

FOREWORD

These are tough times, which call for tough responses. There are so many state and corporate messes made round the world by outright brutality and/or by the devastating indifference of cutting corners and costs on so-called “regulatory standards” of either “human rights” or environmental protection. In the past few weeks for instance, I've fallen into a helpless rage over the murders at the Gaza blockade of the flotilla activists by the IDF, and a spluttering inefficient anger with the continuing sense of ecological doom over the ceaseless spilling of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. The ruling Liberal party where we live is pushing through a massive highway project which is paving over historic, incredibly diverse wetlands along the Fraser River in British Columbia (a key part of their “Gateway” push to open up Pacific Rim shipping ports to dirty Alberta tar sands oil.) War and occupation by Canadian forces in Afghanistan continues apace, propped up by a racist, patriarchal culture of violence here at home which glorifies war over there supposedly in the name of Afghani women, while ignoring—or as seen in the vicious sexual assaults recently in and around Canadian military bases, even instigating—rampant domestic abuse, rape, misogyny, and other attacks on women's health and safety right here at home, to the sad fact of hundreds of missing and murdered women. Politicians and developers bury the history of residential schools while building malls and subdivisions on unceded native land. All this banality of evil, murderously dragging on, this “modern, bereft, commodified life continu[ing] unaffected” (Zerzan 2002, 136)

Poet Maya Angelou was asked by comedian Dave Chappelle about growing up in the civil rights movement and what it meant to have experienced such intense marginalization based solely on the colour of her skin and if it ever made her angry. She answered

If you're not angry, you're either a stone or you're too sick to be angry... [But] you must not be bitter. Bitterness is like cancer -- it eats upon the host. It doesn't do anything to the object of its displeasure. So you said angry, yes. You write it, you paint it, you dance it, you march it, you vote it, you do everything about it. You talk it -- never stop talking it.

It's a constant struggle, that directing of anger into creativity, rather than inward

disappointed bitter nihilism. Propaganda is not enough and token resistance—like walking around in circles outside closed embassies or worse, limiting one's political involvement to dropping a vote in a ballot box once every few years—is simply useless and further depressing. Propaganda of the deed is what's needed.

The forces lined up against us are formidable and complex, and thus are required close and true analyses of our situation, paired with these deeds of creative and purposeful direct action. It is in this regard that I really want to recommend this collection of essays for your use and pleasure, because it is not only chock-a-block with such analytical angles, but also puts forward many excellent ideas and possibilities for refusal and resistance, towards carving out alternative futures. Not content with lyrical lament, these authors are constructive, abrasive, some like a sort of punk rock whetstone sharpening a prod to society, many sparks to the imagination flying off.

This book races up and down history and pre-history, grappling with the “progress” of civilization, colonialism and capitalism's vicious claws dug into our backs. It flies across wide geographical spread, from the shittiest suburban terrain, grit of cities, to the wilds of the landscapes scheduled to be dammed. By sketching out lessons in the life experiences of these many artists and thinkers, it cries out to future pirates, poets & playwrights.

This helps in the honing of our demands, specific methods to fight for the expansion of the commons, rather than its enclosure and demise. The way the ice caps are melting by now, it's pretty clear that the only way to end the class war is to win it. But how?

I have been placing my hopes on the creativity of anarchistic past, present and future generations for many years now. Since when at a formative age I read some Emma Goldman and U.K. LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*, I have both secretly and publicly hoped in the liberatory potential of directly democratic, popular assemblies. In the anarchism of autonomous, direct action to get things done, in popular education and the kids breakfast programs to go with it, by any means necessary. Instead of little pockets of freedom, that we might one day live whole lives of self-determination, without landlords, bosses or borders. Hoped that eventually through more and more consciousness of this power, it would spread like wildfire, spread enough to grow our own food, and squat the world.

But hope is a funny word, like Naomi Klein quipped at the Klimaforum in Copenhagen, it can just be an expression for a holding pattern. It was sad seeing so many people so deeply caught up in their high hopes for Obama, now obviously disappointed, but Klein also dug up a great quote from Studs Terkel: “Hope has never trickled down. It has always sprung up.” I’m with her on that it’s time to “hope less, [and] demand more.”

Even a more liberal journalist like Ryan Lizza recognized back in 2008, “Perhaps the greatest misconception about Barack Obama is that he is some sort of anti-establishment revolutionary. Rather, every stage of his political career has been marked by an eagerness to accommodate himself to existing institutions rather than tear them down or replace them” (quoted in Street 2009, n.p.).

So we are reminded that as we go about building alternative infrastructures and organizing the battles to win our specific demands, the state is not just withering away. Jeff Shantz writes (later in this book) that, “As the anarchist Bakunin famously proclaimed: 'The urge for destruction is a creative passion also.' So it is with [African poets] Ogun and Atunda. In both, 'the act of creation is locked in dialectical combat with the act of destruction'” (Osundare 1994, 84 as quoted by Shantz in this work). Collectively, we have a lot of work ahead, and no doubt maintaining that dialectic balance will further assist our survival.

Our fullest ingenuity and resourcefulness will also be necessary. As political prisoner Seth Hayes once said, “Only through our involvement will we become free.” We must be wary of reliance on “the master’s tools” like so much of the privatized internet, which can so easily be wielded against us in surveillance, exploitation and repression. Green anarchist John Zerzan argues that “[t]echnology, and it’s accomplice, culture, must be met by a resolute autonomy and refusal that looks at the whole span of human presence and rejects all dimensions of captivity and destruction” (Zerzan 2002, 204).

Rather, it is more likely that history will judge us by the extent to which we can, as Nigerian environmentalist activist and poet Nnimmo Bassey cried out, “Leave the coal in the hole! Leave the oil in the soil! Leave the Tar Sands in the land!” How high can we raise up our collective humanity, defend and arm our desires?

So, please, read on, and go flip through the index (the making of which was

some of the most fun I've had yet in my brief foray into indexing); make some time to follow up on some of the fascinating authors, poets, artists, musicians, pirates, actors (and their various bands and collective projects) which can be found in the many notes and references attached after each essay. May you find much fuel for your own creative passions, and may it burn long. All the while, as Zerzan said (to end his cut-up of Chomsky), "It is past time to go forward and engage the real depths of the disaster facing all of us." (Zerzan 2002, 143).

PJ Lilley,
Surrey, BC (on Kwantlen
& Semiahmoo territories)
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