

Beyond Despair :

Toward the end of the 90's the groundwork of a new radical counterculture appeared to be forming. Societal critique, ecological activism, street parties and temporary autonomous zone events were hybridizing into growing, massive collaborations. It seemed that a vast social force would arise utilizing a diverse, non-commercial, critically adept, and technologically aware network. For a moment, a radical break from an unacceptable world looked entirely possible. Despite its excessive optimism, this view had merits as a positive vision challenging our destructive ways of life. However radical change did not occur. Instead we watched coalitions disintegrate, thinking rigidify and reactionary views expand. We would share the same, worsening future: one filled with ecological and political domination, overuse of resources and poor decisions. Despairing at the thought of what seemed possible, the negative approach became much more reasonable. Thoughts of new options turned to those of relentless critique and disengagement. Instead of transformation, we awaited a final collapse: the last window for civilization's despicable course to be thwarted.

Hope appears as an obvious answer to pervasive despair, but analysis responds harshly here as well. Though hope lightens the mood and motivates, we know that it does not create radical change. Becoming sidetracked with warm feelings of what could be, many forget the necessity of the actual, often very difficult work of an endgame that is actually effective. Furthermore, the letdown when hope evaporates threatens to bring an even crueler futility. Yet the endless cycling of critique is cruel as well, leading not to action but to an unproductive negativity and failure to adopt new ideas. A different path is necessary, one that neither places its foundation on hope nor falls into the trap of endless analysis. The dream of realizing the impossible represents a noble cause, but speaking of dreams does nothing to answer our harsh critiques. To move beyond the language of dreams into the language of transformation we must learn to face the world with courage, accepting the harsh limitations of reality

but remaining engaged in creating our own future.

Humanity has a tragic history, this should be self evident. Endless critique and denial are both ways in which we cope with this fact, but both strategies have the same result: they lead nowhere. In any scenario, however limited or terrible, we create what each moment will be, how it is lived and how it will be remembered. To move beyond despair we must meet the world as it is, not as we wish it might be. Our dreams may never be realized and tragedy, misery, waste, and destruction will surely continue long beyond our deaths. Still, nothing about this limits our capacity to burn brightly. The willingness to engage the world elevates our lives, liberating us from the despair of escapism offered by both critique and hope. It is not enough to escape the world, to live outside of it, to critique it, to be religious, to numb ourselves with drugs, to follow leaders, to become lost in media reality. The only path beyond despair is engagement: critique of society and acceptance of history coupled with the courage to risk your life effecting them.

: Thunder in the Ground

We've come now to new moment in history. In a brutal position both ecologically and economically, a limited notion of finding new solutions has finally entered the mainstream discourse. Some hope for massive change that will enable them to continue their ways of life undisturbed. Others continue to distrust the notion of 'solutions' without first a complete collapse of civilization. Realistically, it's hard to say exactly what will happen. One likely course is a return of a government sponsored 'corporate liberalism.' Another is a chaotic battle for resources. Either way, more moderate ideas will probably masquerade as massive change while people fight tooth and nail NOT to drastically change their ways of life, however imperative it is that they do so. What's very possible is that things

will change... but only marginally.

So where does this put those who think human existence must be changed dramatically? Should we maintain a harsh critical stance, stay angry and focused on the negative? Should we embrace a jubilant positivism for its merits as a motivator? It's easy to see which position would be more popular, but that guarantees nothing about actually shifting our ways of life. On the other hand, a radical critique, while still necessary, often chooses to take a marginal position in society, giving an excellent perch for analysis but limiting options for activity anywhere but on the fringes. A marginal force operates in the margins of history. It does not direct history, and in the meantime others take control and make all the decisions. If the goal is to simply critique the decisions made by others, it must be accepted that one's ideas will not play a large role in the world. However if the goal is to make impact, a marginal position outside the world will never suffice, no matter how critical we are of the mainstream's course.

If the objective of radical ideas is transformation, then the spirit of the moment is engagement. The mainstream begins to adopt a few new ideas; we can push things much farther. The challenges will be severe - how can one maintain integrity once immersed in consumerist, over consumptive, destructive civilizations? But the true test of an idea does not occur within the realms of its own critical analysis. A concept must be able to hold up to critique of those with which it strongly disagrees. The underground should not be a place to cower or float along, not simply a party, not simply collection of outsiders, and not a place to feel self assured superiority. An effective underground is an active network that displays a divergent lifestyle, developing it's own technology and ideas. Not an art project but a social force: one which understands its moment and engages with contemporary ideas to push them further. The underground thrives on its status as an unseen force, a place to experiment with life beyond current society. Nevertheless, the lessons learned there must be made relevant to society itself; there must be points of contact. A way of life which is radical, yet indisputably effective offers an exit that is not an escape, but an expansion. This is the mechanism by

which a sharpened critique positioned productively drives transformation rather than merely offering criticism as an afterthought to history. This is the thunder in the ground: a effective, radical culture that exists not simply for its own gratification but instead to leverage constructive action based in its analysis.