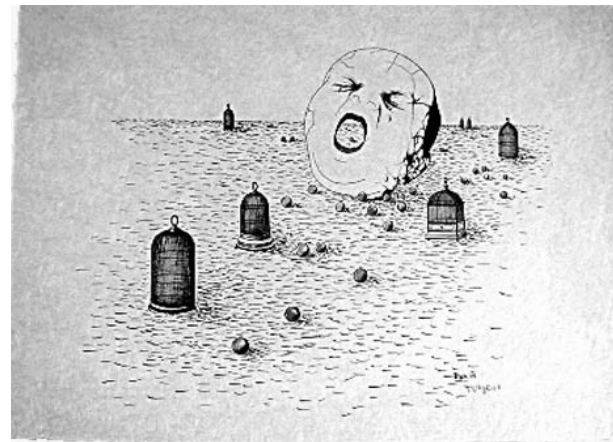


# ***THE CURRENT FACES OF MISERY***

A proposal for  
discussion



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# THE CURRENT FACES OF MISERY

## *A proposal for discussion*

The examination of the current characteristics of the social world is essential for those who want to investigate the possibilities for subversive intervention. So, in this text, I am presenting what I see as characteristics of our present existence in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Of course, this is not, by any stretch of the imagination, an exhaustive list. I propose that those interested consider these things and attempt to come up with ideas for possibilities of subversive and revolutionary interventions – not so much specific actions as general directions for the development of future projects. Discussion can center around perceptions of the specific characteristics listed and ideas of how to intervene in a revolutionary fashion. I think that it is important to consider these matters not in typical activist – which is to say political – terms, but rather in terms of their effects on our own lives, thus in terms of a “revolution of everyday life”. I feel that such a discussion could be useful in clarifying affinities and differences in our conceptions of revolution, social transformation and the creation of a living practice of revolt.

1. Extreme economic precariousness brought on by the total global domination of capital. The dislocation of masses of people and the consequent increase in the number of undocumented immigrants, homeless people, prisoners and people living on the edge of survival. The domination of the senses by advertising, even as those at the bottom find themselves struggling more and more simply to survive, *even in the US and western Europe*. Thus, the global standardization of food, culture, fashion, etc., on the one hand, and the global standardization of the conditions of the exploited as conditions become increasingly precarious everywhere, on the other. The movement of the center of exploitation from the factories of old-style industrialism, and the consequent increasing irrelevance of the old workers’ movement even from a purely reformist standpoint of improving the conditions of workers. The whole of life as the place of exploitation and therefore of the struggle against it.
2. The increasingly blatant authoritarianism of the democratic states. The open use of repressive techniques and strong-arm policing against every aspect of revolt. The use of the term

“terrorism” – completely drained of any meaning since Sept. 11, 2001 – to justify any act of state repression.

3. A drastic increase in the number of prisons, detention centers, “refugee” camps and other institutions for warehousing those considered undesirable by the authorities throughout the world, giving evidence of the increasing number of people who have no place in the current world order. The transformation of the entire social landscape into an open air prison. The proliferation of surveillance technology throughout and even beyond the urban environment: video-cameras at traffic lights, on street corners, on the sides of buildings, in buses, trains and shopping malls; magnetic detectors at the exits of businesses and at the entrances of various official buildings; searches not just at airports, but also at inter-city bus stations; the increasing necessity to provide identification documents for simple transactions; the myriads of private and public guardians serving to safeguard the present world; the virtual surveillance of every transaction involving credit cards, debit cards, ATM cards, store discount cards, etc. As the world pushes more and more of us into difficult living conditions, we are increasingly treated like criminals, because potentially we all are.
4. Universal militarization of policing. As the police are increasingly militarized in order to deal with the endless unrest of a world of precariousness and perpetual disaster, the military activities of the great powers increasingly take the form of “policing” recalcitrant nation-states, small nations that do not conform to the rules of Empire set down by the great powers. The increasing automation of war allowing these “police actions” to be carried out with less and less risk to the armies of the power doing the policing, but of more and more risk of devastating “accidents” against the people being policed. The economic necessity to maintain an unending flow of these “police actions” in order to keep markets open for the technical industries creating the high-tech weaponry. The “war on terrorism” as a new kind of war, one without a specific national target, with unknown and invisible enemies both outside and inside the US and western Europe: a war which, therefore has no guaranteed end, justifies all forms of repression and aggression, draws in support through a propaganda that plays on the fears of the powerless, thus leading the exploited to support policies for their own

repression. Recognition that once the loaded but meaningless rhetoric of terrorism is torn away from this war it is revealed as the naked aggression of the most powerful states against all external *and internal* dissent.

5. The industrialization and consequent poisoning of the farthest corners of the world, leading to the dispossession of the last indigenous peoples and the destruction of their ways of life and knowledge of their world. The consequent vast increase in impoverished individuals filling up urban shanty towns and taking to the road in hope of finding some sort of survival. Environmental disaster on a scale so vast that disaster follows upon disaster with the so-called “cures” often being worse than the problems. Vast, unprecedented forest fires, droughts, epidemics, floods and so on and so on, while those whose decisions bring all this about keep telling us that we have no choice but to depend on them, because only they have the knowledge to find solutions.
6. Large-scale revolts in the poorer parts of the world that sometimes seem to develop insurrectional and pre-revolutionary aspects (Argentina, Algeria, ...). The more common recuperation of the rage of the exploited into ethnic and religious conflicts (e.g., Rwanda, Somalia, the former Yugoslavia) – the identification of the slaves with their masters rather than with other slaves. In the United States, the continuation of racism, sexism and homophobia, as well as gang warfare, as means of dividing the exploited and dispossessed.
7. The loss of language. A literal decrease in vocabulary (in 1930, the average American 10-year-old had a 25,000 word vocabulary; by 1990, this had been reduced to 10,000) along with an increasing incapacity to formulate an argument or to speak poetically. All new linguistic developments being in the realm of technological innovations, this degradation of language makes it increasingly difficult to talk about anything except the projects of capital. This loss also feeds into the degradation of expression in all areas, the breakdown of creativity and the loss of imagination in the face of cultural commodification and the consequent standardization of existence. The domination of computers, television and other high-tech mediation in daily life. The increasing passivity of daily life in consequence of this, combined with the tendency

to replace face-to-face communication with the safety of electronic communication.

8. Increasing religious belief with the consequent increase of cultural conservatism. The concept of god and heaven as a substitute for taking responsibility for oneself and attacking what makes one's life miserable here and now. The “community of the faithful” as a substitute for community based upon the free association between individuals and the mutual realization of needs and desires. “In the absence of the *assault on heaven*, its beatification follows”.
9. Increasingly large numbers of women forced to leave the home to become super-exploited wage-slaves while continuing to have a family for which they are expected to care. A women's movement that is mostly either too conservative and integrated into the power structure to really care (NOW and bourgeois feminism) or too lost in the little world of activist subcultures to be relevant for these women.
10. A disintegration of the cohesive fabric of the family and, thus, of patriarchy – and the loss of the stability, as miserable as this was, that this brought – without an end of male domination or the repressive structure of the family. Thus, the continuation of the violence of the family structure and of gender relations without the constraint of respect within the family or the courtesy of chivalry. The family as a factory for reproducing the roles associated with various target markets: housewives, teenagers, school kids, “bread-winners”. The family as the enforcer of the scarcity of love that is necessary to the continued reproduction of the family.
11. Sexual impoverishment. The scarcity of rich and fulfilling sexual experience for the vast majority of individuals enforced by several factors: sexual puritanism and a continuing acceptance of the empty constructs of marriage and the family; the lack of availability of any space for adolescents to explore their sexuality and their desires precisely when the urges are strongest; the exploitation of sexual problems and fears to promote sexually repressive agendas, particularly, the use of the fear of AIDS, other STD's and sexual predators to support such repressive moralities; the desperate need to cling to whatever connections we can make regardless of how miserable they may be and the fear of being alone; the commodification of sexuality with the consequent

development of unrealistic and impossible ideals with regard to the *image* of sexuality; as a consequence of this commodification, the creation of strictly defined sexual identities (gay, straight, bi, s/m, b/d, and so on) that serve the function of target markets outside the traditional family context; an increasingly mechanistic conception of sexual pleasure centering around the orgasm as the central aim of sexual activity, and the consequent transformation of all sexual activity into an essentially masturbatory activity. The intrusion of many of these tendencies, including forms of puritanism and repressive morality as well as a mechanistic view of sexual pleasure, into various radical circles.

12. Increasing interconnectedness of the various elements of the structures of domination, creating a network that appears to penetrate into every space and every moment of our lives. In contrast, increasing separation and atomization among the various groups and individuals who comprise the exploited, excluded and dispossessed of this world, particularly in the form of increasing racial, ethnic and religious separation. The penetration of this tendency into radical circles in the form of identity politics which moves people to identify with a particular social category through which their oppression is reinforced, separating them both from their own individuality and from others of the oppressed who do not fit into their group identity.

We need to challenge ourselves to come up with ideas for attacking this world in all these aspects, with the aim of subversion and the creation of an insurrectionary break that could lead to social revolution. When I came up with this exercise, I also wrote some of my ideas of ways to explore the subversion of this reality. In order to give an understanding of the sorts of responses I think would be useful to explore, I am listing these responses here (the numbers correspond to the numbers of the aspects of the current reality listed above that I was dealing with). I do not consider any of these responses anywhere close to adequate to the reality we face, but consider them as mere starting points for discussion and practical experimentation:

1. Develop a clear and broad understanding of the exploited class as all of those who have had or are having their capacity to determine the conditions of their existence stolen from them, i.e., of the proletariat as *the dispossessed*. Our dispossession is all we have in common and so is the one basis for common struggle. Recognize that revolutionary struggle is not essentially about taking over the means of production – i.e., a mere change in how production is managed – but about taking back our lives in their totality and, thus, utterly transforming the way in which we live, including the ways in which we go about fulfilling our needs. The destruction of work in favor of means of meeting our needs that are fully integrated aspects of our lives. Most immediately, the autonomous self-determination of our struggle against the conditions of work, the economy, domination and the state. Explorations of methods for meeting our needs here and now that carry within them a defiance of the economic order – thus, also the search for accomplices in such endeavors and explorations of ways to encourage each other in them. Detourn advertisements and commodity displays in such a way as to expose the nature of commodities as stolen lives. Strategically destroy or damage advertisements and commodities. Undermine commodity fetishism, transform commodities into mere things for free enjoyment by taking them without paying or asking permission, sharing them freely with others, giving them away or leaving them for others to find. Participate in the underground, often unconscious revolt against the economy that manifests in small-scale sabotage, workplace theft, shoplifting, the free flow of goods, etc. Interact on the streets with others who are being pushed out the bottom of this

society, sharing possibilities for struggle and challenging any attachment to bourgeois morality in the form of respect for work and property that even those at the bottom often still cling to. Develop informal networks through which the potlatch described above can spread among the exploited. Thus, spread the practice of the subversive destruction of economic relationships so that human relations can flower.

2. Reject **political** methods of struggle, i.e., all methods involving working through or appealing to the institutions including the alternative institutions of the left. Therefore, reject electoralism, litigation, petition and the like. Recognize **all** representatives as usurpers. Take direct action in the original sense of the term – i.e., acting directly and autonomously to take or create what is desired or to destroy what is in the way of liberation rather than turning to any power to grant it to us. Fight relentlessly against the ruling institutions on every front that we can, refusing to back down, compromise or negotiate in the face of repression. Expose the terroristic nature of the state and capital, the blackmail and threats through which power is maintained. Develop an awareness of the potential openings for direct action and attack against domination and exploitation.
3. Fight with all our might against every form of captivity. Actively oppose and attack the institutional framework which creates prisons and similar institutions – i.e., the legal system, the judiciary system, the police system, nationalism and borders and, thus, the state in its totality. Thus, reject all legal and judicial distinctions: the distinction between “guilty” and “innocent”, between “political prisoners” and “common criminals”, between “illegal aliens”, “legal residents” and “citizens” and so on. Expose the increasingly prison-like nature of all the institutions of this society from schools to factories to apartment complexes even to the increasingly policed and camera-monitored streets and shopping centers. Express solidarity with the struggle of every prisoner against her or his captivity, both through specific projects of support and by attacking the manifestations of the society of captivity as we encounter in our lives. Practice total revolt and subversion against every form of captivity that this society imposes from prison to work to school to borders.

4. Relentless revolt against the entire institutional framework of policing and the military – i.e., against the state. International class struggle to oppose the wars between nations by which the ruling class imposes its will. Explore creative ways to struggle against all forms of mandatory military service. Develop informal networks to aid draft dodgers, deserters and others forced into illegality by their resistance to militarism. Promote and act in solidarity with non-compliance, insubordination and mutiny in the military. Counter the myth of the inevitability of war. Expose the fact that the threats of war and terrorism, like those of disaster, environmental devastation, epidemics, etc., have their basis precisely in the continued existence of the state and capital, and in our continued obedience. Examine the interconnections between military and police institutions in aims and methods, and more concretely in research and technological development, and use this analysis to determine ways, places and times to attack this network of control.
5. Defend everything that still manifests free life, among so-called “primitive” people against the industrial onslaught, through acts of solidarity attacking the institutions carrying out this onslaught. Elaborate revolutionary conceptions of the relationships between human beings and the wild world, relationships based in a vital and passionate desire that releases the wildness of the human being, rather than in dead economic utilitarianism that domesticates, deforms and destroys or undead spiritual utilitarianism that sanctifies, separates and destroys. Attack the projects and experiments of capital and industry that seek to transform every living being into a controlled and standardized commodity and every inch of earth into a resource to exploit. Refuse the rule of experts, exposing their incapacity to deal with the problems they create. Expose the interconnectedness of the ongoing round of disasters industrialism has created. Find the weak threads in the technological network and strike there.
6. Express solidarity with revolts in other places through active revolt here. Particularly target and expose the economic and political institutions here that have been the prominent perpetrators of domination and exploitation in the areas where large-scale revolts are occurring. Expose the recuperative and bloody nature of nationalism with well-reasoned critique and communication across borders among those in revolt. Expose

the ruling class use of race, gender and other social identities as means of dividing the exploited. Reject identification with social roles that lead one to identify with one's exploiters rather than with others of the exploited. Confront racist, sexist and homophobic attitudes among the exploited in a non-moralistic manner that exposes how these attitudes weaken all of the exploited. Expose the institutional nature of racism, sexism and sexual repression in this society. Expose the way in which the ruling institutions also use anti-racism, anti-sexism and anti-"hate" to create an ideology of tolerance that serves their ends by enforcing a practice of putting up with each other while continuing to be separated and atomized – thus, allowing us to work "together" on the projects of the rulers without ever achieving the solidarity necessary to act together on our own terms.

7. Refuse at all costs to give up the fullness of language each of us has at his or her disposal. Refuse to talk down to people, to reduce complex ideas to slogans reminiscent of advertisements. Where language is blatantly degraded (in pop songs, on billboards, etc.), use detournement to expose the exploitative, utilitarian, economic basis of this degradation. Refuse the domination of language by the utilitarian. Rather use language poetically as an expression of desires that cannot be priced. Develop the capacity to reason **passionately**, and therefore poetically. Pursue direct communication through face-to-face discussion aimed at creating a real and deep knowledge of each other from which creative and poetic projects of revolt can grow.
8. Use humor and merciless mockery to expose the absurdity of religion. Publicly insult the perpetrators of these lies. Take back creativity, in poetic expression, but also in direct action in revolt against this world, grasping our lives as our own. Develop real face-to-face relationships based on affinity, mutuality of desires and dreams and real appreciation for and enjoyment of differences, rather than on adherence to dogma.
9. Develop a class analysis that deeply explores the nature of the specific oppression of women in the home, on the job and in consumption and that also exposes the ways in which the class collaborationist programs of groups like NOW inevitably broaden the exploitation of women. Recognize that moving from the home into the workplace is not liberation in any

sense of the word, and for most women with families is simply an additional burden to that of her role in the family. Refuse those methods of dealing with the oppression and exploitation of women that aim only at the equal rights of women as such. By remaining within the realm of rights and gender identity, these methods can only operate to **reform** and thus **renew** the current social order. Instead, make a revolutionary challenge to the conception of gender – going beyond gender not as a mere refusal to notice it, but as a rising up against it and every aspect of this society that imposes it. Such a **revolutionary** challenge to gender requires confronting the reality of gender as it exists in this society, but confronting it with the explicit and conscious aim of destroying it.

10. Above all, refuse to reproduce the deformed and deforming roles of the family. Expose how the central value of the family has always been that of reproducing the social order and how this currently means that the primary role of the family is economic in the crassest sense. Refuse and blatantly mock the absurd institution of marriage, but also refuse to let love relationships that have not been sanctioned by the state fall into static and habitual form that imitates marriage. Refuse and challenge the roles of mother and father (this does not rule out having kids, but rather having a certain type of relationship with them). Create relationships of affinity and free association in all areas of life where this is possible and act to destroy all that stands in the way of this. Refuse to fall into any form of filial piety, relating to so-called "relatives" just as we would with any other individual, choosing to continue and discontinue association with them based on affinity, mutuality of aims and interests, enjoyment of their company and not on the mystifications that have been connected to a mere biological connection in the interest of social reproduction.
11. Explore and experiment with our own sensual and sexual desires, without feeling obligated to follow any specific rules except for those we ourselves choose to make in free agreement with those with whom we choose to explore. Thus a refusal of puritanism, but also of any attempt to enforce a sort of "radical" promiscuity. The realms of love are vast and there are infinite paths to explore. Each will choose to explore those that please them. Help adolescent friends find spaces in which they can freely explore their sexual desires, particularly those individuals who may feel that their desires do not fall

into the norms of what is acceptable. Challenge the ways that AIDS, STDs and sexual predation are dealt with in the media and by the authorities. Expose myths, explore alternative and heretical ideas about AIDS. Experiment with varieties of ways to be physically intimate with those with whom we share a mutual passion, ways that emphasize closeness, coming together as full individuals. Develop a strength in ourselves that eradicates the emotional **need** for the other(s) with whom we choose to interact sexually, so that we can relate as lovers on no other terms than that of mutual desire and passion. A refusal of the commodification of sexuality on all levels: a refusal to let our expectations be defined by advertisements and pop culture, a refusal to let our sexuality be reduced to an identity with its corresponding fashions, product preferences and lifestyle choices. Using the energy of our sexual passion to move us to express the passion of revolt against the commodification of sexuality in attacks against the embodiments of this commodification. Refusing to let our sexual experiences be reduced to a mere attempt to achieve a mutual momentary spasm of pleasure through a basically mechanical manipulation of “erogenous zones”. Instead seeking the far deeper intensity that comes from seeing in the sexual experience the potential for encounter, recognition, the union of desires and bodies, a joining together of passions. Recognizing that everything in this society militates against such a total encounter between individuals, such a complete union of desires and bodies. Between the price tags inherent to commodification, the fear of the other induced by atomization and the network of social control, including the mass media which perpetually presents with images of the danger of the other as well as the very real threat of the police and other enforcers of control, and the generally subconscious defensive attitudes this causes us to take, all work against the likelihood of unbridled passionate encounter, of abandoning oneself in the other, of escaping sexual poverty and discovering the potential richness of sexual experience. Thus, the enrichment of sexual experience is also a revolutionary project that best develops hand-in-hand with the project of destruction of the current social order.

12. Talk with people on the streets, in buses, in cafes, wherever we can – but outside of the specialized enclaves of activism. **Interact as peers**, i.e., don’t evangelize. Refuse identity

politics with its categorizations and its reliance upon the methodology of rights, and thus of law and politics. If we refuse to be drawn into these traps (evangelism and politics), we may discover the hidden veins of discontent and revolt among the exploited, the tiny, almost invisible, self-organized methods through which people take back portions of their lives. Develop analyses that expose how the “solutions” provided through electoral, legislative and other reformist means **always** reinforce the power of the state and, thus, the continuation of exploitation. Making links with those we speak with, we could move toward creating an informal network of revolt and subversion against this impoverished way of existing. Starting from where we are we will proceed in the direction of total revolution.