

Land and Liberty

Seaweed

2004

Perhaps it's for the best that you don't have a memory of yourself centuries ago as you looked proudly around your community—a community deeply embedded in a habitat. This is where you first made love, learned to swim, caught your first fish, perhaps even fought a first battle against belligerent neighbors. Practically everybody in your community knows the names of the flora and fauna of your habitat, where the berries are, when the birds leave and return. There is a common history that is told and re-told. Most of you have felt a kinship with the totality of your habitat—its weather patterns, rocks, streams, mountains and its unique smells and sounds—the singular music of your home. In short, you have a sense of place, you belong. These are all my relations, you will exclaim, as you look around.

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Living as anarchists is in our blood. Since the first dawn we have been free, living in genuine communities embedded in bio-regions. Our feelings of indifference to our potential habitats grew over time, out of an imposed separation from our habitats as our homes. Imposed by a world view that seems to have resulted from a series of errors, coincidences and aberrations affecting a few human cultures throughout the so-called Paleolithic era. This is where we find the beginning of our systematic self-enslavement and self-alienation. The developments usually associated with the Neolithic revolution (urban living, a reliance on agriculture, etc.) have ultimately led to the present mega-technological civilization.

Over the centuries, myths have permeated civilized societies in order to make seem natural the ideologies that civilization is predicated on. These myths include the necessity of coercive authority, a belief in Progress, the notion of nature as hostile and the belief that economics (exchange rather than gift giving) are inherent in all human societies. Preceding urban civilization, many changes must have occurred within these cultures' collective psychic experience, for instance the emergence of symbolic mediation (language, art, time, etc.) that made domestication more likely to occur. These destructive upheavals and changes led to sedentary lives and the domestication of formerly wild plants and animals, breaking age-old, organic life-ways and creating a permanent cycle of increasing separation from our natural surroundings.

No matter the chronology, or whether there actually is an original source of domination, our contemporary predicament is most characterized by lack of access to a habitat within which to freely live in self-reliant ways. Restoring or reclaiming genuine habitats means the liberation of geographical areas from the rule of the state and capital, as well as renewing our kinship with nature. Free people living in free communities in harmony with the biosphere need to locate their communities within real habitats that are understood and valued by all members.

If we can push the project for social freedom and harmony with the biosphere toward one initially dedicated to the liberation of geographical areas, then several things become possible. For instance, a movement of genuine and stable communities can begin to establish itself. Once this begins to occur, with its tastes of authentic community bonds, freedom, self-reliance, organic self-direction, etc., our ability and motivation to resist will be much stronger.

While the rule of capital and centralized power might seem omniscient, they actually aren't. The enemy does not occupy every inch. There are many blind spots, openings, frontiers where the sentinels and soldiers are few. We can take advantage of these. Our struggle for individual and collective freedom isn't hopeless or so overwhelming as to make total surrender appear reasonable or inevitable. For instance, because so much of our captivity relies on internalized cops, on the daily reproduction of social misery by our own compliance with the various roles expected of us (worker, citizen, soldier, intellectual, consumer, activist, tourist, artist, man, woman, etc.), the weakest point in our opponents armor is probably our ability to refuse these roles. It is through withdrawal from scripted roles and cultural constructs that we will get to know our neighbors and comrades as more complex individuals (subjects) and thereby be able to create the communities of resistance that we need in order to form the bases of our offensives.

Most non-native radicals are admirably fighting against specific forms of oppression and injustice or even trying to find ways to oppose all forms of domination, but few are fighting for a community and the territory it depends on. This is because so many non-natives of North America are still visitors or settlers; they haven't made this place home yet. Not enough of us apparently have either deep bonds with our surroundings or with those who live within them. Our insurgency should be focused on the liberation of territory as potential habitats from the rule of the market and statist forces so that our nascent communities can become authentic communities, thereby gaining the strength to be genuinely effective forces for authoritarians to reckon with. Non-native rebels should be aiming for a time when they too will be defending real communities and their habitats/territories.

I take great inspiration from our comrades in Chiapas, Mexico, who, in defense of their territories and communities, took the first shot, and to a large degree, have won. With the realization that indeed we have nothing to lose but our false freedom, false wealth and false community, we too could be preparing ourselves for secession from the nation states and ideologies that hold us captive, wherever we live.

Much of North America consists of territory still claimed by the descendants of earlier tribal/clan/extended family peoples, and anti-authoritarian rebels need to acknowledge this when going native where we live. It's important for us to educate ourselves about the indigenous folks who lived in our area before contact with empire and its civilized soldiers and citizens, and to reach out to the traditionalists, our natural allies, among them.

Many anarchists and other rebels still seek anarchy through the creation of large political organizations, by winning converts and taking over the levers of production. They want us to manage civilization for ourselves rather than abolishing it and creating a total transformation of our life-ways. Many syndicalists, for instance, while having the laudable goals that all anarchists have, namely equality and freedom through the abolition of both the state and capitalism, are still primarily focused on achieving self-management of industry, not the abolition of the industrial mode of living. Their vision still includes cities, factories, a productivist rather than a subsistence ethic, an overarching infrastructure (transportation, research, development, etc.), large scale agriculture, etc. This doesn't mean that anti-authoritarian rebels like them and other pro-civilizationist anarchists aren't the allies of those who want to re-wild. It just means that while we might have kinship with individuals from within these movements, we don't share a kinship with the movements themselves. I nevertheless retain a strong affinity with most anarchist currents. Those at the levers of production can play a pivotal role in our liberation, not by kicking out the bosses and instituting self-management, but by destroying the productive apparatus of the bosses, thereby opening the doors for new life-ways to emerge.

What I am suggesting is the creation of organically self-organized subsistence movements that are aimed at asserting access to land. Of course we could likely expect that the cops would be sent in, either immediately or eventually, but that's what anarchist insurgency is, reclaiming our lives! When local folks, without the intermediary of parties or experts, collectively reclaim the ability to self-organize and self-provide within a specific territory this is called rebellion.

Community defense is a different topic than discussions around violence and non-violence. It is a question of our willingness to defend our gains, our communities, our territories and our habitats as we create them. Based on conditions specific to their time and place, some attempts at community self-organizing will experience more repression, more violence, more prison time. Regardless, we need to offer solidarity to both the armed comrades and the commune drop outs, indigenous direct actionists as well as the playful bioregionalist wanderers. If we want a diverse world, we will need diverse ways to get there. But history has shown that the foundations of power won't be quietly dissolved through withdrawal alone.

Organized defense isn't wrong or futile, it's necessary. Unions may have been reasonably good defense organizations in the past for many within the proletariat, but no longer have that role. Some indigenous activists have warrior societies, but these grew out of specific cultural experiences that most non-natives don't share. Many fighting movements, like the IRA, ETA, etc. over the last century have focused on national liberation and the recognition of a homegrown elite while rarely, if ever, talking about truly autonomous territories for local populations. However there have been many movements that are inspiring that had a libertarian basis, the Zapatistas, for example, with their cry of Land and Liberty.

I can imagine a local mutual aid network that also facilitates martial arts training and the teaching of eco-defense skills. The 'warrior' skills and training are only brought forth when necessary. In the meantime green freedom-loving radicals concentrate on creating/asserting some habitat in a peaceful manner. In fact creating these mutual aid networks with a community defense skills component could be seen as an integral part of creating communities of resistance. Let's liberate spaces so that we can once again live in harmony with each other and our surroundings and be ready and willing to defend them.

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