

By: Persephone

This was largely written in the wake of Aaron Bushnell's brave and tragic self-immolation in protest of the genocide in Gaza, in response to the feelings this stirred in me—parts of me that felt a deep sense of recognition in the likely motivations for their act of sacrifice, and parts of me that recoiled at this sense of recognition. This was an attempt to reconcile these parts of myself. More than a year has passed since then, and these different parts of myself have become more integrated, and I feel more sure of myself and less brainwormy about this stuff. I'm publishing this to release these thoughts and feelings and musings, to make way for something new. It is by no means a finished piece of writing, rather a snapshot of my brain from a moment in time, though I've edited it somewhat for cohesion and clarity. As I'm sure no one need be reminded, Israel's genocide of Palestinians continues unabated, despite Israel's pretenses at a ceasefire. For Hind Rajab, Yahya Sinwar, Refaat Alareer, and the far too many martyrs who've fallen in the struggle, we will continue to traverse the tension between joy and sacrifice as we tear down this ruling order.

I feel like I have two competing worldviews inside of me:

one that is like all playfulness and affirmation, wanting everything to be light and nbd, eschewing sacrifice and seeing it as synonymous with resentment/bad conscience, even to the point of desiring a sort of superficiality bc what's the used getting bogged down?

and the other that is like, this world is soaked in blood, perceiving the "truth" of this world is necessarily to be overcome by horror and hatred, and this horror and hatred is a vital resource to be put to use in militant sacrifice towards liberation; martyrdom is desirable, and as a settler whose livelihood and status as a subject comes from colonization, self-destruction is a viable tactic.

I am seeing this as the tension between *joy* and *sacrifice*. On the one hand, whatever, it doesn't matter, we're all going to die no matter what, it is good to feel good, and feeling good might as well be my guiding light because morality is fake and life is what you make of it, and I want to enjoy my life. On the other, the weight of obligation to the dead, the knowledge of how much death makes my way of life possible.

There is of course a type of self-sacrifice, of self-martyrdom, that I still do thoroughly reject. The type where you shoulder burdens that aren't 'yours,' becoming resentful of those around you for things that are actually your responsibility to deal with. The type that sees sacrifice as a moral good in itself, that sees desire as something to repress and pleasure as something to fear. This is the logic of self-sacrifice that cultivates the dreaded ailments of *ressentiment* and *bad conscience* that our old weirdo Nietzsche spoke of. I am familiar enough with this way of being. Long have I felt mistrustful of 'good feelings,' of too strong of pleasures and especially 'undeserved' pleasures, of following the paths of desire too far afield—in short, a fear of intensity, loss of control, and waywardness. There are events in my past that contribute to these fears: sexual trauma, the disciplining environment of school and the family, and the deep internalization of pain common to transfeminized people all play a part. Currently, I try to welcome these fears with open arms, thank them for the protective role they have played and are still trying to play, deeply apologizing that they have had to carry this burden, and gently suggesting that they do not need to play the same role in the present. Kind of basic Internal Family Systems stuff¹. Asserting to myself that it is safe to feel pleasure is new for me.

So I have been trying to cultivate joy. I tend to think of joy in a Spinoza-by-way-of-Deleuze way: as an increase in my capacity to affect and be affected. The book *Joyful Militancy* is great on this. Important to this conception of

joy is that it doesn't shun 'negative' affects; every feeling is valuable, because every feeling increases my capacity to be affected, which increases my capacity to affect, my power of existing. The deeper the impressions that I let these affects bore into me, the deeper my reservoirs of feeling I have to bring to bear. (As a dear friend has said to me about breakups, "sometimes you just have to let yourself feel the wind blowing through the holes you made in yourself to contain their love"). So this conception of joy in theory has ample room for my hatred of this world, for my rage, my guilt and horrible sense of responsibility as a settler whose every breath is subsidized by mass suffering, my shame at not doing "enough," and the immense reservoir of grief that hasn't even begun to truly spill.

However, in practice I find it hard to integrate all of this together, and it often splits off into the competing perspectives I mention above. Cultivating joy turns into running from difficult feelings and hiding from the struggle; embracing negative affects turns into becoming trapped in the perspective of hatred, or fear, or resentment, perceiving danger in the smallest of social interactions and feeling the weight of the future as a monster of undifferentiated agony bearing down upon me. Neither of which is particularly conducive to living the way I want to live: joy and struggle entwined with each other, pleasures of all kinds sought with no need for moral justification, me feeling enabled to act proportionally to the crises which structure my life but not do so out of fear, etc. These words from Bonanno ring true: "All this separation between ourselves and joy depends on our being 'separate' from ourselves, divided in two by the process of exploitation." For Bonanno, joy is cultivated through "the search for play" in the process of the "refusal of the fixed conditions of capital and its values." The most immediate value to be refused is that of "work as a value," or the work-ethic, but also on the chopping block are duty, sacrifice, and death in general². The association of death with capital is

problematic for me, as is the wholesale rejection of sacrifice. As a counterpoint, *Bædan* assert that “the death drive names that permanent and irreducible element which has and will always produce revolt. *Species being, queerness, chaos, willful revolt, the commune, rupture, the Idea, the wild, oppositional defiance disorder*—we can give innumerable names to what escapes our ability to describe it. Each of these attempts to term the erratic negation intrinsic to society. Each comes close to theorizing the universal tendency that any civilization will produce its own undoing.” For me, a near synonym for *joy* would be the *affirmation of life*, and I believe that this affirmation is intimately entangled with the searing lacerations of the death drive. I have an erotic fascination with self-harm and death, and while some parts of myself are pretty uncomfortable with that, from a more grounded perspective I think it just makes good sense. The deepest and truest affirmation of life comes from the equanimous embrace of death as an ever-present, latent possibility, as something we carry around with us and which will one day consume us. The desire to create a triumph of life over death, as seen in Bonanno, seems to come from a place of fear towards death, and results in the futile attempt to control and suppress it. This fear is the fear of the unknown. For all we know, to die may be to come home.

This intimate entanglement of death and joy is articulated best in *At Daggers Drawn*: “We can choose not to live. That is the most beautiful reason for opening oneself up to life with joy. ‘There is always time to put an end to things; one might as well rebel and play’—is how the materialism of joy talks.” In a world that seems to do everything it can to make us want to kill ourselves, embracing suicidality as a line of flight towards joy and struggle seems like one of the few worthwhile paths to take.

Idris Robinson said that for the current era of revolutionary struggle, “we need to go past the hedonism of ‘68.” To this

end, he has been exploring ideas of martyrdom. He says that, "in seeking (...) justice, which is beyond life and death—whether your life or someone else's life—the martyr transforms themselves. In this context, in our context, this transformation is what it means to be a traitor to the white race. That's the abolitionist project, and it coincides with martyrdom." Not sure I rock with any form of the concept of justice, but besides that I fuck with this. The concept of martyrdom as "beyond life and death" appeals to me.

More on sacrifice: I fear that I don't have the hardness and discipline necessary to do what must be done. 'Necessary' is an apt word, in fact, because one way this anxious narrative frames itself is the suggestion that I don't know how to embrace *necessity*. I feel that I shun doing hard and difficult things, and that if I just could do more hard and difficult works of struggle, then I could help push things forward towards where they need to go—insurrection towards absolute rupture with the existent. I probably am not giving myself credit for the hard and difficult things that I do every day. But even so, I sometimes feel that any experience of life that fails to reveal the entire world and every available way of living save life-as-struggle as a horrifying sham is falling short of the truth. *Truth* and *reality* also figure heavily into this way of thinking and feeling. In this mindset, the truth of the world is as Walter Benjamin put it, that "hell is not something that awaits us, but this life here and now." Taking any glance at the footage coming out of Gaza—glances that I hardly let myself take anymore—confirms this. Hell is a world where everything can explode into fire and rubble and death at a moment's notice, where even the places they sent you to for safety are bombed, where losing everyone you love is a near-certainty, and if they don't get blown up, you might have to watch them die slowly of starvation or thirst or untreated wounds or preventable sickness. And all of this because you had the misfortune to hail from a piece of land that a genocidal empire wants to claim for itself. Hell is a world

where you can see this happen from a million different angles, streamed from a device made with rare earth metals which another people are genocided and exploited for, and assembled in sweatshops by desperate and underpaid workers in yet another part of the world, and all you can do is watch, share the video and its misery, or ignore it and let yourself be bought off. Or revolt in the most destructive way you know how to. A politics of joy grounded in the here-and-now seems very difficult to make viable when “this life here and now” is hell. When I let myself feel the full weight of all of this, sacrificing everything seems like the only path forward. Reality is a pitiless place, and since we know that it is prison that produces society and not the other way around³, at every waking moment we are surrounded by prison bars of various types.

Hell is the truth of this world. But truth is fragmented, containing multiplicity. The reality of this world is that it is soaked in blood, and the unlucky, or anyone with a heart that beats, are prisoners-in-waiting or future murder victims of the state. But reality is multiple as well. There is a certain sense that a fixation with the evil in the world is itself the perspective of domination, that convincing ourselves that there is only one true reality, that of genocide and climate destruction and the enclosure or extermination of anything free and held in common, is exactly what those in power want. The feeling is that to embrace pleasure and the moment and the possible is to deny this reality, but it's not. The tension can remain a tension; the multiple and fragmentary can remain what they are. There is an aestheticization and a madness that must be embraced in order to hold horrific truths but keep living nonetheless; and the best way to keep fighting is to keep living.

1. An approach to psychotherapy that recognizes that we as

individuals are made up of many different fragmented selves, many of whom are younger versions of ourselves that have been stuck at various moments in the past due to burdens they were forced to take on in order to survive traumatic experiences. It provides a framework for gently and sweetly parenting this 'internal family system,' to attain a state of better integration of self. As with the majority of therapeutic approaches, this can be done in a very normativity-enforcing, model-citizen-producing way, which IFS's emphasis on homeostasis may help to encourage (though probably the material structure of the mental health industry is equally responsible for this use of it). However, as a crazy tranny bitch, I've used the framework (or my take on it) both to gain more of a sense of mental stability, *and* to open myself up to the unknown and absolutely other within myself and the world. You could call these different uses *traumatophobic*—that which aims solely at 'resolving' trauma, maintaining psychological homeostasis, operating within a paradigm of mental health and self-improvement—and *traumatophilic*—that which affirms the self-shattering pleasures of repeating, revisiting, and in general playing with one's trauma, pleasures that can lead to new understandings of self (see *Sexuality Beyond Consent* by Avgi Saketopoulou). To be clear, both approaches are important.

2. "There is no joy in sacrifice, death and revenge. (...) If life is something serious death is an illusion, in the sense that so long as we are alive death does not exist. (...) So the great seriousness of the world of work and productivity hides a total lack of seriousness. (...) On the contrary, the refusal of this stupid world, the pursuit of joy, dreams, utopia in its declared 'lack of seriousness', hides the most serious thing in life: the refusal of death." (Bonanno)

3. "The phrase "prison is the solitary confinement of society" is true only with the corollary that there is no "society." It is not "society" that produces prisons. On the contrary, it is prison that produces society. It is by asserting, by constructing its own fictitious outside, that Empire creates the fiction of an inside, an inclusion, a belonging." (Tiqqun, Preliminaries to Any Struggle Against Prisons)