

Tough Mind, Soft Heart



nurturing solidarity in the
struggle against fascism

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Tough Mind, Soft Heart: Nurturing Solidarity In The Struggle
Against Fascism (2019)

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“One must have a tough mind and a soft heart.”
- Sophie Scholl

Thank you to the village it has taken to keep me going through the rough patches! Shout out to free self-defense classes, jail support, community gatherings with food, and places to sleep. Special thanks to Antifa International for helping me in a jam, the Victoria Anarchist Bookfair for hosting the workshop this zine is based on, and to the people who helped me edit and work through ideas. Thank you to my family, therapists, and the many comrades and friends who I've worked with and supported me in all different ways throughout the years, I appreciate you!

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INTRODUCTION

Antifascism has ebbed and flowed throughout the years depending on the need for it, and it seems the tide will not be going out for some time. The stresses of climate catastrophe and the corresponding global rise in authoritarianism has made fascism a more present and pressing menace than it has been in decades with no clear end in sight. There has also been a corresponding uptick and interest in fighting against fascism and a new wave of antifascists have emerged from all different corners in an inspiring upswell of action and energy alongside growing worldwide unrest and revolt. We're taking on new challenges, and so new forms and paths are emerging. Antifascism can help people on both the individual and community level become more whole, more healthy, more liberated, and more militant instead of more traumatized, broken, and isolated. Doing so is hard work and not always very straightforward. How are we fortifying ourselves and each other for what is shaping up to be an increasingly turbulent era?

In this piece I hope to highlight the renewal of a healthful, sustainable antifascism along side some of the underlying assumptions and values that help create the environment for

it, as well as some of the barriers and some suggestions for how to deal with those difficulties. Even under apocalyptic conditions the human capacity to live fully and well is vast, and I hope I am able to articulate some ideas to help our antifascist movements be spaces of care and joy. The last few years I have spent fighting fascism have been the most terrifying, joyous, difficult, rewarding, lonesome, connected, and intense time of my life. Some of that time I have felt powerful, supported, enveloped in community and able to take on anything, while other times I have been terrified, despairing, and alone. Through remembering my more difficult times, and in working to learn more about healing, I realize that other people may also be grappling with similar experiences. Other folks doing antifascism may also feel isolated and traumatized as thousands of people have taken to the streets, or started small collectives, or tried to fight on their own out of a moral imperative. I wrote this for the survival of those who are just entering the fight now and for those who have been in it for a while and are dealing with cumulative strain.

There can be a lot of criticism or shame placed on people who we don't think are doing right by each other or the movement, but there are complex and deeply human considerations we need to take into account. I'm hoping this will be an invitation for us to dig deep and be compassionate with ourselves and each other as we consider what some of the deeper causes of our difficulties are. Some of our toxic politics are affecting our efficacy, and this is also my attempt to more clearly articulate a solidarity focused style of antifascism that can be undervalued or overlooked despite its prevalence. This organizing philosophy fosters health and resiliency, creates space for all different kinds of people to be able to participate, and has been the backbone of long term success. While I am not introducing a new concept, the bits and pieces of information on these considerations tend to be buried in

other works and overshadowed in the mainstream dialogue by other versions of antifascism. My aim is to explore ways we can strengthen our antifascist movements by addressing our community culture and to incorporate research in healing, feminism, and disability justice. I know there are many others with more experience and insight into these topics, and I hope that this will not be seen as a set of answers as much as a jumping off point for more inquiry and discussion.

It has been pointed out to me that much of this piece is translatable to activism outside of the specifically antifascist sphere, and I hope that we all continue to share insights and lessons learned across different struggles. I decided to write about antifascism in particular because that is where I have been hanging my hat (or bandana), and also because the fight against fascism speaks to many of our universally deepest held issues and concerns about how we treat each other and approach the struggle for life. The thoughts and ideas I share in this zine come from a place of deep love and respect for everyone fighting fascism, and an understanding that the struggle for justice, equality and dignity flourishes the best when it is diverse, has room for everyone at whatever place they are at, and supports whichever ways they feel led and able to create change. Many of the ideas come from the following works which I have quoted throughout and I highly recommend for further reference:

Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky with Connie Burk

Anti-fascism Against Machismo: Gender, Politics, and the Struggle Against Fascism by Petronella Lee

* * *

As Black As Resistance: by Zoé Samudzi and William C. Anderson

Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times by Nick Montgomery and carla bergman

Emergent Strategy by adrienne maree brown

Blessed Is The Flame: An introduction to concentration camp resistance and anarcho-nihilism by Serafini

NURTURING ANTIFASCISM

Everywhere I've been I've known many antifascists to be kind, caring, deeply compassionate people who often share an unspoken vision at the heart of their work that is not generally well reflected in the movement's outer aspect or seemingly dominant culture. A good description of this approach is described in an article written by Kim Kelly about antifa after the Charlottesville attack in 2017:

Whether it's collecting shoelaces, cigarettes, and Metrocards to give people once they get out of jail, or cooking big vegan dinners for folks as they carry out letter-writing to political prisoners, or offering childcare when others hit the streets, it's all necessary and valid. This is the fierce, radical care with which we support one another in the struggle. This is the beating heart of the liberation movement, the crux that sustained our forebears in every other revolutionary grassroots organization. Solidarity is our strength and our greatest weapon.¹

Another comes from an op-ed more recently in Newsweek by Tae Phoenix in response to the calls to label antifa a terrorist

group:

Like many Americans, I had misconceptions about what kind of people [antifa] were, and I thought I had better things to do [than find out]. All that changed earlier this year when a couple of right-wing extremists began sending me threatening messages and turning up anywhere they expected I was scheduled to sing or speak. As I wrangled with the legal system and made arrangements for security for myself and my family, local Antifa organizers came to my aid. Not only did they provide me background information about my stalkers' known extremist group affiliations, they were there for me with the kind of emotional support you'd expect from a faith community; sending me texts to brighten my day and reminding me regularly that I could call them if I needed anything at all. I'd never even met most of these people in "real life," but their commitment to ensuring my safety and psychological well-being during a difficult time was touching. As I've gotten to know them and connected with others they've helped, I've come to understand is that Antifa isn't really a group so much as a far-reaching, multidisciplinary mutual aid and support network.²

adrienne maree brown says, "We are in an imagination battle"³, and so I'm going to try to put words to what has been described by so many actions (often unnoticed or under appreciated) which draw deeply from currents of thought in anti-racism, feminism, and disability justice. This dreamed movement is:

- **Inclusive**

Anyone of any age, ability, or identity is seen as an asset, has meaningful work to do, and feels as safe as possible, useful and valued

* * *

- **Relevant**

Seen as a resource to their communities, approachable by people in need, knowledgeable, helpful

- **Connected**

Has solid community ties and is able to be in solidarity with others, and others are in solidarity back

- **Healthful**

Participants are supported both in times of crisis and healing, daily operations leave people feeling good, seen, strong and/or held

- **Liberatory**

The work moves us all towards collective liberation while achieving interim goals

- **Uplifting**

Directed by and/or comprised of those most at risk; emergent from oppressed communities

It should be noted that this vision doesn't mean every antifascist group or project necessarily ticks every one of these boxes, but that as a connected network it works and strives in those directions. It's partly coalition building, but it moves beyond that into the realm of deeper connection and care. There is an orientation towards love and health which is translatable to projects that are not about building community as well as those that are. From this vision emerges an understanding of struggle as multifaceted, incorporating activities such as education and care work as equally vital to liberation as physical defense. Petronella Lee in describing a feminist antifa:

Conceptualize anti-fascist resistance broadly and engage

in multi-layered struggle. Embrace a variety of organizing strategies and tactics, and move away from the tendency to look at anti-fascist struggle in terms of a hierarchical ranking in which certain forms of activity (e.g. combat/fighting, involvement in formal political organizations etc.) are placed at the top, and all other forms of activity are seen as secondary and less important. Anti-fascist resistance isn't just one thing. It involves a lot of different types of activities, and requires a diversity of things.⁴

This vision includes personal growth, healing practices, education, and building community connection, and it rejects the patriarchal notion that militancy is undermined by kindness or warmth. Instead it proposes that militant action cannot exist in any sustainable manner without a strong infrastructure of training and care work wherein people feel supported and encouraged by a loving community. As stated in *Joyful Militancy*, "When people find themselves genuinely supported and cared for, they are able to extend this to others in ways that seemed impossible or terrifying before."⁵ This vision respects violence but is not dominated by it.ⁱ Don Hammerquist writes in 'Confronting Fascism':

A revolutionary culture must not incorporate violence into its internal functioning. This is an extremely important distinction with all variants of fascism and unfortunately with many variants of leftism. It has to be

ⁱ "Absolute dismissals of violence are limiting, but so too are absolute defenses of violence as always-already necessary or inherently virtuous when committed by the oppressed. Rather than reinforce either position, [Ben Case] grounds violence in the needs of current social movements to respond to the contemporary moment. It is important to move beyond the violence-nonviolence dichotomy, and instead to think of violence as a constitutive element of a long-term objective." *Editorial Committee. "Building Everyday Anti-Fascism." Upping the Anti*, 2 Aug. 2017, uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/19-building-everyday-anti-fascism/.

a place where everyone feels safe, particularly those who are the objects of violence in society generally. This is not at all easy to combine with the importance of militance in the general struggle, with the necessity to reject strategic pacifism, and with the need to sharply challenge and vigorously debate various ideas and attitudes which inevitably will be part of the scene.⁶

This vision conceptualizes the struggle for liberation as inseparable from the daily toil for survival. It embraces the long work of building community, changing systems, healing wounds, and overcoming a continuous series of obstacles to a better world that is never truly finished, instead of the status quo discourse which falsely dictates that our main concern is to fight a battle based in war and domination where we fight for glory to defeat our enemies towards an end goal when we've "won". As long as white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy are hegemonic, fascism will continue to be a problem. This vision of antifascism includes a type of routine maintenance that walks along-side other liberatory struggles as opposed to being limited to exceptional circumstances such as WWII or as isolated from other movements. In this vision we not only stop fascists in action, we work to stop the creation of them by undermining the systems and logics that support them, while simultaneously working to heal the damage they impose. The penultimate goal of this vision is not a thriving antifascist community (although that is an intermediate goal), but rather a community that is antifascist, or even better, for the category of "antifascist" to no longer exist at all because antifascism is no longer necessary. Unlike fascists, we don't work to impose our will on the world, but to be outdated relics of a more barbaric age.

This vision is concerned with defense based in community self-sufficiency and empowerment rather than a focus on elite

core militias or parallel non-governmental policing forces.ⁱⁱ While hatred can be an animating force, it isn't the main collective focus. Zoe Samudzi and William C. Anderson write:

What we must come to understand is that a willingness to defend ourselves and our communities is rooted in politics of collective care. Rather than seeking vengeance and aiming to harm oppressors, our desire to defend ourselves should be rooted in our love for one another. We are not ready to fight because we love fighting. We are ready to fight because we are worth fighting for.⁷

This vision is one where healing and connection are part of the bones of the movement at all scales from our smallest interactions with each other to our biggest campaigns. Using emergent strategy framework, this vision knows that “how we are at the small scale is how we are at the large scale”⁸ and “our movements themselves have to be healing, or there’s no point to them.”⁹ In this vision, we unabashedly love each other. As Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha says, “Love gets laughed at. What a weak, nonpolitical, femme thing. Love isn’t a muscle or an action verb or a survival strategy. Bullshit, I say.”¹⁰

ⁱⁱ Community training can be effective at stopping attacks, as shown by a study done on a program in Kenya called IMpower, which educated adolescents in rape prevention. “Findings include an average 51% decrease in the incidence of rape among trainees in the year after the program—no mean feat in a country where one in four women has experienced sexual or intimate partner violence in the last 12 months.” *Paiva, Lee. “How Kenya’s Self-Defence Classes Are Halting the Rape Pandemic in Its Tracks.” Apolitical, 6 Oct. 2017, apolitical.co/solution_article/kenyas-self-defence-classes-halting-rape-pandemic-tracks/.*

OBSTACLES

What keeps us from this vision more widely? First, antifascism is highly autonomous and very diverse, so not everyone shares this vision. There are many variations or deviations, and probably many valid critiques for the way I have it laid out. There are also other visions of antifascism, some of which have not wrestled with unexamined biases or unintentionally favor the abilities or organizing styles of people with privilege (able-bodied, cis, white, middle class, male, etc). Secondly, we're under constant attack from fascists and the state, which severely undermines our efforts through threat of violence, actual violence, surveillance, and infiltration. Not only a three-way fight, this is a four-way struggle as we also must contend with the internal damages of infighting, paranoia, poverty, and burn out. The sheer amount of important and meaningful antifascist work which has been done under these conditions is truly remarkable!

While we don't have control over external threats, we do have control over some of our internal responses and in how we choose what directions to grow to help us move forward. Working towards solidarity antifascism can help soothe our work by consciously detoxifying our praxis and creating an intentionality behind healing ourselves and our communities so we have the ability and capacity to fight. It is important to

acknowledge the relationship between our inner selves, the minutia of our interactions with each other, and our efficacy in stopping fascism and creating a new world. Whether or not we succeed in our goals, we can exist in ways that make our lives more luscious and worthwhile. All of our actions arise out of our deeply held values, our state of mind, and the wholeness or brokenness of our hearts. As adrienne maree brown says:

What we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system. Grace [Lee Boggs] articulated it in what might be the most-used quote of my life: “Transform yourself to transform the world.” This doesn’t mean to get lost in the self, but rather to see our own lives and work and relationships as a front line, a first place we can practice justice, liberation, and alignment with each other and the planet.¹¹

We are not immune to being affected by or unintentionally recreating oppression, and the question is, what are we doing or can we do to interrupt those systems of harm and to heal as an intentional antifascist praxis? The world in general is a difficult and toxic place to live in, and activism can especially be so since it is stressful, emotional, and high stakes. Antifascism is among some of the higher stakes types of activism and also one of the most explicit about being willing to/ needing to use violence as a tool when necessary, which significantly heightens risk both of physical harm, psychological harm, and repression from the state. Culturally, antifascism has also embraced a certain venomous tenor in order to engage in psychological warfare and halt the rightward shift of the Overton Window,ⁱⁱⁱ arguing that society

ⁱⁱⁱ The Overton Window describes “commonly held ideas, attitudes and presumptions [that] frame what is politically possible”. Russell, Nathan J. *“An Introduction to the Overton Window of Political Possibilities.”* Mackinac

should not show any tolerance of racism and fascism and we need to actively attack appeasement of any kind. That is an absolutely important stance, but sometimes that intensity isn't as well focused or as effective as it could be, or it can be mixed up with stress and trauma resulting in collateral damage to each other when the confrontational attitude is directed inwards. Without recognizing healing and care as integral to our movement spaces, this stress and intensity build up and spaces become toxic. Disability justice writer and activist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha wrote:

Most folks I know come to activist spaces longing to heal, but our movements are often filled with more ableism and burnout than they are with healing. We work and work and work from a place of crisis. Healing is dismissed as irrelevant, reserved for folks with money, an individual responsibility, something you do on your own time. Our movements are so burnout-paced, with little to no room for grief, anger, trauma, spirituality, disability, aging, parenting, or sickness, that many people leave them when we age, have kids, get sick(er) or more disabled, or just can't make it to twelve meetings a week anymore.¹²

I have witnessed the ways internal toxicity affects our efficacy and disrupts our ability to work together, to grow as a movement, and even to effectively stop fascism. Toxicity feels bad, creates isolation, can spur backlash and counterproductive actions, and pushes out diversity by creating a hostile environment. I want to reiterate that antagonism and hostility are important tools to the movement, and I'm not suggesting that we all become fluffy bunnies. However, an antagonistic stance and approach can be wrapped up in unexamined oppressive or destructive

Center for Public Policy, 4 Jan. 2006, www.mackinac.org/7504.

behaviors and be accidentally corrosive to each other as well as the work itself. Some sources of corrosive behaviors are *trauma, fear, dehumanization, ego, and despair*. All of these are very commonplace to the human condition. We're not alone, and we don't need to recreate the wheel as much as continue to actively apply existing concepts and approaches to our struggle and the specific needs of our communities. We can respond to these difficulties with *support, boundaries, compassion, solidarity, and meaning*.

TRAUMA & SUPPORT

Trauma is defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary as “a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury”.¹³ Fighting fascism often causes trauma, so trauma care is already part of our movements but is sometimes overlooked, under appreciated, or neglected. An understanding of trauma and how to care for it shows at every scale, from one person talking about burnout with a comrade up to more organized large scale responses for thousands of people at large protests. How are we incorporating trauma care into our spaces? Contemporary life is by itself already traumatic and difficult and we all bring different lived experience into the work, and unaddressed trauma can sow havoc and produce serious consequences to our organizing especially since antifascism can exacerbate existing issues. Are there norms or structures we can create to help mentally ease newcomers into the work or help prepare folks for shocks and life disruptions? While individuals are ultimately responsible for their own health, we are strongest when we move away from "self care" models and work to create structures of community care. As explained in the book *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* :

It's not about self-care - it's about collective care.

Collective care means shifting our organizations to be ones where people feel fine if they get sick, cry, have needs, start late because the bus broke down, move slower, ones where there's food at meetings, people work from home - and these aren't things we apologize for.¹⁴

An under recognized aspect of this work is secondary / vicarious trauma. Whether you are a researcher reading reports of domestic violence, a social media moderator sifting through death threats, or simply watching videos of protests, even when it doesn't seem direct we are being exposed to intense violence and it takes its toll. A recent Medium.com article about antifascism spoke about the difficulty:

Despite the Antifa researchers' successful track record, everyone I spoke to talked about how emotionally draining the work can be. "At first when you look at one of these chats, you're like, 'Oh, more racist internet crap, nothing new,' David said. "But then you see the seething mass. We often take breaks or switch off, because when you see somebody dreaming about killing you for who you are, for hours on end, it's unsettling."¹⁵

In her book "Trauma Stewardship" about what she calls 'trauma exposure response', Laura Van Dernoot Lipsky writes, "If we are to do our work with suffering people and environments in a sustainable way, we must understand how our work affects us. We need to undertake an honest assessment of how our feelings or behaviors have changed in response to whatever trauma we have been exposed to."¹⁶ She goes on to describe sixteen symptoms of trauma exposure response including; feeling helpless and hopeless, a sense that one can never do enough, hyper vigilance, diminished creativity, inability to embrace complexity, minimizing, chronic exhaustion, deliberate avoidance, dissociative

moments, sense of persecution, guilt, fear, anger and cynicism, inability to empathize/numbing, addictions, and grandiosity / an inflated sense of importance related to one's work.¹⁷ More than one of these strongly resonated with me, and while I believe that much of this simply describes the reactions of living under our current myriad systems of oppression, I see them even stronger in some antifascist spaces in a way that is worth scrutinizing.

Some of these responses have come to be seen in some spaces as cultural norms and feed into the larger phenomenon in radical spaces of hostility, inflexibility, and anxiety in what Joyful Militancy describes variously as “sad militancy, grumpy-warriorcool, manarchism, [or] puritanism” and says “this phenomenon is difficult to talk about because it presents itself as the *most* radical, the *most* anti-oppressive, the *most* militant.”¹⁸ However, this phenomenon is not relegated simply to radical spaces and is in a way reminiscent of other social services work. We are not alone or even particularly extraordinary in these regards, and I would say we are actually often ahead of the rest of society in our responses. In speaking generically about care work Lipsky states:

Secretly, many of us may feel that if we admit to having a hard time, we will open a door that we won't know how to shut. In organizations where toughness is promoted as a virtue, there may be a great deal of incentive to keep up our façade. As one community organizer told me, “I think we're all fronting with how we're doing.”¹⁹

When we recognize these patterns and see how we can situate ourselves as part of a larger culture of people and workers exposed to trauma we can learn from others and continue to adjust our own internal culture towards resiliency,

health, and sustainability in ways that make sense for us.^{iv} Really simple practices can be healing; for instance, one antifascist I met uses an exercise bike while he does research, and another group begins every meeting with check-ins and ends them with expressing gratitude for each other. A recent article describes the community care orientation of an antifascist training with Antifash Gordon:

One of the organizers pointed out the refreshments by the window (sliced pineapple, pretzels, trail mix) and urged participants to make use of the yoga mats, blankets, and foam blocks stashed in the corner. “Whatever your body needs,” she said. “Really, feel free to self-regulate,” Gordon seconded. “This material is heavy. It can inspire some things.”²⁰

Group dynamics where we don’t make space for trauma are going to unconsciously discriminate against those holding the most trauma, which is often going to be people dealing with different intersectional oppressions as well as our own movement veterans. This is one way that we unintentionally recreate oppression and capitalist disposability as people with trauma aren’t held and leave spaces. Taking care of those suffering from trauma is not always an easy task and movement spaces are not always the right places for it, but what can we do to get people the help and support they need and create a community where people can still be involved in some capacity while they work through issues? This is an area we can deepen our praxis and there is a lot to be learned from mad pride and disability justice movements, or by simply

^{iv} There are entire fields of research and human experience dedicated to mental health, spiritual health, and trauma care. If the discussion of trauma exposure resonated with you, I recommend reading the book “Trauma Stewardship” and exploring her advice and conclusions on how to deal with it.

listening to, learning from, and actively supporting those in movement spaces who are already engaged in this work. It is beneficial when we don't see healing as secondary, as an add on that is required in order to keep the 'real work' moving forward, or as a necessary consequence of the result of action, but as a main tenant of what we do. Healing each other and holding each other as we navigate this world *is* the work. As Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha said:

It doesn't have to be either healing or organizing: it's both. Someone asked me at a talk I was giving at Portland State University's Take Back the Night how we choose between healing and activism. I tried to tell them that healing justice is not a spa vacation where we recover from organizing and then throw ourselves back into the grind. To me, it means a fundamental - and anti-ableist- shift in how we think of movement organizing work to think of it as a place where building in many pauses, where building in healing, where building in space for grief and trauma to be held makes the movements more flexible and longer lasting.²¹

FEAR & BOUNDARIES

Fear is the mind killer that leaks into our spaces and praxis and compromises our ability to function. Everyone has different strategies to contend with fear, and the goal is not to be fearless, but to effectively manage our fear and not let it destroy us. The Center for Applied Non-Violence and Action Strategies (which has put out guides on taking down authoritarian dictatorships) states that “fear is a normal, instinctive response to a perceived threat. Fear is observed in the entire animal kingdom and therefore has no moral value attached to it. Most of us cannot overcome fear itself. However, all of us can overcome the detrimental effects of fear.”²² Security culture,^v community, and solidarity are key, as well as continually building resilience through good nutrition, exercise, spiritual/therapeutic practice, and self-compassion. The access to these things often depends on

^v “A security culture is a set of customs shared by a community whose members may be targeted by the government, designed to minimize risk. Having a security culture in place saves everyone the trouble of having to work out safety measures over and over from scratch, and can help offset paranoia and panic in stressful situations—hell, it might keep you out of prison, too.” *CrimethInc. Ex-Workers Collective. “What Is Security Culture?” CrimethInc., 1 Nov. 2004, crimethinc.com/2004/11/01/what-is-security-culture.*

privilege, so a healthful, resilient culture means we try to incorporate access to food, exercise spaces and programs, spiritual / therapeutic spaces (including nature), into our work collectively to share resources as we are able. Courage is communal. People are doing this by having healthy food at meetings, creating martial arts clubs, prayer groups, mental health support groups, and more. Also, when as a movement we acknowledge a plethora of different types of activism actions as valuable, people can stay closer to their comfort zone and manage fear in that way. More advice from CANVAS:

If members of your movement are too afraid to take directly confrontational or high-risk actions, it is worth considering if there is a lower-risk alternative action that they could do. It does not help a movement to put its members into situations that they are not prepared for. If your activists are too afraid for one action, it is important to find other actions that they can do. Also, many activists frequently assume that actions that require great courage, risk, and publicity will be the most powerful and effective actions that they can take. However, this is not always true. Sometimes, low-risk, low-profile, dispersed actions can be more effective.²³

Authoritarianism thrives on fear, and the state injects it into our movement however they can. How do we grow and create more community, but remain safe? We must first contend with the reality that fighting fascism is not safe and if you choose to do this work you are compromising any sense of safety you may feel. We must also recognize that if you do not do this work you are still not safe, and any “safety” society has given you is a lie meant to weaken your resolve and allow the horror of the status quo to continue and worsen. Especially for those of us who are white, white supremacy functions by telling us that we are safer if we allow people of the global

majority to suffer and die and will try to tempt us away from the fight, but we must resist.^{vi} “An injury to one is an injury to all” is not just a saying, because these intertwined systems of ableist capitalism, white supremacy, and cisheteropatriarchy^{vii} are truly going to be the end of our species if we don’t tear them down. We need to breathe into this reality of constant danger but not let it consume us and not become nihilistic about the perceived omnipotence of the state.

Having everyone taught about security culture before working on projects can help alleviate stress, because there is a lot we can do to protect ourselves and make it safer. When people are not trained, it can lead to exclusion, paranoia, and an inability to grow. Fear of infiltration and the need for tight security is justified, but depending on the type of project the threat model can also include the threat of being isolated and disconnected from wider society. Not all projects are about community engagement or growth, but as a network our approach to safety can involve security culture as well as building connections, as community roots keep us safer by making it harder for the state to justify force and by giving us access to needed allies and resources. Also, while the edges are the least safe because people are new and untrained, they are also some of the most bountiful in terms of revolutionary

^{vi} “We need to consider the extent to which racial violence is the unspoken and necessary underside of security, particularly white security. Safety requires the removal and containment of people deemed to be threats. White civil society has a psychic investment in the erasure and abjection of bodies that they project hostile feels onto, which allows them peace of mind amidst the state of perpetual violence.”- Jackie Wang Lee, *Petronella. Anti-Fascism Against Machismo: Gender, Politics, and the Struggle Against Fascism. The Tower InPrint*, 2019. P 19

^{vii} “Cisheteropatriarchy: a system of power based on the supremacy & dominance of cisheterosexual men through the exploitation & oppression of women and the LGBTQIA. Also referred to as sexism. This includes oppressive constructs such as homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, etc..” “Glossary.” *Decolonize ALL The Things*, 12 July 2017, decolonizeallthethings.com/learning-tools/glossary-of-key-terms/.

energy, vision, and surprise. To be an antifascist is to be on the edge, and it is scary, but also exhilarating. An extremely strict security culture that hasn't taken an effort to train newcomers or has not clearly defined the type of security required for its goals can end up creating a culture of shame, badjacketing,^{viii} and frustration, and in the end actually intensify fear rather than alleviate it.^{ix}

It behooves us to always be assuming that we have already been infiltrated, especially with larger projects, and know that we are generally not very good at discerning who is or is not a threat and an attitude of too much paranoia can make a project look more dangerous, which ironically can create interest by security forces or bad actors.^x Set security needs at the level corresponding with the openness of the project, as too much or too little can both be detrimental. I've also noticed that it is often people with privilege who are the most concerned with strict security, and the discussion of security breaches can be unaware of that social power dynamic and alienate those who are more used to being targeted by white supremacists and the state. Security is only useful up to the point where it enables

viii "BADJACKETING: creating suspicion, by spreading rumors or unsubstantiated accusations, that people are undercover, infiltrators, snitches, or cooperators." Badjacketing was a tool used effectively by the state to undermine both the Black Panthers and the American Indian Movement. *"No Badjacketing: The State Wants to Kill Us; Let's Not Cooperate."* Twin Cities General Defense Committee, 29 Nov. 2015, twincitiesgdc.org/badjacketing/.

ix A gentle way of reminding people about security culture comes from the oogglesphere; saying "dcsc" (pronounced "dee-see-ess-see") which stands for "dude (comma) security culture" is a way of letting people know that they have crossed a boundary without shutting them out or down.

x "Understand that changing normal activities or acting differently calls attention to yourself. Security services conduct pattern analysis. They analyze patterns of people's and organization's regular behavior. When an organization or individual start behaving differently (breaking the pattern), he/she/it (sic) attracts attention." Popović Srđa. *CANVAS Core Curriculum: a Guide to Effective Nonviolent Struggle: Students Book*. Centre for Applied NonViolent Action and Strategies, 2007. P. 171

the work and becomes counterproductive when taken to an extreme making the work itself undoable or is seen as more important than treating people with respect. When done well, everyone feels safer without compromising community connection. Some advice from Antifash Gordon:

Gordon suggested novice sleuths look at security as a spectrum, in which no amount of precaution is completely foolproof. The more secure you try to be, the less organizing work you can do, he explained, adding that such calculations should be based on a careful threat assessment: a catalog of the risks and the costs of mitigating them.²⁴

It can be helpful to use a feminist lens and frame security culture as being about respecting boundaries instead of exclusion or a decision about the innate character of who will make a good activist, which can be rife with sexist, classist, and/or ableist judgement. R*pe culture teaches us to have no boundaries so we often don't learn how to respect them, but to be able to do this work effectively and minimize fear we need to learn. Teach yourself and each other about boundaries. In a discussion of healthy boundaries the book *Joyful Militancy* states "for joy to flourish, it needs sharp edges."²⁵ I read one description of what to look out for when determining infiltrators which described being too friendly, helpful or talkative, all traits gendered female. By those metrics womxn are much more likely to be seen as infiltrators or as expendable, and neurodiverse people are at risk of being seen as untrustworthy because they are socially awkward. Everyone has a right to choose who to work with, but I've seen security culture used as an excuse for hidden underlying biases. A healthy movement has space for everyone, if not everyone in every space.

Maintaining healthy boundaries and moving at the speed

of trust^{xi} means having a variety of groups or activities with different levels of trust needed, instead of having to move people prematurely into an intimate level of security in order to work with them. As one comrade said, “Let infiltrators peel potatoes.” The balance between openness and safety in these ‘gray spaces’ is not an easy one, but it is an area we must breathe into if we are going to grow and maintain the upper hand in the coming years. How can we help encourage in-between cultural community spaces where people can be involved and learn more while not being a security risk? The need for tight security measures can be offset by being in large community groups and spaces open to all (except fascists, of course.) Cultural spaces such as sports, music, art projects, movie screenings, and other community events are great venues for this. What other spaces can we grow into? More from Petronella Lee:

It’s important to have spaces, roles, and activities that account for the variety and diversity of social life - for example considering things like ability and age. Historically, there existed a wide range of anti-fascist cultural spaces. These included things like reading groups, social clubs, collective kitchens, daycare centers, workplace organizations, and sports associations...Anti-fascist gyms are great, and anti-fascist football clubs can be useful. But, what about an anti-fascist neighborhood association? Or anti-fascist story-telling time for children, or an anti-fascist food program? Or maybe, anti-fascist day at the nail salon or an anti-fascist roller derby league? The list could go on.²⁶

It’s important to note that it can be problematic and ineffective

^{xi} “Move at the speed of trust. Focus on critical connections more than critical mass - build the resilience by building the relationships.” - brown, adrienne maree. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. AK Press, 2017. P. 42

to use “antifascist” as a add-on label denoting a cultural identity instead of as a key value or focus of a project. Depending on the level of threat in the area at that time it may make more sense to bring an antifascist perspective or knowledge base to existing communities or projects instead of trying to start new projects. Can we face our fears and be gentle with people on the edges to get them more training or give them something lower risk to do instead of discarding folks? Can we balance individual safety and community safety? From Trauma Stewardship:

When we acknowledge our fear, we have an opportunity to deepen our compassion, not only for ourselves but also for every being that has ever been afraid. If we look deeply, many of us will discover that the fear that underlies all other fears is the fear of our own death. It is worth asking how we want to live knowing that we will die. The answer is generally not that we would quit. Rather, it is that we would embrace the preciousness of life. We would choose to be loving and compassionate, and to deepen our caring for others and the planet even in the face of our inevitable end.²⁷

When we understand and respect boundaries, can communicate those needs in a clear, firm, and loving way, and have structures in place to accommodate those needs, we can be less fearful and more confident in our dealings with each other and new folks.

DEHUMANIZATION & COMPASSION

Violence and dehumanization can go hand in hand, and it is understandable that we sometimes end up using dehumanizing language or attitudes towards fascists. A dehumanizing framework can simply be descriptive of actions or political positions which themselves are already void of humanity. Sometime the use of violence is necessary for survival and the utility of dehumanizing your enemy goes along with that, such as in self-defense where you are taught not to look your attacker in the eyes because seeing their humanity can damage your ability to hurt them and stop you from escaping alive. Also, the media is far too invested in humanizing nazis and cops while continuing to dehumanize their victims. However, beyond a survival function, the act of dehumanizing others is at the heart of our oppression, is the mechanism by which we do truly terrible things to each other, and is a key tool of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism. Violence is a type of power, and while it can be a tool for liberation it can also be corrupting, especially for those who already hold institutional or systemic power of other types, so those holding that privilege need to be acutely aware of the harmful side effects.

Respecting the power of violence to be damaging or alienating and working to continuously reconnect with our ability to be compassionate and have a healthy emotional range are key to feeling safer to comrades and community partners who experience dehumanization as a matter of daily existence. Being aware of dehumanization as a tool used by Empire^{xii} can make us less likely to unintentionally reinforce those systems of domination in the course of our work. Dehumanizing can really backfire when used casually as it reinforces destructive structures instead of working to dismantle those systems, and when we dehumanize fascists we undermine our argument to the larger public that we act from a place of ethicality. As CrimethInc put it in August of 2017,

“We have to become adept at spelling out the ethical differences between fascism and anti-fascism, and all the justifications for forms of direct action that can actually be effective in this struggle. We need allies from many different walks of life who can help us make this case to the public at large.”²⁸

For example, calling fascists fat or making fun of them for being poor or mentally ill reinforces oppression and sends a message that people who are poor or with different ability or bodies aren't welcome in our spaces even if the intention was supposed to be towards a specific party. I've watched this tendency diminish throughout the last few years, but it does still crop up especially among people newer to the movement.

Engaging with dehumanization can also leak into how we

^{xii} “The web of control that exploits and administers life - ranging from the most brutal forms of domination to the subtlest inculcation of anxiety and isolation - is what we call Empire.” - Bergman, Carla, and Nick Montgomery. *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times*. AK Press, 2018. P. 48

treat each other, as disagreements or arguments turn really nasty when badjacketing becomes involved. In leftist spaces badjacketing is a form of dehumanization as someone who has been marked as a cop or informant is no longer afforded respect or dialogue from their peers and can become a target for abuse and exclusion. In extreme cases we can treat each other like we treat fascists with devastating consequences for the targeted parties. This can only happen if our core values include dehumanization and disposability as acceptable, a weak link in our politics which hands a powerful tool to the state to destroy us from the inside. Antifascism coming from a dehumanizing disposability framework can also reinforce the carceral state. Antifascism can be uncomfortably celebratory about incarceration, when in reality jail doesn't necessarily stop fascists from organizing. A lot of fascist literature and organizations have come out of prisons, which can serve as nazi boot camp to the detriment to our imprisoned communities as well as those on the outside when fascists come out hardened. We win when fascists stop being effective fascists, either by abandoning the cause, becoming too impeded to continue effectively, or dying disgraced and alone. If jail aids in those aims it can be seen as a win, but when we celebrate incarceration as the end goal we are not furthering collective liberation and instead reinforcing the prison industrial complex.

As part of a larger liberatory movement we are crafting new ways of understanding and practicing justice, and although we are severely limited by being trapped in the system we are in, the way we conceptualize and dream of a new world will affect our praxis. What do we want social accountability to look like? Glimmers of this come from feminist work in that arena, underlying the reality that sometimes people's unwillingness to confront fascism comes from a place of genuine compassion and unacknowledged fear that the current injustice system will do more damage than

good. In her book on fighting r*pe culture Nora Samaran describes a different way of imagining justice:

Imagine how it would feel to have no fear of social repercussions when standing up to violence, because a structure is in place that means their fundamental humanity and worth will be legitimated and taken seriously. What would it be like to live in a culture where we all could be socially embraced in this way, where we could speak up about harm, could say no to it, without fear, because we know without question that no one in our community will dehumanize another?²⁹

The deeply inhumane authoritarian system the government has in place to deal with harm is itself a deterrent to action against harm, so we must be working to abolish the system itself if we are ever going to be able to engage all people in the fight against fascism. We can't fight fascism with one hand and hold up the police state with the other. When direct action is also framed as dehumanizing, it can look like just another bad option when people deep down are seeking a way out of domination entirely. Dehumanizing in our movements is never inclusive.

As a conrad wrote to me on this subject:

An ideological framework that decides who is or is not human leads nowhere but back to fascism. Liberals who imagine 'one big human family' get hung up here because for all their peace and love they low-key ascribe to a dehumanizing ideological framework: for liberals, 'fascists are people too' is a resolve-shattering realization that prevents them from militantly opposing them. But the truth is that real, flesh-and-blood humans do terrible things sometimes, and a politics that seeks to create a world worth living here in reality will come into (sometimes violent) conflict with these humans.

Dehumanizing fascists can give them the power of the super-human or a veneer of surreality which they can cloak themselves in, while giving us an excuse to not contend with the truth of humanity's capacity to be truly horrific.

Confronting fascism is to confront our own demons about what it means to be human, and that is an existential battle which we cannot shy away from. Daniel Harper of the antifascist podcast "I Don't Speak German" spoke eloquently on the subject in their episode on famous white supremacist David Duke:

I think it's important to note that these are human beings and to understand them as human beings, as opposed to treat them as monsters all the time. I think to treat them as monsters who are fundamentally different from you and I avoids the real issue, it avoids the fact that these ideologies do not just come about because people are just like, always bad, and it plays into the very thing that allows someone like David Duke who comes across as, 'well he's very polite to that one Black person he knows, so how could he possibly be racist', you know? It's that exact failure of knowledge and imagination that allows these people places to grow...seeing him as a person as opposed to as a villain gives us a sense of the reality that seeing him as kind of the cartoon cut-out of just 'racist man bad' does not and I think that we can acknowledge the evil and acknowledge the real harm that this man has done over his life while at the same time recognize that those failures are human ones and not demonic.³⁰

A solidarity vision of antifascism rejects dehumanization and disposability by framing the work as creating strong boundaries instead of throwing people away, not being

bloodthirsty about reveling in hurting fascists,^{xiii} and by making space for compassionate intervention. This framework separates the person from their actions and rejects eugenic logic that sees fascism as an indelible or innate part of someone. Compassion doesn't have to mean inaction or weakness, as Lipsky speaks of "acts of fierce compassion" which mean "taking firm or even severe steps."³¹

Understanding the complexity of human experience allows for antifascist work that, while not as direct as punching nazis, is just as radical in its politics. It is radical to approach this work believing that we don't have to use the tools of domination in order to be effective. Even physical confrontations with fascists can be about boundary setting instead of domination.

People are often drawn to fascist politics for many of the same reasons they could be drawn to leftist politics, and antifascism can be preventative and interrupt the creation of fascists early in their radicalization. In some of these less metastasized cases a hostile dehumanizing praxis will create backlash and harden a potential fascists' beliefs where a firm but human discourse, access to community, education, and boundary setting might change their path or allow for other options. And while making life terrible for fascists, we can leave a door open for them to get out. Compassion allows for fascists to change and leave racist scenes, which has been done with help by antifascist groups such as One People's Project and Hope Not Hate^{xiv}. An inclusive and diverse antifascism

^{xiii} "This is not a thing we take joy in - the personal suffering of white supremacists," David [of Rose City Antifa] said. "But it is a good thing when a Nazi gets fired, because they have less resources and they're no longer in a workplace where they could potentially threaten people." Gell, Aaron. "Anti-Fascists Are Waging a Cyber War - And They're Winning." Medium, GEN, 12 Sept. 2019, gen.medium.com/antifas-keyboard-warriors-254f62be2a95.

^{xiv} Daryle Lamont Jenkins of One People's Project was recently the subject of a short film documentary called "Skin" about his work helping a racist leave the scene. Hope Not Hate, an antifascist group in based in the UK, recently worked with a disillusioned neo-nazi to help stop a murder. "Hate Has

which has different styles of intervention provides the right tool and right person for different situations and jobs.

Having an orientation towards compassion helps maintain loving relationships to ourselves and those around us and oils our internal mechanics even as it challenges us to be flexible and creative in our approaches to the work. Destroying the life of a hardened fascist is often an important part of stopping fascism, but we lose ourselves and our message when it becomes the end goal. It is a small, yet important distinction that the ultimate goal be to destroy fascism, not just fascists. Sometimes antifascists being aware of the history and patterns of progression of fascism can jump ahead and conceptualize the situation in terms of future battles and tactics before we have reached that point, and it is important to stay rooted in the present and not cede opportunities to intervene where we are currently. The future is not written. “Less prep, more presence. What you pay attention to grows.”³²

*Consequences.” One People’s Project, onepeoplesproject.com/, Quinn, Ben. “Hope Not Hate Spy Played Key Role in Stopping Far-Right Plot to Murder MP.” *The Guardian, Guardian News and Media*, 3 Apr. 2019, www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/03/hope-not-hate-spy-played-key-role-in-stopping-far-right-plot-to-mp.*

EGO & SOLIDARITY

It takes a lot of chutzpah to take on literal nazis and a certain amount of posturing can be both effective and entertaining, as when one antifascist I know ripped their shirt off and sent some big goons packing by sheer force of personality. However, sometimes that attitude can become a liability when it moves into the spheres of machismo, elitism, or self-righteousness.^{xv} The 'ego' I'm referencing to is different from audacity or self worth, it's ego which becomes toxic when rooted in unexamined privilege or disconnection from community. This is where being in strong solidarity with each other and other liberation movements is key not just to our praxis but also to our own well being. We need each other, and we are at our best when we are living in service to others. Some of the most humble and honorable people I have ever met are antifascists, usually those doing work deeply rooted in solidarity and mutual aid. There is nothing more humbling than working with those who are suffering and resisting in ways that are different from you.

^{xv} I don't know who needs to hear it, but it bears repeating: there is nothing radical or revolutionary about being an asshole.

To be able to accomplish solidarity and build community with groups at risk from fascists requires us to continuously do the internal work of disinvesting from oppression. While most of us are under attack from fascism for some aspect(s) of our identity, the work of self-liberation, education, and deepening our analysis to extricate ourselves from patterns of domination is never done. An important aspect of this is uprooting our own biases and white supremacy. Antifascist spaces are not specifically anarchist or white, but regardless an important dynamic in is addressed in this quote from the zine *Uproot White Anarchism*:

White anarchism is a phrase describing the cultural hold and maintenance of euro-centralized anarchist theories, culture, dynamics, figures, and mechanisms built on the directives and assumptions of a colonized society...if we continue to fail to acknowledge and address the need to dismantle the toxic patriarchy, neocolonial culture, and white supremacy in our own spaces, we will only continue to disseminate these problematic platforms and experiences...Often what is being theorized even in good intentions is stuck in theory, and if direct action does take place, it is too often removed from the communities about which are being theorized.³³

Deepening and creating real working relationships with our larger communities and rooting our action down into a local context and culture are key to us being able to be in meaningful solidarity with others, instead of re-creating euro-centric charity models. As stated in *As Black As Resistance*; "Any ideology of self-defense must have the will, desire, and support of the communities we claim to represent."³⁴ People have been fighting authoritarianism for centuries, so we can ask ourselves what the local iterations of that fight are and how can we support work that is already being done.

Questioning our own motivations for doing this is

important to our praxis. Are you here for the right reasons, or are you possibly going to do more harm than good? Find joy in helping people with no reward, although when you are working in good solidarity with people you usually do get thanks from them, and there is nothing more meaningful or more moving. If you're never receiving any appreciation, you may want consider why that is, why you feel entitled to it, whether or not you are really acting in solidarity instead of charity,^{xvi} and what you can do to improve your relationships with your community. I've also experienced how we can become bitter, defensive, and critical when we don't feel valued or connected to others, and it's a reminder of how important good process and inclusion are to the work and our health as a whole. When everyone has a voice and useful work to do our egos are less likely to try to step in to protect us and stir up acrimony. From a handbook on collective process from AK Press:

How many intelligent, motivated individuals have left projects behind because they were attacked, neglected, undervalued, or silenced in other ways? When we work to develop and sustain stronger, more egalitarian sets of processes to guide our interpersonal interactions, we help to ensure that our collectives are something more than a group of frustrated people sparring with one another. Instead, a truly egalitarian collective is a model of the society we want to see, someday, in miniature.³⁵

One last note on ego: sometimes what seems like ego may actually be burn-out. As mentioned briefly before, one symptom of trauma exposure response is grandiosity and an inflated sense of importance related to one's work. On this

^{xvi} From the group Mutual Aid Disaster Relief's model of "Solidarity, not charity." "Core Values." *Mutual Aid Disaster Relief*, 15 Oct. 2019, mutualaiddisasterrelief.org/core-values/.

subject Lipsky writes,

“We need to acknowledge the value of what we bring without making our work be all about us. Once we cross that line, it can be difficult to come back. We can lose an accurate sense of our individual capacities and limits as well as our actual interdependence with others working in our fields.”³⁶

The causes of fascism are complex and global including geopolitical forces that we have absolutely no control over, and no one person or group is responsible for stopping it alone. The piece each person is doing is very important, but it is just that, a single piece. If your identity and self worth have become tied to the work this admission can feel deflating, but the reality is that a grandiose mindset is isolating and unhealthy, and relinquishing it allows space to see and be inspired by all the myriad ways that humanity is fighting for liberation. If you are feeling like your personal work is the only thing stopping humanity from slipping into the stranglehold of authoritarianism, you need to take a break. This is the importance of solidarity, because when you are working with others it is easier to take care of yourself without feeling like everything will fall apart. It is too much of a burden to bear the whole weight of the world on one set of shoulders.

DESPAIR & MEANING

“When people come into contact with their own power - with their capacity to participate in something life-giving - they often become more militant.”³⁷ -Joyful Militancy

As a disabled femme who has been told my life will be nothing but a hopeless mess of heartbreak, medical intervention, shortened life span, and constant struggle, the question comes up from time to time about why to keep going on, and the simple answer is: because fuck you, that’s why. I didn’t always have this confidence. This has been one of the most difficult sections to tackle, as the subject of despair is one I hold close to me and continue to wrestle with as we hurtle forward into an unstable, darkening future. I came to antifascism hoping to have a meaningful death and have found instead a meaningful life, with a previously tenuous connection to existence having been fortified in ways I could not have imagined. The powers that be would have us hide away in various forms of disengagement, but there is something ecstatic about living in the real world even in all its terror. I worry my time here may be shorter because of the stand I have taken, but that seems to be the trade-off many of

us are making in order to reject pacification in favor of being present and reacting to the events of the world in accordance to our values. People hate antifascists because we shed light onto liberal society's shame and the fact that our current system of "democratic" nation-states seem to devolve into fascism as a matter of course. Nazis are a symptom of a disease no one wants to talk about, and we're talking about it. We live with open eyes and it scares those who would rather we were blind.

While I would argue that life can't be truly meaningful unless it is rooted in a clear-eyed view of the challenges facing us, it is also hard on the soul to stare into the depths of the abyss. The dominant systems are so entrenched, so brutal, and so cruel it can be really difficult to function or see a path forward under their weight as the genocidal logic of capitalism is trying to march us all off a cliff. Some respond to this pressure by trying to look past the current world and focus on a future utopia where our systems value life, or look even further still past death to a heaven where we can finally be at peace and are freed from the boot on our neck that strangled us in life. But as an antifascist I feel it is my job to puncture holes in any fantasy that becomes all encompassing and keeps us suspended in inaction or grasping at campaigns reliant on a world whose demise may be imminent. To focus on the future is to delay experiencing the present, and to require a happy ending is to live half-dead engulfed in yet another fantasy that would try and sell us back the status quo that is killing us. As the anarcho-nihilist says: "It speaks to the very nature of our domestication that we only choose resistance so long as it feels like something we can win."³⁸

To be an antifascist is to fight for life surrounded by cults of death, whether in the form of neoliberal stasis or fascist domination. Antifascism is at its core a philosophy which affirms life in defiance of the destructive illogic of genocide. I live in order to spite the systems that would prefer me dead. While I do hope there is a future utopia and I do hope to

experience heaven when I die, putting hope in them is not the animating feature of my life as I have found them an unreliable source of energy. I say that human life has value *now*, and we can bring bits of heaven to earth *now*. To engage in the internal work of fighting for my own life against despair is itself a meaningful antifascist struggle as by doing so I stubbornly proclaim that we, the impure, the poor, and the degenerate^{xvii} have value. That life itself, the planet and the people on it (including myself) are worth saving, even while concurrently holding that the fight in this moment is worthwhile independent of whatever the future holds. From an anarchist essay on morale:

“For me, accepting that my actions cannot derive their meaning from some future goal is intertwined with the process of coming to terms with my mortality. Recognizing death as inevitable, I don’t hurry any faster towards it...We may be defeated by our enemies, we are certainly doomed to become dust ourselves... In this regard, my ability to believe in the possibility of change—not as something to occur in the future, but as something I can pursue right now—is a fundamental part of my power to live fully, to maintain a healthy relationship to my own agency.”³⁹

For me antifascism tied together the confused strings of thought which found evidence all around that something is seriously wrong and no one seems to be doing much about it. Fascism is the rot at the core of our intertwining systems of patriarchy, racism, capitalism, ableism, and domination that strangle a world aching for freedom. To fight fascism is to get to the crux of the matter and to get the most bang for your buck when it comes to actions you can take to help turn the tide of the world away from death and destruction. For the

^{xvii} I’m intentionally using the terms “impure” and “degenerate”, which are originally Nazi terms to highlight diversity, disability, queerness, and sex-positivity. Fuck you, nazis.

first time in my life actions I have taken have had tangible, meaningful effects in the world and I've seen how our work as antifascists ripples out into society and changes history. I've also seen the quieter but in many ways even more powerful effects of the joy, relief, and strength I can bring people who are scared when I have been willing to confront monsters and bullies. Through the solidarity I have been shown I have also learned how deeply meaningful seemingly small acts of kindness can be, through virtue of which I am alive today. I don't know if I will survive being an antifascist, but I know I wasn't really surviving not being one, and in the end no one "survives" at all anyway. It is hard to imagine going back to a "safer" reality devoid of the connections and purpose I have gained being antifa.

It's the reductionist approach to life: if you keep it small, you'll keep it under control. If you don't make any noise, the bogeyman won't find you. But it's all an illusion, because they die too, those people who roll up their spirits into tiny little balls so as to be safe. Safe?! From what? Life is always on the edge of death; narrow streets lead to the same place as wide avenues, and a little candle burns itself out just like a flaming torch does. I choose my own way to burn. - Sophie Scholl

The opposite of despair is not happiness, which is just shallow pacifying ephemera continuously sold to us by Empire. Neither is it joy, which is only meaningful in its nature as a rupture, and while is an important shot in the arm to disrupt despair, is not a sustaining force against it. The opposite of despair is movement, is struggling alongside others as we make each moment more livable. Whatever may happen in the future, right now this moment exists and can be used to help someone, interrupt abuse, bring joy, create space for peace, prevent harm, rest, and stitch together the fabric of our lives. Antifascism is a chance to open up space for life. One punch to Richard Spencer's doofus face made the whole world erupt in joy and power. I watched those remixes on

repeat as it broke through the depressed, fearful malaise America was falling into in the face of rising fascism. Some one was fighting back, and that lit my soul on fire. Life! From Blessed Is The Flame:

I am interested in the sort of resistance we pursue, not because we necessarily believe it will produce desired changes or lead us into a brighter future, but because it is the most meaningful response to this world we can imagine. Because we simply can't stomach the idea of being passive in the face of a system this brutal, regardless of how far we may be from our dreams. We might think about acts of resistance not as a means of liberation, but as acts of liberation in themselves.⁴⁰

The nihilist speaks of 'stopping time' to achieve "jouissance", or the joy at the shattering of the oppressive order: "These cries to 'stop time' and to discover jouissance are essentially asking us to sever any attachments we have to the existing order, and to position ourselves outside of and against its progress."⁴¹ For those of us who are disabled or chronically ill we already understand this innately as our bodies do not fit within a 'progressive' time scale since we simply do not function in a capitalist framework of continuous productivity and "improvement". Movement spaces which are anti-ableist have a better understanding of the more natural rhythms of ebb and flow as we listen to ourselves and have times of energy and action move smoothly into (often longer) times of rest and recovery. Instead of a constant grind that wears us down into dust and despair, life becomes a delicious soup of silence, caring for others and being cared for, punctuated by intense ruptures of joy, noise, and attack that then recedes back into rest and love and gratitude. In this way we can open our arms to despairing moments knowing they are just one part of the richness of life which we can move through into the next moment.

Interestingly, and I don't think coincidentally, one of the

most effective sites of resistance in the concentration camps during WWII was a hospital.^{xviii} When we pair resistance with care work we can free each other in spirit even as they still try to keep us demoralized and alone. You are never alone when you are fighting fascism even though sometimes it can feel like it. It's so wonderful and important when we create systems where everyone feels that connection, presence and love, and when we can break through isolation and be heartbroken together. Standing with the vulnerable and with each other imbues life with meaning and strength, creating courage beyond what we ever could imagine. Incorporating direct solidarity results in rupturing futurity in the vein of the anarcho-nihilist without acting from a place of hopelessness, but also not relying on a wispy unreliable hopefulness either. Humanity loves the image of the rebel because we all know deep down that at this moment in time we must fight back to live, and to care for those (including ourselves) that the system deems expendable is to rebel. We all reach for "that reflexive spirit of resistance rooted in the basic existential understanding that recalcitrance is simply a more meaningful and joyous form of existence than docility."⁴²

"Struggle so that all may live this rich, overflowing life. And be sure that in this struggle you will find a joy greater than anything else can give." - Pyotr Kropotkin

^{xviii} "The hospital was slowly established as a place that was not only occasionally capable of healing people, but was also one of the central pillars of the resistance movement. Underground activities in the hospital included establishing contacts with patients, saving lives by falsely diagnosing illness (to avoid selections or work), executing informants on the grounds of falsified illness, and most spectacularly, breeding lice infected with typhus to be used as biological weapons...The general reluctance of the SS to enter the disease-ridden hospital made it one of the safer places for the organizations to operate." Serafinski. *"Blessed Is the Flame: An Introduction to Concentration Camp Resistance and Anarcho-Nihilism."* The Anarchist Library, 2016, theanarchistlibrary.org/library/serafinski-blessed-is-the-flame.

CONCLUSION

There is scholarship and conversation happening in all different corners of social justice spaces around the issues of how to maneuver to meet the increasingly dire circumstances of this century. Our current struggle will continue to morph significantly in the coming decades, and it is probably going to get much harder before it gets any easier. There may be times in the future when the battle is simply for basic survival, as individuals or as a community, where there is no work done other than maintaining our spirits. While we must remain anchored to the present moment, it is hard to forgo seeing all the different possible futures ahead (some of which are quite bleak), and it is in these moments of darkness it becomes even more clear that everything we do now on the slow steady walk towards health and resiliency is invaluable for our future. The connections we are making now and the ways we practice remaining flexible, curious, compassionate, and loving in a disorienting world make all the difference to the livability of the present moment while helping set us on the path to a better future.

We're still exploring all the ways healing and care work factor into our movements, and I know we'll keep connecting those dots between us and other struggles as we weather these

storms. I have nothing but faith in antifascists to continue to be sources of strength, encouragement, and inspiration for each other and those around us, and to build new tools and avenues for growth in this era of great uncertainty and even greater possibility. At its best, antifascism can be a much needed cultural zone where fierceness, intensity, love, and joy not just coexist, but nurture each other in ways that are healing and difficult and amazing. The world badly needs more of this as well as help extricating itself from the grasp of fascist domination. People are depending on us in ways that many aren't ready to acknowledge, and we have a duty to ourselves and to our communities to be accountable and ready to struggle.

There is on-going psychological warfare being waged against us and we must resist. Moving forward I hope we can keep discovering and creating new ways to find strength in ourselves, in our processes, and in radical solidarity. At the end of the day, I don't regret any of my actions against fascism despite the fear and consequences, but I do regret when I haven't taken care of myself or have fought with comrades. I wish everyone the best of luck in contending with the difficult but important work of figuring out our internal dynamics. It's a long haul, and a worthy one. Solidarity is our greatest weapon!

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In Loving Memory.



Lin "Spit" Newborn



Daniel Shersty



Heather Heyer



Sydney Eastman



Dani Henri
Sommerville



Stu Tanquist



Willem Van Spronsen



Sean "Armenio"
Kealiher

And everyone who has died fighting fascism or has been victim to it

