

Articles from “Machete” #4

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The Actor and the King

It seldom happens.

Fortunately.

Yet once it did occur that an actor chose a king to be his friend.

Or perhaps it was the other way round.

But in the end it makes no difference.

The two of them were honest and sincere friends. They quarreled and were reconciled, as is generally the custom between true friends.

For two years their friendship held.

The actor made no more ado about this friendship than he would have done about a friendship with any other mortal.

One afternoon they went strolling together in the park.

The actor had played a king the evening before. But not a Shakespearean king. The royal patron of the theater could not endure those. For Shakespeare's kings, notwithstanding their divine right, were quite ordinary men who loved and hated, murdered and reigned — just as it suited their intents and purposes.

The part of the king in the play of the previous evening, however, had been written by an author who was an anarchist at the age of eighteen, though later he was appointed a privy counselor.

It is understandable that this part should have delighted the king enormously and gave him occasion to converse with the actor on the problem of representing kings on the stage.

“What is the sensation you encounter, dear friend, when you appear in the role of king?”

“I feel myself to be totally a king, with the result that I would be incapable of any gesture which does not suit the character of a king.”

“That I can understand very well. The crowd of extras, bowing before you as the stage directions instruct them to do, sustains your sense of majestic dignity and suggests to the audience that you are indeed a king.”

“Even without the supporting actors I remain a king in the eyes of the audience — even if it happens that I must be quite alone on stage and deliver a monologue!”

This magnificently artistic conception of the actor's stimulated the king to draw a strictly circumscribed comparison between himself and the thespian king.

“But nonetheless, there remains an unbridgeable abyss between a real king and a thespian king. However remarkable your performance as a king, you cease to be a king as soon as the curtain descends. Suggestibility and dramatic illusion put an end to your majesty as soon as they cease to operate. Whereas I, my dear fellow, I remain a king even when I lie in my bed!”

To this the actor rejoined, “My dear friend, your comparison applies to both of us. No more than a short while ago we drove in a carriage to the gates of this park. Countless people lined the streets and ran behind us. They waved — you returned their greeting. They shouted as loud as they had breath, ‘Long live the king!’ and ‘Hurrah!’ — you smiled. Rather smugly. But if these

people should ever cease to play their parts as unpaid extras, then you also — and not only in your bed, but also in the clear light of day — you also, my friend, will cease to be a real king!”

The king halted abruptly in his tracks.

He stared fixedly at the actor.

His lips grew pale and began to quiver.

Suddenly he turned on his heel. Briskly he walked to the carriage and rode home.

Alone.

The friendship was at an end.

The friends never saw one another again.

And never again did the king attend the theater.

He became a thinker.

Became obsessed by the notion that he was a quite ordinary mortal.

Consequently he had to abdicate.

Died five years later.

His mind deranged.

It was said.

[Ret Marut]

Destroying Civilization, Destroying Nature.

Theses toward decivilizing and becoming dangerous

1

One of the most harmful prevailing prejudices of our times is the belief in Nature as a unified being separate from, and even opposed to Humanity (also perceived as a unified being). In the context of this doctrine, what is specifically Human — what is created by conscious human activity — is called Artificial as opposed to Natural.

2

The concept of Nature (that is the concept that all beings, things, relationships and activities not created by human beings constitute a unified whole that stands in contrast to all the things, beings, relationships and activities consciously created by human beings) is itself a product of conscious human activity and, thus, *artificial*.

3

Etymologically, “nature” simply refers to what is born into something, what is inherent to it; “artifice” refers to something that is made through consciously applied skill. Considered in this way, there is no necessary (“natural” if you will) opposition between “nature” and “artifice”, since what is consciously and skillfully created can only be made by *natural* beings (at least as of now) with an *inborn* capacity to learn to act consciously and with skill.

This does not mean that all or even most “artificial” creations are desirable. Just as there are certain “natural” realities that may cause us harm, so there are many “artificial” realities that are detrimental to us. Furthermore, while “natural” harms are usually temporary events that we can endure and get beyond, artificial creations that cause us harm are often meant to be permanent and even expansive. Thus, the only way to put an end to their harmfulness is to dismantle or destroy them. For example, institutions, large-scale structures and technological systems are all created through conscious human activity. They form a network that defines and limits the possibilities of our lives. They harm us socially and psychologically through these limitations that cripple imagination and creative capacity. They harm us physically by causing or enhancing disasters, illness, poverty, pollution, etc. Getting beyond them requires not endurance, but rather conscious human activity aimed at destruction...

In addition, there are aspects of the reality in which we live that are neither “natural” or “artificial”, neither inborn nor consciously created, I am speaking here of the vast array of historical,

social and cultural contingencies that develop out of the continuous, fluid interweaving of human relations amongst themselves and with non-human beings and things. Though they develop from human activity, they are not conscious creations, but rather reflect the meeting of chance and necessity in living in the world. For this reason, they often reflect the absurdity of the attempt to institutionally rationalize the world. But they also often provide the opportunities for challenging this institutional rationalization. Thus, in order to attack the civilized ruling order, we need to see beyond the “natural”-“artificial” dichotomy and explore this realm of historical, social and cultural contingency in order to grasp what we can as weapons for our revolt.

4

The conception of Nature as a unified entity is the basis for two apparently contradictory, but in fact complementary, ideologies that serve the ruling order by enforcing control over our lives: the moral ideology that ascribes goodness to the Natural and evil to the Unnatural and the metaphysical ideology of inherent alienation that sees Nature as a force hostile to Humanity and its development, a force that must be conquered and brought under control.

The moral ideology is applied most widely to in the sexual realm, but has also been used against magical and alchemical experimentation as well as any activity that is looked upon as a challenge to god’s rule (hubris). In our times, it is used against a variety of sexual acts as well as against abortion. Sexual minorities interested in assimilating often try to prove the naturalness of their sexuality (for example, by claiming it is genetic) as opposed to the unnaturalness of certain other forms of sexuality (pedophilia, whose definition has been expanded in recently years to mean the sexual attraction of an adult for anyone under the legal age of consent¹, and to a lesser extent bestiality are the prime contemporary examples of “unnatural” desire). But whether used against the hubris of alleged sorcerers, alchemists or courageous infidels, or against specific sexual or reproductive acts, this *moral* Nature serves as a tool for keeping passion and desire in check and thus for keeping us under control.

The ideology that views Nature as a hostile force which Humanity must conquer in order to meet its needs occurs to some extent within all civilizations, but only seems to have become the dominant conception within western civilization in the past five or six hundred years. Its rise to dominance, in fact corresponds with the rise of capitalism and the beginnings of industrialism. It was necessary to begin to channel human creative endeavors into activity that would maximally exploit all potential economic resources — natural and human — and this ideology provided a justification for just such an exploitative development. It makes use of disease, storms, floods, droughts, earthquakes and other so-called natural difficulties and catastrophes to back up this perspective and justify the most intrusive and controlling technological interventions. More than the moral ideology, this perspective is the modern justification for domination and control.

5

Civilization is a network of institutions that materially and practically alienate us from our own lives and creativity and, at the same time, from the myriad of relationships with the infi-

¹It original meant the sexual attraction of an adult for prepubescent children.

nite variety of beings and things that make up the world in which we live. This alienation is what transforms the variety of beings and things into the *unity* of Nature. This unity mirrors the imposed unity of civilization.

6

Overcoming alienation could thus be seen as a process of decivilizing. But what does this mean? It does not mean rewilding, going back to the primitive, going back to Nature. All these ideas imply a return to a way of being that is in reality a conceptual model (the Wild, the Primitive, the Natural) and thus a civilized ideal. Decivilizing is not a *return* to anything. The flow of relationships between ever-changing individuals that is existence outside of the Civilization-Nature dichotomy is never repeatable. So decivilizing has to be understood and explored without models, without any concept of a return.

7

A process of decivilizing would instead be a process of destruction and dismantling. Of material and social institutions and structures, of course. But also of the ideological structures, the false conceptual unities (Stirner's "spooks") which channel thinking to such an extent that most of us don't even notice these chains on our thoughts. The oneness of Nature, the oneness of Life, the oneness of the Earth are all civilized ideological constructions that guarantee that we continue to view our relationship with the rest of the world through the lens of alienation.

8

In this light, the desire to attack and destroy the institutions, structures and people that enforce the rule of the civilized regime becomes meaningful only when we are experimenting with ways of grasping our lives as our own and encountering other beings as individuals striving to create their lives — i.e., when we are practically attacking the ideological structure that channel our thoughts and desires. This does not mean rejecting all categorization, but rather recognizing its limits as a specific tool. Categorization can, for example, help us to distinguish poisonous from edible plants. But it cannot tell us the reality or even the most significant aspects of another being: their desires, their aspirations, their dreams...

9

By recognizing and encountering the uniqueness of each being in each moment, we find the basis for determining how to carry out our desires, for recognizing where complicity and mutuality are appropriate, where conflict is inevitable or desirable, where passionate encounter might flare up and where indifference makes sense. Thus, we are able to focus on what we need to realize desire, what place other beings and things and the relationships we build with them have in this creative process.

10

In terms of attacking civilization, this means rejecting any monolithic conception of it, without losing sight of its nature as an intertwining network of interdependent institutions and structures. These institutions and fundamental structures can only exist through the alienation of individuals from their lives. That alienation is their basis. This is why we can never make these institutions and basic structures our own, and there is no use in trying to grasp them as such. Rather they need to be destroyed, removed from our path.

But the development of civilization has created a great many byproducts of all sorts: materials, tools, buildings, gathering spaces, ideas, skills, etc. If we view civilization simplistically, as a solid monolith, then we can only bemoan our need to continue to use some of these byproducts as we dream of a distant future when we will live in a paradise where every trace of this monolith is gone.

If, on the other hand, we can distinguish what is essential to civilization from its byproducts and encounter the latter immediately in terms of our needs and desires (i.e., in a decivilized manner), new possibilities open for exploring how to live on our own terms.

11

This is how outlaws, the so-called “dangerous classes”, tend to encounter the world. Everything that isn’t nailed down is there for the taking to create life with. As anarchists who recognize civilization as the institutionalization of relationships of domination and exploitation, we would also encounter these byproducts in terms of how they can be used to attack, destroy and dismantle civilization.

12

But how does the idea of relating to each individual being in its uniqueness affect the human need to consciously and skillfully create? If we conceive of the ever-changing myriads of relationships around us as a monolithic Nature that is basically hostile toward us, the techniques methods and structures we develop will aim to conquer, control and dominate this hostile force (perhaps even to destroy it). If, instead, we see ourselves and all the beings around us as unique individuals in an ever-changing interaction with each other, we would still use skill and artifice, but not to conquer a monolith. Instead, we would use them to weave our way through a wonderful dance of relationships — destroying the calcifying institutions that block this dance — in a way that brings the greatest enjoyment to our lives.

13

A practice of this sort requires a vital and active imagination and a resolute playfulness.

By *imagination*, I mean the capacity to “see beyond” what is, to see *possibilities* that challenge and attack the current reality rather than extending it. I am not talking here of an adherence to a single utopian vision — which would tend to create authoritarian monstrosities in search of

adherents to devour — but of a capacity for ongoing utopian exploration without a destination, without a goal.

Perhaps this is what distinguishes anarchists from other outlaws. Imagination has moved their conception of the enjoyment of life beyond mere consumption to playful creation. Certainly, the ways in which outlaws have often historically consumed — the squandering of all they gained through their wits and daring in excesses of debauched feasting and immediate enjoyment of luxuries — runs counter to the capitalist value of *accumulation*, but it still equates wealth with things, reflecting the alienation of current relationships. Active, practical imagination can show us the *real* wealth that can spring from free relationships as creative activity.

By *resolute playfulness*, I mean the refusal to compromise oneself by taking on an identity that pins one down, the refusal to take seriously precisely those things to which this society gives importance, the insistence upon experimenting with one's life in each moment without worrying about a future that does not exist. The world is full of toys, games and challenges that can heighten the intensity of living. They are often hidden, buried beneath the institutional seriousness or the necessities of survival imposed by the ruling order. The insurgent and outlaw grasping of life involves breaking through these barriers.

14

So, a process of *decivilization*, of freeing ourselves from the constraints and obligations imposed by the network of institutions that we call civilization, is not a return to anything. It does not center around learning certain skills and techniques or applying certain utilitarian measures. It is rather a matter of refusing the domination of the utilitarian, the domination of survival over life, of insisting upon going out into the world to *play* on our own terms, taking hold of what gives us pleasure, and destroying what stands in our way.

Against Unemployment and Temp Work: Continual and Equal Exploitation for All!

We want to work. Yes, we want to work at all costs. Not so much for the money in itself as for our social prestige, for confidence in ourselves and in the future. And, most of all, for our freedom; so many great thinkers have assured us that work makes us free!

For too long we've been excluded from this freedom and left to ourselves, and this has generated anti-social habits in us. Instead of getting up at dawn to go to the factory or office, we've had breakfast in bed, basked and then gone back to sleep. Instead of risking death by getting crushed by machinery or from boredom, we've roamed the streets in search of adventure. While industrialists and politicians have to deal with a financial crisis of huge proportions, while conforming citizens — or, more briefly, citizens — trudge stressfully along, we have all the time in the world available to us to daydream, wander, read, make love. We've had it! And this is why we want to go where government leaders, from whom we expect everything, meet. Because unemployment should be suppressed, and everyone should be able to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow.

In order to achieve full employment for all, we propose:

- The leveling of the useless mountains and hills with shovels and pickaxes; the transport of the rocks, on the backs of men and women on foot, to the industrial deserts, where they will be used to erect huge pyramids glorifying CEOs, the president of the World Bank and other Pharaohs of the Sacred Market. The pyramids will attract global tourism, which is bound to create supplementary jobs for servants.
- With the aim of defeating foreign competition, we demand the establishment of a maximum wage that should be no higher than the average wage in the poorest countries. In this way, our employers will be willing to continue exploiting their fellow countrymen and women rather than transferring most of their activity to other countries in search of more responsive labor.
- The hiring of all the unemployed who are compatible with information technologies in virtual enterprises to produce virtual services paid with virtual money.
- The immediate privatization of air. Why? First of all, because it is counterproductive and sets the worst possible example that there is still something available for free on this planet. Also because it is immoral for idlers and good-for-nothings to appropriate the same right to breath as scrupulous workers. But, above all, because this measure will provide the final solution to the problem of unemployment. On the one hand, it would give birth to new jobs: lung capacity measurers, oxygen tariff collectors, respiration controllers. On the other hand, all the shirkers could no longer treat themselves to respiration and would finally vanish from our lives. It remains to be seen whether global conventions will allow the

creation of still more workplaces for transforming the suppressed unemployed into bars of soap, lampshades and other domestic articles.

Yes, for a cause like this, we are ready to crawl to the ends of the earth, to wherever the powerful hold their summits, barefoot, in chains, zigzagging, three steps forward and two steps back, just the way they want us. Along the way, we are ready to mutually whip each other and throw ourselves at the feet of all the tie-wearing professionals that we encounter, crying out for compassion.

The Union of Voluntary Slaves

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