



Negativity/Positivity

In these times of crisis a general negativity seems to be infused in everything, a negativity which slows us down, moves us towards depression and inaction or, at best, moments of hatred and vengeance expressed in destruction. But in these times it is hard to say that the crumbling of capitalism is creating the inspiration and space for anarchist intervention and expansion. Rather, a paralysis is created as recent big popular riots, uprisings and smaller acts of sabotage haven't changed much; the fascists have gathered strength not only in Greece but all over Europe and inserted their ideologies deep into the political sphere(s); neo-liberal capitalism dances ahead unhindered as everyone feels that we must let the professionals fix the economy even though the destruction of the economy would be a more desirable scenario. Years ago many wrote about a coming storm, predicting a crisis of the current logic with wild insurrections and uprisings all over Europe and the world. We saw them and if we were depressed before because nothing much was happening, now that these violent dreams have come to life and not much changed anyway, despair easily sets in.

So we live in a moment of time of in-betweens: there is no hope, it was better before, all work and no pay, remember the Pasok days... And in this gloom and the contagion of mass depression, we see this negativity also amongst ourselves as anarchists and anti-authoritarians. Even though internal negativity is always something to address and try to hinder in the anarchist milieu and something which is easily overlooked due to various factors, at the present time it



is increasingly important. All over Europe the riots have changed, they are not necessarily ours anymore. The days of the anti-globalisation movement and the so-called "*anarchists'* travelling circus that goes from summit to summit with the sole purpose of causing as much mayhem as possible" (Tony Blair, Gothenburg, June 2001) are long forgotten and these days we instead see French right-wingers fighting the police together with homophobic anti-abortion Christians on the streets of Paris and big scale riots and burning barricades in Kiev that led to the overthrow of a prime minister and the presence of Neo-Nazis in a transition government. The European elections are looking to be a huge victory for all kinds of far right forces from all over Europe. The riot as we have known it is over. Capitalism is more brutal and fascism is spreading everywhere.

But wasn't it the smashing of capitalism that we were proposing, amongst other things? How can it be that as capitalism loses all credibility, at the same time it becomes stronger and more authoritarian and it is not us who are seizing the moment? It may be that it's easier to swallow the simple answers of fascist populists, but it is difficult for me to see how the simplicity of their solutions can be so easily swallowed by so many. Perhaps the destruction of the capitalism that existed a few years ago suddenly

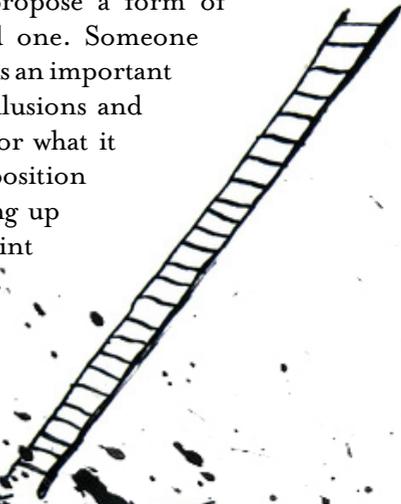


makes that recent kinder capitalism seem desirable again and we ask for the people who were running it then to please give it back to us, even when this is an absurdly foolish hope. As much as people can theorise, there is no semblance of a consensus as to why the political centre has moved far to the right, why capitalism has given up any façade of democratic representation and why we ended up in this so-called crisis anyway. However, all over Europe it seems that though the last few years have had many interesting moments in the streets, we are largely absent from the greater picture; while popular anti-authoritarianism has shifted like a flag in the wind both to parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics, from national and EU elections to street activities, forms of direct action and internet activism. Who is anti-authoritarian now? Is it still us, or is it the populists and far-right who claim to be the underdog standing up for the common man against the European Union, unhindered multiculturalism and immigration, the destruction of traditions and family values? We may well feel that these groups and individuals represent many authoritarian positions such as nationalism, hetero-normativity and patriarchy but their support is gathered from what many see as an anti-authoritarian stance against a changing world.

So, there are good reasons to feel disempowered and negative. It is, then, a difficult task to suggest that we do not let this negativity destroy us into nothingness. First of all, we do not have a choice. Giving up means that we let a bunch of fascists and capitalist fanatics destroy our existence, reality and natural environment. The negativity is obviously not without reason and there is no love in these words for the smug activism of those who say that it's better to do something than nothing. Not all action is positive. Look for instance at the climate camp movement in the United Kingdom; it was a parody of anything antagonistic and was the perfect example of what was discussed in the excellent text 'Give Up Activism' which came out in that same country at the height of the anti-globalisation movement. Though the Climate Camp movement did radicalise a new group of people, it also marched happily down a dead end street on a political discourse which could only lead to liberalism, or self-destruction. Similarly, the consensus meetings and their rules of hand signals and formalities which legitimately were brought into

practice in order to create non-hierarchical spaces where everyone could participate on an equal level, eventually led to a farce best signified by a new breed of activists who travel around Europe criticising everyone who does not speak their specific political rhetoric, while they invent hand signals—like showing a flat palm or rubbing their bellies as different ways to prevent people from continuing their argument or expressing themselves at all.

The problem becomes how not to focus on negativity but rather to propose a form of positivity, though not a blind one. Someone once wrote that giving up hope is an important step because you give up on illusions and see the horror of this world for what it is and that's an important position to actually start from. So giving up on hope shouldn't be the point where one really gives up, but a point where one starts. Let us look at it simply. As anarchists we propose that a world where people are a part of making decisions about their



lives and acting together on a basis of solidarity, mutual aid and voluntary participation is a desired scenario and one that will lead to personal liberation and a world where the destruction of the self, others and our planet can be avoided. However, we fight amongst each other, many of our anarchist meetings have clear but unspoken hierarchical structures that are full of privilege-infused power and we say that we want to rule our autonomous, self-determined zones and federations (or whatever) by people's assemblies. We can excuse others for laughing at us. It doesn't make things look any better when young men at our demonstrations regularly start attacking each other or people they don't like the looks of or who tell them off for their macho shit. Anarchy is not a philosophy ruled by the strong or leaders, anarchy is when we do away with imposing ourselves on others and work together without threats and coercion.

If anarchists do not create environments which work in a way that creates motivation, a desire towards participation, encouragement, joy, empowerment and a lust for life, then we are neglecting a fundamental element of how anarchy is to exist. Calling those close to us 'scum' or 'liberals' or 'counter-revolutionaries' discourages participation and prevents anarchy. It is not the purism of me and a few of my friends that will move us away from the promised disaster of global capitalist monoculture. Neither is there a mysterious proletariat somewhere,

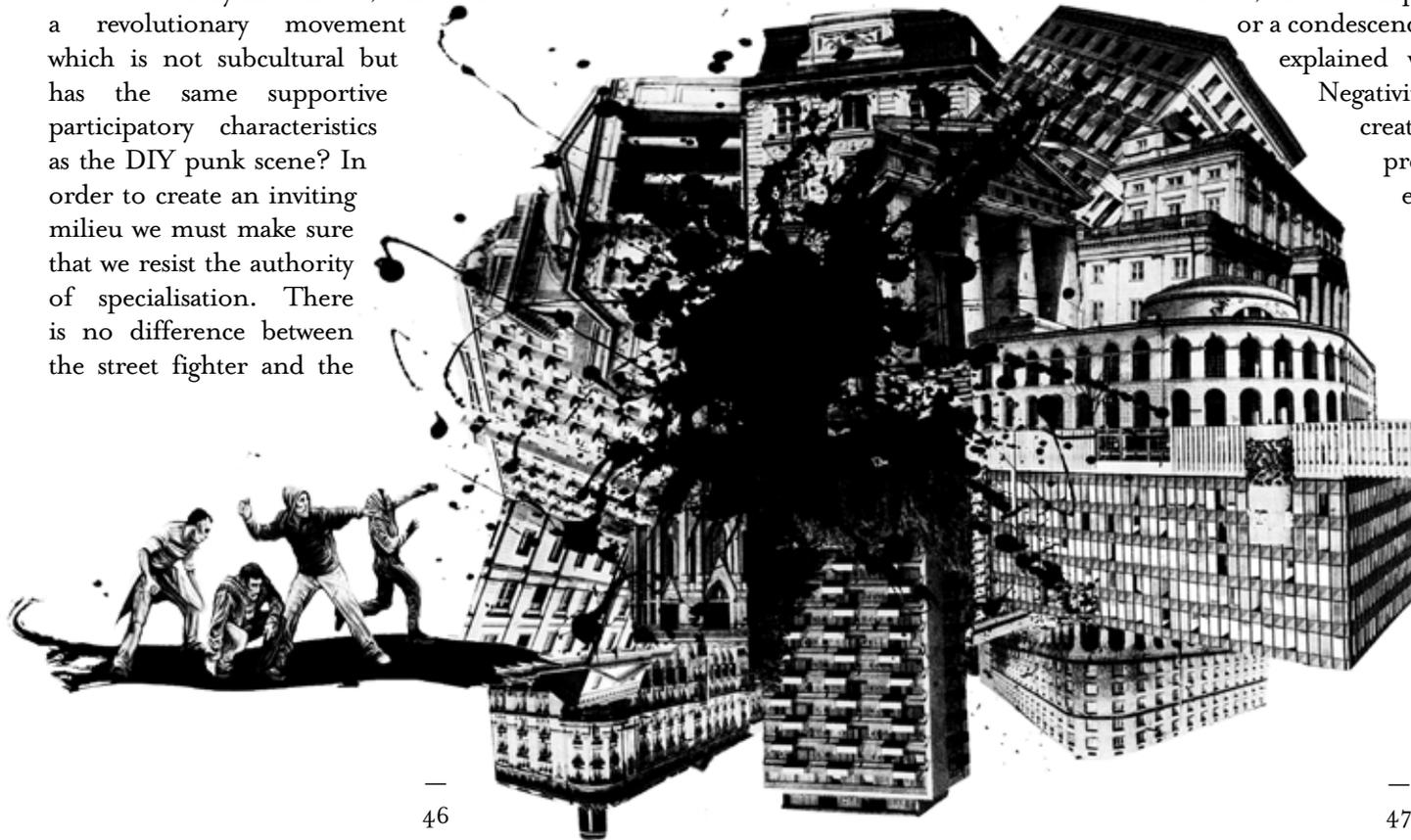
waiting for us to magically make a few right moves so it can rise with pure revolutionary strength and usher this world into a utopian era. Religion and Hollywood have both filled our childish hearts with such desires, but we're going to have to deal with each other instead. Anarchist theory becomes a lot less romantic when it comes to lots of people like us having to figure out together how to build anarchy. There will be no religious experience that saves us, and we're going to have to work together.

When working together it is important not to be always putting one another down. Often, in these anti-authoritarian political milieus, it can feel to a newcomer that the agenda is very explicitly set, though it is not written anywhere. A learned programme can be regurgitated over and over again, truths have been agreed upon and the newcomer is told how it is and what will and won't work. This 'tyranny of structurelessness' (to borrow a phrase from an interesting essay from the seventies) shows itself continuously in anarchist praxis. It exposes a basic lie: that we are without hierarchical structures. The structures are there and the tyranny exists because the structures are invisible- or not recognised. No one takes responsibility for setting the agenda. This is not to say that non-hierarchical organising is not possible or desirable, but it is difficult, and the creation of positions of power and specialisation needs to be continuously addressed. When we do not address these we easily re-create the positions of power that are dominant in the mainstream society we claim to want to transform or reject. If your parents or the state give you money and you have a good education you are immediately in a better position for attending all meetings, setting the agendas and taking more risks in the streets than if you have children, lack papers, are struggling to pay the rent and juggling several jobs etc. Since these situations do appear, it is important that people are honest about this and that we create an environment where it is not just the professional revolutionaries or activists who run the show, but rather that we create a space where everyone feels empowered, welcome and important, even if they don't know everyone and do not have the same time to give to the struggle.

Similarly, it is important to also recognise that even though one might have a lot of experience, none of us have figured out this thing about how to overthrow capitalism and create a revolutionary momentum. When we silence voices because we make people think that their ideas are stupid or make them afraid to speak and act, we immediately halt potential. The student demonstrations on the 6th of December in Athens have had an enthusiastic energy and spontaneity often lacking in more regular anarchist demonstrations. This can often be seen across the world as students and youth regularly surprise everyone when suddenly taking to the streets and starting occupations with unhindered momentum, without asking any established groups or milieus for permission. It is important to share knowledge and experience, but it is equally important to not censor other people's initiatives because we think they won't work. If we sometimes shut our mouths and stay on the sidelines we will often be positively surprised.

Some friends once wrote that they never felt as free in free spaces as they did in the process of creating them. It is true what I stated earlier, that doing something is not necessarily better than doing nothing, it depends on what you are doing, but there is something to be found in the act of doing itself which is worth looking into. When the streets of the city centres cease to be what they normally are, and we walk through wide roads covered in rubble and smouldering bins as the shop windows are smashed or boarded up and teargas residue stings our eyes; there is that moment. No traffic, no shopping, a suspension of normality. When we are in the demonstration or blockade and we feel strong, empowered and stick together, defending ourselves when necessary, attacking when possible if we want; there are those moments of feeling free and together. These are the moments that we must recreate everywhere. A friend once said during the counter-summit days of the anti-globalisation movement that she was always involved in the actions but none of that would be possible without the self-organised kitchens, the teams that organised toilets, built structures and carried out first aid. In these processes we find the same moments as in the riots and their surroundings. A suspension of normality, a collective process of self determination- we do things on our own terms and support each other in the process. Many times this is the only source of strength that I can find when it comes to wanting to escape or overthrow this normality.

However, we know that the social centres, meetings and deeper organising often lead to negativity, frustration, in-fighting etc. Negativity infects everything and our moments of collective joy crumble as we wake up in the grim reality. Much can be taken from the DIY punk scene which is a big part of autonomous and anarchist structures in the north of Europe and the Americas. Another set of values, styles and codes combined with a sense of everyone being able to participate draws people to this scene. Subculture however, is not the answer: DIY vegan punks might as well be goths or metal heads or whatever identity that comforts them, while capitalism is very fond of niche markets; "get your vegan shoes and snacks here, it's more expensive but it's organic & cruelty free!". There is nothing wrong with looking for another reality, in fact it can be refreshing as hell to sit down for a beer in a social centre or local bar with some friends after spending a day in a normal work place with all the fucked up values that we often find in such places. But subculture can never be revolutionary in itself. So, can we create a revolutionary movement which is not subcultural but has the same supportive participatory characteristics as the DIY punk scene? In order to create an inviting milieu we must make sure that we resist the authority of specialisation. There is no difference between the street fighter and the



person who organises self-organised children's spaces. No task is above another, no person more or less important. We need everything, so there must be a place for anyone who wants to contribute.

This text is written as a summary of discussions around this topic and is not a critique on the situation in Greece or any groups or individuals specifically. Neither is it a text that wishes to suggest pacifism in any way or discuss the specifics of tactics. It comes from discussions with both foreigners and Greeks where two things were noticeable: many people are not so involved in Athenian anarchy because they do not feel welcome and do not feel that their opinions would be valued, even though they are themselves sympathetic, hang out in anarchist places, attend demonstrations and have various levels of experience already. This is a scenario which is recognised in many countries and not limited to the city of Athens, but still worth pointing out. Secondly, when one does try to participate and suggest

ideas, these attempts are often met with scepticism or a condescending attitude where it is pointedly explained what will and will not work.

Negativity then seeps into everything, creating an exclusive environment and preventing participation, initiative, encouragement, and the joy of experimentation. This is exactly what we do not need. We must kill the cops in our heads to start to break free, but we must also kill the bosses and workers in our heads to work together and resist authority and negativity in the broader society as well as within our free spaces and anarchist milieu. Remember, there is no authority but yourself!

Love and Rage,
Coraline