

An Anarchist Anti-Gun Manifesto

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For Reuel and all those who fight.

Before I begin in earnest, let me be clear: this is not a call for pacifism. This is not some plea for non-violence in the face of the near incomprehensible brutality of the police, the prisons, of the state and its vigilante accomplices. If anything, this text is intended as a call for more explicit attack on our enemies, more direct antagonism against the institutions of our suffering, a more intentional incorporation of resistance to these brutalities into our daily lives until such resistance is as second nature as breathing.

I believe in fighting back with anything and everything we can get our hands on, however, I have grown tired with the continued fetishization of guns in radical (specifically anarchist) spaces. I've grown tired of the borderline admission of defeat that leads to reactionary positionalities where we lose site on how our orientations reproduce the world around us. This text is an attempt to critique what I believe to be a culture of self-delusion as to what guns are, what they do, and how they impact our relation to the worlds and people around us. My goal is to articulate a broader position of antagonism so we might be better poised to draw blood and be this world's undoing.

Surviving is not enough.

I still want to win.

I want it more than anything.

What the fuck do you want?

Illusions and Delusions

We exist in a world of incalculable, purposeful, brutality; most directed at the most marginalized. The institutions of our suffering are vast, near omnipresent in our lives, and ever expanding. The police are at our doors, their vigilante counterparts, ever eager for their chance to take part in the rituals that keep capital flowing, are waiting in the wings for their chance to crack skulls. Sometimes on a subway, sometimes outside of a Walgreens.

Our bodily autonomy is stripped as abortion access is pushed further and further towards impossibility and trans existence is criminalized to the point where what bathroom we use becomes a game of Russian roulette. With each law passed, each drag story hour threatened, each captured display of violence on film, I see many with whom I find affinity echo some version a similar refrain:

“This is why you need to buy a gun”

Every time I see this refrain, I pause and sit with the unease that rises from my guts into my throat and out my nose. I sit in the unease until a question formulates “What do you think a gun changes?”

I've been around guns my whole life. I learned how to shoot at a young age, first a shotgun, then a rifle, then a handgun. I learned how to clean and care for a gun. I learned to make eye contact and verbally confirm control when being handed a firearm. I am comfortable with a gun in my hand. I say all this, somewhat awkwardly in the middle of a thought, to assure the reader that no matter how outlandish you find my critiques, they are not coming from a place of irrational worry or fear of firearms. They are intentional and as precise as I can make them.

In no subtle words, believing that gun ownership is a meaningful answer to the violence enacted on marginalized peoples is to reify the illusion that to possess a gun is to increase one's proximity to "safety", and that to possess more guns is to become even "safer". Owning a gun will never make you safe, because there is no such thing as safety in this world for the marginalized, for the Black, the targeted nonwhite, for the poor, the visibly queer, for the immigrant, for the disabled, for the unhoused, for the incarcerated (in prison or in the all too similar psych wards).

If you wish to continue breathing, there is no gun you can possess to prevent the sheriffs from carrying out an eviction. There is no gun you can possess to turn your heat back on. If someone really, truly, wants you dead, no gun will keep you alive, unless you turn yourself into a machine of pure vigilance, sacrificing living for the hope of survival that can never be guaranteed.

If there is to be a path towards anything resembling "safety" it will not come from individually arming ourselves, even in large numbers. It will come from a generalized culture of antagonism towards both formal and informal institutions of power. It will come from a culture of spontaneous resistance, from insurrectional potential. Guns may be a part of some explicit actions within that culture; however, they are neither necessary nor sufficient for bringing it about and may (as I will touch on later) hinder its continued existence. The only chance we have at protecting each other is gaining ground in the social war of our time.

But for the radical, for the anarchist especially, to recognize one's position within a social war, to admit the stakes and the costs and begin to build that culture of antagonism, is to take on incredible risk. It is incredibly frightening to confront what we must be willing to lose if we are truly willing to win. So many don't confront that risk at all. They look anywhere else, towards any other path. Rather than taking an offensive position of articulating worthwhile actions and carrying them out, many revert to a defensive (even reactionary) positioning of arming themselves and simply waiting for the coming genocide, for the coming collapse. They may have other projects that they take part in but they are mostly ways to kill time. They don't attempt to gain ground and so they don't risk losing ground. Still, they are convinced of their own radicality because they armed themselves, they have primed themselves to defend the marginalized (potentially including themselves), the most radical thing one can do.

But the genocide isn't coming, it's here. It is in the hospital billing departments and waiting rooms. It's in the classrooms and the lunch lines. It's in office of records and it's in the church halls. It's in the interrogation rooms and it's in the prison cells. They are no better primed fight back now than they were prior to becoming armed. Nothing has changed about their positionality or orientation, only their means of expression.

We can't shoot our way to liberation, not if liberation means the ability to determine for ourselves what a life worth living would be. A few shots may help, but they will never be the sufficient form of resistance against a world built upon the logic of concentrated power, of which guns are a primary mode of expression.

The Concentration of Power and the Reproduction of Daily Life

Here is where I get a bit pointed. I don't think the illusion of safety is the primary reason people acquire guns, though I think they convince themselves otherwise. I think people acquire guns because of the fantasy of possessing hyper concentrated power. We live in a world of incredible alienation and disempowerment. We look outside and believe ourselves broadly incapable

of affecting our surroundings. In this context, a machine that, with the push of a button, can irreparably alter our existence is easily fetishized.

For the radical who has grown disillusioned with the prospect of revolution or mass movement, guns become a way to ease the existential dread of that disillusionment. Through the possession of such a machine they are able to maintain the belief that whenever they so desire, they can, in fact, enact their will on the world.

These fantasies become so engrained that even when those beautiful moments of real revolt explode, the gun toting radical ends up emerging as a de facto police force rather than making use of the exposed vulnerabilities of our enemies. These power fantasies inevitably blind the radical from recognizing the experimental space opened before them, and so these radicals actively repress the experimentation and insurrectionary potential of others in those spaces. I saw far too many such “radical” policing forces in 2020 to ever trust a person who shows up to a riot carrying an AR.

It is because of such experiences witnessing self-described radicals and anarchists take on the role of policing within supposedly anti-police spaces that it feels imperative (especially in the context of a world of relations defined by colonialism, anti-Blackness, racism, etc) to question the role of machines that so deftly concentrate power in our spaces at all.

If we seek and end to police, we must seek and end to the relations that allow for policing as well.

Fetish as Smokescreen

Perhaps the consequence of the continued fetishizing and fantasizing that feels most pressing, is how it alters our relation to the arms manufacturers themselves. I rarely, if ever, see these manufacturers recognized as viable targets of direct action even at the height of anti-police mobilizations despite the fact that the only reason the police are able enact violence on the scale that they do is because these manufacturers supply them with near infinite arms.

I ask you to sit with this question for a time. Bring it up with friends at your next assembly or reading group. Is it because you don’t care? Is it because you think it too abstract a target? Too risky? How does the culture of gun ownership within radical spaces affect how we talk or don’t talk about gun manufacturers?

If you don’t care, fuck you.

If you find the target too abstract, I ask if you would say the same about the police, or the prisons, or capital, or any other indefinite system we decry on our dropped banners or in our communiques.

If such action is too risky, I ask if you’ve fully considered the risk of not acting. Is your risk assessment somehow tied to your current proximity to, and prioritization of, comfortability.

The very fact that it has been near radio silence from anarchists on these points in recent history, to me, signals a complete lack of willingness to engage with the actual terms of the social war in which we find ourselves. If we aren’t willing to consider finding ways to undermine the supply of arms to the police and military, then we assume the inevitability of their being as well armed as they currently are.

This is as good as admitting defeat, as we will never be able to match the police or military in the arena of arms procurement, and even if we could, the only way we’d be able to match them

in an arms-focused conflict would be to turn ourselves into a military of our own with all the loss of autonomy and life that entails.

I refuse to admit defeat, and I refuse to fulfill some dutiful role within a misnamed revolutionary military. I desire life, I desire a life worth living.

Expropriate, Use, Destroy

As I said earlier, while neither necessary nor sufficient for bringing about a culture of antagonism towards the existent world and all its intersecting brutalities, guns may serve some purpose within specific actions and so it feels worthwhile to throw out a potential way of relating to them in the moments we deem them useful.

We expropriate (both individual armaments and the means by which to produce them) in order to break away from participating in the profiteering of the gun manufacturers while simultaneously dispossessing our enemies of their means to brutalize us.

We use what we have expropriated in the ways deemed worthwhile when we have deemed such actions necessary.

We destroy what we have expropriated to the best of our ability.

Most importantly, we destroy the means by which these arms are produced. So long as there exists a way to quickly mass produce arms, there will always be a timebomb waiting for the next police or military to emerge.

At its most simplistic, a gun is a machine designed with the specific purpose of killing. The majority of handguns and rifles produced today are designed with the specific intention of killing people. I refuse to accept the normalization, and fetishization, of such a machine within anarchist spaces.

While I'm not so naive as to believe there will be some idyllic future in which no one harms anyone else, I am certainly idealistic enough to believe a world without these machines is possible. If you disagree, fine, you can stand in defense of the gun factories, maybe even point one at me as I light the match.

As I said at the onset, I want to win. I want it more than anything.

Winning, to me, looks like the ashes of every precinct and prison mixing with the ashes of every factory, the ones that make guns included.

Winning looks like concentrations of power being incessantly confronted, wherever they arise.

It looks like children playing, adults playing.

It looks like breathing, breathing free, whatever that means for each of us.

It cannot look like a gun in every hand, while we wait for the next police to show itself.

I will never be able to breathe in that world.

And I need to breathe.

So, get a gun if you feel you must. Learn how to use it, learn how to clean it and how to properly hand it off to another person. But never, ever let it become more than what it is, a machine for killing. It is not safety, it is not defense, and your desire for it cannot supersede the

need to undermine their production writ large. There will come a time when it will need to go, like all other vestiges of the world of police and prisons. I only hope you understand by then.

“The most useful thing one can do with arms is to render them useless as quickly as possible”

~ At Daggers Drawn

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