of revolutionary duty, but because it is the only way possible to have full, rich, uninhibited sexual relations in which love ceases to be a desperate mutual dependence and instead becomes and expansive exploration of the unknown.

is used. Since the old religious justifications for sexual repression no longer hold much water for large portions of the populace, a material fear of sex now acts as a catalyst for a repressive sexual environment. This fear is promoted mainly on two fronts. First of all there is the fear of the sexual predator. Child molestation, sexual stalking and rape are very real occurrences. But the media exaggerates the reality with lurid accounts, exaggeration and speculation. The handling these matters by the authorities and the media are clearly not aimed at dealing with the very real problems, but at promoting a specific fear. In reality, the instances of non-sexual violence against children and women (and I am specifically referring to those acts of violence based on the fact that the victims are children or women) are many times more frequent than acts of sexual violence. But sex has been invested with a strong social value which gives acts of sexual violence a far more frightening image.* And the fear promoted in the media in relation to these acts helps to reinforce a general social attitude and needs to be repressed or at least publicly controlled. Secondly, there is the fear of STDs and particularly AIDS. In fact, by the early '80's the fear of STDs had largely ceased to function as a way of scaring people away from sex. Most STDs are fairly easily treated, and the more thoughtful people were already aware of the usefulness of condoms in preventing the spread of gonorrhea, syphilis and a number of other diseases. Then AIDS was discovered. There is a great deal that can be said about AIDS, many questions that can be raised, a whole lot of shady business (in the most literal sense of the term) relating to this phenomenon, but in relation to my present subject, it provided a basis for using the fear of STDs once again to promote sexual abstinence or, at least, less spontaneous, less abandoned, more sterile sexual encounters.

In the midst of such an utterly distorted sexual environment, another factor develops that seems almost inevitable. A tendency grows to cling desperately to those with who we have made some connection no matter how impoverished. The fear of being alone, without a lover, leads one to cling to a "lover" whom one has long since ceased to really love. Even when sex continues within such a

* The extremely important matter of the ideology of childhood innocence – an ideology that only serves in keeping children in their place in this society – also relates to this. But that would require an article of its own just to begin to touch on the matter.

evolutionary adaptation. The animal or the plant, or the bacteria is completely explained by the interaction between genes and environment. No principle of self-organization or self-expression is accepted. There is no sense that evolution exerts an influence upon a subject – everything is merely an object of forces whose time-span alone renders it impervious to individual influence. This scientific monomania is bad enough when applied to animals – it simply fails to register either their playfulness – but becomes distinctly sinister when it turns its attention to human beings and becomes a plank of state social policy.

A number of groups have become excited by evolutionary psychology. It panders to their own adaptation to the market and the state, by asserting an iron law of evolutionary determination of life itself. With the exception of certain maverick minority publications it is impossible to escape the monotonous mantra that political action or social change can only occur within the limits set by the global market, welfare state, resources available, etc. In the forefront of this adaptive behaviour from leftists is *Demos*, who recently held a conference announcing evolutionary psychology as a breakthrough in understanding human behaviour – a breakthrough which happily gelled with their own abject surrender to what seems most powerful in society (currently, the market, whatever that is) thereby confirming Orwell's charge against the real treason of the intellectuals. Evolutionary psychology is nothing more than Darwinism applied to the human personality and therefore presents human beings as a '*fait accompli*' [a finished work – editor] that can only be managed or 'worked with'. True to their Stalinist roots the idea of freedom is foreign to them. Like any nineteenth century gentleman naturalist they toil over their taxonomy of exhibits, only this time it is human beings who are to be collected into the various types, identities, genders or categories that currently appear to present the most exhaustive picture. No wonder the present government likes them so much. They have provided it with the justification for the maximum meddling with the added advantage of a fail-safe excuse for failure. More surveillance is absolutely necessary, but if that doesn't manage to improve people's lives then it is entirely as a result of certain intractable evolutionary characteristics.

If people though it was bad enough when architecture embraced the formula: 'Form follows function' which managed to banish the playful and ornamental from most modern housing estates, how

much worse will it be to live under a state for whom this watch word is the foundation of its reason to be. Adaptation being perhaps the most unequivocal achievement of New Labour there is no surprise in its willingness to subject the rest of us to adaptation to whatever is already most powerful.

I however remain away with the birds. Just as the variety of birdsong within species has no evolutionary function (in fact could be described as counter-evolutionary) so I plump for self-representation before function, life before its desiccation into little parcels of useful attributes. To those who think I am putting the spirit of things before the matter of them, I would ask them to reverse their priorities. To be oneself is the most materialist position to take – to rewrite oneself as an assembly of evolutionary and economic functions is the triumph of the spirit, albeit a very cynical one, as far as I can see. When crows play they take it very seriously but it is still play. A dog would have great difficulty with the concept ‘It’s only a game.’ The playful is the most important, and only the pressure of managed lives could have led us to impose our own miserable conception of life on what is blatantly and stunningly without purpose.

In such calculated interactions, there is no place for spontaneity, passion beyond measure, or abandoning oneself in the other.

This is the social context of sexuality in which we currently live. Within this context there are several other factors that further reinforce the impoverishment of sexuality. Capitalism needs partial liberation movements of all sorts both to recuperate revolt and to spread the stultifying rule of the market into more and more aspects of life. Thus, capitalism needs feminism, racial and national liberation movements, gay liberation and, yes, sexual liberation. But capitalism never immediately sheds the old ways of domination and exploitation, and not just because it is a slow and cumbersome system. Partial liberation struggles retain their recuperative use precisely by continuing to have the old oppressions as a counterpart to prevent those involved in the liberation struggles from seeing the poverty of their “liberation” within the present social order. Thus, if puritanism and sexual oppression were truly eradicated within capitalism, the poverty of the supposedly more feminist conscious sex shops would be obvious.

And so puritanism continues and not just as an out-dated holdover from earlier times. This is manifested in the obvious ways, such as the continued pressure to get married (or at least establish an identity as a couple) and have a family. But it manifests in ways most people would not notice, because they have never considered other possibilities. Adolescence is the time when sexual urges are strongest due to the changes in the body that are taking place. In a healthy society, it seems to me that adolescents would have every opportunity to explore their desires without fear or censure, but rather with openness and advice, if they want it, from adults. While the intense sexual desires of adolescents are clearly recognized (how much TV and movie humor is based on the intensity of this desire and the near impossibility of exploring it in a free and open way?) in this society, rather than creating means for these desires to be explored freely, this society censors them, calling for abstinence, leaving them to either ignore their desires, limit themselves to masturbating or accept often hurried sex in high pressure situations and uncomfortable environments in order to avoid detection. It’s hard not to wonder how any sort of healthy sexuality could develop from this.

Because the only sort of sexual “liberation” of use to capitalism is one that continues to rest in sexual scarcity, every tool for maintaining sexual repression in the midst of the fictitious liberation

The commodification of sexuality has led to a kind of “liberation” within the schema of market relationships. Not only does one frequently see sexual relations between unmarried people on the big screen, but increasingly homosexuality, bisexuality and even a bit of kinkiness are achieving some level of acceptability in society. Of course, in a way that suits with the needs of the market. In fact, these practices are transformed into identities to which one more or less strictly conforms. Thus, they come to require much more than the practice of a particular sexual act. An entire “lifestyle” comes to be associated with them, involving conformity, predictability, specific places to go, specific products to buy. In this way, gay, lesbian, bi, leather, s/m and b/d subcultures develop which function as target markets outside of traditional family and generational contexts.

In fact, the commodification of sexuality places all forms of sexual practice in a context of products for sale at a price. In the sexual marketplace, everyone is trying to sell himself to the highest bidder while trying to purchase those who attract her at the lowest price. Thus, the association of sexuality with conquest, competition, struggles for power. Thus, the absurd games of playing hard to get or of trying to pressure the other into having sex. And thus, the possessiveness that so often develops in ongoing “love” relationships – after all, in the market regime, doesn’t one own what one has purchased?

In this context, the sexual act itself tends to take on a more measured, quantifiable form in keeping with this commodification. Within a capitalist society it should be no surprise that the “liberation” of sexual frankness would predominantly mean an increasing discussion of the mechanics of sex. The joy of the sexual act is reduced not just to physical pleasure, but more specifically to the orgasm, and sexual discourse centers around the mechanics for most effectively achieving orgasm. I do not want to be misunderstood. An ecstatic orgasm is a marvelous thing. But centering a sexual encounter around achieving an orgasm leads one to lose touch with the joy of being lost in the other here and now. Rather than being an immersion into each other, sex centered around achieving orgasm becomes a task aimed at a future goal, a manipulation of certain mechanisms to achieve an end. As I see it, this transforms all sex into basically masturbatory activity – two people using each other to achieve a desired end, exchanging (in the most economic sense) pleasure without giving anything of oneself.

THE RISING OF THE BARBARIANS: *A Non-Primitivist Revolt Against Civilization*

If we examine much of the current debate in anarchist circles surrounding civilization, technology, progress, green anarchy versus red anarchy and so on, we are left with the impression that criticism of civilization has only recently arisen within anarchist and revolutionary thinking. But this impression is false, and harmful for those of us with a revolutionary anti-civilization perspective.

In fact, a revolutionary questioning of civilization, of technology and of progress can be found throughout the history of modern revolutionary thinking. Charles Fourier posed his utopian socialist “Harmony” against the disharmony of “Civilization”. A number of the most radical of the Romantics (Blake, Byron and Shelly among others) were distinctly distrustful of industrialism and its utilitarian reason.

But we can bring things closer to home by looking at anarchists of the 19th century. Certainly Bakunin had no problem with industrial technology. Though he didn’t share Marx’s almost mystical faith in the capacity of industrial development to create the technical basis for global communism, he also did not see anything inherently dominating in the structure of industrial systems. In fact, his concept of workers taking over the organization of society through their own economic and industrial organizations was to eventually become the basis of anarcho-syndicalism. (This development, however, is based on a misunderstanding, since Bakunin quite clearly stated that this organization was not something that could be developed on an ideological basis outside of the direct struggle of the workers, but rather that it was something that the workers would develop for themselves in the course of their struggles. He therefore did not suggest any specific form for it.) Nonetheless, Bakunin’s appeals to the “unleashing of the wicked passions” of the oppressed and exploited were seen by many of the more reasonable revolutionaries of the time as a barbaric call for the destruction of civilization. And Bakunin himself did call for “the annihilation of bourgeois civilization” along with “the destruction of all States” and the “free and spontaneous organization from below upward, by means of free associations”. But Bakunin’s French contemporary, Ernest Coeurderoy, was less conditional in his rejection of civilization. He says simply: “In civilization, I vegetate; I am neither happy, nor

ON SEXUAL POVERTY

free; why then should I desire this homicidal order to be conserved? There is no longer anything to conserve of that which the earth suffers.” And he, along with Dejacque and other anarchist revolutionaries of that time, appeals to the barbaric spirit of destruction to bring an end to the civilization of domination.

Of course, the majority of anarchists at that time, as in our own, did not question civilization, technology or progress. Kropotkin’s vision of communized “Factories, Fields and Workshops” or Josiah Warren’s “True Civilization” inevitably have more appeal to those who are not prepared to face the unknown than the anarchist critiques of industrialism and civilization that often offer no clear vision of what will be after the revolutionary destruction of the civilization that they hate.

The early 20th century, and particularly the great massacre known as World War I, brought a major overturning of values. Faith in the bourgeois ideal of progress was thoroughly eroded and the questioning of civilization itself was a significant aspect of a number of radical movements including dadaism, Russian anarcho-futurism and early surrealism. If most of the better known anarchists (such as Malatesta, Emma Goldman, Mahkno and so on) continued to see the possibility of a liberated industrial civilization, other lesser known anarchists saw a different vision. Thus, around 1919, Bruno Filippi wrote:

I envy the savages. And I will cry to them in a loud voice: “Save yourselves, civilization is coming.”

Of course: our dear civilization of which we are so proud. We have abandoned the free and happy life of the forest for this horrendous moral and material slavery. And we are maniacs, neurasthenics, suicides.

Why should I care that civilization has given humanity wings to fly so that it can bomb cities, why should I care if I know every star in the sky or every river on earth?

[...]

Today, the starry vault is a leaden veil that we vainly endeavor to pass through; today it is no longer unknown, it is distrusted.

[...] I don’t give a damn for their progress; I want to live and enjoy.

Now, I want to be clear. I am not bringing all of this up in order to prove that the present-day anti-civilization current has a legitimate anarchist heritage. If its critique of the reality we face is

A society based upon concentrated power and economic exchange impoverishes every area of life, even those that are most intimate. We hear a great deal of talk about women’s liberation, gay liberation and even sexual liberation within anarchist circles. And analyses of male domination, patriarchy and hetero-sexism are not so hard to find, the reality of sexual impoverishment seems to be largely ignored, questions of sexual expression being largely limited to those surrounding monogamy, non-monogamy, poly-amory and other such issues of the mechanics of loving relationships. This limitation is itself, in my opinion, a reflection of our sexual impoverishment – let’s limit ourselves to speaking of such relational mechanics so that we can avoid the question of the quality of these relationships.

There are several factors that play into the sexual impoverishment we experience in this society. If we look into its origins, of course, the institutions of marriage and the family and the imposition of patriarchal social structures are significant, and their role cannot be ignored. But in the present at least here in the so-called West, the strength of these institutions has greatly diminished over the past several decades. Yet sexual impoverishment has not. If anything, it has become more intense and desperately felt.

The same process that has led to the weakening and gradual disintegration of the family is what now upholds sexual impoverishment: the process of commodification. The commodification of sexuality is, of course, as old as prostitution (and so nearly as old as civilization), but in the past five decades, advertising and the media have commodified the conception of sexuality. Advertisements offer us charismatic sexiness, bound to lead to spontaneous passion in deodorant sticks, toothpaste dispensers, perfume bottles and cars. Movies and TV shows sell us images of the ease with which one can get beautiful people into one’s bed. Of course, if one is gorgeous and charismatic oneself – and so the deodorants, perfumes, gyms, diets and hair gels sell. We are taught to desire plastic images of “beauty” that are unattainable because they are largely fictitious. This creation of unattainable, artificial desires serves the needs of capital perfectly, because it guarantees an ongoing subconscious dissatisfaction that can be played on to keep people buying in the desperate attempt to ease their longing.

recognize the reality of racism, sexism, etc. But just as a revolutionary rejection of hierarchy, authority and delegation is a practical confrontation with these social relationships aimed at their destruction, so also the rejection of race, gender, sexual preference, etc., as categories is a practical confrontation aimed at the destruction of these social constructions. It is thus not an attempt to run away from the very real problems of racism, sexism, heterosexism, ethno-centrism and so on, but rather to confront them in a revolutionary manner – a manner aimed at the destruction of this entire social order and the overturning of all social relationships – rather than in a reformist manner that seeks to guarantee every social category its rights.

Ultimately, an anarchist social revolutionary perspective is completely incompatible with a reformist perspective, because it is born from revolt. Reform assumes that the present social order can be improved and brought to the point of accommodating the needs of all by recognizing their rights. Revolt is born when recognizes that this society can never recognize them on that most basic level, as a concrete (as opposed to abstract) individual. It is thus a total rejection of this society, its methods, its roles and its rules. The reformist seeks to justify the existence of each category (and these categories are already socially defined) within society. Revolt cannot be justified within the terminology or categories of this society, because revolt is an act of hostility against this society and all of its categories. And revolution is the conscious extension of this hostility with the aim of completely destroying the present society in order to open the way for something completely new. It has nothing to do with reform, because it is not a question of progress, but of surprise, of launching into the unknown of freedom.

accurate, why should we care whether it fits into some framework of anarchist orthodoxy? But Bakunin and Coeurderoy, Malatesta and Filippi, all of the anarchists of the past who lived in struggle against domination, as they understood it were not trying to create any ideological orthodoxy. They were participating in the process of creating a revolutionary anarchist theory and practice that would be an ongoing process. This process has included critiques of civilization, critiques of progress and critiques of technology (and often in the past these critiques were not connected, so that, for example, Bakunin could call for “the annihilation of bourgeois civilization” and still embrace its technological outgrowth, industrialism, and Marcus Graham could call for the destruction of “the machine” in favor of an unmechanized civilization). We are living in different times. The words of Bakunin or Coeurderoy, of Malatesta or Renzo Novatore, or of any of the anarchist writers of the past cannot be taken as a program or a doctrine to be followed. Rather they form an arsenal to be looted. And among the weapons in that arsenal are barbaric battering rams that can be used against the walls of civilization, of the myth of progress, of the long-since disproven myth that technology can save us from our woes.

We are living in a world in which technology has certainly gone out of control. As catastrophe follows catastrophe, so-called “human” landscapes become increasingly controlled and mechanized, and human beings increasingly conformed to their roles as cogs in the social machine. Historically the thread that has gone through all that is best in the anarchist movement has not been a faith in civilization or technology or progress, but rather the desire for every individual to be free to create her or his life as he or she sees fit in free association others, in other words, the desire for the individual and collective reappropriation of life. And this desire is still what motivates anarchist struggle. At this point it is clear to me that the technological system is an integral part of the network of domination. It has been developed to serve the interests of the rulers of this world. One of the primary purposes of large-scale technological systems is the maintenance and expansion of social control, and this requires a technological system that is largely self-maintaining, needing only minimal human intervention. Thus, a juggernaut is created. The recognition that progress had no inherent connection to human liberation was already recognized by many revolutionaries by the end of World War I. Certainly the history of the 20th century should have reinforced this understanding. We look

out now on a physically, socially and psychically devastated world, the result of all that has been called progress. The exploited and dispossessed of this world can no longer seriously desire to get a piece of this putrefying pie, nor to take it over and “self-manage” it. The reappropriation of life must have a different meaning in the present world. In light of the social transformations of the past few decades, it seems to me that any serious revolutionary anarchist movement would have to call industrialism and civilization itself into question precisely because anything less may not provide us with the necessary tools for taking back our lives as our own.

But my anti-civilization perspective is not a primitivist perspective. While it may indeed be inspiring to look at the apparently anarchic and communistic aspects of some “primitive” cultures, I do not base my critique on a comparison between these cultures and the current reality, but rather on the way in which all of the various institutions that comprise civilization act together to take my life from me and turn it into a tool for social reproduction, and how they transform social life into a productive process serving only to maintain the rulers and their social order. Thus, it is essentially a revolutionary perspective, and this is why I will always make use of anything in that arsenal which is the history of revolutionary theory and practice that can enhance my struggle. “Primitive” people have often lived in anarchic and communistic ways, but they do not have a history of revolutionary struggle from which we can loot weapons for our current struggle. Having said this, however, I do recognize those anarcho-primitivists who continue to recognize the necessity of revolution and class struggle as my comrades and potential accomplices.

Revolutionary struggle against the civilization of control and profit that surrounds us will not be the reasonable attempt to take over means of production. The dispossessed of this world seem to understand that this is no longer an option for liberation (if it ever was). If most are not clear about precisely who or what is the enemy, most do understand that they have nothing to say to those in power, because they no longer share a common language. We who have been dispossessed by this world now know that we can expect nothing from it. If we dream of another world, we cannot express that dream, because this world does not provide the words for it. And most likely many no longer dream. They just feel rage at the continuing degradation of their existence. So this revolution will, indeed, be the release of the “wicked passions” of which Bakunin

remain in permanent conflict with the ruling order as we go about our struggle, and that we express this in active ongoing attack against every facet of that order as we encounter it in our daily lives. Behind these basic principles of practice is the most basic principle – that if we, as anarchists and revolutionaries, are ever to have any chance of accomplishing our aims, our ends must exist already in our means.

What is perhaps most interesting though about the methodology of autonomous direct action attacking the institutions that comprise this order and refusing to back down or negotiate is that it is a methodology that can be used in intermediate struggles as well. Any careful look at the history of uprisings and revolutions will show that no uprising began with a fully worked out total critique of the social order. Rather they were born in frustration over specific conditions combining with a loss of faith in the capacity of the ruling order to deal with those conditions. Often in these situations, people will organize themselves in order to deal with the specific struggle at hand, and in the process put into practice a methodology very much like that described. Thus, there is no reason why anarchists should not pursue the application of these methods to specific struggles where they are at, in this way practically undermining the methodologies of reform that so frequently recuperate the anger of people over the conditions of their daily existence.

But the very basic principle, that the end must exist already in the means used to achieve it has further implications. Even in the most revolutionary anarchist circles, reformism raises its head in relation to specific forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, hetero-sexism and the like, though in a mostly negative form as rejection of the implications of a fully revolutionary anarchist perspective. As I said earlier, social revolution is the complete overturning of existing social relationships. Just as in the struggle against domination and exploitation, it is necessary to reject all hierarchical, authoritarian and representative relationships, so in the struggles against racism, sexism, hetero-sexism and the like, it is necessary to reject the social constructs of race, gender, sexual identity, along with every form of nationalism. I understand that these categories and identities can be useful for improving one’s conditions *within* this society. But this is precisely why clinging to these identities is a reformist practice. What many people fear in the revolutionary rejection of these categories is that this rejection will lead to the refusal to

interest to stake our lives on destroying this society and leaping into the unknown.

So a social revolutionary position is not simply a more extreme position on the same spectrum on which reform lies. It is something absolutely other than reform, something as opposed to reform as it is to reaction, conservatism or any other part of the political spectrum. The revolutionary critique is thus not essentially *extreme*, but rather *radical*. In other words, it goes to the roots; it asks the fundamental questions, and in doing so comes to recognize that what appear to be separate problems and issues of this society are in fact deeply connected, and that the real problem is this society itself. And this cannot be reformed away.

Since social revolution is something absolutely other than reform in its aims and in its critique, it must also be absolutely other in its methodology of practice. Reformists have accused revolutionary anarchists of being “negative” for as long as there have been revolutionary anarchists. Bakunin’s calls for destruction and praise of the “wicked passions” of insurgent populations even frightened those revolutionaries who desired a more orderly insurgence, one they could control. The reformists and the proponents of orderly revolution are not wrong in their assessment of a truly revolutionary anarchist perspective. It is utterly negative in relation to this society, rejecting its most fundamental categories. And even that which is creative in the anarchist perspective – individual freedom, autonomy, self-organization – is a negation of all authority, all hierarchy, all representation, all delegation of responsibility.

The methodology of anarchist practice aimed toward social revolution stems from a few basic principles. The first is direct action in its original and most basic meaning: acting directly to accomplish whatever task one wishes to accomplish, from the publication of a flyer to the destruction of some aspect or instrument of the system of domination and exploitation. Implied in this is the necessity of the autonomy of struggle. This means the rejection of all organizations or structures such as parties, unions or formal federations that seek to represent the struggle. In addition it means the rejection of every ideology and every role, because these too, in their own way, become representatives of struggle, defining its contours and limits. Direct action and autonomy cannot function in any practice involving dialogue with the rulers of this society, in any context of compromise or negotiation with the enemy. Thus, to maintain autonomous direct action in practice requires that we

spoke, the destructive passions that are the only door to a free existence. It will be the coming of the barbarians predicted by Dejacque and Coeurderoy. But it is precisely when people know that they no longer have anything to say to their rulers, that they may learn how to talk with each other. It is precisely when people know that the possibilities of this world can offer them nothing that they may learn how to dream the impossible. This network of institutions that dominate our life, this **civilization**, has turned our world into a toxic prison. There is so much to be destroyed so that a free existence may be created. The time of the barbarians is at hand.

[...] May the barbarians break loose. May they sharpen their swords, may they brandish their battleaxes, may they strike their enemies without pity. May hatred take the place of tolerance, may fury take the place of resignation, may outrage take the place of respect. May the barbarian hordes go to the assault, autonomously, in the way that they determine. And may no parliament, no credit institution, no supermarket, no barracks, no factory ever grow again after their passage. In the face of the concrete that rises to strike the sky and the pollution that fouls it, one can well say with Dejacque that “It is not the darkness that the Barbarians will bring to the world this time, it is the light.”—Crisso/Odoteo

COMPLICITY, NOT DEBT *An anarchist basis for solidarity*

*"We owe each other nothing, for what I seem to owe to you,
I owe at most to myself."—Max Stirner*

None of us *owes* anyone anything. This should be a guiding principle behind all anarchist practice. All systems of power, all hierarchies and all economic relationships are justified by the idea that each of us as individuals owes her existence to the collectivity that is this social order. This is a debt without end, an eternal obligation that can never be fulfilled, which keeps us chained to a cycle of activity that maintains this society. Our aim as anarchists and insurrectionaries is the complete overturning precisely of this cycle of activity, of the social relationships that rule over our lives. What better place to start than the absolute refusal of the most basic of economic and political principles: *debt*.

Unfortunately, much of the social struggle that is currently going on bases itself on economic/political assumptions, and particularly that of debt. People speak of reparations, of getting what is owed, what is one's *by right*. This even extends into the way we talk of class struggle when the idea of "taking back what is truly ours" is taken to mean that which we have a right to because we have "earned" it – i.e., the idea that "the product should belong to the producer". This way of conceiving class struggle keeps it firmly within the economy, which it is in our interest to destroy.

The economic/political methodology of struggle opposes *privilege* with *rights*. In doing so, it assumes that the individual is dependent upon a higher power, the power that *grants* rights and privileges (i.e., the existing social order). In fact, rights and privileges are really the same thing: limited freedoms that a higher power grants to one due to some inherent or earned value that this power recognizes in one. Thus, the opposition of rights to privilege is a false opposition. It is nothing more than a disagreement over how the higher power should value us and an appeal to it to recognize our value. As such the struggle for rights is nothing more than a struggle to sell oneself at a higher price. At its most radical, it becomes the attempt to sell everyone at the same price. But some of us do not want to be sold at all.

DIFFERENT AIMS, DIFFERENT METHODS: *On the incompatibility of reform and revolution*

*Reformist consciousness is always expressed in the form of justification.
Contrarily, the behavior of the rebels seemed unjustifiable.*
—Yves Delhoysie

I have always contended that reform and revolution are incompatible. But the full significance of this statement requires a deep examination of what one means by these terms. First of all, in order to be clear from the beginning, when I speak of revolution I mean *social* revolution, i.e., the overturning of all social relationships. But here the fundamental question of the relationship of reform to revolution remains.

Within progressive ideology, reform and revolution are simply matters of degree. A revolutionary perspective is supposedly just more extreme than a reformist perspective but has the same aims, and could thus use reformist methods alongside its revolutionary methods. The extent to which even some of the most extreme anarchists buy into this perspective is made evident by the extent to which they address so much of their communication to activists, progressives and reformists, seeking acceptance of their own practice within these circles, and the extent to which they will find justifications for a variety of reformist practices they carry out, from litigation on various issues to allowing themselves to be represented in the mass media.

Yet it should be quite clear that social revolution as described above has nothing to do with progress. I believe it was Apollinaire who said "...the new does exist apart from the consideration of progress. It is implied in surprise." And in this statement we can see the basic difference between reform and revolution. Reform has as its basis the continuation of the present order and simply seeks to make progress toward lessening its misery or rather the extent to which we feel it. Social revolution, on the other hand, is as destructive as it is creative, seeking to completely overturn current social relationships in order to make way for the creation of something new, something utterly unlike what existed before. Revolution stems from the recognition that our present existence does not offer us anything that can really make up for the impoverishment that it imposes on us and that it is thus in our best

Nanotechnology creates the tiniest monstrosities capable of the greatest horrors, because they are capable of carrying the systems of social control directly into our bodies. We cannot even pretend that there is any room for dialogue here any longer. This is a blatant display by the rulers of this world that the maintenance of social peace is an act of war against all the exploited and dispossessed. It is necessary for those of us who desire the freedom to create our lives on our terms, who desire to remain human individuals capable of any sort of autonomous action, to act destructively against the entire system of social control, the totality of this civilization in which machines ride people and people slowly transform into machines. Here and now.

The kind of “solidarity” this method of struggle creates is a relationship of *service* based on the conception of debt. When you demand that I give up “my privilege”, you are not just demanding that I sacrifice something to your conception of struggle. More significantly, you are assuming that I recognize this privilege, define myself in the terms necessary for earning it and owe it to you to give it up. To use an example, let’s say that you demand that I give up my male privilege. There are a few assumptions in this: 1) that I see myself as essentially male; 2) that I *own* this privilege and can thus dispose of it as I will; and 3) that I owe it to you to give this up, i.e., that I have a debt to you due to my maleness. But I do not, in fact, see myself essentially as a male, but rather as a unique individual, as *myself*. You may correctly respond that this sexist society, nonetheless, does perceive me as male and grants me specific privileges as such which act to your detriment. But here we see that *I* do not own this privilege, nor do I own the maleness upon which it is bestowed. Rather these are imposed on me by the social order. The fact that they may work to my advantage *in relation to you* does not make them any less an imposition upon me as a unique individual. In fact, this advantage acts as a bribe through which the rulers of this society attempt to persuade me not to unite with you against it. But this bribe will only work to the extent to which I perceive the advantage of the male privilege granted to me by this society to be of greater value to me than my capacity to define my own sexuality and create my relationships with others of whatever gender on my own terms. When I recognize this society as my enemy, I recognize all the privileges *and rights* that it grants as enemies as well, as impositions and limitations it places upon my individuality. Since male privilege is something granted, and therefore, defined and owned by the social order, even if we remain within the economic/political framework of struggle, it is not *I*, but this social order that is in debt to you. But as we have seen above, the very conceptions of “privilege” and “right” depend upon the idea of a rightful dispenser that stands above us and decides what we deserve. The social order is that dispenser. Thus, it cannot be said that it *owes* you anything. Rather it dispenses what it owns on its terms, and if you disagree with those terms, this does not make you its creditor, but its *enemy*. And only as the enemy of this social order can you truly be the enemy of privilege, but then you also become the enemy of “rights”. As long as you do not decide to reestablish “rights” by appealing to a *higher* authority, for example,

a better future society, you are now in the position to begin the struggle to make your life your own. At this level of total hostility to the existing social order, we can meet in true solidarity based on mutuality and complicity, uniting our efforts to overturn this society.

Ultimately, any form of solidarity that rests on an economic/political basis – on the basis of debt, rights and obligations, sacrifice and service – cannot be considered solidarity in an anarchist sense. From the economic/political perspective, “freedom” is a quantitative term merely referring to relatively lower levels of restriction. This view is summed up in the statement: “Your freedom *ends* where mine begins.” This is the “freedom” of borders and limits, of contraction and suspicion – the “freedom” of sacred property. It makes each of us the prison warden of the other – a very sorry basis for solidarity.

But as I see it, the anarchist conception of freedom is something qualitatively different from restriction. It is our capacity as individuals to create our lives on our own terms in free association with others of our choosing. When we conceive of freedom in this way, there is the potential for us to encounter each other in such a way that the freedom of each of us *expands* when it meets the freedom of the other. This is the basis of *mutuality*; our coming together enhances each of us. But in the world as it currently exists, there are many with whom a relationship of mutuality is not possible. Those who hold social and political power, those who hold wealth as their sacred property, those whose social task is to maintain the order of domination and all those who passively put up with this order act to restrict my freedom, to suppress my capacity to create my life on my own terms and to *freely* associate with others to achieve this aim. The masters of this world and their guard dogs impose their terms upon my life, forcing predetermined associations upon me. The only possible relationship I can have with them and the social order they uphold is that of enmity, of complete hostility. I discover the basis for mutuality precisely in those others who are enemies of the rulers of this world and their lackeys, those who strive to take back their lives and live them on their own terms. And this is where *mutuality* – the recognition that one’s freedom can expand where it meets the other’s freedom – becomes *complicity*. Complicity is the uniting of efforts in order to expand the capacity for individual self-determination against the world of domination. It is the active recognition that the rebellion of

body – the cyborg of science fiction. But nano-biotechnology takes things further, with the actual creation of organic machines through atomic manipulation. It is here with the creation of machines that seem to carry out biological functions (proponents of nanotechnology have talked of machines capable of reproducing themselves using methods similar to that of the asexual reproduction of cells), that the fear of the “grey goo” arises, the fear that these microscopic machines capable of reproducing themselves could eventually penetrate into everything, tearing down molecules to carry out their programmed functions and in the process melt everything down.

Of course, this fear is of the most extreme and apocalyptic sort. But in the name of “progress” even the most legitimate fears – like the fear of the total monitoring of existence, or the fear of possible infection from nano-biotechnological developments – are to be set aside. The misdeeds of techno-science and the disasters it causes are always attributed to “bad use”, because technology, of course, is neutral. That these disasters seem to follow one right after another somehow does not raise any questions about this alleged neutrality, about whether any “good use” is possible.

The role of the experts has always been to justify the technological system, to explain how the ongoing parade of disasters are mere separate incidents, aberrations that do not reflect at all on the system itself. We can no longer let them be the ones to make the decisions about these matters. And taking back the capacity to decide for ourselves on this matter can take only one road, that of attack against the system of domination and exploitation in all of its aspects. By the time the scientific experts are telling us about these technologies, they are describing a decision that has already been made over our heads. To seek any dialogue with them or with the ruling powers they serve at this point about them is useless. We need to recognize these developments for what they are – a further stealing away of our lives, an attack upon any capacity for self-determination that may be left to us.

The opposition to these latest technological developments cannot go the path of so many past movements of opposition, that of attempting to dialogue with the masters of this world. In such dialogue, the masters always win. Perhaps in a few places, the monstrosities produced by these technologies have to be labeled, so that we have a “choice”, But the monstrosities still become a normal part of our existence.

suggested that the Veri-Chip would make a great alternative to the green card and has also recommended its use on children, the elderly and prisoners. A technology with so much potential for social control is likely to be brought in to use on broader and broader levels until it is considered normal . Then it would just be a small step toward making it mandatory – at first through an indirect blackmail: “No, you don’t have to get this chipped placed under your skin but if you don’t, you won’t be able to get a job, collect benefits, have a bank account, make purchases, etc., etc...But quite possibly eventually legally required with penalties for refusal or removal of the chips.

In fact, in Britain the government has proposed implanting chips in convicted pedophiles. These chips would not only register the location of the “wearer”, but also the heart rate and arterial tension. Another words, not the specific signs of sexual arousal, but those of nervousness and fear – the same nervousness and fear that a thief or a saboteur might feel while in the act. Using the alarm that has been roused by the media over pedophilia – a definitive case of creating a public consensus favoring increased social control in the name of children who have no say in the matter – the project of carrying social control directly into our bodies is justified. And once people are used to the idea that certain people should be monitored, this monitoring will be easily broadened in scope.

The fear for the safety of children already provides another are for the broadening of this monitoring. Experts and parents’ associations in Britain recommended that all children be chipped after two girls were raped and murdered in 2002. In this way all children would become the wards of the state and its technological apparatus for life. The question then becomes: who will protect the children from the penetrating eye of their parents and the state? Who will protect them from the inescapable network of technological control?

The importance of nanotechnological research to those in power is made evident by the huge appropriation of funds for this research. The US government invests 600 to 700 million dollars a year in this sector. The European Union also invests several hundred million Euros in this research in which multinationals such as Philips, Motorola and STMicroelectronics are involved.

These chips demonstrate only one of the ways in which micro- and nanotechnology blur the distinction between living and non-living beings through the penetration of the machine into the living

specific others expands one’s freedom and, thus, it finds ways to act together with these others against the forces of domination and social control. It is not necessary to know these others personally. They may be carrying on their struggle half a globe away. It is only necessary to recognize our own struggle in their struggle and to take appropriate action where we are. Not out of charity or a sense of duty, but *for ourselves*.

DECIDING FOR ONESELF:

Democracy, consensus, unanimity and anarchist practice

One of the distinguishing principles of anarchist practice is that if we are to achieve our aims, they must already exist in the methods we use to attain them. The most basic aim of all anarchist revolutionary activity is the destruction of every structure of authority, every hierarchy, domination in all its forms. But to understand what this means in the immediate practice of struggle, it is necessary to have some idea of what this means beyond the negations. I am not speaking here about utopian blueprints or political (or even *anti*-political) programs, but rather about of how we can relate to each other in a way that is truly free of hierarchy and domination in our projects aimed at the destruction of this society and the creation of different ways of living and being together. It is important to keep in mind that the anarchist project is not to be a political program among political programs, another ideology in the marketplace of opinion (and thus, the eternal loser it is bound to be in that arena), but rather to develop a practice of social subversion here and now that is in perpetual conflict with the social order that surrounds us.

The absence of any sort of domination, of any sort of hierarchy, of any imposed order would manifest in practice as the practical capacity for every individual to decide for herself how she is going to live his life and to freely choose with whom he is going to share it and how. This is the meaning of *self-organization* – that most fundamental of anarchist principles. If instead we were to interpret the self that is organizing as a *collective* entity, then we would have to recognize that every state, every corporation, every institution is technically “self-organized”. Self-organization in the anarchist sense starts from *individual* self-determination and develops itself from there.

The application of this idea to our practice of revolt has significant implications in terms of the way we organize our projects and decide how to carry them out. Perhaps the first principle to be drawn from this is that organization in itself has no value. The value of organization lies in the use that each of us can make of it in carrying out the tasks necessary for creating her life and struggles in solidarity with others. Thus, the point is not to create massive organizations that seek members and that *represent* a particular perspective (anarchist, anarcho-communist, revolutionary

miniaturization opens the door to the presence of intelligent micro chips on any product on the market. Already, certain manufacturers are having chips placed on products that permit their movements to be traced. Miniaturized to the nano-scale such chips would be impossible for the consumer to detect.

As with every technological development of recent years, the proponents of nanotechnology also publicly proclaim the “humanitarian” uses of this technology – in medicine, in food production, in the general “improvement” of our way of life. But the real interests of the rulers of this world in developing this technology lies elsewhere (as was hinted at above).

Nanotechnology, like nearly every technological system developed in the past sixty years, has been largely developed in the framework of military studies. A clear example is that of the MEMS (micro-electrical-mechanical systems), the first generation of nano-machines. These are miniature receivers and motors the size of a grain of dust, the prototypes of which are already coming into use in industry. The application currently being studied is that of a surveillance powder that would be sprayed onto a battlefield or into an area under observation in order to gather certain kinds of information.

In fact, this is much like the “smart dust” the proponents of which present it as a “convenience” that could be spread on walls of buildings, connected to heating, air conditioning and electrical systems and switch on or off heat, air conditioning, lights, etc. as needed. But experiments have also been going on with possible uses of the “smart dust as a means of police surveillance.

The robo-cop or robo-soldier of the future is likely to be a micro- or nano-robot, versatile, relatively inexpensive, nearly impossible to detect, capable of intruding into almost any space.

Nano-technology is an ideal medium for vastly extending social control. Consider the Veri-Chip, a product of the Florida company, Applied Digital Solutions. This chip is about the size of a grain of rice and is intended to be inserted under the skin through injection. It can be programmed to hold information about the person into which it is injected and can also be linked to the Global Positioning System (GPS). It has been offered on the market since April 2002. The company advertises it as a means for storing one’s medical information directly on one’s body and also as a kind of electronic bodyguard against abduction for the rich. But other possibilities of a much more sinister sort are not forgotten. The company’s CEO

THE TINIEST MONSTROSITIES: *Nanotechnology and Social Control*

In the pursuit of full control over every aspect of existence, the ruling order has begun to push the development of technologies that manipulate matter on the scale of the nano-meter, that is to say a millionth of a millimeter. At this level, the level of atoms and molecules, and thus of proteins, carbon compounds, DNA and the like, the distinction between living and non-living can begin to get hazy and many of the proposals relating to this technology stem from this haziness. Nanotechnology creates new products through the manipulation of molecules, atoms and subatomic particles. While biotechnology manipulates the structure of DNA to create new organisms through the recombination of genes, nanotechnology goes further, “breaking down” matter into atoms which can then be put back together to form new materials, literal created atom by atom. At present, attention is focused on the carbon atom, but scientists would like to have control over the every element of the Periodic Table to use at will. This would allow them to combine characteristics (such as color, resistance, melting point, etc.) in ways previously unknown.

Much of the research in nanotechnology is also connected to biotechnological research, examination for the possibility of manipulation of atoms on the biomolecular level. This is the origin of nano-biotechnology. The proponents of this research speak publicly of a myriad of possibilities that this toying with the borderline between living and non-living matter on the atomic level could provide: self-cleaning plastics in which enzymes feed on the dirt, airplane wings full of proteins that function as adhesives if the wing is damaged and thus repair it, ensembles of atoms intended to be used as food or drink that are capable of combining in varieties of ways to create the desired food or beverage, ultra-fast computers with circuits based on a “framework” of DNA, electric conductors of dimensions on a nano-scale in a protein base – i.e., the “living plastic” built upon a genetically manipulated bacterium capable of producing an enzyme that scientists claim can polymerize.

But these are just the worthless knick-knacks displayed before the public to provoke infantile desires in the consumer who will then crave their satisfaction. These gadgets are little more than public relations activity. Much more significant are the miniaturized information processors to be found in each of these gadgets. This

or whatever label is chosen for the group), but rather to bring together the time, the space, the tools and the accomplices for carrying out the projects and activities we desire, the projects that can combine to form that “collective movement of individual realization” that is revolution in its fullest sense.

Unfortunately, many anarchists – even some who may claim to reject formal organization – organize their projects on a collectivist model. The desire to carry out a project together and the need to organize that project is transformed into the creation of a collective entity that represents that project. This collective entity and the project it represents come to have priority over the individuals who first had the desire to do the project. The contradiction between this model and the anarchist principle of self-organization as described above becomes most evident in the way decisions are made in these collectives. As soon as a collective entity formalizes, it becomes necessary for decisions to be made *as a collective*, and this requires a decision-making process. Thus, in joining the collective, the individual must sacrifice her capacity to decide for himself to the need of the collective for a decision-making process that is incumbent on all. The two processes most commonly used in collectives formed by anarchists are direct democracy (majority decision) and consensus.

Consensus has been described quite well as a method for obtaining people’s support without allowing them to express themselves autonomously. Starting from the idea that the needs of the collective take priority over the individuals involved, it seeks a decision that no one in the group will actively oppose, and once such a decision is reached (usually through hours and hours of tedious discussion that, as likely as not, merely wears down some of those in the group), everyone is expected to abide by it. Achieving consensus among any more than a few people is necessarily a matter of finding the lowest common denominator between all involved and accepting this *lowest* common denominator as the *highest* level of action. Thus, if we are talking specifically of anarchist revolutionary projects, the consensus process operates by lowering the level of critique that can be actively expressed. It is easy to get people to accept and rally around superficial critiques, but deep, radical critiques – and the kind of activity they call for – tend to frighten people and cause division. Thus, consensus best corresponds to a gradualist, piece-meal approach, to a reformist

approach that does not require one to be able to act on one's own and to make decisions quickly in the moment of action.

One of the critiques some anarchists have made of the consensus process – a critique that is correct as far as it goes – is that if complete consensus were always required in order to act, nothing would ever get done, because it requires only one person to block it. But if those who make this critique don't also reject the collectivist model, then they have to turn to another decision-making process, that of direct democracy, i.e., majority rule. From an anarchist perspective, the problem with this should be obvious. We are opposed to all rule, that of the majority as well as that of a minority. Even when it is the desires of *the majority* that prevail over the rest, even if that majority comprises 99% of those involved, if this decision is mandatory over those who do not agree, it is an imposition, a form of rule.

The real problem with the processes of consensus and direct democracy is that they are based on the assumption that the collective will, however it is determined, is to prevail over the will of the individual. But this has always been the basis of every form of *rule*, of every institution of authority. It is an act of self-deception to think that one has eradicated domination and hierarchy simply because one has eliminated its human face. The most insidious forms of domination are precisely those invisible concepts that stand above us and determine our existence – invisible concepts such as the collective will, the group consensus, the majority. These create the faceless domination, the disembodied hierarchy, in which the group rules over the individual. The rejection of all rule in our practice, thus requires the rejection of the collectivist model and all that it imposes. In other words, it must start from my choice neither to be ruled nor to rule, and to create my life against every form of rule to the extent that I am able to do so.

Thus, each of us decides for ourselves what she will do and does this with those who agree with him on what to do and how to do it. In this way, those who act together do so in full unanimity, and the project is not tainted by reservations or resignation to a decision that was not one's own. In practice, this inevitably means that we will come together in small, temporary groups based on affinity. These groups will be fluid, constantly changing, coming together and breaking apart. Those who value large-scale unity, a single front to present to the world, will look upon this as a lack of organization, a weakness preventing "us" from having a continuous influence over

now know such a view is far too Christian to ever be truly revolutionary. Revolution is a wager, and that wager is precisely that the unknown, which offers the possibility of the end of domination and exploitation, is worth risking, and that taking this risk involves the destruction of the totality of this civilization of domination and exploitation – including its technological systems – that has been all we have ever known. Life is elsewhere. Do we have the courage and the will to find it?

expression of any overarching metaphysical value or conception. Thus, any product of history has to be viewed as a product of its context in terms of the concrete social relationships in which it developed. From such a perspective, there can be no such thing as a “neutral” technology.

Technology always develops within a social context with the explicit aim of reproducing that context. Its form, its purpose and its possibilities are determined by that context, and this is precisely why no technology is neutral. If we understand technology as large-scale systems of techniques (such as industrialism, cybernetics, etc.), then we do not know of any technological system that was not developed within the context of domination, class rule and exploitation. If Marx, in his myopic Hegelian vision, could somehow see communism in the industrial system, it is only because his vision of communism was the negation of individual freedom, the absorption of the individual into the “species being” that was manifested in the compulsory collective productive process of the factory. In fact, the industrial system was developed for one purpose – to maximize the amount of profit that could be gotten from each moment of labor by increasing the level of control over each and every movement of the worker on the job. Each new technological development within the industrial capitalist system simply increased the level of control over the processes to the point where now they are mostly automated and nanotechnology and biotechnology are creating the basis for bringing this control directly into our bodies on a molecular level.

Just as the ideologies of any epoch are the expression of the ruling system of that epoch, so the technologies of any epoch also reflect the ruling systems. The conception that technologies are neutral, that we could simply reappropriate the technological systems and use them for our ends, is a mystical conception granting an ahistorical innocence to technology. Like ideology, those systems of reified ideas through which the ruling order enforces its domination, technology is a product of the ruling order, created to reinforce its rule. The destruction of the ruling order will involve the destruction of its technology, of the system of techniques it developed to enforce its rule.

At this point the technological systems developed by the ruling order are so intrusive and so harmful that to even pretend that they could be used for any liberatory purpose is absurd. If Marx, following Hegel, wanted history to have a final, determined end, we

time, from presenting a “real alternative” to people in struggle. But behind this critique lies the political program, the preordained schema of how to go about overturning this world, that can only seek followers, not accomplices.

Acting in small, temporary groups in which the desires and the will of each individual is fully realized because the group itself forms out of the coming together of the individual wills is a completely different way of conceiving revolutionary transformation. The point is no longer to bring together the masses to storm the Winter Palace, but rather to act immediately against the forces of domination we confront in our daily lives and to organize this activity in a way that expresses our refusal to be ruled, to submit to any form of higher authority. By not submitting ourselves to any sort of collective will in the way we carry on our struggle, we subvert those tendencies toward centralization, representation and hierarchy that exist even among anarchists, and remain free to act even when the various so-called revolutionary *groups* say to wait, to submit to the times. This is how we express our aim to destroy all domination in the methods by which we go about our struggle. Each of us starts from himself and finds her accomplices through the immediate practice of struggle in her life here and now.

“EVERYTHING MUST GO!”

Some Thoughts On Making a Total Critique

“Think of another concept of strength. Perhaps this is the new poetry. Basically, what is social revolt if not a generalized game of illegal matching and divorcing of things.”

—At Daggers Drawn

The various institutions of the state and the economy are spreading their net into every corner of the globe and every moment of our existence. From the surveillance camera on the street corner to the genetically engineered soy product, from the strip mine in the West Papua jungle to the increasingly broad and far-reaching “anti-terrorist” laws, the world is becoming an interwoven network of control and exploitation coupled to an unending parade of environmental and social catastrophes that are used to justify the increase in control. For those of us who imagine and desire a world in which we, as individuals, truly determines our own existence, together with those we enjoy sharing our lives with, it is necessary to develop a critique of this world that goes to the roots of all this, a total critique of the existence that has been imposed on us.

This is by no means an easy task. We have been taught to simply accept things as they are, and when we start to question, it is much easier to examine things piece-meal, not trying to make connections or keeping those connections on a surface level. This is easier on a number of levels. It not only does not require one to think as deeply or examine reality as closely. It also makes for a critique that is much more easily actively expressed without disturbing one’s own calm existence too greatly. If we view the killing of an unarmed person by a cop, the war against Iraq, the clear-cutting of a forest, the sweatshop in Taiwan and the emptiness of our daily lives as separate matters, we can easily conceive of them as mere aberrations. Our task then simply becomes that of pointing out the problem to the right authorities, so that they can correct the problem. Voting, petitions, litigation, appeals for legislation and public *non-violent* demonstrations before the symbols of the institutions responsible for taking care of these matters become the order of the day. The aim is simply to make the institutions live up to their own proclaimed ideals. But in the present reality, this reformist perspective either requires one to put on blinders so as to only see one’s own narrow issues, or to continually scurry from one

ON THE MYSTICAL BASIS OF THE “NEUTRALITY” OF TECHNOLOGY

...the production of robots is naturally (or rather unnaturally) accompanied by the development of an environment suitable only for robots.

—Encyclopédia des Nuisances

There is an assumption popular among leftists and other radicals who still feel some attachment to the concept of progress or even just to Marxian theoretical constructions that technology, as such, is neutral. The assumption is particularly amusing because those who hold it will accuse the critics of technology of having a mystical and ahistorical conception. What these apologists for technology claim is that the critics of technology promote “technological determinism”, making technology the central determining factor in social development, and thus losing sight of the social factors. They end up by proclaiming that the problems do not lie in the technological systems as such but in who manages them and in how they choose to utilize them.

Doubtless, there have been those who have attributed essential determining powers to technology. One of the greatest proponents of this view was Marx, whose economism was decidedly a technological economism. In his perspective, economic necessity created technological developments (such as the early industrial factory) that then created the basis for the inevitable supersession of the dominant economic system. Thus, Marx’s economic determinism incorporated a kind of technological determinism as well.

Marx’s fault lies precisely in his determinism (an unavoidable consequence of the fact that his critique of Hegel was limited to turning Hegel – a historical determinist – “right side up” rather than rejecting his fundamental constructs). A truly historical, as opposed to a mystical, approach to social struggle and all the factors involved in it has to reject any form of determinism, because it begins from the idea of history as human activity rather than as an

REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGY IS DYING

Revolutionary ideology is dying, not revolutionary theory and practice. And, after all, the collapse of ideologies only involves those who were trapped inside them, those who needed the Berlin wall to see revolution. Or the great masses of the cold and hungry. Or the great proletarian parties. It is enough for us that we do not feel at ease in this world. And if the possibility of revolution is not guaranteed with certainty, the desire and necessity increases before our eyes with every day that passes. But in order to launch this wager once again, it is necessary to put the past back in play. The heritage of revolutionary movements can no longer form a tradition to safeguard, a torch to keep lit or a program to realize, but must become an arsenal to plunder for continuing use by new revolutionaries.

One thing should be clear. If a revolutionary movement has so much difficulty emerging today, it is because it is no longer possible to demand anything of that which exists in this world in order to defend it, to understand it, much less to transform it in a “radical” manner as the reformists of survival claim to do. Thus, if the end of certainty signals a decisive step for the domination of capital, in a certain sense, it also grants the triumph of utopia. At last, revolution appears as what it has always been, a gratuitous feast. Not the carrying out of a political program, not the conquest of the means of production – and so much the less of power – but the irruption into the unknown through the destruction of what exists. Now that the lie that this movement required the bricklayers of socialism has been exposed, the Argonauts of Revolt can begin their journey. In short, it’s a question of resuming hostilities, knowing well that this time there will be no contradictions because the end is in the means themselves.

isolated problem to the next, on and on in the activist rat race until one burns oneself out.

So it is clearly necessary to go deeper, to make the connections between the various miseries and disasters that we face. It is necessary for us to learn to make the “illegal matches” that we have been trained to ignore, the connections that allow us to begin to understand the totality of our existence. This is not as simple as making blanket declarations that all of this is caused by the state, by capital, by civilization. As true as this may be, all that we have done if we do this is given a label to this totality, and labeling a thing is not the same as understanding it adequately to be able to confront and challenge it. In fact, without an adequate analysis of the nature of the state, capital or civilization, they merely function as abstractions that can distract us from the actual realities we face and may even end up become one’s role within the activist milieu, the basis for a political identity that is placed in contention with others in the ideological marketplace. This is itself enough to indicate that such critiques are not yet total.

If one has not overcome the method of critique that this society imposes, the piecemeal critique of the parts without any conception of the whole, one’s attempts to critique the totality of our existence may take the form of quantitatively adding together a series of oppressions and/or institutions to be opposed. A prime example of this is to be found in the statements of purpose of groups such as Love and Rage, which may inform us that they oppose sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, capitalism and the state. And those who want to be more radical may add ageism, ableism, speciesism, civilization and so on. But this still is a more like a laundry list than a serious critique, a list of issues to deal with in a political framework. Deeper connections – connections that show how the ruling order can recuperate partial oppositions (anti-racism, feminism, gay liberation, even those forms of opposition to capitalism, the state and civilization that continue to operate within a political activist framework) to its own ends – can only spring from a different kind of critique.

Even when a critique places the various oppressions under a single conceptual umbrella (e.g., the state, capital, patriarchy, civilization) in order to explain them, this critique is not necessarily a total critique. Such critiques may in fact be *broad* without having *depth*. When such critiques are partial this will become evident first of all in the inability to apply the critique concretely to one’s daily

struggle against this social order. This indicates that although the critique may indeed appear to have made the necessary connections, the “illegal matches”, on the surface level, this has happened in such a realm of abstraction that it does not allow for the “illegal divorces” – the singling out of specific targets, the recognition of the physical body of the enemy – to occur.

One of the primary reasons for this is a failure to recognize and reject reification. Reification is the ideological and social process of transforming an activity or social relationship – something we do – into a being that stands above us and acts upon us as if we were mere tools. An example of what I mean can be drawn from a particular critique that has developed in certain anti-civilization circles. (I choose this example because it so clearly expresses this failure and because my own perspective also includes a critique of civilization, thus this is part of a comradely critical discourse.) In recent writings, certain individuals in anti-civilization circles have made a critique of reason that is actually an ideological *rejection* of reason. Of course, their argument against reason is always *reasoned* (even if often poorly so). However, the fact that this critique may not be able to be fully realized in practice now (which anti-capitalist lives absolutely without money? which critic of technology lives without any products of the industrial system?) is not sufficient reason to discount it. Where the problem lies is that if this critique cannot be applied usefully precisely in the way we develop theory and critique, i.e., in the way we think (and there is no evidence that it can), then it has no practical application to our revolutionary struggle. The failure of this critique as revolutionary theory stems from the fact that it accepts the concept of reason as a thing in itself. In other words, it accepts the *rationalist* reification of reason and bases its rejection of reason upon this. So this critique is really a mere philosophical game, a game of words that allows the players to claim that their critique of this society is more total simply because it is *broader* than that of others. But a total critique requires *depth*; it needs to get to the bottom of things, to the roots. And at bottom reason is not a thing in itself. It is an activity we do, but one that has been reified in the form of rationalism into an ideal above us precisely because it was socially useful. But the absolute rejection reason is also a reified concept, an ideal that stands above us, since even on the level of antagonistic struggle it can only exist as a goal for a distant future. The rejection of *reified* reason would start with the recognition that Reason, as a thing above us, *does not*

exist. Rather each of us *reasons*, and has his own reasons, and certain tools for critical thinking can help us hone our capacity to reason into a weapon we can use in our lives and struggles.

In fact, a total critique is qualitatively different from a partial critique. All partial critiques, regardless of how extreme they may be, start from the perspective of this society. (For instance, the critique of reason described above starts from the social conception of Reason as defined by rationalism). The more extreme and broader partial critiques simply lead to an *ideological* rejection of major aspects of this society or even of all of it considered abstractly because this society is deemed to have *failed* on its own terms. Such ideological rejections offer little of practical use to the immediate struggle against this society since they are based on the same reifications through which this society seeks to justify itself. In developing a total critique, one starts from *herself*, from her desire to determine his existence on his own terms. This critique is thus the act – or better, the ongoing practice – of confronting this society with oneself and one’s hostility to its intrusion into one’s existence. It is from this basis that one can indeed plumb the depths of this society and begin to recognize the intertwining networks of control through which it defines every moment of our existence. This is also the practical basis from which to make those “illegal matches and divorces” – the capacity to put together and break apart in order to know how and why, when and where to attack. Since one makes this critique starting from herself and her desire, it is not merely a critique of the failures of this society, of what is worst in it; it is also a critique of its *success*, of what is best in it, because even if this society were to live up to all of its ideals, it would still demand the subjection of our individuality, of our uniqueness to it, “to the common good”. Furthermore, because it is an *active* critique, the intertwined theory and practice of our enmity against this social order, it is never a *finished* critique. Rather it is in continual development, honing itself as we struggles against the reality of our current existence. When one starts from himself in developing his critique of the social order, she recognizes this order as an enemy to be destroyed and seeks the weapons she and the accomplices with whom he can attack this order. And from here solidarity and revolutionary practice can develop.