The Unquiet Dead

Anarchism, Fascism, and Mythology

0.5: the introduction.

dedication

To 'Anarcha', the enslaved black woman so named by her owner, who was used in experiments by the pioneer of U.S. gynecology, Dr. James Marion Sims. He operated on her thirty times. She is no symbol for our cause, and we shall never know her name for herself; but we may remember her as we exercise our freedom to name ourselves.

context

To be sure, the individual is defenceless, the peril can only be vanquished in community. But every individual perceives that his free will is involved. Hence the recoil from anxiety to more intense anxiety: It depends upon man, each individual man, upon the decision. It must not be, it shall not be—it is not inevitable. That which has happened is a warning. To forget it is guilt. It must be continually remembered. It was possible for this to happen, and it remains possible for it to happen again at any minute. Only in knowledge can it be prevented.

—Karl Jaspers

If fascism could be eradicated it is because the subjectivities that embodied it at a certain point refused to reproduce it, broke with their past, decided that a new dream of cohabitation, another idea of mankind had to be born. If fascism hasn't been totally defeated it is because patriarchy and the colonisation of life by commodity are still our daily bread.

—Claire Fontaine

In a damaged human habitat, all problems merge.

—Cesar Chavez

IT WAS LIKE THIS: two men bumped into each other at a Manhattan post office in July of 1927. Each was preoccupied: the younger with thoughts about his new real-estate business; the older with the question of how to save Sacco and Vanzetti from the electric chair. Fred Trump emerged from the grand post office and immediately collided with Carlo Tresca, hurrying between the columns. Tresca stopped, gracefully apologizing despite his rush; Trump harrumphed, recognizing a social inferior by his Italian accent, and shoved past him, clutching a bundle of letters in his hand, addressed to his superiors in the Klan. Tresca shook himself, shrugged off the incident, and went in to complain once more about the Post Office's refusal to issue his paper a second-class mail certificate, which was limiting the circulation of his desperate appeal on behalf of the two facing execution. And so the two parted: Trump on his way out into the wide world to make his fortune from the exploitation of the workers Tresca had spent his life going to prison to save.

The two almost could have met before; they were likely part of the same riot, though on different sides and in different boroughs. In New York City on Memorial Day in 1927, two fascists were "killed on their way to join a detachment of black shirts in the Manhattan parade, and 1,000 Klansmen and 100 police staged a free for all battle in Jamaica [Queens]." Fred Trump was arrested at the Klan protest for failure to disperse; he was 22 at the time, and had just incorporated his real-estate business. Carlo Tresca, for his part, faced suspicion of ordering the killings; his newspaper office was raided by the police, and his friends were beaten in prison by police trying to force his name from their lips. He was cleared of formal suspicion, but it still clung around his name. Fascists had already tried to kill him with a bomb the year before; vendetta now renewed, they did not stop until they finally succeeded, sixteen years later. His parole officer watched and did nothing as he was shot down by Mafia gunmen; at his funeral, a policeman burst into tears, mourning Tresca despite their antagonistic positions. Seven years after that, Woody Guthrie wrote angry songs against his new landlord, Fred Trump, who would not rent to black people. Trump no longer had time to go to Klan riots, but he still did his part for the cause, whether or not he had ever formally been a Klansman. By then, his son Donald was four.

The first paragraph of this story is fictional, I think. The second is true... I think. This is the way history works: a series of unbelievable coincidences and near-misses nearly as implausible. As far as I know, Trump and Tresca never met—but, from a distance, it seems that they must have, because it fits the mythic structure we use to narrativize our experiences. And, while the first paragraph of this book is its only intentional falsehood, there are doubtless many others, for that very reason. History moves in haunting cycles, echoing near-repetitions—but slightly diverges with each movement. It is in that difference that I place my hope and fear.

I set out, grimly, to write against heroes. Carlo Tresca was certainly among their company—one of the last anarchists left after the Red deportation era, he fought tirelessly for workers in the IWW; he campaigned fiercely against fascists from the moment of their emergence until the moment of his death; he was an anarchist through and through in a time when anarchists were being imprisoned and deported on a daily basis; he was the lover of the famous socialist Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, and they fought together against capitalism despite their political differences. Defiant until the end, on the day of his death he made plans to lead a walkout from a meeting that would have united Italian-American anarchists, communists, and fascists. Six thousand people came to his funeral. Max Eastman said in his eulogy, "[Tresca was] a fortress. He stood so firm in this time of dissolving characters and standards. Firm in his courage both physical and moral. Firm in his love of the oppressed. He was the last of the great revolutionists who fought implacably with love instead of hate in their hearts." If he is not remembered today, his biographer wryly concludes: "Well, he was an anarchist and must take the consequences of a lost cause."

And yet, Carlo Tresca was a terrible man. His first wife filed charges of brutality against him; he left his wife and child to be with Flynn; he got Flynn's sister pregnant, ruining their sibling relationship for decades; he curried favor with politicians, which earned him distrust from his fellow radicals. For that matter, how heroic must Donald Trump find his father Fred, who taught him his business and left him so much wealth? How much does the father inspire the son, and how disobedient can we be to the legacies they bequeath us?

The purpose of writing history, for me, is to comprehend and defy its action upon the present. Like Walter Benjamin, "the pearl diver," I have become obsessed with curating perfect quotations. "Walter Benjamin knew that the break in tradition and the loss of authority which occurred in his lifetime were irreparable, and he concluded that he had to discover new ways of dealing with the past. In this he became a master when he discovered that the transmissibility of the past had been replaced by its citability..." (Arendt) It is this disorder in the present, not the rebirth of the past, that I care for: "for an anarchist, the past has no more authority than the police." As Benjamin put it,

> To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'... It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of anger... The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. ...Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.

When I began writing this text in 2013, neo-liberalism, colonialism, globalized trade, white supremacy, gender, and (for some) technology had been more relevant sites of animosity than fascism for decades. At most, we dutifully turned out to counter-protest tiny groups of laughably unimportant fascists... and forgot them a day later. This was never the case in some parts of the world, which offered less of the privilege of forgetting. Conflicts were frequent and deadly in those places; people have lived, fought and died under everything from openly fascist political parties to less-organized gangs, many of whom murdered people who were of color, Jewish, gay, politically radical, or simply in their way. Despite these struggles, as U.S. radicals focused on opposing the gloved hand of power, we tended to forget about the naked fist. We organized against white supremacy, which exists in non-fascist formations but is closely linked to fascism... and we knew that the U.S. police continue to be an armed, powerful, racist organization with links to explicitly fascist groups. Still, in many ways, we slept.

Alas, there is no haven to flee to; we cannot escape our doom, whether it comes from without or within, without facing it down. At present, this country is threatened by ISIS, a religious-fascist state force; rightwing populists use ISIS to justify their fascist rhetoric; the police continue to murder black people with little consequence; and elements of fascist mythology sometimes even

manifest within radical communities. I have noted with alarm the themes of essentialism running through spiritualities prevalent in predominantly white environmental circles. Many white liberals seeking a sense of authenticity and spiritual connection have responsibly turned away from drawing on the cultures of others... but, sometimes, towards emotionally investing in mythologies that also inspire white supremacists. Things become ever more-muddied, overlapping, and complex. I write about fascism of the past, therefore, to aid our struggle against it in the present. I am in no way attempting to provide an exhaustive catalog of current, past, or possible future fascisms; that is everyone's work now. Rather, I write to refuse the grave myth of the linear progression of space, time, and politics.

The Spanish Civil War historian Helen Graham tells us that writing history can serve as "a necessary restitution in the work of collective memory." She describes how, as all talk of those days was potentially deadly for the anti-fascists who survived to live under Franco, it has only become possible to look at those events recently: not from the perspective of participants, or even their children, but with "the grandchild's gaze." It is from a similar perspective that I write about history in this text. To be linear for a moment, I am a child trying to piece together the great and terrible acts and ideology of my forefathers, the resistance and survival of my foremothers... not to continue their project, but to, like Graham, allow "the moral and magic powers of the unquiet dead to flow into the public sphere." The past does not pass; the dead are not dead, for they continue to move us today. Following M. Nourbese Philip: my work is *hauntological*.

These ghosts have not risen simply to be put to rest, but to speak in the manner for which they were killed; some of them must be battled anew in our hearts. As Donna Haraway says, "...the point of the differential/oppositional rewriting is to not make the story come out "right" whatever that would be. The point is to rearticulate the figure... to unsettle the closed logics of the deadly racist misogyny." Or, by Saidiya Hartman's understanding: "...the point isn't the impossibility of escaping the stranglehold of the past, or that history is a succession of uninterrupted defeats, or that the virulence and tenacity of racism is inexorable. But rather that the perilous conditions of the present establish the link between our age and a previous one in which freedom too was yet to be realized." We review and rewrite history *to refuse the closure our anxiety desires*.

In our age of nostalgia, as we sort through and dust off relics of our past and recuperate them for future emotional and financial investment, old attitudes of rebellion are becoming resonant again. I write to assess current and historical movement towards fascism, on the one hand, and liberation, on the other. Neither currently dominate the world we live in; both are opposed to it. I write, therefore, to ask questions of our collective imaginary. To do so, I put pieces of entirely different puzzles together, unexpected conjunctions that may evoke interesting results. As Anna Tsing puts it, "To write a history of ruin, we need to follow broken bits of many stories and to move in and out of many patches. In the play of global power, indeterminate encounters are still important." Or, from more revolutionary sources: "The philosophy of dialectics reveals that everything develops through the unity of opposites, of what are paradoxes to simple observation... To truly know anything, then, is to embrace paradoxes and to find beneath the surface the underlying substratum of reality where contradictions interact..."

the map

In the first section, I begin at the beginning... mythologically speaking. In the U.S., Nazi Germany has become a blueprint of what to avoid; even now, pundits are fretfully comparing Trump's policies to Nazi policies, or dismissing concerns about Trunp with the argument that he isn't Hitler. This makes emotional, if not logical sense: the Nazi myth was powerful, rooted in essential appeals to age-old Western beliefs about blood, land, and the dangerous stranger. I explore the development of these myths and their manifestations in Nazi circles, including the full, deadly bloom of necropolitics. I take certain intellectuals to task for their role in developing and legitimizing race-thinking and the justification of Nazi technology, and critique Wilhelm Reich's failed essentialist analysis of the psychology of fascism.

In section two, I go to the historical beginnings of fascism in Italy, and review the complicities and animosities between fascists and anarchists there and then. I begin with Fiume, the city-state that was a short-lived paradise for the avant-garde on the left and right; then, I explore Mussolini's personal evolution. After evaluating the lives and shared destinies of several other anarchists turned fascist, I conclude with a look at Futurism, the sometimes-fascist cultural movement. The lesson of the rise of Italian fascism is that if we are serious about opposing fascism, we must guard against it within ourselves.

If German fascism is the mystified example Americans refer to, Spain is the myth of fascism and resistance we *should* take to heart. As in the U.S. today, most Spanish people were anti-fascist, or at least not for it; only fringe people on the far Right actually identified as fascist—even Franco himself did not call himself a fascist; and fascists rose in response to a progressive government that was making wide reforms. There was widespread dissatisfaction with capitalism, and a fear of outsiders, as well as a plentitude of angry veterans with experience fighting in foreign wars. Most importantly, the Spanish resistance came closest to succeeding in defeating fascism out of any of these examples... but were held back by foreign intervention, subtle and obvious, designed to hold the balance of power in Europe. For these reasons, I discuss the Spanish Civil War at length in section three.

One of the purposes of this text is to ask us to look critically at ourselves. We are not fascists, but when we drink from the common well of essentialism, we poison our struggle for freedom. In the fourth, I examine some of the ways in which we have attacked each other as feminists, and ask cis white feminists to do better. I also underline some of the essentialist, even crypto-fascist, currents in environmentalist movement, and lay out some alternative ways of thinking. By challenging our perceptions of each other—by refusing to erase or reinscribe difference, but rather to celebrate our diversity as individuals—we will grow stronger without buying into our enemies' false unity.

The fifth section moves towards a look at strategies for mythologically understanding ourselves and our pasts that are not rooted in essentialism, and how they may better equip our struggle for freedom. I consider the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, and Saidiya Hartman. Next, I think through the work of some indigenous Canadian prisoners towards gaining access to spiritual practices, and critically evaluate the presentation of that effort. Finally, I meet the argument for embattled nationalisms and essentialism with Jasbir Puar's suggestion that we understand ourselves not as intersections, but as assemblages.

In the sixth section, I step back from the real and focus on the speculative. I describe how bourgeois and fascist mythologies have justified practical evils with immaterial mystifications, and then offer various examples of speculative fiction's attempts to critique our current reality... and dream beyond it. I take seriously Roland Barthes's critique of Leftist myth as failing to function as myth insofar as it is inessential, and try to imagine how we can work around that problem to sustain ourselves and our struggles.

We are told that pluralistic democracy is the only sustainable model for our society. I challenge the idea that it is sustainable, desirable, or the best we could hope for. I open the seventh section with an extended discussion of Nietzsche's importance to the theoretical development of elitist politics within fascist, anarchist, and Leftist circles, then explore populist efforts on both the Left and the Right through populist tactics. Finally, I examine democracy and its relative failures.

Lastly, I think through white supremacy in the United States, first from the perspective of its constituents, then from the perspective of its survivors. I present Afro-pessimist and Marxist perspectives as useful ways to understand our current racial/economic situation of struggle. Then, I consider these two embattled narratives as different (and in no way equivalent) ways of thinking about white supremacy. What are the emotional aspects of fascist narrative, and how are survival narratives of those they target differently constituted? What, I ask, does this mean for our project of breathing together in our mutual struggle for freedom?

This is by no means a neutral or objective text; I am an anarchist, an anti-fascist, an anti-racist, and a gender nihilist. I have made a choice to deliberately reveal my lack of objectivity or remove, as a show of feminist praxis. Moreover, I will not pretend a level of elite knowledge or expertise. I am not an accomplished academic, nor is my voice more worth hearing than the voices of many others. Therefore, I have sought to present and dialogue with the work of many others in this text. My theoretical reference points include Afropessimism, anarchism, Marxism, queer theory, and materialist feminism, Foucault's analysis of biopower, and speculative fiction.

essentialism

"...the concept of 'woman' is elusive."
—Donna Haraway

While continually elaborated, at its core this term refers to the Platonic concept that this world is a shadow play, a reflection of our Divine, truest essences. Variations of essentialist philosophy are found in the Abrahamic religions, and in many other cultures, spiritualities, and philosophies. It is the view that any thing, creature, or person has an essential nature that categorically defines it, materially and/or spiritually. As it is practically deployed all around us, it defines a *true aspect* of humanity: manhood, whiteness. All others are judged in terms of their deviations from that norm; standards of womanhood, of blackness, and so on are created, and these already-Others[a] are rigorously, exponentially judged for their differences from those standards. The degree to which any person corresponds to these essential definitions is the degree to which they are successful examples of their kind... still, inevitably, less than human. For example, some feminists have responded to the social construction of the feminine Other by claiming the existence of a basic, natural, feminine force in the world. Though this advocacy is meant to oppose patriarchy, it tends to enforce patriarchy in practice, to serve as a basis for policing the boundaries around what it means to be a woman. Good intentions poisoned by essentialism have paved social democracy's road to our present moment. Our deviations are always under surveillance, and seen as criminal, unnatural; there is a corresponding push towards conformity.

a Coined by Hegel, politicized by de Beauvoir, developed by Lacan and Derrida, the term "Other" means generally to place a human as not "one of us", and to oppress them on that basis.

In opposition to these forces, anti-essentialists ranging from materialist feminists, like Monique Wittig, to post-structuralists, like Michel Foucault, argue that not only human interactions but also our understandings of the rest of the world are fundamentally based in non-natural social constructions, which vary from culture to culture and also between individuals within those cultures. They argue that there is no way to objectively observe anything—we all carry our socially formed views into each enterprise, no matter how allegedly scientific. Our perceptions are therefore charged with power, as is our society; who carries the power to determine truth and enforce it on others is not determined by who has the clearest observations or the most compelling arguments, but by who holds the most social power. This does not mean we are doomed to experience eternal domination, but that those with less power have to struggle, socially and politically, to enact their truth.

It has been disputed for decades by many different observers whether racism is necessary to fascism. I do not know; but I find that *essentialism*, of one form or another, is. While it may manifest in assertions about raced or gendered truth, or in de-racialized and de-gendered national identity, or in some other formulation, all fascisms share in common the idea of an essential in-group vs. an essential Other. It is not possible to transcend your placement in either category—the most you can do is hope to remain invisible behind enemy lines. The in-group is framed as the more deserving, the more naturally fit, by right of birth or history; the Other is characterized as parasitic, invading, weak, treacherous, malformed. For fascists to believe they are carrying out an ethical imperative—often one that means brutal reprisals, "cleansings," or invasions—they must believe they are acting in accordance with their superior nature, carrying out a responsibility not only to themselves and those they are sworn to protect, but to God (sometimes), a higher truth (often), and nature (always.) Therefore, I will be identifying and critiquing essentialism throughout this text.

biopower and racism

Michel Foucault described a shift (though, importantly, an incomplete and non-linear shift) in the kinds of power that states exercise: he terms these *sovereign* power and *biopolitical* power. He defines sovereign power as the power to *make die and let live*: if someone breaks the law, acts in ways that contradict the power of the leader or has territory the state desires, they can be killed. This was long the justification for war, putting down civil unrest, and the death penalty. Biopower, in contrast, is the power to *make live and let die*. Foucault argues that biopower has become the primary site

of power within dominant society, although it continues to work in tandem with sovereign power over those exceptionalized bodies that can be killed at will. In a particularly coercive twist, biopolitics requires the participation of those it acts upon—for example, to receive welfare benefits, we must fill out forms detailing our activities, resources, and relationships. The state provides this welfare not out of a pure benevolence, but to surveil its population; to ensure a surplus workforce for itself; to prevent insurgency; and to promote an ideology of self-policing in an atmosphere of generalized distrust. No longer is the fear of death the only way to control people—now they can be controlled by altering the conditions in which they live, think, and interact.

Foucault and others have pointed to this development in many different parts of life: the spread of prisons in which to contain and control certain lawbreakers, or criminal-designated races and classes; mental asylums and the identification of mental illness as a social tool for defining what kinds of thinking are "healthy" or "unhealthy" (terms that can be made to fit the needs of social control); capitalism's commodification of human interaction and objectification of what used to be intangible; the isolation of sexuality as a practice of fear and desire; and the media spectacle as a way to create and cultivate desires and hatreds. While the development of biopower is far more diffuse and nonlinear than progressive, even the most sovereign actions of our governments now have a biopolitical tinge to them. Our wars are no longer ones of direct conquest and formal colonies, but wars of management, containment, and manipulation. Our profits are no longer those of land and direct wealth, but of the supervision of that land and wealth, as in Iraq and Afghanistan. (It's interesting to think about the transition towards this kind of management—what was the Vietnam War about, in these terms, and why did the U.S. fail in its project there? Or did it?)

Closer to home, the story is the same. Why, if there is such racial hatred and political incentive towards closing the U.S.-Mexican border, has it not happened? I do not favor closing the border, I favor abolishing it entirely, but *neither will happen* because the U.S. economy depends on undocumented, underpaid labor, kept precarious and unable to organize by virtue of its illegality. In keeping legal immigration inaccessible and the border porous, the government can manage the situation most precisely. The immigration debate is a spectacle made of dehumanized bodies. Politicians ruin dreams and destroy lives to get re-elected by voters who are worried about their social values being overturned by the fiction of invaders. This is no aberration, but the state functioning by means of an advanced logic.

The abstractness of this game does not mitigate its deadliness for those within its grasp; the tears of children who will never see their parents again are not dried by this analysis. And yet biopolitical control is not a vast conspiracy, although certainly some of those in power must be aware of what they're doing. Rather, capitalism, racism, patriarchy and the state are aspects of a vast social mechanism which adapts to changing conditions even at the expense of some of its seemingly elemental components. We may hope for social collapse, but there may be no natural outer limit; adaptation is relentlessly sucessful, and Marx's prediction is over a century expired. Progress is an irrelevant narrative; there has been a sideways movement to our history, a deepening of suffering, a muddling of victory, that means *we have never won, except in moments; we have never suffered more than we do now, except for all the times when we did; the apocalypse is not coming, but has always been with us.*

fascism

Everyone who studies fascism argues about how to define it. Billig's four key elements of fascist ideology can serve as a simple working definition:

> 1) nationalism and/or racism, which espouse a belief in the unity of a nation or race; 2) anti-Marxism and anti-communism because these belief systems would divide the race or nation on the basis of class differences; 3) statism, a strong belief in the role of the state to protect the race or nation and the capitalist system; and 4) the first three features are advanced in such a way as to threaten democracy and individual freedom.

However, following the debate within this discourse has given me the impression that trying for a grand definition, or attempting to make sure that all of the themes one notices within fascism are throughout all of its manifestations, is at least a waste of time, but perhaps even actually antithetical to this project—one that is, again, against essential definitions, and for working models by which you can trace lines of relationship. Therefore, I will discuss only a few themes and a few of their manifestations, and will make reference to their importance as argued by several authors without adopting any of their frameworks.

Furthermore, I intentionally advocate for a *broad* definition of fascism. There seems to be concern about "throwing the word around"; in contrast, I feel concern at limiting our use of it. I am quite ready to say that the Islamic State is a religious-fascist nation; that fascist movement is on the rise on

both grassroots and governmental levels in the United States; that fascists are murdering people in the Ukraine as we speak. Our enemies are not Voldemort; though they are nearly as terrifying, we need not fear to speak their name. However, we must avoid dehumanizing or homogenizing those we recognize as fascists; that will serve neither our ethical project nor our tactical thinking.

There is no necessary accordance between elements of fascist thought and particular fascist regimes. The disparate ideas and arguments of many true believers found currency for a time, and were later discarded; I do not think they are any less valid examples of fascist thinking for their lack of "success" or state-granted legitimacy. The prominent scholar of Italian fascism, Renzo de Felice, explains this tendency as one of fascist movement versus fascist regime, which had to suppress ideological fascist movement in pursuit of practical domination. There are many examples of this dialectic, even just among the two times and places most generally agreed to be fascist: D'Annunzio's poetic fervor and action was supported only occasionally and strategically by Mussolini, who was generally suspicious of him; Nazi Germany was briefly interested in Futurism, but eventually dismissed it as too modern; Heidegger found currency among Nazi intellectuals during the early years of the regime, but quickly fell from grace; various racial theorists in fascist Italy struggled for supremacy, with no clear victor; and so on. This is not to elevate these theoreticians and true believers over the grimy regime: all have blood on their hands, or would if they got their way. Also, this intellectual hetereogenity made the regimes that oversaw them more durable, if less effective as totalitarian states. Suppressing divergent lines of thought in the name of the fascist desire for individual-nation-state conformity would have resulted in a quicker demise for those states.

This is why I talk about essentialism in feminist and environmental movement, and why I analyze fantasy novels—not to taint them with an accusation of fascism, but to determine which mythic elements are common between fascism and friendlier realms, and which cannot help but struggle against both the world as it is and the world as our enemies would like it to be. And, though I reference certain elements of current fascist movement, I am in no way attempting to provide a catalog or even a survey of modern fascism, white supremacist populism, or elite racist formations. That is an immediate project for everyone to undertake; it would be foolish to attempt it on my own.

I also explore elitism and populism as poles of political organizational tactics common between anarchists, fascists, and unaffiliated rebellions, and therefore ways to understand how revolutionary movement is built, undermined, and soured. Reactionary populism is blatantly on the rise in the U.S., and need not confuse us; as Hannah Arendt said about pre-Nazi Germany, "In the growing prevalence of mob attitudes and convictions—which were actually the attitudes and convictions of the bourgeoisie cleansed of hypocrisy—those who traditionally hated the bourgeoisie and had voluntarily left respectable society saw only the lack of hypocrisy and respectability, not the content itself." Or, elsewhere: "...the language of the mob was only the language of public opinion cleansed of hypocrisy and restraint." But this does not occur only in conservative or racist formations; Occupy fed off a similar energy on the Left. This is the problem of modern American politics: "Unable as yet to live without fear and hope, these masses are attracted by every effort which seems to promise a man-made fabrication of the Paradise they had longed for and of the Hell they had feared." Meanwhile, there are elite formations of self-acknowledged fascists arming for attack, simultaneously scorning the populist Right and using them as cover. This suggests to me that tactics alone can be used by anyone: it is the emotional tone, the political content, the material actions, and the self-critical eye that make a rebellious politic liberating. It is fear and hope, past and future we must discard in favor of a present-oriented emotion and practice.

speculative fiction

I am serious about abolishing our constructed understanding of space and time—but I think this is best done with playful tools. Therefore, I reference and discuss speculative fiction throughout this text. We all refer to myths on a daily basis to move through the world—the bourgeois myths of cosmetics, beer, and safety; the proto-fascist myths of the glorious past and dangerous future; the libertarian[b] myths of freedom, equality, and peace. We know, on some level, that these myths are fictional; how have we engaged with them in explicitly fictional environments? What does it mean to fight the war of the past in the future, or to have won everything at the cost of a single suffering innocent? The stories we read our children, or escaped with as teenagers, or are streamed to us on sleepless nights, mean something. What could we make them mean?

b The word libertarian is used here, and throughout, in the European sense of "partisans of liberty"; it does not refer to American Randians unless so specified.

I am an anarchist. To me, that means living my life against the state, capitalism, racism, misogyny in all its variations, and all other forms of hierarchy infused with power that oppress us. It means an unsettled life, one without contentment or plenty, one of decadence and joy; as Murray Bookchin observed, scarcity is frequently both a push towards anarchism and its limit. But neither do I only live for my own desires: the rhetoric of "freedom," when it is absent ethical content or a revolutionary goal, only mobilizes support for state capitalism. I feel a fierce anger at injustice, a desire for solidarity with people and creatures struck down by power, a love for my comrades, and the necessity of constantly examine my own heart and actions for wrong. I am not writing to make anyone else an anarchist... though I cannot stop you. I do not claim to represent the views of anarchists in general. I reject the social power that can come from putting words into the world, but I do not refuse exchange, accountability, or conversation.

In short, I write to point out that generalizations are made to oppress people, and so the anti-fascist and anarchist project is to recognize individual difference and organize along lines of affinity while recognizing our historical oppressions. Moreover, I think it is worth interrogating our present imaginary to trace the genealogy of our emotional and material relationships to the mythic currents shaping the beds of political and social projects. This is of deep practical importance: if fascism is, as it claims, experiencing a rebirth, we may be able to kill it in its infancy... but to do so, we must identify it within our own hearts. Our struggle against fascism must not supplant our focus upon the long-anticipated, but never fully realized, birth of freedom. Furthermore, we must reject space and time as constructs developed—like gender—to justify political projects of destruction. If the past seems sweeter to us, it is only because we were children then—or because we have believed the redemptive fictions created to found our present. It is crucial to remember that not all childhoods are happy... and that no unhappy childhood is blamelessly so. Bad things do not happen to children inevitably, like bad weather, though they may be the result of equally complex relationships and flows of power. Refusal is possible; and when it is not, it was for someone else, further up the line. The fascist and capitalist arguments are alike in that they mean suffering for children today, and justify it by satisfying the imagined needs of the children of the past or future. Rather than caring for these past or future children—which care, however well-intentioned, is likely to be the foundation of fresh misery—let us consider the choices, however haunted, with which we are faced in the present.

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One may see that the history, which is now indivisible from oneself, has been full of errors and excesses, but this is not the same thing as seeing that, for millions of people, this history—oneself—has been nothing but an intolerable yoke, a stinking prison, a shrieking grave. It is not so easy to see that, for millions of people, life itself depends on the speediest possible demolition of this history, even if this means the leveling, or the destruction of its heirs.

—James Baldwin

It is true that totalitarian domination tried to establish these holes of oblivion into which all deeds, good and evil, would disappear, but just as the Nazis' feverish attempts, from June 1942 on, to erase all traces of the massacres—through cremation, through burning in open pits, through the use of explosives and flame-throwers and bone-crushing machinery—were doomed to failure, so all efforts to let their opponents 'disappear in silent anonymity' were in vain. The holes of oblivion do not exist. Nothing human is that perfect... One man [sic] will always be left alive to tell the story... the lesson of such stories is simple and within everybody's grasp. Politically speaking, it is that under conditions of terror most people will comply but *some people will not*...

—Hannah Arendt

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