

In the dawn, there is a wasteland and in the wasteland, a city and in the city, a ghetto and in the ghetto, a prison and in the prison, a cell and in the cell, a mother and in the mother, a child and in the child, a heart and in the heart, a heartbeat: the

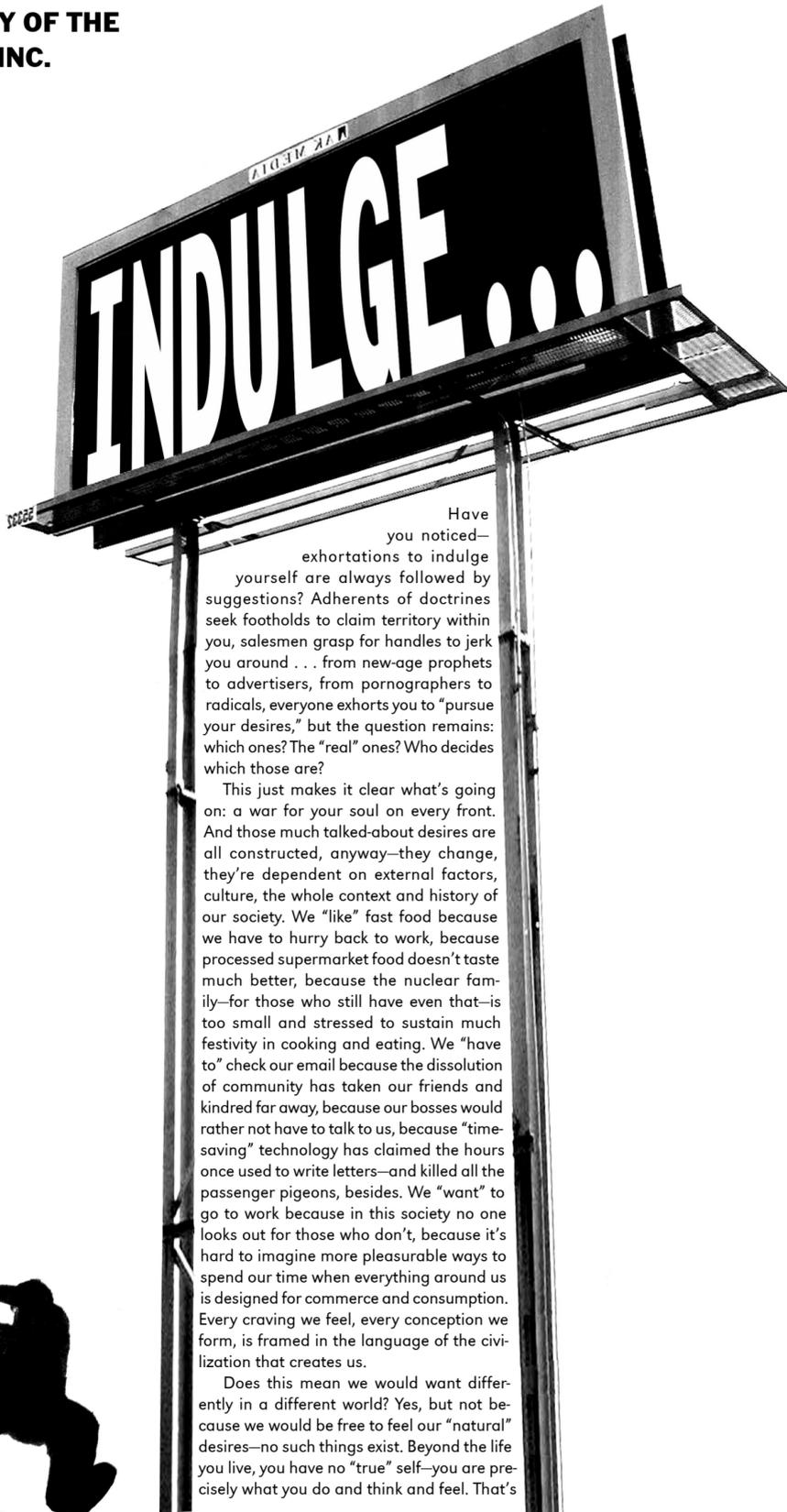
HARBINGER

of a new dawn.

FREE
as the air in your lungs and
the song on your tongue
surface-to-air missile
to the new generation
4TH COMMUNIQUÉ

A RANSOM NOTE REGARDING YOUR LIFE

COURTESY OF THE
CRIMETHINC.
SECRET
SERVICE



Have you noticed—exhortations to indulge yourself are always followed by suggestions? Adherents of doctrines seek footholds to claim territory within you, salesmen grasp for handles to jerk you around . . . from new-age prophets to advertisers, from pornographers to radicals, everyone exhorts you to “pursue your desires,” but the question remains: which ones? The “real” ones? Who decides which those are?

This just makes it clear what’s going on: a war for your soul on every front. And those much-talked-about desires are all constructed, anyway—they change, they’re dependent on external factors, culture, the whole context and history of our society. We “like” fast food because we have to hurry back to work, because processed supermarket food doesn’t taste much better, because the nuclear family—for those who still have even that—is too small and stressed to sustain much festivity in cooking and eating. We “have to” check our email because the dissolution of community has taken our friends and kindred far away, because our bosses would rather not have to talk to us, because “time-saving” technology has claimed the hours once used to write letters—and killed all the passenger pigeons, besides. We “want” to go to work because in this society no one looks out for those who don’t, because it’s hard to imagine more pleasurable ways to spend our time when everything around us is designed for commerce and consumption. Every craving we feel, every conception we form, is framed in the language of the civilization that creates us.

Does this mean we would want differently in a different world? Yes, but not because we would be free to feel our “natural” desires—no such things exist. Beyond the life you live, you have no “true” self—you are precisely what you do and think and feel. That’s

...AND UNDERMINE.

the real tragedy about the life of the man who spends it talking on his cell phone and attending business seminars and fidgeting with the remote control: it’s not that he denies himself his dreams, necessarily, but that he makes them answer to reality rather than attempting the opposite. The accountant regarded with such pity by runaway teenage lovers may in fact be “happy”—but it is a different happiness than the one they experience on the lam.

If our desires are constructs, if we are indeed the products of our environment, then our freedom is measured by how much control of these environments we have. It’s nonsense to say a woman is free to feel however she wants about her body when she grows up surrounded by diet advertisements and posters of anorexic models. It’s nonsense to say a man is free when everything he needs to do to get food, shelter, success, and companionship is already established by his society, and all that remains is for him to choose between established options (bureaucrat or technician? bourgeois or bohemian? Democrat or Republican?). We must make our freedom by cutting holes in the fabric of this reality, by forging new realities which will, in turn, fashion us. Putting yourself in new situations constantly is the only way to ensure that you make your decisions unencumbered by the inertia of habit, custom, law, or prejudice—and it is up to you to create these situations. Freedom only exists in the moment of revolution.

And those moments are not as rare as you think. Change, revolutionary change, is going on constantly and everywhere—and everyone plays a part in it, consciously or not. “To be radical is

simply to keep abreast of reality,” in the words of the old expatriate. The question is simply whether you take responsibility for your part in the ongoing transformation of the cosmos, acting deliberately and with a sense of your own power—or frame your actions as reactions, participating in unfolding events accidentally, randomly, involuntarily, as if you were purely a victim of circumstance.

If, as idealists like us insist, we can indeed create whatever world we want, then perhaps it’s true that we can adapt to any world, too. But the former is infinitely preferable. Choosing to spend your life in reaction and adaptation, hurrying to catch up to whatever is already happening, means being perpetually at the mercy of everything. That’s no way to go about pursuing your desires, whichever ones you choose.

So forget about whether “the” revolution will ever happen—the best reason to be a revolutionary is simply that it is a better way to live. It offers you a chance to lead a life that matters, gives you a relationship to injustice so you don’t have to deny your own grief and outrage, keeps you conscious of the give and take always going on between individual and institution, self and community, one and all. No institution can offer you freedom—but you can experience it in challenging and reinventing institutions. When school children make up their own words to the songs they are taught, when people show up by the tens of thousands to interfere with a closed-door meeting of expert economists discussing their lives, that’s what they’re up to: rediscovering that self-determination, like power, belongs only to the ones who exercise it.

Shout it over the rooftops: *Culture can belong to us.* We can make our own music, mythology, science, technology, tradition, psychology, literature, history, ethics, political power. Until we do, we’re stuck buying mass produced movies and compact discs made by corporate mercenaries, sitting faceless and immobilized at arena rock performances and sports events, struggling with other people’s inventions and programs and theories that make less sense to us than sorcery did to our ancestors, shamefacedly accepting the judgments of priests and agony columnists and radio talk show hosts, berating ourselves for not living up to the standards set by college entrance exams and glamour magazines, listening to parents and counselors and psychiatrists and managers tell us *we* are the ones with the problems, buying our whole lives from the same specialists and entrepreneurs we sell them to and gnashing our teeth in secret fury as they cut down the last trees and heroes with the cash and authority *we* give them. These things aren’t inevitable, inescapable tragedies—they’re consequences of the passivity to which we have relegated ourselves. In the checkout lines of supermarkets, on the dialing and receiving ends of 900 numbers, in the locker rooms before gym classes and cafeteria shifts, we long to be protagonists in our

own epics, masters of our own fate.

If we are to transform ourselves, we must transform the world—but to begin reconstructing the world, we must reconstruct ourselves. Today all of us are *occupied territory*. Our appetites and attitudes and roles have all been molded by this world that turns us against ourselves and each other. How can we take and share control of our lives, and neither fear nor falter, when we’ve spent those lives being conditioned to do the opposite?

Whatever you do, don’t blame yourself for the fragments of the old order that remain within you. You can’t sever yourself from the chain of cause and effect that produced you—not with any amount of willpower. The trick is to find ways to indulge your programming that simultaneously subvert it—that create, in the process of satisfying those desires, conditions which foster new ones. If you need to follow leaders, find leaders who will depose themselves from the thrones in your head; if you need to “lead” others, find equals who will help you dethrone yourself; if you have to fight against others, find wars you can wage for *everyone’s* benefit. When it comes to dodging the imperatives of your conditioning, you’ll find that *indulge and undermine* is a far more effective program than the

old heritage of “renounce and struggle” passed down from a humorless Christianity.

To return, finally, to the original question—yes, we too are *making suggestions* about which desires you pursue. We would be scoundrels to deny that! But we would be scoundrels *not* to make these suggestions, not to extol freedom and self-determination in a world that discourages them. Exhorting others to “think for themselves” is ironic—but today, refusing to oppose the propaganda of the missionaries and entrepreneurs and politicians simply means abandoning our society and species to their control. There’s no purity in silence. And liberty does not simply exist in the absence of control—it is something we have to make together. Taking responsibility for our part in the ongoing metamorphoses of the world means not being afraid to take part in the *making* of our society, influencing and being influenced as we do.

We make suggestions, we spread this *propaganda of desire*, because we hope by doing so to indulge our own programmed passion for propaganda in a way that undermines an order that discourages all of us from *playing* with our passions—and so to enter a world of total liberty and diversity, where propaganda and power struggles alike are obsolete. See you on the other side.

Until our most fantastic demands are met, fantasy will always be at war with reality.

It hijacks history classes and funerals, waylays secretaries on the way to the coffee machine, turns rails into slides and shopping malls to playgrounds—it sends lives spinning out of control. Movie directors endeavor to harness it, travel agents to peddle it, political parties to enlist it; but fantasy, like the one who pursues it in earnest, can serve no employer.

Now that every continent has been conquered and every countryside explored, nothing is more precious than passages to new worlds. Mass-manufactured faiths are haunted by a thousand dreams of escape—and fancy weaves better wings for flighty youth than pragmatism ever fashioned our forebears.

As revolutionaries, of course we are fighting for our daydreams! When we cannot stomach another hour of this, we side with those moments we surprise ourselves, flashes in which anything feels possible, peak experiences that may last only instants—and therefore with every inhibited impulse, forbidden pleasure, unexploded dream, all the stifled songs which, unleashed, could create an upheaval like no one has ever seen. And when the dust settles afterwards, we will side with them again.

Call this escapist—perhaps it is; but what class of people is most disturbed by the idea of escape? Jailers. Right or wrong, selfless or selfish, possible or impossible, we’re getting out of here.

They were shooting off fireworks through the tear gas down on the waterfront, the sky exploding in grenades of color. Whatever it is that pulls the pin, that hurls you past the boundaries of your own life into a brief and total beauty, it is enough.



“You can see the whole wide world from up here.”

“Yes—and others, as well.”

The invitation to a new world may take a lifetime or more to extend; self-imposed outcast status may be established in order to receive the transmissions, to give the seeds soil in which to grow. The one who does this is not jettisoning herself from “life” after all, but providing its first port of entry—metabolizing, invisibly, the garbage of the old world into the new one, just as other “parasites” do.

“Just like every coddled middle class liberal, when it comes down to it he’ll just run back home.” “Those lifestyle anarchists don’t care about anything but themselves. Don’t they understand if everyone lived like them, there would be no system to leech off?” “If they’re not going to abide by the decisions of the spokescouncil, they shouldn’t be here at all. I’d rather they were at home doing nothing than messing up our protest like this!” “How can you expect to _____ without _____? If you really cared about _____, you’d _____! (like me)” “I don’t want to be an activist or an anarchist or a part of this at all if it means I have to . . .”

infighting the good fight:



Why We Can't All Just Get Along

Can we get along? Even for those of us who would prefer to be hermits, there is no question today more important than this one—the fate of our species and planet will be decided by the answer.

There is no shortcut around this dilemma. Any kind of capital-R Revolution, any redistribution of wealth and power, will be short-lived and irrelevant without a fundamental change in our relationships—for social structure is a *manifestation* of these relationships, not a factor external to them. Revolution, then, is not a single moment, but a way of living: anarchy and hierarchy *always* coexist in varying proportions, and the important question is simply which you foster in your own life.

We are ill-qualified to reconstruct human relations if we can't even get along with each other in the attempt—and nothing seems to create dissension and division like those attempts. Often it seems that the people who know *least* how to relate to others are the self-professed activists who set out to save them. Yet these conflicts are not an inescapable consequence of human nature, but rather a pattern of cause and effect—that can and must be altered. This is a startling place to consider what the challenges are in undertaking this, and why we've had such a hard time to date.

The Scarcity Economy of Self

In a world where free, creative action is hard to get away with, we all feel *impoverished*, cheated of the experiences and sensations we know should be ours. We compensate as best we can, and often this compensation serves only to preserve our destitution. We seek status in wealth, power, strength, beauty, reputation, anything to soften the blows of wasted days. We compensate by seeking another kind of status, too:

“With a little hard work, you can make yourself feel alienated by anything.”

wonder we end up fighting among ourselves.

Justice and Judgment

Scarcity thinking and the destructive insecurity it fosters have played a large part in shaping our notions of justice². Passing judgment can be the ultimate compensation for one's own shortcomings. It's easy to get self-righteous about someone else's mistakes, flaws, inconsistencies . . . for we *all* have them, and the more focused we are on the shortcomings of others, the less we have to think about our own. Witch-hunters who believe that they have found a real live criminal (or racist, lifestyle anarchist, class traitor, etc.), just like the ones in the movies, can reassure themselves that they have isolated the contagion and need look no further—and the more vitriolic their denunciations of the enemy, the more afraid everyone else is to admit what they have in common with him.

Once again—we live in a violent world. It's as sensible to blame any one of us for being colonized

“Righteousness is a premium currency in this post-Christian society, though it refers to a mythical world.”

by this violence as it is to blame the oceans for being polluted. The question should not be whether an individual is guilty—we all are, at least of complicity—but rather how to enable *all* individuals to confront and transform the violence and ignorance within themselves. Often nothing can help a person to do this more than to offer him forgiveness, to trust that he is interested in communicating with you; this makes it easier for him to drop his defenses and acknowledge what you have to say. This is *not* to say that we shouldn't defend ourselves whenever we have to, and by any means necessary—but let's do this for practical reasons, not to serve a lust for revenge and superiority.

Objectivity vs. Subjectivity

Objectivity thinking, on which our scarcity-oriented, authoritarian civilization is based, posits that there is only one truth. According to this school of reasoning, those who want to explain human behavior or overthrow capitalism should make different propositions re-

² The self-righteous activist's sense of justice is derived from the same origins as the “justice system” which feeds today's prison-industrial complex: a Christianity that emphasized “individual responsibility” over the cause and effect of social conditions, in order to invent, advertise, and sell the ultimate scarce commodity—salvation. In a state of truly mutually-beneficial social relations, such threats as incarceration and hellfire would be unnecessary—the threat of expulsion from the community would be dismaying enough.

¹ The other expression of this same affliction is hero worship, in which one projects all the qualities one finds admirable onto others. This is simiarily crippling, of course, and inevitably leads back to the same hostility and scorn—for the only thing you can do with individuals or groups you have put on a pedestal is *knock them off*.

garding the best way to do this, and debate them until the “correct” one is selected. And so, in the ivory towers, intellectuals and armchair revolutionaries debate incessantly, coming no closer to consensus, development and more exclusive jargon, while the rest of us labor to make something actually happen.

When it comes to “under-represented” perspectives, remember—it's not *your* role to “represent” them, as the politicians “represent” us. Better to do your best to represent yourself, and encourage others to do the same . . . for example, by listening to those who *already are*. Some people may dismiss your perspective (as “middle class,” “reformist,” “extremist,” etc.), but there is no such thing as an illegitimate perspective—it is only illegitimate to act as if *any* perspective is not legitimate. A lot of this goes on, often perpetrated in the name of the under-represented (an easy trick!) by those who aren't necessarily under-represented themselves. Don't be intimidated—you can be sure that if you are feeling something, someone else is feeling it, too, and needs to know she is not alone.

Different people are going to have different beliefs, tactics, goals. Accept this. They don't necessarily think differently than you do because they are not as smart or experienced or perceptive as you—they may be your equals in all these regards, but come to different conclusions based on different evidence from their own lives. Respect this, while offering whatever perspectives you can yourself—keeping in mind that the less you have in common, the more you would do well to *listen* rather than speak. When hearing a person's position on an issue, you don't have to immediately begin debating which of you is right. Instead, try to think of projects you could undertake together that would further the interests you have in common. Whatever ideological issues need to be worked out can be worked out in practice, if they can be worked out at all—they certainly will not be resolved by another contest of egos disguised as a debate about theory³.

Obviously, it's impossible for anyone to legislate for everyone else, since every life experience is unique—nevertheless, you can offer your own experiences and conclusions, for others to do with what they will (in the words of the divine Marquis: “if you can speak honestly for yourself, you will find you have spoken for others as well”). This may be *seen* as legislating, by those who believe there is only one right way; but those who attack you for offering your own perspective or analysis on the grounds that it doesn't apply to them (or isn't relevant to *all* people, starving mothers in Somalia, the transgendered community, etc.) are still working within the scarcity model.

Remember—every value you hold, every decision you make, you make for *yourself alone*. The scarcity-thinkers will attack you as if you are deciding for everyone—don't fall into the trap of their thinking by arguing for your own methods and ideas as universals. Simply point out that you act according to your own conscience, and hope to integrate your genuine desire to make things happen—for them, activism serves the same function that machismo, fashion, popularity serve for others. Activists who are still serving the imperatives of insecurity tend to alienate others—they may even unconsciously *want* to alienate others, so they can stand alone as the virtuous vanguard. Seeing such activists in action, people who don't have the same insecurities to placate assume that activism has nothing to do with their own lives.

Whenever you have an idea for a “revolutionary” project—you should ask yourself: Are you certain of

³ In “taking sides” against others, you can forget that *everyone's* positions are fluid—and forcing someone to act as a partisan of one “side” can trap them into identifying themselves with that side exclusively.

approach into those of others—just as it is up to others to do with you.

The Capitalism of Ideas

Those who still hold that there is such a thing as “objective” truth generally feel a compulsion to persuade others of their truths. This is the self-perpetuating consequence of the power struggles that go on in the market of *ideas*; as in any economy based on scarcity, this market is characterized by competition between capitalists who strive to preserve and increase their power over others.

In our society, ideas function as capital in much the same way money does⁴. Individuals who can get others to “buy in” to their ideas obtain a disproportionate amount of control over their surroundings; large conglomerates (the Catholic Church, the Communist Party) can come to rule large parts of the world this way, just as corporations do—indeed, there can be no entrenched political or financial power without ideological capital to back it up. Little “start-up companies” of competing ideas enter the market to contest such monopolies, and sometimes one unseats the reigning creed to become the new dominant paradigm; but, as in any capitalist system, power tends to flow upward to the top of a hierarchy, from which the masters, the ones qualified to employ it, decide matters for everyone else

. . . and just as in financial capitalism, ultimately it is not even the ruling class but *competition itself* that is in control. In this environment, anyone with a value or viewpoint has to rush to sell it to others before being run out of business.

It's hard to imagine from here what a world free from this war of ideologies would be like. Obviously, it would have to be a world free from analogous wars (for money, power, selfishness), too, for it's foolish to insist that “one can think however one wants” when some ways of conceptualizing the cosmos are punished by exclusion or embargo. Those of us who fight for freedom from the dictatorship of ideology—*any* ideology—which always accompany and enable them⁵.

power of gods and masters would do well to contest the dictatorships of ideology—*any* ideology—which always accompany and enable them⁵.

Why People Don't Want to “Join the Movement”

Considering the numbers of public relations agents, televangelists, self-help gurus, and other assorted fanatics and salesmen competing to convert them, the hesitance “the masses” show to get involved in any kind of social movement is actually a healthy self-defensive mechanism. Thus the biggest challenge for those who would find common cause with others to make revolutionary change is how to avoid making them defensive.

Radical politics does make people feel defensive in the West today—this is a greater obstacle to social transformation than any corporate control or government repression. And this is due in large part to the attitudes of the activists themselves; many activists have invested in their activist identities as an act of *compensation* at least as much as out of a genuine desire to make things happen—for them, activism serves the same function that machismo, fashion, popularity serve for others. Activists who are still serving the imperatives of insecurity tend to alienate others—they may even unconsciously *want* to alienate others, so they can stand alone as the virtuous vanguard. Seeing such activists in action, people who don't have the same insecurities to placate assume that activism has nothing to do with their own lives.

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⁴ Ideas, like other forms of capital, are considered private property, and protected by law—in the cases of plagiarism and copyright infringement, for example.

⁵ This statement, paradoxically, rests on ideological assumptions of its own—but perhaps this kind of self-contradiction is the first, necessary step in the disarmament of ideology.

your motivations? Will your words and deeds mobilize and enable, or immobilize and discourage? Are you trying to create a spectacle of your freedom/compassion/erudition, to establish your status as a revolutionary/leader/intellectual theorist, to claim the moral high ground, to win at the childish competition of who is most oppressed (as if suffering was *quantifiable*)—still seeking power and revenge in the guise of liberation? People can tell when you are lordng yourself over them or playing a role, just as they can sense when you are acting out of honesty and joy. They're much more likely to respond to that, since their lives are already filled with enough role-playing and rivalry.

We would do better to abandon the crusade to “convert the masses,” with all its patronizing implications that others are lazy, blind, weak, victimized, in need of guidance. Instead—first, we ought to reach out to those who are in situations similar to ours, or ones we have been in, these people, with whom we have the most in common, are the ones to whom our perspectives can be most useful⁶. Second, we can find people already active in communities other than ours with whom we share values and goals, and work with them—this is vastly preferable to entering others' communities and attempting to “organize” them according to the doctrines of outsiders⁷. Third, we can endeavor to defend others from the encroachments of power and ideology—and extend to them whatever tools we have developed in our own struggles, to apply as they see fit outside our agendas⁸. Finally, we can find common cause with people on the grounds of the “antisocial” things they are already doing and feeling: theft, vandalism and graffiti, “laziness,” rebelliousness, general nihilism, compassion.

This is the real significance of the “glorification” of shoplifting, adultery, etc. that some radical propaganda indulges in: *not* to argue that shoplifting itself is revolution in action (or for that matter that one *must* shoplift to be radical—as if revolution was a commodity in a scarcity economy, only available through certain channels), but to establish connections to the daily lives and resistances of individuals who are not yet acting out of an articulated desire for revolution. *The radical significance of a statement is in the effects of making it, not in whether or not it is “objectively” true.*

On the grounds of the private longings and frustrations people feel—their hatred for busywork, the joy in transgression they find they share with teenagers and anarchists, the instinctive suspicion with which they approach all totalitarian systems—a resistance can be established that proceeds from the individual motivations and standpoints of all those who comprise it, rather than the demands of political parties and dogmas. This is the only kind of resistance that can rescue us from both authoritarian power *and* authoritarian ideology.

Not Unity, But Harmony

Any kind of “resistance movement” is going to develop conflicts over strategy (“violent” vs. “non-violent,” etc.), as different individuals construct their own analyses and test them out in practice. To contest this diversity rather than seeking to benefit from it—to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory by turning chances to address important issues into squabbles—is to wish everyone had the same life history and perspective. Teenage hoodlums are not going to find the same things liberating as middle-aged librarians do; but both have a stake in liberation, and must be a part of any struggle for it. Those who would set rules for the unruly and regulations for the irregular would deny the complexity not only of human beings but also of the revolution we have to make.

Others are always going to have different approaches and goals than you do; the challenge is not to convert them to your own strategy (for who knows—could it be they *actually know better than you what is good for them?*), but rather to find ways to integrate divergent methods into a

mutually beneficial whole. Like it or not, if you feel that another's tactics are ineffective or counterproductive, it is up to *you* to find and add the missing ingredient that can *make* them effective—otherwise, all the energy they put into their efforts is not only *wasted*, but turned against them and everyone else. Under such circumstances it will be much easier to point fingers and lay blame—but this accomplishes nothing.

Approaches that speak clearly to some people may alienate others—even and especially proclaimed activists (though, really, the *last* people any given approach needs to reach or please are people who are *already* radicalized). In these cases, it's important not to *feel* too

we'll need an equally diverse arsenal of outreaches. In other cases, approaches that seem to contradict each other may actually form a perfect symbiosis: as in the relationship between masked rioters and well-behaved, well-spoken proponents of social change. No one in power would take heed of the latter without the former behind them (imagine Martin Luther King's non-violence without the implicit threat of Malcolm X's confrontational stance), and without “respectable” support, insurgents can easily be marginalized and destroyed. In these situations, all parties should remember that others may even have to publicly disavow their tactics in order to continue playing their part effectively⁹: when this happens, there should be no hard feelings.

Certainly it can be difficult to work alongside people who profess beliefs entirely different from yours—and you should never work with others you fear will betray you or hijack your efforts to serve their own ends. But, again, ask yourself: are your positions significant to you as positions—possessions, status symbols, badges of identity—or as generalizations that exist to help you create more fulfilling moments of life? It's common sense to integrate the differing tactics of those who share a common goal; it's more challenging, but equally important, to put aside your compulsion to persuade everyone else of your opinions, and work to create harmony between individuals who live in totally different worlds. That harmony might never be complete—but it's a nobler ob-

jective than any unity enforced by standardization.

“I grew up as a middle class rebel, a punk rocker. When I gave up trying to push reforms through the established channels and began to practice direct action with others from my subculture, I realized what a vast, untapped force this demographic has to offer.”

“We were thrilled to discover that just one neighborhood over there was a group in the Hispanic community trying to do similar things, using different words for the same ideas. When we sat in on one of their meetings, it became clear to us how much more we could be doing.”

“When the locals began joining in the streetfighting, we showed them how to make their shirts into masks so the police couldn't identify them, and how to use lime juice to protect themselves from the tear gas—that's anarchist leadership in action, or what we have in place of it: sharing our skills with others, spreading power, instead of concentrating it.”

“As the black-masked corporate window-smasher yelled at the law-abiding liberal protester who tried to restrain her: “It's not your job to stop me from ‘making your cause look bad,’ but to distance yourself from my actions as much as you have to to keep the respect of the demographic you're trying to reach! It's my job to make something happen here so they'll have to listen to you in the fucking first place!”

“Anyone who isn't on both sides of the issue is obviously against me from some direction.”



threatened since you may not actually be—and to keep in mind that with the vast diversity of lives on this planet,

own—and this can actually be a *more* complete person, as her companions can represent parts of herself for her that she would not otherwise express. This makes sense, for everyone is ultimately a product of the same world—we are all interconnected, each manifesting different aspects of the same interplay of forces. Without this insight, cooperation and community can only be incidental and haphazard.

Eventually, for the individual experienced in living communally, it becomes possible to regard the entire cosmos as one vast, albeit dysfunctional, collective; the problem is simply how to make its workings more to one's liking. This is not to say the fascists, sexists, etc. can go about their merry business and be “part of our collective”—they'd be the first ones to deny that, and follow it up with *proof!* But remember, the chief argument of fascism and reactionary thinking has always been that cooperation and autonomy are mutually exclusive, that people *have* to be ordered and controlled or else they will do nothing but be lazy and kill each other. The more we can demonstrate that this is untrue, the less appeal their claims will have.

War, or Revolution?

We would-be revolutionaries so frequently frame our project in martial terms: we set out to Fight Racism, Smash Fascism, Destroy Capitalism, Eat the Rich. This enables us to see ourselves as noble crusaders—and more importantly, to have adversaries, which reassures us of our own righteousness. This reassurance is apparently more precious than the success in our efforts it replaces and prevents—at least, it is so long as one hasn't yet tasted that success. We have to remember in every instant that our enemies are *not* human beings.

Perhaps the most important thing you can do is *be there* for others, help them believe in themselves, offer real compassion—not the condensation of charity—when it is needed. But there is no formula for this; mercy comes in the least predictable forms and from the most unexpected sources. Often it takes a person who has suffered something similar to be able to offer real succor to one who is suffering or struggling. That's another reason why it is good that we have all chosen different paths and suffered different things, even things that seemed to isolate us—why there is a place even for spoiled rich kids and homeless drug addicts and lovers who have lied and betrayed in this struggle: for who else could relate to others in those difficult situations, offer them guidance and hope? When you recognize how your own tribulations have prepared you to help others, it can make sense of experiences that seemed unjustifiable; at the same time, this may help you to see the importance of others who previously appeared without worth.

Often we have our hands full dealing with our own pain, too consumed by bitterness and confusion to be able to offer others anything, least of all mercy. This means it is all the more critical that we not miss the opportunities we do get to be good to others—whether or not they think we've “earned” it, whether or not we understand them, whether or not we think it will make a difference.

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ones around you. Revolution may involve learning to live and act cooperatively, but it doesn't mean *everyone* has to be friends.

ings: our enemies are the conditions that make us enemies.

Perhaps a world entirely without enemies is not possible, or even desirable—but understand, war is *business as usual* for capitalist society: Exxon vs. Shell, U.S.A. vs. Iraq, Communists vs. Anarchists, lover against lover and parent against child. Even if we could kill every last rapist, C.E.O., head of state, police officer, and housemate who won't do the dishes, that violence would remain in the world as the venom and fury of those who survived them (not to mention the ways those murders would leave their mark on us)—that's karma for you. *Revolution* is what happens when you create situations that make the old conflicts—all that inertia of resentment and insecurity and antagonism—irrelevant.

Of course warfare is necessary sometimes—we have to fight all efforts to keep us at war with each other, and for some of us this will mean violence. But, as the venerable sage once pointed out, “*if it's you against the world, bet on the world.*” So many of us alienate ourselves so needlessly from others, eventually relying on some abstraction (“the working class,” “the imminent insurrection”) for camaraderie once every companion of flesh and blood is gone, or, worse, concluding that cooperation is simply “impossible”—when history shows that it is possible, just not for you, until you're ready to be more patient, considerate, humble, forgiving.

When you can be generous enough not to blame another for her incoherence, selfishness, mistakes, bad ideas, even acts of violence, you can discern what she does have to offer. When you can put into practice a form of justice that *takes responsibility* for setting things right, you can *heal*, rather than impotently dispensing guilt and glory. When you can be patient with impatience, when you can resist contemplation, when you can refrain from being self-righteous even and especially with the self-righteous, you can do your part to liberate all of us prisoners of war.

Doing things you *enjoy* will help you not to take your frustrations out on others—as will working with people you like, whenever it's possible¹⁰. There's nothing noble or revolutionary about “sacrificing yourself for the cause,” especially when it makes you impossible to be around. At the same time, it won't—and shouldn't—always be possible to surround yourself with people who see things the way you do: be ready to leave your comfort zone, and bring a generous heart when you do.

This is dedicated to all those who have done so over the years, who have taken it for granted that for all their clumsiness, people from other backgrounds and advocates of other tactics really did want to coexist and cooperate with them: to the men and women of the working class who took the time to explain to bourgeois activists how they were alienating them, even when the latter did not at first know how to listen; to the women who not only demanded men recognize the existence and effects of their sexism, but also acknowledged the fears and anxieties *men* feel; to the survivors of abuse who went on to give counseling to both abused and abusers. Without them, we would assuredly have torn each other to pieces already. It's frightening to let your guard down, it's hard to swallow your pride (even when clinging to it means betraying yourself)—but this is the only way to help others do the same. Until they can, we will live in a barren world of shields and swords, each of us a city-state unto herself. Some anarchy.

Don't be intimidated by the colossal challenge of “saving the world”; there are as many worlds as there are people—save *yours*, the one made up of the life you share with everyone around you. Where one flower can bloom, a million more will follow.

Perhaps the most important thing you can do is *be there* for others, help them believe in themselves, offer real compassion—not the condensation of charity—when it is needed. But there is no formula for this; mercy comes in the least predictable forms and from the most unexpected sources. Often it takes a person who has suffered something similar to be able to offer real succor to one who is suffering or struggling. That's another reason why it is good that we have all chosen different paths and suffered different things, even things that seemed to isolate us—why there is a place even for spoiled rich kids and homeless drug addicts and lovers who have lied and betrayed in this struggle: for who else could relate to others in those difficult situations, offer them guidance and hope? When you recognize how your own tribulations have prepared you to help others, it can make sense of experiences that seemed unjustifiable; at the same time, this may help you to see the importance of others who previously appeared without worth.

Often we have our hands full dealing with our own pain, too consumed by bitterness and confusion to be able to offer others anything, least of all mercy. This means it is all the more critical that we not miss the opportunities we do get to be good to others—whether or not they think we've “earned” it, whether or not we understand them, whether or not we think it will make a difference.

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¹⁰ Consensus-based organizing can sometimes create unnecessary conflict and interference. Organizing autonomously—and trying another free association whenever one isn't working—can give you the freedom you need to resist others, so you can work well with the

Definition of Terms

a flow chart

In a totalitarian regime (whether it be political, like the Stalinist government of the Soviet Union, or socio-economic, like the corporate capitalism of our day), in which the whole of human relations is regulated, fragmentary resistance to any one aspect of that regime—environmental destruction, police brutality, child abuse, racism, employee ennuï—can only fail. The totality itself must be contested, the basic paradigms as well as their specific manifestations . . . not in order to impose another totalitarian order, but to open new horizons for everyone.

For this, a resistance is needed that does not standardize those who participate in it, in which individuals can help each other break free in the process of creating and exploring themselves. This sketch of six oppositions is not meant as a complete map of the world of human relations, but rather as a selection of tools for the woman or man engaged in her own analysis.

—Nadia C.

We move in spiral paths, imploding (🌀) or expanding (🌀), relinquishing the world to become what we hate, or finding the faith to discover new worlds and loves. **Alchemy** is the process by which one moves from the vicious inner circle outwards . . .

Abundance

All of us can be rich . . .

Abundance and scarcity are not just measurements of the resources which exist to meet one's needs—they are different ways of regarding both the resources and the needs themselves . . . which become reflected in the world.

Abundant resources exceed the need for them; they may even multiply when utilized. Most of the things which set life apart from survival—love, friendship, confidence, imagination, courage, adventure, experience—are available in abundance: the more you partake of them, the more they are available to you and everyone else as well.

Scarce resources, on the other hand, exist in limited supply, and there may simply not be enough to go around. A scarcity economy is driven by the considerations necessitated by those conditions: in it, the "laws" of supply and demand are imposed first of all by a shortage, real or perceived, of needed goods.

It might seem that scarcity is simply an inescapable fact of life, but it's not that simple. Not all scarcities are imposed by circumstances—often, we impose them upon ourselves by the ways we assess and apply our assets. In our technologically advanced, post-industrial civilization, tools and amenities which were unheard of before are plentiful, yet most of us distinctly feel there to be a shortage of the things we need. This should not be surprising, for our social and economic systems depend on there not being enough for everybody. Everyone can have a full life—but not everyone can have a full wallet. Our society institutes scarcity and deprivation, by framing life as a desperate rush for limited material wealth and status.

They say the only free men are the hobo and the king. They are indeed the only ones who can claim to be lords of all they survey—though for utterly different reasons: the former possesses the entire world by releasing it, while the latter still owns only what he can conquer. Here we can see the paradigms of abundance and scarcity in action as philosophies of life. Likewise, the scavenger who thrives off the excess of his society sees opportunity and adventure where the executive sees only hunger and destitution; the non-monogamous lover sees love as something that only increases in richness and depth by being shared freely, while the possessive husband regards it as a precarious prize obtained by sacrifice and hard labor, which must be hoarded and caged; the would-be rock idol or movie star needs a million anonymous fans watching his actions to validate them (thus selfhood itself is subject to scarcity in a spectator society), while the woman in a supportive, egalitarian community generally attains self-confidence and happiness to the extent that she helps others around her do the same.

Once upon a time, humans lived in a relationship of trust with the earth, seeing it as a wellspring of abundance¹¹. We ate fruit, which grew freely around us, naturally wrapped in a biodegradable peel and containing seeds from which more fruit trees would grow after the fruit was eaten. Today we eat candy bars, for which we must exchange our labor, of which supplies are strictly limited—and when we throw away the wrappers, manufactured from plastics and chemicals foreign to nature, we can be sure that we are adding to the slow accumulation of garbage that makes fruit trees more and more scarce. Ancient human beings lived in conditions of feast or famine, celebrating when their cups overflowed and whistling through leaner times, never having to diminish their faith in their resources by measuring them; for us, everything is a transaction, an occasion for computation and calculation.

Abundance and scarcity are above all the manifestations of opposing approaches to life: ingenuity or inertia, faith or fear. If we restructure our values and assumptions about what the cosmos has to offer us, we can enter a new world of plenty.

Scarcity

. . . not all of us can be wealthy.

The more you recognize the treasures life has to offer, the more you can trust that it will offer them.

The more you trust the world, the more wonderful things you recognize in it.

Faith

Invest in the future . . .

One either invests oneself in the present, or the future: either reacts to existing circumstances and their demands, or acts to change them. You can spend all your energies surviving according to the terms set by the market economy, the expectations of parents and peers, the force of your own inertia—or risk everything to make those considerations obsolete. For this, though, you need a nihilist's abandon . . . or faith.

Faith is the opposite of superstition. Faith means believing in the boundless possibilities of the universe—and setting out to explore them. It means knowing that if you leap off a cliff, you're bound to land somewhere. Faith means trusting that the world is wider and richer than you could possibly see from this point, and therefore not feeling pressure to plan out the rest of your life from here. Better to sketch a route to the horizon: from there, you'll be able to make out new vistas, and make new plans accordingly. Heaven help the people who make long term plans today and stick to them, whose lives will never be greater than what they can imagine right now!

Faith enables you to rely on your intuition: instead of being trapped by what you know, you do what you need to do. Faith gives you power over your fear. What you are confronting a police line or giving birth to a child or a song, faith is indispensable for capital-L living.

Life

Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

Life is existence when it feels worth waking up in the morning. Life is written about in epic poetry, love songs, Shakespeare's plays and sonnets; survival is treated in medical textbooks, urban planning reports, and ergonomics presentations. Life is glorious, heartbreaking, extravagant. Survival, without life, is ridiculous, burdensome, absurd.

The more you approach life as a game, the more full and free it becomes.

The more you live in your own hands, the more it is an experience of liberty and pleasure.

Survival

Safety, and the Pursuit of Property

Survival is life reduced to imperatives, whether they be biological (get air to breathe! get food to eat! get laid!) or cultural (get air conditioning, to be comfortable! get a television, to keep up with what's going on! get a sports car, to attract a mate!). It's often ambiguous which class a given mandate falls into, as in the case of the computer programmer who cannot feed himself without a can opener; but the essential character of these needs is that they appear non-negotiable.

Survival resources tend to be seen as scarce—there's only so much food, water, housing, medicine in the world; but as the famous tramp responded to the query of a bourgeois man ("you've got to eat, haven't you?"): "yeah, but not as much as you eat."

Our era is characterized by ever-increasing standards of survival. The minimum "standard of living" to participate in society is always mounting, and it's a full time job keeping up: getting the new format for video-viewing, learning to use the new computer program, treating yourself with the new antidepressant . . . This constant technological and subsequent cultural acceleration is the consequence of an economic system based on competition, in which constant innovation is necessary both to sell new products and to keep up with everyone who uses them.

Current anthropology suggests that people spend more time working to meet their "basic needs" today than ever before: prehistoric human beings spent the greater part of their days in creative leisure, while with all our labor-saving devices we waste most of our lives earning the money to pay for them, using them to mow the lawn, waiting in traffic to buy more batteries for them. And of course, the more time we spend providing for mere survival, the less time we have to live.

Work

. . . not destinations.

Work provides for survival, nothing more. It always appears as a response to necessity, whether it be the need for food and shelter and life insurance, the establishment of social status, or the obligation of the Protestant work ethic. Work answers to imperatives; play creates its own rules.

Exchange Economies

They say everything has a price.

Liberty ends where economics begins. Get your money's worth—earn your keep—there's no such thing as a free lunch¹²; exchange economics posits life as a zero-sum sport between bargainers who maneuver to outbid and outwit each other in order to gain control of more fragments of the world. Free trade, the free market—these are oxymorons: where systematized competition is free to bend all humanity to its prerogatives, ultimately no one is free to focus on anything else.

Exchange-economics thinking presupposes a one-dimensional scale of value, according to which everything can be appraised: if an avocado costs a dollar, and a new sports car costs \$20,000, then a sports car must be worth exactly twenty thousand avocados. But such equations are absurd. Can you calculate the financial value of a friendship, the exchange rate of a clever joke for a meal tenderly prepared, the comparative worth of the sound of birds singing in the trees against the current market value of lumber? Those who would measure such things miss everything that is beautiful and unrepeatable about them; once one recognizes this, it becomes clear how pathological such calculations are in any context. As if one could "deserve" life in all its complexity and magnanimity in the first place—let alone good or bad fortune, the moment of stillness at sunrise, the flavor of avocados, the sensation of riding in a speeding car! This is simply not the way the world works—anyone who has lived and paid attention knows the best and worst things life has

Relationships of Force

. . . or live and die by the sword?

When you live in fear, the only way to approach the world that makes sense is with a gun in your hand. Just as the ones who see scarcity everywhere they look create a world of shortages, those who depend on force to relate to others create a necessity for it; and those born into this world of coercion inherit the cycle.

Coercion comes in more subtle forms than rape, "peace-keeping" bombings, economic sanctions. It comes camouflaged as body image standards (which even masquerade as "health" standards), psychological pressures that influence people to repress their desires, laws enforced by public opinion as well as thugs in uniform. It may be disguised as a seemingly trivial argument between friends (for anyone who seeks to establish rank, even in knowledge of trifling things, seeks a lever with which to exert force on his fellows), or that quiet self-mutilation which lowers and relatives sometimes use to manipulate each other—the inverse and identical twin of macho aggression.

Some call this a democracy—did you get a say in what the billboards you pass every morning say, what they go on repeating inside your head all day, the trees they cut down by your house to make room for the new gas station? How about the preservatives they put in the food you eat, or the conditions in the factories that produce them? Your wages at work, or how much money the I.R.S. takes from you? These aren't just inevitable "facts of life"—they are the manifestations of conflict as the system of human relations, every man for himself and force against us all¹⁴. The leagues of intimidating red tape and the battering of women, the biased news coverage and the inhumanity of factory farms, the jockeying for ascendance between colleagues and countries, all these are simultaneously expressions of the strife at the heart of our civilization and weapons which, used by factions fighting for survival on its terms, perpetuate it.

Living under the reign of coercion strips you of your faith, leaves you ready to use force on others, to treat them as the world has treated you. It is well known that the playground bully acts out of feelings of worthlessness, that the teenage hoodlum is moved to vandalism by insecurity and frustrated yearning; how much self-loathing and desperation must then be in the hearts of the moguls and power-brokers, whose machinations it is that keep the

Gift Economics

We know everything is priceless.

In stark contrast to exchange trading, gift-giving is its own reward. In a gift economy, which exists whenever anything is freely shared and no score is kept, the participants receive more the more they bestow. Everyone who has shared a real friendship or a morning of incredible lovemaking knows intuitively that when the option opens, human beings return to this natural relationship.

This is a challenge to find and share the trust and responsibility it will take to reinstate this as the basis of all human affairs, as it was before the cancer of avarice took hold.

Play

Head for horizons . . .

Play is what takes place when all the problems of survival have been solved and there is energy left over. Play is not constrained by external demands—the player establishes her own goals and meanings in the course of acting. Play takes place in a condition of freedom—rather, it is the condition of freedom. In play, the individual interacts with the forces around her rather than reacting to them, creates the context for her actions as she acts rather than passively being shaped by the situation: it is thus that self-determination is possible. You can see play today in the collages on teenagers' walls, in the eccentric furnishing of squatted buildings, in the break between skirmishes when the insurgents dance, in the movements of lovers' bodies together.

The resources for play are available in abundance. The more one plays, the more others are enabled and encouraged to play; true playfulness is infectious. One can't play at the expense of others for long—being "free" at such a price ends up taking a lot of work, as in the case of the "successful" executive, and doesn't lend itself to much real, spontaneous play, as the ennuï typical of the trust-fund playboy demonstrates.

It's ambiguous whether many of the things currently called "play" actually are: Is it play when a businessman goes golfing with his boss? When a group of young men play basketball together according to a strict set of rules, with a struggle for dominance as an ever-present subtext? How about when a young man comes home from work so exhausted that he doesn't have enough energy to do anything but "play" video games?

Children, on the other hand, come into this world knowing all about play—at least until they've spent a few years cooped up in small rooms with the television on. We can recapture that lost innocence, for them and for ourselves, by approaching everything we do as a game rather than a struggle or responsibility—by creating environments in which we can run wild. For the best-kept secret of capitalism is that play activities can also provide for our survival needs; except in extremities, work is unnecessary.

Abundance

The more you approach life as a game, the more full and free it becomes.

The more you live in your own hands, the more it is an experience of liberty and pleasure.

Scarcity

The more you work, the less you live.

The more you think you need for survival, the harder you have to work.

The more you work, the more you feel the need to provide for yourself.

Fear

The more you trust, the more you depend on force.

Force is always present where exchange must be negotiated, where giving is not profitable to you.

The less freely you give and receive, the harder you work to provide for yourself.

Force

The more you depend on force, the less you can give and receive freely.

The less freely you give and receive, the harder you work to provide for yourself.

Exchange

The more pleasure you take in your activities, the more willing you are to share the fruits.

The more freely you give and receive, the more your life can be a game rather than a struggle.

Relationships of Love

Cooperate and celebrate . . .

Love is secure, fearless, generous. Love does not make demands or judge according to standards—love celebrates, consecrates the unique, makes beauty and beautiful. To feel love is to be grateful for the whole of the past, present, and future, to feel for a moment that there is meaning in one's existence. To be in love is not to be deluded or destitute, but to gain a sixth sense with which to perceive the real splendor of the universe. To experience love is to be connected directly to the tragedy of existence—which is not that there is not enough beauty in life, but that none of us has the breadth or depth of self, or the time on this planet, to savor fully the magnificence the world lavishes upon us.

Love makes war upon any peace which in fact is war systematized and concealed, for love is a ruthless enemy of senseless conflict and waste. It is love, of liberty when not of one's fellow beings, that makes it possible for us to coexist in pursuit of our own desires rather than languishing in thrall to that fat old god Discord. Those in love come to identify each other's needs with their own, ultimately making no distinction, and overcoming the self/other dichotomy that is at the root of Western alienation: thus in love we find a way to surpass ourselves, to exalt each other and ourselves in the course of living.

Gift

Beauty must be defined as what we are, or else the concept itself is our enemy.

Why languish in the shadow of a standard we cannot personify, an ideal we cannot live?

To see beauty is simply to learn the private language of meaning that is another's life: to recognize and relish what it is.

Love

The more you share freely with others, the more they share with you.

The more you feel love and gratitude, the more you can give freely.

Relationships of Force

Coercion comes in more subtle forms than rape, "peace-keeping" bombings, economic sanctions. It comes camouflaged as body image standards (which even masquerade as "health" standards), psychological pressures that influence people to repress their desires, laws enforced by public opinion as well as thugs in uniform. It may be disguised as a seemingly trivial argument between friends (for anyone who seeks to establish rank, even in knowledge of trifling things, seeks a lever with which to exert force on his fellows), or that quiet self-mutilation which lowers and relatives sometimes use to manipulate each other—the inverse and identical twin of macho aggression.

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Gift

Walk down the street. Look around. The skin cream advertisements proposing an unreachable ideal for women's beauty, urging them to ransom their self-confidence by pouring their income into corporate coffers: violence. The fruits and vegetables for sale in the grocery store, which will be thrown in locked dumpsters to rot before they are shared with the hungry a block away: violence. The taxes on the sales of those vegetables, which pay for prisons to hold men who will slave there for their ancestors did in chain gangs and slave plantations, and bombs to be sent as foreign aid to governments who oppress and kill their own: violence. The employees who work at the stores, so they can afford a disproportionately small portion of the goods and services made by others like them: violence. The hospitals, insurance companies, psychiatrists, manufacturers of psychoactive prescription drugs, waiting like so many circling vultures for the bodies and minds of these people to weaken and betray them, poised to plunder their bank accounts and drive them and their children back to work: violence. The hush in the air, the absence of friends rejoicing together, of the shouts of children at play, for the children are all at home with video games and television and no one wants to be here, everyone wishes they were in a world somewhere far, far away, farther even than the palm-tree-spotted scenes on the billboards advertising vacation resorts and malt liquor . . . violence, violence.

You may not see one altercation, one bruise; but the feeling in the air is the feeling of war.

Play

Children, on the other hand, come into this world knowing all about play—at least until they've spent a few years cooped up in small rooms with the television on. We can recapture that lost innocence, for them and for ourselves, by approaching everything we do as a game rather than a struggle or responsibility—by creating environments in which we can run wild. For the best-kept secret of capitalism is that play activities can also provide for our survival needs; except in extremities, work is unnecessary.

Exchange Economies

Liberty ends where economics begins. Get your money's worth—earn your keep—there's no such thing as a free lunch¹²; exchange economics posits life as a zero-sum sport between bargainers who maneuver to outbid and outwit each other in order to gain control of more fragments of the world. Free trade, the free market—these are oxymorons: where systematized competition is free to bend all humanity to its prerogatives, ultimately no one is free to focus on anything else.

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Exchange-economics thinking presupposes a one-dimensional scale of value, according to which everything can be appraised: if an avocado costs a dollar, and a new sports car costs \$20,000, then a sports car must be worth exactly twenty thousand avocados. But such equations are absurd. Can you calculate the financial value of a friendship, the exchange rate of a clever joke for a meal tenderly prepared, the comparative worth of the sound of birds singing in the trees against the current market value of lumber? Those who would measure such things miss everything that is beautiful and unrepeatable about them; once one recognizes this, it becomes clear how pathological such calculations are in any context. As if one could "deserve" life in all its complexity and magnanimity in the first place—let alone good or bad fortune, the moment of stillness at sunrise, the flavor of avocados, the sensation of riding in a speeding car! This is simply not the way the world works—anyone who has lived and paid attention knows the best and worst things life has

Relationships of Love

Cooperate and celebrate . . .

Love is secure, fearless, generous. Love does not make demands or judge according to standards—love celebrates, consecrates the unique, makes beauty and beautiful. To feel love is to be grateful for the whole of the past, present, and future, to feel for a moment that there is meaning in one's existence. To be in love is not to be deluded or destitute, but to gain a sixth sense with which to perceive the real splendor of the universe. To experience love is to be connected directly to the tragedy of existence—which is not that there is not enough beauty in life, but that none of us has the breadth or depth of self, or the time on this planet, to savor fully the magnificence the world lavishes upon us.

Love makes war upon any peace which in fact is war systematized and concealed, for love is a ruthless enemy of senseless conflict and waste. It is love, of liberty when not of one's fellow beings, that makes it possible for us to coexist in pursuit of our own desires rather than languishing in thrall to that fat old god Discord. Those in love come to identify each other's needs with their own, ultimately making no distinction, and overcoming the self/other dichotomy that is at the root of Western alienation: thus in love we find a way to surpass ourselves, to exalt each other and ourselves in the course of living.

Gift

Beauty must be defined as what we are, or else the concept itself is our enemy.

Why languish in the shadow of a standard we cannot personify, an ideal we cannot live?

To see beauty is simply to learn the private language of meaning that is another's life: to recognize and relish what it is.

Love

The more you share freely with others, the more they share with you.

The more you feel love and gratitude, the more you can give freely.

Relationships of Force

Coercion comes in more subtle forms than rape, "peace-keeping" bombings, economic sanctions. It comes camouflaged as body image standards (which even masquerade as "health" standards), psychological pressures that influence people to repress their desires, laws enforced by public opinion as well as thugs in uniform. It may be disguised as a seemingly trivial argument between friends (for anyone who seeks to establish rank, even in knowledge of trifling things, seeks a lever with which to exert force on his fellows), or that quiet self-mutilation which lowers and relatives sometimes use to manipulate each other—the inverse and identical twin of macho aggression.

Some call this a democracy—did you get a say in what the billboards you pass every morning say, what they go on repeating inside your head all day, the trees they cut down by your house to make room for the new gas station? How about the preservatives they put in the food you eat, or the conditions in the factories that produce them? Your wages at work, or how much money the I.R.S. takes from you? These aren't just inevitable "facts of life"—they are the manifestations of conflict as the system of human relations, every man for himself and force against us all¹⁴. The leagues of intimidating red tape and the battering of women, the biased news coverage and the inhumanity of factory farms, the jockeying for ascendance between colleagues and countries, all these are simultaneously expressions of the strife at the heart of our civilization and weapons which, used by factions fighting for survival on its terms, perpetuate it.

Living under the reign of coercion strips you of your faith, leaves you ready to use force on others, to treat them as the world has treated you. It is well known that the playground bully acts out of feelings of worthlessness, that the teenage hoodlum is moved to vandalism by insecurity and frustrated yearning; how much self-loathing and desperation must then be in the hearts of the moguls and power-brokers, whose machinations it is that keep the

Gift

Walk down the street. Look around. The skin cream advertisements proposing an unreachable ideal for women's beauty, urging them to ransom their self-confidence by pouring their income into corporate coffers: violence. The fruits and vegetables for sale in the grocery store, which will be thrown in locked dumpsters to rot before they are shared with the hungry a block away: violence. The taxes on the sales of those vegetables, which pay for prisons to hold men who will slave there for their ancestors did in chain gangs and slave plantations, and bombs to be sent as foreign aid to governments who oppress and kill their own: violence. The employees who work at the stores, so they can afford a disproportionately small portion of the goods and services made by others like them: violence. The hospitals, insurance companies, psychiatrists, manufacturers of psychoactive prescription drugs, waiting like so many circling vultures for the bodies and minds of these people to weaken and betray them, poised to plunder their bank accounts and drive them and their children back to work: violence. The hush in the air, the absence of friends rejoicing together, of the shouts of children at play, for the children are all at home with video games and television and no one wants to be here, everyone wishes they were in a world somewhere far, far away, farther even than the palm-tree-spotted scenes on the billboards advertising vacation resorts and malt liquor . . . violence, violence.

You may not see one altercation, one bruise; but the feeling in the air is the feeling of war.

Play

Children, on the other hand, come into this world knowing all about play—at least until they've spent a few years cooped up in small rooms with the television on. We can recapture that lost innocence, for them and for ourselves, by approaching everything we do as a game rather than a struggle or responsibility—by creating environments in which we can run wild. For the best-kept secret of capitalism is that play activities can also provide for our survival needs; except in extremities, work is unnecessary.

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DO IT YOURSELF.

d e C l a s s i f i e d s

The raw awareness that you have the power to change the world is more important than any other resource—this is the hardest one to develop and share, and the most essential. It cannot help to give your endorsement to political representatives, social programs, or radical ideologies when the fundamental problem is that you don't know your own strength.

Self-determination begins and ends with your initiatives and actions, whether you live under a totalitarian regime or the canopy of a rain forest. It must be established on a daily basis, by acting back on the world that acts upon you—whether

YOU CAN make a potato into a battery—put a piece of copper in one side, a piece of zinc in the other, and attach wires to each. Add more potatoes or other vegetables to the circuit for more power.

YOU CAN create a seam sealing two sheets of plastic together by cutting them with a hot razor blade—try this for do-it-yourself lamination.

For a new listening experience, **YOU CAN** play your favorite music backwards by taking a cassette apart with a screwdriver and putting the tape reels in backwards; better, record it onto another tape on the third or fourth channel of a four track recorder, then listen to the other side of the second tape.

YOU CAN clean and refresh old, dirty bass guitar strings by boiling them.

YOU CAN entertain everyone by putting soap or laundry detergent in public fountains.

YOU CAN compile a monthly calendar of events that include free food (art openings, city council extravaganzas, etc.) and circulate it to hungry people.

YOU CAN sleep outside. Laying out cardboard when you sleep in fields, alleys, etc. will help you stay warm and dry. In bad weather, look for an all-night bus terminal (they're less likely to kick you out for napping than the 24-hour diner), or investigate whether there are any rooms or closets to wait in until the public library closes.

YOU CAN approach restaurants and grocery stores as a representative of a charity group, asking for their leftovers. You should be able to gather enough food this way to provide for a number of people—perhaps a free grocery program for a poor neighborhood, or a weekly communal meal in a public place.

YOU CAN establish a community garden, with plots open for people to grow their own food, or volunteer programs for them to participate and share in the harvest. Many people already have yards that go untended, and there's always those abandoned lots . . .

Many towns have a time where there are very few police on patrol and even fewer people on the street; in most towns of under 500,000, this happens after the bars close at 2 a.m. Imagine all the things **YOU CAN** do with the streets to yourself—paint umlauts over all the vowels on the street signs, for example.

YOU CAN prevent the destruction of the last of our forests. Tree spiking can be an extremely effective way to interfere with the market value of timber—and thus discourage logging. Basic spiking involves a big hammer and large nails—a usual carpenter's hammer isn't enough. A "60 penny" nail (app. 6.5" long) will do the trick; no more than one per tree is necessary. Drive the nail almost all the way into the tree, use bolt cutters to cut off the head, and finally drive it the rest of the way in to make it more difficult to spot and nearly impossible to

remove. Spike as high on the tree as possible, above head level, to avoid injury to chainsaw operators, and to make the spikes more difficult to spot during the initial cut. Only spike timber being considered for a cut. Spike randomly throughout the lot and be absolutely sure to alert the forest service (anonymously!) and corporations that the proposed sale is full of spiked problem-causing trees. You can glue bark over the nails to further decrease the chances they will be detected. Spiking in the rain greatly reduces the loud sounds generated by hammering nails into trees. Advanced spikers can look into "pinning" trees (using drills) and using ceramic spikes (to avoid metal detectors).

YOU CAN carry out guerrilla plantings of kudzu and other fast-growing, indestructible "weeds" in public parks, around buildings that are unattended for a few weeks, etc. to give nature a hand in revitalizing cities and suburbs.

YOU CAN use BB guns to shoot out lights that are otherwise difficult to reach, if you need to act under cover of darkness.

YOU CAN put glass etching solution (hydrofluoric acid) on the windows of corporations or agencies that you think need a wake-up call, if a brick would attract too much attention; if you want to make it clear why you're doing it, try applying the solution through a stencil expressing your message! If a brick is called for, you can dress up nice, carry it in your purse, and apply it without ever having to take it out.

YOU CAN really wreak some havoc on videotapes in noxious corporate rental stores, etc. with a powerful magnet. The same goes for computers, of course.

YOU CAN short-circuit any electric or electronic machine by introducing salt water into it. Once upon a time vandals would do this to soda vending machines, causing them to spit out free soda and change. You can also stop stripped-down fireworks in the coin slot to achieve a similar (or perhaps even more fantastic) result.

YOU CAN save the "postage paid by addressee" envelopes you get in junk mail to send back stuffed with more junk mail—or, better, with love letters to whomever opens them, begging them to seek a better life.

YOU CAN soak the ink off some cancelled stamps with alcohol—better, cover the stamps with a thin layer of soap or water-soluble glue before mailing; the addressee can soak off the soap or glue.

YOU CAN fill a five gallon bucket with sawdust to serve as a toilet.

To make compost, reduce garbage, or fertilize your gardening projects, **YOU CAN** dig a four foot hole in the ground and dump your biodegradable waste in it.

YOU CAN build a greywater system (greywater: any water that has been used in the home except in toilets) so the water you do use is used more efficiently—for example, to irrigate your garden. For a simple start, just

that means calling in sick to work on a sunny day, starting a neighborhood garden with your friends, or toppling a government. You cannot make a revolution that distributes power equally except by learning firsthand how to exercise and share power—and that exercising and sharing, on any scale, is itself the ongoing, never-concluded project of revolution.

What you do today is itself the extent of that revolution, its limits and its triumph.

put buckets under the sinks and open the exit pipes.

Try catching rainwater in a trough hung from your roof and redirecting the water into a basin. Install a pump in the basin, set up some piping into your kitchen area, and with a little fine tuning **YOU CAN** have running water.

YOU CAN use lemon juice or urine as invisible ink—heat up the paper, and it appears.

YOU CAN take the clear adhesive envelopes available free at unmanned Federal Express stations everywhere and put them up on the walls of city streets, corporate elevators, gas station bathrooms, etc. with secret instructions or maps to buried treasure inside.

By putting a weight at the bottom, **YOU CAN** insure that the big banner you drop from a building or freeway won't blow in the wind.

If you want to make a banner particularly difficult to take down, **YOU CAN** suspend it from helium balloons tied to a power line.

YOU CAN make massive inflatable structures out of thin plastic sheeting. Try making them from painters' tarps, 2-4 millimeter thickness, available at any hardware store; use packaging tape to close up the seams. These spigots generally have one of two kinds of handles which can be attached to them for operation; you could carry both handles with you, for sure-fire access to water, if you happened to find them unremoved.

YOU CAN carry a marker in your pocket and get in the pleasurable habit of altering your environment everywhere you go—by adding "capitalism:" at the top of DEAD END signs, for example, or "LIES" across the display window of corporate newspaper vending machines, or "ballot box" on trash cans during an election.

You can make your own ineffective graffiti marker by combining 80% Rustoleum and 20% mineral spirits in a shoe polish applicator or similar device—how about a deodorant container with a dry eraser inside?

YOU CAN make those paper stickers you scam from the local copy shop more weatherproof by covering them with clear packing tape.

YOU CAN go to stores that sell house paint and get mis-mixed buckets for little to no cost. Think of all the things you can do with paint. Make woodcuts with potato stampers, or inoleum, for example—or make a stamp out of shoelace with wire through it, shaped into a word or line image.

YOU CAN find fabric (napkins, tablecloths, etc.) for making patches, banners, etc. in the laundry bins behind restaurants.

YOU CAN knit your own clothes in the time it would take you to earn the money to buy them prefabricated, and in much more pleasant environ-

ments. You can turn a large t-shirt into a tighter, smaller one by laying a shirt of the intended size upon it, tracing around the smaller shirt, cutting away the excess, and restitching it. Try sewing with dental floss—it's tougher than thread.

YOU CAN fix holes in your shoes with the rubber used for repairing holes in bicycle tires.

YOU CAN keep warm in winter by lining the inside of your clothes with plastic. This will work best if you place the layer of plastic right next to your skin—although it will make you sweat a lot.

If you are looking to stay warm and have fun over the coming winter, **YOU CAN** learn everything you need to know at http://www.earthliberation-front.com/library/elf_manual300.pdf

If you want to make a movie or documentary for free, **YOU CAN** buy an expensive electronic video camera from a distributor with a liberal return policy, and shoot all your footage and download it onto a computer before the return deadline. You can do the same thing with fancy musical equipment for a few days of recording, or with . . .

YOU CAN get free press passes to attend concerts and similar events simply by approaching the promoters as a representative of the media. You'll probably get more privileged treatment than any of the paying customers. A press pass might also help you get past security, or could bolster your cover story if you need to cross national borders in an emergency.

YOU CAN keep an extra pair of shoes stashed in a secret place to use for 'night work'; this will prevent the inevitable footprints from being used against you in court. Wear extra socks so you can wear the shoes a few sizes too big.

YOU CAN use cotton work gloves to keep your fingerprints off of places they don't belong. Leather gloves should be avoided, as they leave their own unique fingerprints. Latex gloves are good for light work, but they leave perfect prints on the inside—so be very careful how you dispose of them. Burning them might be your best option.

YOU CAN use a small and easily concealeable pair of tin snips (available at all hardware stores) to cut all types of barbed wire, razor wire, and chain link fences.

YOU CAN put a blue filter on your flashlight: this will enable you to use it in the dark without ruining your night vision, and with much less chance of being seen by others.

YOU CAN write to companies informing them that you really enjoy their product, or that you were shocked to find you had purchased a defective item. They'll probably send you free coupons.

YOU CAN steel coupons from corporate stores, or copy them (this may work best if the coupons have a bar code on them already). If the coupons need a stamp to be valid, just steal the stamp. Many chains have coupon systems in place that few consumers

are aware of—educate yourself about these. Old timers tell of a certain 'sub-way sandwiches' chain that gave away stamps with every purchase—seven stamps bought you a sandwich. Kids could stand outside the franchises, asking if people would mind getting stamps for them when they got their sandwiches, and thus saving enough stamps up for a sandwich every half hour or so . . . while simultaneously educating the consumers about their own coupon options.

YOU CAN glue door locks to keep those doors shut. Try filling a syringe (minus needle) with epoxy glue mixed with a little alcohol—you'll have half an hour before it hardens. You can also use superglue, jam in and break off as many flat toothpicks as will fit, or try Liquid Nail, if you can find it.

YOU CAN make your own ammunition that will penetrate bullet-proof vests and light armor. Learn to load ammunition through studying instructions available in common books (ask for books about "reloading"). Use steel-core bullets—they usually have a green (good) or black (better) tip. These can be legally purchased as reloading components at gun shows and through mail-order. If bullet proof glass is on the menu, follow the above instructions, and be sure to use a .308 caliber round or larger (.50 caliber is a sure thing, but expensive).

If you are rightly concerned about your firearms purchases being monitored by the government, in many states **YOU CAN** legally purchase any pistol or rifle from another private individual (i.e. not a gun-dealer) without having to fill out any forms or provide any identification. This often occurs at gun shows. State and local laws may vary—become well-versed in them before attempting said purchase (a good place to start might be gunlaws.com).

YOU CAN create a distraction in a variety of settings by announcing that you've lost a contact lens and insisting that everyone help you find it, or at least stay off a given floorspace.

YOU CAN protect your home from police dogs by laying down a thin line of cayenne pepper across each doorway. The dogs will be able to sniff it on their way in, and won't be able to smell anything else for a while.

If you need to create a false identity in an emergency—for example, at a hospital, when you have no money or insurance—**YOU CAN** simply make up a name and give your social security number with the first five digits as they really appear but the last four changed. If you offer a distant false home address, it will take longer for them to find out you have played a trick on them.

YOU CAN give your friends tattoos with a clean safety pin and India ink. For branding, heat a shaped piece of coat hanger with a small blowtorch.

YOU CAN make paper maché (for puppets, or uncommissioned public sculptures, or . . .) by heating three parts water and two parts corn starch until it becomes thick. Let it cool a bit, and apply it to newspaper to make it stick together.

YOU CAN make wheat paste by mixing three parts wheat flour and one part corn starch, boiling that in water (at proportions of two parts starch to three parts water), and cooking it down to a paste. Hurry to stick up posters everywhere with it before it dries. Some hold that corn starch is not entirely necessary—try variations of the recipe until you find a personal favorite. The more paste you slop on, the better it will stick, so be sure to prepare at least a gallon for a serious night of pasting. Don't be afraid to use a lot of paste on each poster, both between it and the wall and on top of it. Be sure corners and edges are all secure and flat. Plastic gallon orange juice jugs work well, just leave the cap for off quick application—or, keep your wheat paste warm and wet longer in winter by carrying it around in a drink cooler.

YOU CAN encourage strangers to share their brilliant ideas with you and everyone else (and make public space more interesting!) by wheatpasting fliers with wheatpaste recipes on them all around your city—along with a headline reading "call for submissions."

YOU CAN make stencils out of cardboard or clear plastic acetate and spraypaint your own artwork and ideas everywhere. You might have luck finding the acetate in the trash of companies that do lamination—like office supply or photocopying chains. You can also apply house paint through the stencils with rollers. You could make a "handicapped" stencil and make all the parking spaces at the mall handicapped spaces. You could make a stencil a hundred feet long

out of a roll of thick paper, and apply it on the street in two minutes with three people—one in front, unrolling, one in the middle applying the paint roller, and one in back, rolling up. You could stencil a sonnet throughout downtown, one word on each streetcorner—or the same image everywhere you go, until people know it better than any corporate logo.

YOU CAN mix styrofoam into gasoline to make it stick—this recipe has been used for the filling in molotov cocktails.

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YOU CAN protect yourself from the effects of tear gas by covering your mouth and nose with a rag soaked in vinegar or lime juice, and wearing swimming goggles. When not wearing the goggles, put them on your forehead with the inside facing out, so they won't fog up.

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beverage distributors in your area and check out what great surplus of products is discarded every day, as expiration dates draw too near for them to be sent out. Sometimes the bounty will be more than you could ever imagine—imagine being able to provide fresh juice for every single person you know in your town.

YOU CAN prepare a meal of dumped-stered food for friends and family that still have reservations about your lifestyle. Don't disclose its origins until after they've enjoyed it.

YOU CAN go to college campuses at the end of the semester and collect incredible amounts of discarded food, clothes, and furnishings—and all the bicycles that have been abandoned to rust on the bike racks, if you have a good set of wire cutters. You could start a "free bikes for kids" program with these. If you need more, dress up and go to the local police station—chances are they've already collected scores of forgotten bikes the same way you did.

YOU CAN establish a "yellow bike" program for your town: get a bunch of cheap bicycles, paint them all an ugly yellow color, and leave them around town at specified drop off points so people can ride them from one point to another. Voila! Public transportation that is both free and autonomous.

YOU CAN walk or ride your bike instead of always driving or riding in cars. It may take longer, but you will see a lot more of the world, and you might enjoy the chance to collect your thoughts.

YOU CAN help your bicycle stay healthy by remembering to spray the chain and joints with WD-40 occasionally.

If **YOU CAN** get a password from a student, you should be able to use the computers at the local university for everything from email to printing out fliers. If you can borrow a student's meal plan card, you can go into a college cafeteria with a backpack and come out with enough food to feed yourself and some companions for a few days. Hell, you might be able to sneak in, anyway—if just walking in purposefully (to retrieve your forgotten backpack, of course) doesn't work, try looking for the handicapped access elevator, the emergency exit, or the employee entrance.

YOU CAN get a job working for a company you don't respect that has a resource you need (photocopies, film developing, food, information, art supplies. . .) and hold it as long as it takes to smuggle out what you want. A circle of friends could do this together, each supplying a different resource.

YOU CAN hold skill share workshops, to trade knowledge in your areas of expertise with your friends, and make knowledge freely available to everyone regardless of their background or resources.

YOU CAN start a reading/discussion group with friends in order to get more out of just about anything you might read. You may find it easier to give voice to your thoughts in this environment than in traditional classroom settings.

YOU CAN find food, flowers, furniture, clothes, building supplies, and more precious things left out on the street in front of houses in the suburbs, or in dumpsters. You might have more luck finding building supplies at construction sites at night, though—or just wheeling them out the back door of a corporate "home repair" chain on a cart. You might be able to return some of the items you rescue from the trash—such as food that has passed the expiration date—for money or store credit.

YOU CAN find food, flowers

The old man lives in a city filled with factories. The factories roar away morning, noon, and night; it is well nigh impossible to hear anything over them. The people of the city must shout at the tops of their lungs when they speak to each other, and even when they are alone making grocery lists or reflecting on the lost afternoons of childhood. They blast their music, which is necessarily cacophonous and overbearing, at the maximum volume their stereo speakers can deliver; they buy alarm clocks louder than bombs. There is not a single space or moment free from the incessant ear splitting din.

Only the old man, who was a young boy before the factories were built, can remember what it was to walk, think, linger in silence. He tries to tell the others about it, but they cannot hear his soft voice. He tries to ponder what to do about the noise, but cannot clear his throbbing head to begin. He stuffs his ears with cotton and wax, presses pillows over his head—nothing helps. Finally, driven mad by the constant bangings and clangings of the machines, the wails of sirens, honks of horns, screams and guffaws and whistles of his neighbors, he grabs a sledgehammer and sets out for the center of the city, where the greatest of the factories thunders. He clambers over the barbed wire fence, shredding his fingers and thighs, and charges through the stockyard to a back door. It is unlocked, and he enters; but security guards spy him, and hurry after.

He finds himself in the entrails of the machinery. The blows of its hammer rhythm are deafening. Pounded by shockwaves, almost overwhelmed, he struggles forward to a vulnerable pipe and raises his weapon to deliver a crippling blow. At that moment the security guards, horrible in their matching uniforms and ear protection, overtake him and drag him away.

He is sent to a prison. The halls there echo all day and night with the hoots and yells of prisoners, the ringing of bells, the slamming of doors and the jingling of keys, but for once he is not disturbed by the clamor: the moments he spent in the factory have deafened him.

In this new found peace, he writes a manifesto of silence that will be read by millions and whispered from ear to ear.

She lives in a world of absolutely regulated time. In the boarding school, every moment is strictly regimented: rise at six o'clock, wash until ten after, dress by twenty after, breakfast at six thirty, and so on; likewise Tuesday night is laundry night, Thursday is soccer day, and every other Saturday evening, a movie at ten on the dot. The nuns meet every morning at five thirty to synchronize their watches by the great tolling belltower. They teach that time is ordained by God: He has created it in all its precision to show that He is universal, that His creation is flawless and uniform, that there are no exceptions. Bells ring to announce every movement of students and faculty. Clocks and watches tick tick tick tick in unison in every room. Every semester includes exactly 1200 hours of sleep, 100 hours of mathematics homework, and 10 hours of visiting time.

The young student is secretly terrified by this timekeeping mania. She lies awake in bed when everyone is supposed to be asleep, counting down the seconds to her death. It seems to her it is lunacy to calibrate life this way—as if subdividing time made *more* of it!—but whatever it could be she would prefer, she cannot imagine. She comes up with a plan. The next day, she and a few rebellious students are ten minutes late to each class; she has calculated that they can gain a few minutes more free time this way, in relation to the detention time their tardiness will occasion. It is strange and new to have these few minutes to do with what they please; but they still have to keep an eye on the clock, for arriving at class more than ten minutes late draws much longer periods of detention.

After a couple days, she is the only one still playing this game; the others are already in too much trouble with the administration for their tastes. *That's it for your little insurrection*, she thinks bitterly to herself—and then, possessed by frustration and defiance at being abandoned by her classmates, *no, it's not*. She tears off her watch, tosses it away, and stomps into the forest.

There, everything is wholly different. Time, as she has known it, stops completely; in its place is a profound and beautiful stillness, like nothing she has felt before. Here, there is no need to fear death, for she can linger in the eternity of the moment, absorbing and savoring it. The birds twitter overhead, the sun moves slowly across the sky; eventually the moon ascends, the darkness thickens, and she reluctantly concedes to herself that she must go back, since she is not yet ready to live alone in the woods.

Upon her return, she is immediately apprehended by a stern hall monitor, who seizes her arm and drags her to the office of Mother Superior. She receives her talking-to in stoic silence, and doesn't flinch when the woman threatens severe punishment. The next morning before dawn she rises and advances on the great belltower with a book of matches. She knows her freedom depends on whether she can wrest everyone from the rhythm of the bells.

The Sultan is omnipotent in his desert empire because he controls the water supply. He rations it strictly: for women, a teaspoon a day; for great, stout men, a tablespoon; for infants and elders, a thimble full. No one dares protest, for to drink any less would be fatal. Priests baptize babies with spit from their droughted mouths; wives collect the sweat off their husbands' brows to bathe in. The subjects make do as best they can, and take great pains not to displease their ruler.

One day, an incredibly beautiful maiden appears from far away. She is the Sultan's new wife, fresh from the monsoon country. Her long, black hair flows and ripples like a river; her voice is the song of a laughing brook; looking into her dark eyes, one finds oneself floating in a summer sea. The very air around her drips nectar.

The Sultan's stable boy falls in love with her. He languishes for months, living only for the rustle of her skirts, the glimpse of her moist skin. Unbeknownst to him, she too is watching him—she likes his faraway air, his shy seriousness, the depth of feeling in his knitted brow. One morning, while the Sultan and his henchmen are away on business, the stable boy sneaks into her chamber. She is bathing in a magnificent pool.

The poor boy stands mute before her. All he has longed for his whole life, the years of parched throat, cracked lips, arid isolation, is personified in her—and he is a simple stable boy, intruding upon her. In the recklessness of desperation, he opens his mouth: a torrent of adoration pours out. It becomes a deluge; then, a psalm. She is moved; it has been a long time since anyone has spoken to her honestly, let alone beautifully, in this barren land. She tells him to come to her after sundown.

That night, after everyone else is asleep and the moon is high in the clear sky, the stable boy leaves his tent and creeps to the tower in which the Sultan keeps his wife. The door is locked, and soldiers stand guard inside, so the boy scales the dry brick of the wall to her window. She opens it and helps him in. Hours later, the Sultan is awakened by sounds of passion from his young wife's bedchamber.

His soldiers stamp up the stairs, but it is too late. From their lovemaking flows a river so deep and so wide that all the Sultan's horses and men are unable to cross it to punish the enraptured couple. In a rage, the Sultan orders that a mountain of dust be piled up so that his subjects will not see the new body of water. It is done, and none of them do; but the hot sun shines over head, and soon the gypsies in the countryside are crooning a new folk song: *you can outlaw the rain, they sing, but we all see the clouds are gathering*.

The brother and sister have grown up together; everything they are, they have become as a pair. They have survived the same challenges, heartaches, illnesses; they have treasured the same meanings in songs and poems and chilly sunrises. If one prefers the crusts of bread, it is because the other favors the soft core. Whenever one feels, suffers, triumphs, it is for them both.

A day comes when they decide to part and seek their separate fortunes; between the two of them, they reason, they can chart the world, and share it when they meet again. The sister sets out with a simple pack on her back, and doesn't stop to sleep until she is many leagues from their childhood home. She continues this way for many weeks, entering regions vastly different from their homeland. There, she encounters wondrous animals, witnesses new cultures, strange customs, exotic religions and value systems. She learns to charm cobras, to dance flamenco, to speak a few of the infinite languages in which the grandeur of the cosmos is written.

Years later, as agreed, she returns home to meet her sibling. The two embrace, and sit down before a warm fire. The sister relates all her adventures, all the wonders she has experienced, one by one. Her brother listens pensively, hesitates, finally speaks.

He explains that all the marvels she has seen are little better than illusions: that there is only one thing in the world worthy of contemplation. He relates how he, too, set out from home, and stopped the first night at a monastery. When the monks inquired about the purpose of his journey, he told them of how he and his sister had pledged to chart the corners of creation together. The abbot informed him that they could assist in his quest, and brought out their holy book: a book which, the elderly man declared, held the truth about everything in the world, down to the last blade of grass.

The brother recounts how he spent the following years deep in study with the monks, and found that the whole of the world, all that can be felt or known or pondered, was indeed contained in this book. It became clear to him that further traveling was unnecessary; instead, he isolated himself entirely and spent every waking instant poring over the book, memorizing every word, learning to fit every detail of life, even the ones that seemed not to fit, into the system it contained.

Her brother concludes his story and implores his sibling to return with him to the monastery. But she politely takes her leave, and sets out again across the earth. She will find the single unaccounted-for blade of grass, the irreplaceable note from a french horn, the one recalcitrant turtledove that will break the book's grip on her brother, so he will again be free to recognize the universe in all its diverse splendors—to perceive that the world is too big and too beautiful to fit in one million such books.

"All this is like a dream, and I never dream."

"Like the king who never had any dreams until the wizard made him sleep in a pigsty."

Scarcity, propriety, cruelty, routine—these things seem like laws of nature, until you experience otherwise. You can't blame those who cannot imagine more—only show them it exists.

And so our charge is to be alchemists. Just as the alchemists of bygone days strove to change lead into gold, we must make fortune from misfortune and magic of the mundane. *Alchemy* is the art of reinventing the world, of rearranging existing elements to create new possibilities. The alchemist understands it is the forces that count, the relationships, not the materials, not the things in the world. Any situation, every situation, can be revolutionized—you simply have to enter knowing your life is at stake.

Our contest is with gravity, with the weight of inertia. It is up to us to shake it off—or turn it to our advantage. For the slothful man, gravity is a force to be feared, a hated master; he finds in it an argument against motion, action, life itself. But for the dancer, gravity is indispensable, beloved even. Without it, she would have nothing to play against, no counterpoint for her strength and skill. She flies all the more gracefully for being born without wings.

We must dance with our apprehensions, our agonies, our histories, or be paralyzed by them. With lightness of foot, we can transform our centuries-long history of destruction and disappointment into a mere prologue, the tragic overture before a beautiful symphony—justifying and absolving ourselves, and the world we know, in the process.

If there is anyone foolish enough to want this world the way it is, then let him have it—let him have it!!—and perish with it. For the rest of us, alchemy is our only hope.

She takes my hand and leads me breathless from the ruins. "Life is not retrospective," she confides. "Let's not be, either."