IN OUR SYSTEM, COERCION IS ACCEPTED. WHY?
“Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is ‘in power’ we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with… disappears, ‘his power’ also vanishes.”


“Nearly every social movement begins in the absence of might, and that’s one view of history: all these great social changes begin with people who have little opportunity... power exists in the smallest human relations.”

Perhaps you too are mad. [pissed off? fed up? hōhā as hell?] Frustrated with the way the world is organized, our hierarchical system and the concentration of power it permits, casting hurt and division among us. Need I list the ills? Exploitation, indifference, discrimination and profiteering, the destruction that underlies unjust accumulation, the violence⁴ (and silence)⁵ that protects its gains. In our fighting to get near the top – in the very race that establishes the top as a goal – we are distracted, drawn into conflict that misdirects our pain, preserving the power that causes it.

There are no revelations here. The issues are systemic, a collectively known, lived-with failing, called out again and again. But who is listening? Not those in power.³ Why? The reason is their power: “In order to have the continued opportunity to express their ‘generosity’, the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this ‘generosity’”⁴ – and with it, the denial of our agency. How else could they claim to speak (but not listen)?

For this, I am angry. [still / the rages burns⁵] Angry at an order that I didn’t (we didn’t) consent to, a political system that claims neutrality at odds with its practice. What do I mean by this? That “the assumption of a view from Nowhere is the projection of local values as neutrally universal ones”.⁶ Something/someone is always obscured; other ways wait to be found (again).⁷

This ‘neutrality’ is the work of empire. Fuelled by felt superiority, it is an arrogance that denies the diversity of the world, enforcing a single mode of being as valid – that held by those in power.⁸ In the process, we witness (and have witnessed) attempts at erasure both violent and clumsy, resisted by all who hold their own ways as true. The struggle knows many names, but is united in this: an insistence on self-determination, the right to make one’s own (collective) decisions.

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¹“Analysis of existential situations of oppression reveals that their inception lay in an act of violence—initiated by those with power. This violence, as a process, is perpetuated from generation to generation of oppressors, who become its heirs and are shaped in its climate.” Paulo Freire Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Continuum, New York, 1970) 58.

²“The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them.” Edward Said Culture and Imperialism (Knopf, New York, 1993), xiii.

³In quick rebuttal to red: Labour signing the TPP. I evoke the (out of context) tweet/poetry of Hera Lindsay Bird: “This government announcement feels like one of those Zen koans where the master pushes his student into a bush, for enlightenment reasons”. [oh, did u think / you were safe?]

⁴Freire, 44.

⁵“how could you become new, if you had not first become ashes?” Friedrich Nietzsche Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006).

⁶Professor David Theo Goldberg, quoted in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 24. Readers, please note, your awareness of multiple (and infinite) ways of being is assumed; as is the status of all knowledge(s) as partial and fragmentary. [gaps left / that we might grow]

⁷“after the critical dismantling, there has to be something more: a restoration of meaning, a process which cannot avoid being interpretative and imaginative... an original recovery of what was previously self-evident.” Paul Carter The Road to Botany Bay (Faber and Faber, Sydney, 1987) 349-351.

⁸“‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it.” Michel Foucault “Truth and Power” in Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977 (Pantheon Books, New York, 1980) 133.
Our first task is one of framing. Despite their myriad differences (and making no attempt to conflate them), all oppressions share the same root. In the words of revolutionary educator Paulo Freire: "the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another.”

What does this mean? In Freire’s take, it is choice that makes us human: our "ontological... is to be a subject who acts upon and transforms [the] world, and in doing so moves towards ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life, individually and collectively." The struggle, then, is concerned with freedom – not that of Ayn Rand (to ignore or oppress), but one limited by what it asks for itself: an application of the Golden Rule. Only that which makes space for agency is sufficient. There is no struggle that does not contain and uplift all others – to be otherwise is to submit to a certain, limited outlook, one that denies, discrimination and hurt that centralized power produces?

Thus framed, the struggle is an act of love “opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressor’s violence.”

However, in this we should note the temptation to silence, to re-act for the rest of life is long, is almost, always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors... their perceptions of themselves as opposites of the oppressor do not yet signify engagement in a struggle to overcome the contradiction; the one pole aspires not to liberation, but to identification with its opposite pole.

Instead, true liberation “would require them to eject this image [of dominating those who had dominated] and replace it with autonomy and responsibility.” In their struggle towards liberation, they must move their own power to dominate and supress, not only emancipating themselves but also restoring to the oppressors “the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression.”

How might such transformation be effected? The task is, in essence, personal: “while no one liberates [them]self[by] their own efforts alone, neither are [they] liberated by others.” As the task is a becoming, a becoming fully human, it requires a full acknowledgement of agency, hence: “The correct method lies in dialogue.”

It is for this reason that Freire focuses on pedagogy, the process of learning necessary to come to a critical awareness of the world. Once established, this criticality empowers its holders to engage in praxis (lived theory): repeated cycles of reflection and action that lead to the systematic reorganization of the system.

However, too risks exist. For the pedagogy – this process of transformation – to be effective, any who would “teach” must also “learn.” It is the dialogue that matters, a relationship that’s never still. The students must come to knowledge themselves, their own ways of being, and formulating a comprehensive, and limiting – and therefore capable of change: “Problem-solving education affirms people as beings in the process of becoming – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality.”

When what, then, of our (constructed) reality? Of our suffering climate and peoples, the denial, discrimination and power produced. The centre cannot hold – because it has never held. To the degree ‘we’ are Western, our received narratives (of history/progress/value) reflect a certain, limited outlook, one that denies, discrimination and hurt that centralized power produces. The question is: how might the system be changed?

Conventional wisdom tells, in what will come to be revealed as a typically Biblical narrative, of egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies giving way to those organized around farming and its accumulation, leading to our distinctly flawed hierarchical system and all the inequality and oppression it casts. And so it is that projections of a “Fall” from Eden give rise to the resignation of modern humans as doomed and thus, somehow, deserving of oppression. Must we be coerced?

As anthropologist David Graeber and archaeologist David Wengrow explain, a closer analysis of prehistory suggests otherwise – revealing a “shifting back and forth” between egalitarian and hierarchical social forms during certain times of the year, on the proviso they could not last; on the understanding that no particular social order was ever fixed or immutable.

At this point, we should be noted that while a process of revolutionary pedagogy requires autonomy – in that it only revolves where it returns for space for agency (and is conducive to an inhuman social order) – its process doesn’t exclude a later ceding of autonomy, providing that it is consented. That is, once a subject has the tools necessary for critical reflection/action upon the world, and so can be said to be ‘aware’, it is fully within their right to consent to or delegate certain functions to the above-mentioned agent. The point is, in order, to reveal that small scale groups are especially likely to be egalitarian, or that large ones necessarily have to be, bureaucrats, or these bureaucratic forms are justified as facts.

When looking at alternative structures, it is perhaps useful to illuminate the difference between inequality in its accepted form (i.e. “those for whom one can naturally be a ‘fact’”) and inequality as it jars, where the advantages are held not by effort, talent and resource, but the product of gaming the system (i.e. rent seekers, who insist on systemic privilege, Mike Hosking, Max Key etc). Consider the difference between ‘authority’ in its earned, risk-carrying sense – that which you respect by virtue of the experience/knowledge they carried that formally imputed to technocrats, in absence of consent: repugnant for all it does to deny their humanity/agency.

This differs explained, at length by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, is that there is no struggle that does not contain and uplift all others – to be otherwise is to exclude a later ceding of autonomy, in absence of consent: repugnant for all it does to deny their humanity/agency.

This is crucial: to understand how a process of revolutionary pedagogy properly requires autonomy – in that it only revolves where it returns for space for agency (and is conducive to an inhuman social order) – its process doesn’t exclude a later ceding of autonomy, providing that it is consented. That is, once a subject has the tools necessary for critical reflection/action upon the world, and so can be said to be ‘aware’, it is fully within their right to consent to or delegate certain functions to the above-mentioned agent. The point is, in order, to reveal that small scale groups are especially likely to be egalitarian, or that large ones necessarily have to be, bureaucrats, or these bureaucratic forms are justified as facts.

Once again, we return to the personal, not cast in isolation, but that which is shared, the interpersonal, and the ways in which we space for autonomy there. So it is that we must begin by transforming ourselves.

In the pedagogy of dialogue – the practice of relationality, what Freire calls “reflective participation” – the oppressed came to an increased awareness and criticality of their place, catalyzing into action and reasserting their agency in the world: “For apart from the inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other”.

So it is that our politics returns to its roots, the interpersonal base from which it begins, by way of consent and our own volition, build structures to elevate and express our voice as a right of human beings: interrogating intentions of “wealth” as essentially world wide, but one that engages an expansive fluidity, embedding us all in infinite play.

Profs. 72.
JUST NOT THAT INTO YOUR POWER, AYE.

we choose / us a better future

*consent-based politics, please*