

No Borders

Love, Liberation & the Internal Revolution

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2006

“In any form of duality, the one we have judged as inferior is the one that rules us.”

—Rodolfo Scarfalloto

Of all the intoxicating notions of insurrection, “without borders” is one of the most enduring. The toppling of walls, the deletion of divisions, the repudiation of alienation and separation remains an ever-elusive vision and immediate attraction.

Yet, authentic abolition seems impossible to achieve through a decaying vortex of politics and activism. However, even those who negate politics with various anti-theories that pose as the one, true negation seem no more prepared to push past the either-or rubric that renders revolution a battle between reformist dreams and reactionary violence.

Somehow, the obvious outcome of eradicating alienation is frightening: diving from a cliff into the deep water of hope and heresy. External revolutions always promise a kinder, gentler enslavement. Radical obligation becomes a new master, complete with rituals of denial, talismans of self-sacrifice, and calls to martyrdom. The construct of activism can feel like going to a day job, without any of the meager benefits.

From the binary, dualistic trap of purely political and military revolutions, only one beast survives: the enemy within. Cut off from the emotional reality of interconnection, the anti-corporate activist becomes a mini-corporation, the anti-statist becomes a mini-state, the anti-militarist becomes a militia of one. Like the mythic serpent always sucking its own ass, we come full circle. Rebellions become the repression of the next rebellion. The father’s son always becomes his daughter’s father. The repressed child becomes the oppressive parent, and the cycle continues.

What about the internal revolution? This revolution requires a different kind of commitment. What if we kept fighting by refusing to live in an either/or reality?

Borders have always been the problem- the primary delusion, the hierarchical apex of human social arrogance— but why do we respect them so? Why do we erect them internally, even when we labor to abolish them externally?

The entire legacy of the ultra-left has hinged on an “us-them” fiction. At least, we are not like them. Forever washing our hands of their sins, we purify ourselves like monks. The fictions of deep social divisions are costly for those on the losing team. But for us as a species, they never existed as an ultimate reality. Such notions only serve those in power.

Our chosen narrative of resistance is in fact a fantasy, a facile feat of fatality. It’s an immature fantasy. Because if we lose, they must win or if they lose, we must win. Why do people who espouse a transcendence of competitive values so frequently fetishize triumph? The new boss is the narcotic notion of victory. It’s also always already a violent fantasy. On this one-dimensional trajectory of so-called history, the battle always requires bloodshed. Might the real refuseniks map entirely new terrain?

Is Love All We Need?

When we chart a new language of the possible, we can add new words to our deepest yearning. Yes, we can make radical our expressions of emotion. We can revolutionize as vectors of love.

In “The Meaning of Love,” advocate of “emotional literacy,” Claude Steiner, considers the chronic curtailing of compassion created by the institutions of repression, “a persistent system of supremacy of men over women, the powerful over the weak, of the middle aged over the young and elderly. This ancient tradition also known as patriarchy includes the domination of the emotions and threatens people with dire consequences if they fail to keep those emotions in control. Love is a particular target of patriarchal control because in its many forms it challenges and threatens patriarchal domination.” Steiner sees love as the most potent weapon to topple domination, not through protracted conflict but through profound community.

Of course, “love is all you need” is the oldest, most obvious pop-culture cliché. Yet love is also the only libation that can seed authentic liberation. Perhaps love should become prerequisite in forming affinity groups, in creating a vocabulary for sustainable solidarity. How can we speak of freedom without speaking of love? How can we speak of revolution without speaking of love? Will we go back to splitting hairs and spitting corpses?

From the barricades to the bedroom, another seed will germinate, forming the bedrock of the new world, a communal heart beating, the flower of passion and friendship and fierce, unconditional love.

The Interpersonal is Political

So much talk about bringing the war home, we may have forgotten that the war is already home. For generations, the domestic sphere has been drastic and tragic, the definition of un-safe space.

For all the study groups on the important texts of history, theory, and struggle, how many collectives devote a day a month to promote emotional health? How many hours per week should we commit to loving, playful, frivolous touch? Do we eat together, dance together, make art together, plan celebrations together? Does your household, commune, collective, infoshop, or reading room offer classes on healing, healthcare, daycare? Do we teach each other how to play fair?

Why do most attempts to reconcile the radical and the emotional get feminized and side-tracked, postponed while the real radicals engage in some real revolutionary work?

The DIY idea has fostered fabulous and festive gestures in mutual aid, in free education, in horizontal networks and skillshares. Can this notion be extended perpetually and perennially to posit the communal, emotional needs of the people as a primary revolutionary objective?

Feeling Gravity's Pull

Like a ripe apple wants to fall from a tree, babies want to be held and loved. Adults are not that different. Like gravity, love is a law in the ecology of humanity.

Of all the primal attractions and primary mysteries of human culture, nurturing and understanding the necessary pull between parent and child remains crucial. Theories of pleasure, touch, and healthy development in children based on peaceful, loving, and appropriate affection contribute to mature, convivial, independent, and interdependent communities.

After doing extensive scientific studies of the impact of “mother love” cross culturally, James Prescott concludes in “The Origins of Human Love and Violence”: “It is this form of culturally induced brain dysfunction/damage that accounts for the massive history of violence, human inequality and injustice which has so characterized the ancient and contemporary histories of patriarchal homo sapiens. Human physical affectional love which is mutually shared neutralizes power in human relationships and provides for the neurobiological and neuropsychological foundations for egalitarian, peaceful and harmonious behavior in human relationships.”

If we come to grapple with love as part of the sustainable biology of community and self; we might begin to see the hug differently, the handshake dialectically. Indeed, the warm, fuzzy, and hopeful remark is a kind of ecodefense. Moreover, protecting our spirits against insecurity, insult, and insanity can be seen as a kind of tactical action. Why not do for the old fashioned idea of “feeling good about ourselves” what we’d do for an old-growth forest? Why not unlearn the rationalist, masculinist insistence on thought over feeling? Why not accept that humans need love like riverbeds need water and dispense love generously as part of the generalized gift economy?

Sticking it to the Straw Man

“People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints, such people have a corpse in their mouth.”

—Raoul Vaneigem

Vaneigem warned us. But why do we quote him and quibble among ourselves—plotting, frothing, fulminating? Do we think that the anarchist gathering is the one true gathering? From the impoverished Id of failed revolutions, why give birth to purist ideologies to disprove other purist ideologies?

Stuck in the revolving door of an anti-religion, critics preen their radical pedigree, killing hope with another diatribunal. Sucking us into another personal attack on the naive nice-isms of New Age sages, some badass junior Bakunin will bust our chops with another of his more-radical-than-thou theories. In our collectives and our households, we bicker, back-bite, and back-stab to the extent that we dull our dreams, dampen our desires, and forget what we are fighting for.

I refuse to fight the war within the movement. To give name to this syncretic and eclectic impulse for peace within our pitifully small milieu, I recently called for an idea I called “ecumenical anarchy.” This notion gained some notoriety in the form of ridicule from both my friends and critics. Later, I realized I wanted something far more utopian than that: eclectic, syncretic, and ecumenical anarchy proved far too limiting a vision. When I tried to pass this peace pipe and no one smoked with me, I decided I was trying too hard to be right. So I gave up the fight. I refused to be correct or defend my position. I’m not peddling an ideology or shopping for one. I’m going back to un-school.

I’ve decided to become a conscientious objector to the war within myself.

—Winter Solstice 2005,
Pumpkin Hollow

fifth Estate

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<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/371-winter-2006/no-borders>
Fifth Estate #371, Winter 2006

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