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Some Reflections on Tame Words from a Wild Heart (by Jean Weir) and the Distillation of Core Insurrectionist Concepts

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Introduction

In a lot of ways it is difficult to imagine where I, personally, or insurrectionism in the English speaking world would be without the constant contributions of Jean Weir. In running Elephant Editions, and participating in other projects to network with non-English speaking insurrectionists and translating their work, she has been largely responsible for the rise of insurrectionism and the repositioning of the anarchist project around a push for immediacy, and away from arbitrary speculation about some hypothetical future.

This repositioning has taken the anarchist project from the utopian pipe-dreams of the creative and experimental amongst us, from a position that for many years was relegated to a position subservient to Leninism, from a position in which the most anarchism had to offer was a posture of theoretical resistance and activism. The move into an insurrectionist orientation re-centered anarchism around the act, around direct action and strategic consideration, and thus, took it out of the clouds and attached it to the Earth, the world that we exist within and the terrain in which fighting occurs. This is nothing short of taking a project that centered around dreams, fictions and speculation, and grounded it in activity, materiality and the immediacy of struggle.

But, in this work she has often been overshadowed by the works that she has participated in translating and propagating. The ideas being expressed in these texts are framed around the voice of the author, and the voice of the translator and the motivations for the translation are lost. In this case, however,

we can catch a glimpse into these questions in Wier's on writings, in this case encapsulated in the short collection *Tame Words for a Wild Heart*.

In this short reflection I am not going to attempt to even claim that this short text is a full expression of the ideas that have motivated this work. Even in this partial view, however, we can catch a glimpse into an important distillation of ideas. Insurrectionist thought can be many things, militant, angry, motivating, complex, simplistic, poetic, bellicose, all of these things at once, but one thing that is often absent is clarity and concision. The tendency, within that space, has been to recognize that complexity requires patience, which results in the spacing of arguments and concepts out over, often, multiple pieces written over a series of years; Bonanno's work is a classic example of this

This is not a critique of insurrectionist thoughts, complexity, and thus a level of difficulty, is necessary in order to not fall prey to simplistic explanations of overly reduced existences. It is important for us to grapple with ideas, to play with concepts, to experiment, to challenge and to complicate; otherwise we risk collapsing into ideology or into understandings of the world which eliminate possibility, complexity and uniqueness all in the service of reductionistic forms of "understanding". At the same time, however, it can be necessary to ground this complexity, to articulate the core concepts that form the foundations of these conceptual moves, and it is here where we can start to understand the core of a certain understanding of the insurrectional project.

*The term politics is being used here in the traditional Greek sense, as “matters of the polis”, or the dynamic of things that occur, and not in the sense of modern statecraft.

If you would like to read the text referenced here it can be found on Anarchist Library:

<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/jean-we>

Weir’s writing and speaking (some of these texts are transcriptions of speeches) tend to function in a more relaxed form, a narrative that is conversational and human, grounded in an approachability that conceals the complexity of the ideas at work within the narrative. In this approach we can see ideas highlighted, emphasized and brought forward in a way that allows for clarity and the experimental collision of these concepts in a living, breathing discourse which, in itself, is connected to activity. In elaborating on this point we will be focusing on three concepts, projectuality, immediacy and intermediacy, which not only form the core of this text, but also form what, in my reading, really forms the core of insurrectionism, and the specific ontology that is expressed through this medium.

Projectuality

A core concept in the text, and one in which Weir consistently returns, is the notion of projectuality. There are a number of senses in which this term is utilized, but in all senses the concept of projectuality is inherently connected to a concept of action. At its most simplistic, the concept of projectuality expresses the ability of actions to exist within and act upon the particular dynamics of any given moment.

In this sense, the concept of projectuality is being used here to express a variety of different elements of this concept of action and materiality. Firstly, the concept is one which discusses a projection of action across space within immediacy, that actions can have resonance within material conditions, and that

these resonances ultimately form the cascading effects of the act. Concurrent to this, the concept of projectuality also interacts with a concept of time, with the impacts of the act stretching out as a series of reverberations into future present moments.

This reliance on a future present moment, expressed in this concept of forming the conditions of the future, carries with it an important rethinking of the concept of “strategy” as often articulated. We will return to some of these ideas when we discuss intermediacy later, but, for now, the concept of projectuality fundamentally disrupts the concept of knowable and extendable conceptual understandings of actions that mimic strategic thinking.

Too often what passes for “strategic” thinking within anarchist spaces in the US is actually a form of political pre-figuration. In this form of appearance strategic discussions begin with a political discussion, one centered on a world we want to see, with actions being planned in order to fulfill some approximation of this abstract vision. In other forms, what occurs is closer to strategic thought, but often falls down into the application of strategic approaches already deemed to be always already effective; we see this in the discussion of shields, which are often taken as an article of faith, even though they are, most of the time, a hindrance to mobility which fosters poor strategic choices in the streets, like staying together in a single large group.

When we start to think strategic engagement through the concept of projectuality we have to begin the discussion from a fundamentally different point of departure, the actual dynamics

objects into categories all the way to the assertions of the existence of some universal truth (which would paradoxically necessitate a deterministic universe in which revolt would be impossible).

This project is critical, more so today than in years past. The level of political discourse and action in the US is at a contradictory spot in the present moment. At the same time that we see a rapid acceleration in conflict against the state, we are also witnessing the reduction of discourse and theory to partisans of various reductionistic ideological projects arguing with one another in incredibly simplistic terms. Whole conceptual universes are asserted in discussions about how best to “manage society”, how some sort of abstract future scenario will be dealt with, how these concepts interact with attempts to end history in the culmination of some ideological revelation. These reductionisms displace action into the realm of the abstract, constructing a politics of abstraction that then attempts to become the world...and we wonder why revolts have a horrible tendency to turn into authoritarian purges and police states.

If we are to escape the tragedies of the past, the failures of the revolutionary project, the purges and massacres, this requires a complete rethinking of the terms in which we engage with action and politics. These new terms must dispense with the simplifications of modernity, move beyond the attempts to end history and begin to embrace the complexity of lived existence, in all of its conflict and contingency. It is only from this point of departure that we can redefine what action looks like, and it is only from that perspective that politics can flow.

Conclusion

For many of us that have been around for some time the direction of the insurrectionist project within the US has taken a series of unfortunate turns. From the retreat into concepts of “revolutionary subjectivity” and an approach grounded in an assertion of affirmation in action, the insurrectionist project, unfortunately, deviated from its core. In this text we can see this core being illuminated, brought down to core concepts and structured in such a way as to facilitate its role as a foundation, rather than an ideology.

What emerges here is an approach to the act, and to revolt, which is simultaneously a hearkening to the past, as well as an outlining of a possible approach to the present. On one level the discussion of action from the position of ontology is one that strips away a lot of the ideological baggage of philosophical modernity, all of the absurd assumptions of things like “society” or utopian goals, all of the retreats to theory and self-aggrandizement. It is a return to core, foundational discussions and concepts, a basis from which things can be build on top of, grounding these new formations in experimentation and immediacy.

On another level, this reframing of the insurrectionist project around an ontology of immediacy firmly grounds it on the terrain of lived existence, the moment, and in doing so surpasses the terms of the modernist project (of which liberal democracy, socialism and traditional anarchism are all a part). By doing so, by grounding politics in the act, we can overcome the assertions that come to us in theory, from the generalization of

of the time and space of the action itself. In other words, a discourse ceases to be strategic discourse to the degree that all action and conditions are thought abstractly, through the lens of the concept first, with discussions of acts occurring only afterward, with the terms entirely premised on the abstract. By discussing projectuality on the level of resonance, the reverberation of an act across time and space, the potential future impacts of the act are thought only in reference to that future present moment when they manifest.

As such, the future resonance of the act becomes something that is unpredictable. As one acts the first move of projectuality is immediate, the projection of action into the present. This immediate ace converges with the dynamics of the moment to create the possibility of reverberations. These reverberations then come to change the dynamics of future moments. If that is the case, if reverberations stretch out across time indefinitely, impacting all future present moments, then it is impossible for us to predict, with anything more precise than blind speculation, what the impacts of these acts can be. The result of this is a grounding of the action in the present, with the purpose of the act being a projectuality which generates unpredictable resonances.

Once this perspective is adopted, which is necessary for us to ever speak of actions, all of which occur in a present, then the concept of having a plan for revolt, or a programme, any sort of rigid strategy that is meant to be enacted regardless of circumstance and the formation of any structures that are meant to determine actions in the future (federations, unions, etc), is at best a work of political fiction, and at worst a dis-

course which pretends to function strategically, but which in reality functions as a limiting force to the possibility of action. The approach to action, therefore, within this perspective, functions in the present to create the possibilities that form present moments in the future.

Immediacy

Carried within this concept of projectuality is a concept of immediacy, or a reliance on the existence of the present as the site in which action, and life, occurs. We can see this manifest itself in a formula, which is repeated throughout, which fundamentally ties theory to activity. This argument takes on two specific manifestations, both of which come to terminate in the concept of the experiment.

The first manifestation centers around the conceptualization of theory as an act in itself. The realm of theory, the universe of the concept, is one in which the particularity of material objects and moments is eliminated in the construction of the concept. In other words, when we construct a concept which is meant to speak of a group of things, we have eliminated the particularity of those things, and typified, defined, them through the contours of the concept.

On the surface, and there is a far more complex discussion to be had about this point, the role and ontology of theory (totally writing a book on this soon), the realm of the concept is incapable of speaking of the material world. But, at the same time, the act of thought, or the act of theory, is an act, and as such, it occurs in a time, in a space, and has resonant effects.

the entrance into this space of intermediate struggle is an intervention, not to create some sort of pre-figurative utopian space (which carries with it all of the problems of the immaterial and non-immediate as discussed above) or predictable outcome, but, rather, to attempt to intervene to shape the dynamics of activity in an immediate sense.

The question of intermediacy is a question of terrain, and this is the second core point. Far from a call to work with liberals and authoritarians, although that may occur, the concept of intermediacy is more of a recognition of the dynamics of terrain within late capitalism. If we are being honest with ourselves, though the anarchist, and adjacent, milieus have grown dramatically in the past two decades, we still are far from a space in which open conflict with the state typifies the spaces of action. So, if we are always necessarily acting in the immediate, and in those immediate circumstances most of the conflicts we are enmeshed in are reformist in nature (this includes calls to defund the police), then engagement in that immediate time and space will likely occur in these scenarios, unfortunately.

This does not mean, however, that we are being called to accept the terms of those engagements as typified by activism. Within the context of activism engagement becomes an imperative in all scenarios, regardless of strategic dynamics. The concept of intermediacy, rather, is a concept of action framed entirely around the propulsion of action through resonance, and the maximization of resonant effects. This requires a perspective centered around strategic calculation, and the analysis of strategy in the framing of points of intervention.

ous, existentially nullifying experience, and at the end of the day, we aren't even fighting the same fight.

The concept of intermediate struggle, as articulated here, is often criticized for encouraging us to attempt to, at all costs, work in these hostile areas of political activity; but that is a superficial reading. Weir discusses intermediacy as an attempt to engage in some immediate conflict with the state, around some issue or question of immediate importance in a local area, that could be expanded in a wider social conflict. Though this seems like a pretty straight forward concept, there are two elements of this concept that fundamentally shape this in a different, much more useful, form.

The first element of immediacy that should be elaborated upon centers around the ways that intermediacy reframes the terms of engagement. The traditional mode of engagement, which I term activism, is a symbolic form of discursive engagement meant to make some sort of rhetorical point through material activity (See the introduction to *Insurgencies #1* for more thoughts on this: https://littleblackcart.com/index.php?dispatch=products.view&product_id=318) [ed.: available on edist.ro here: <https://edist.ro/library/what-is-in>]. The focus is on an abstract "issue" and the pace of activity is driven by discursive outrages, rather than material imperatives. In this traditional form the terrain of conflict is displaced from the material, and inserted into a conceptual debate between different discursive positions.

When intermediacy is discussed the question of the "issue" fades into the background. The purpose of engaging in intermediate struggle is not to win that conflict necessarily. Rather,

Following from an argument leveraged by Sorel and Galleani, among others, this repositions theory alongside any other act, and as such, the calculus of theory can be thought around the measurement of the effectiveness of the theory act, rather than some abstract discourse on some concept of "correct"-ness.

As such, and this is the second move here, the act of theory becomes thought as an act, and the act itself is imparted with relevance; the act acts on the material world. Now, as we spoke about earlier, this act is not ontologically capable of implying its own conclusion or resonances, which are predicted in a speculative form, at best. The act, therefore, is not something that can be undertaken due to assured outcomes, and as a result, the act always functions within the realm of experimentation.

The concept of the experiment is critical here for a series of reasons. Firstly, experimentalism carries with it a rejection of concepts of truth and universality, and the knowability of universality. There is a lot more discussion that is needed to analyze all of the issues of universality within radical theory (again, writing a book about this soon). Suffice to say, for now, once we reject the concept of knowable universal truth, and wager on its absence, not only do we enter into the only ontological approach that allows for the possibility of revolt, but we also enter into a realm of the unpredictable.

Within this matrix of concepts, the act, all acts, are rearranged, not around their outcomes, but around constant analysis of their resonances, which can only be gazed upon from within the immediate, the actual reality of its existence in the moment. As such, everything becomes provisional, a temporary strategic probe to determine the interactivity between cer-

tain acts and their resonances over time, within the immediacy of the present.

Not only does this form the foundation for the concept of informal organization (if the point of action is to fundamentally change conditions, then how can we form eternal political and strategic approaches in the abstract), but also grounds all activity in the immediacy of its occurrence and the resonances it generates. This is nothing short of an argument against utopianism, and a reframing of the objectives of revolt around experimental possibilities, rather than dull deterministic futures and asserted ends of history (all of which carry echoes of millenarian Christianity). The result is a highly dynamic approach to the act, which generates its own possibilities based on strategic openings in the present, the resonances of these events and the constant analysis of these resonances over time in order to shape experimentation, with experimentation becoming method, goal, strategy and politics.

Some may find this lacking, may find the absence of some conclusive strategic doctrine to be a hindrance. But, the question must always become, if the act is immediate, and if the goal is to fundamentally change the terms upon which life is lived, then in what way would we possess the perspective, ability to predict the future or the the intellectual gaze to posit some sort of commonality of moments over time? This sort of commonality, an assertion of a predictable continuity of past and future, of which the present is a mere expression, is inherently implied in any quest to define some sort of universally applicable strategic approach, or the attempt to do strategy in the abstract. If that commonality of moments existed, if everything was defined in

some core ontological way that persisted across time, then the whole point of revolt would be rendered moot anyway.

In moving away from these simplifications, these conceptual shortcuts we take to avoid the complexity of the world and the inability to really speak of it directly, we can begin to bring into alignment the ontological perspective necessary to conceive of revolt (which implies the absence of some universal truth), the plane of activity in which we exist and the attempts to make sense of all of this through the concept. It implies recognizing the limitations of perspective, the simplicity of the conceptual frameworks we mobilize, and taking that limitation, that unknowability of the world, not as an end point, but as a point of departure. This is a call to embrace the ontology of the moment, recognize its inherent connection with the concept of revolt, and then build approaches from there.

Intermediacy

Now, I know that working with liberals is largely an experience akin to the pain one would experience stabbing themselves in the eye with a ballpoint pen, and potentially more dangerous (liberals have shown themselves to be snitches time and time again). And I know that working with tankies feels like constantly trying to explain simple points of political theory to a brick wall that is hell bent on justifying genocide, and excusing the acts of any state that is either willing to openly fund propaganda operations (Russia), or that declares themselves “socialist” (North Korea and the PRC). It is a horrible, danger-