

Growing Up

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While most of the anarchist movement consists of fairly young people, I have the privilege of living in a town with many older anarchists. By “older” I mean people in their 30s, but also people in their 40s and 50s (or at least approaching their 50s).

This has been a great benefit to me. I am young, so lots of ideas and experiences that are commonplace to older anarchists in my town are still novel to me, and when I encounter them, my responses are often predictable. When I encountered Ted Kaczynski’s writings, I suddenly called everything and everyone “leftist.” When I learned of the ELF, I thought this was the only model of resistance that anyone should consider. As I learned about the *Federazione Anarchica Informale*, the Conspiracy Cells of Fire, *Individualidades Tendiendo a lo Salvaje* (now *Reaccion Salvaje*), and other anti-tech terror groups, I—again, predictably—began to think that the only way this industrial machine will fall is if people make direct attacks on infrastructure (which, I should mention, is not a position I hold any longer).

Living in the age of the internet has made some of these phases rather embarrassing and permanent. Like every other young activist, I went through a quick period where I was enraged with a few different things and decided to take it out on a specific label. In my case the label was “anarchist.” Given I was particularly frustrated and publishing on the internet is just so simple—it almost beckons you—I posted “Why I am leaving anarchism.” To be fair, I still have qualms with the things that I noted in the essay, and I don’t always refer to myself as an anarchist, since it usually does steer the conversation in a direction I just don’t want it to go. But there are still tell-tale signs of a young activist growing up: rebellion against something abstract, talks of starting a “totally new movement,” things like that.

But no matter how predictable my viewpoints are, no matter how colored they are by inexperience, the older anarchists have always been supportive and offered guidance in a non-intrusive way. It’s not like this in all places. I know this from what others have told me, from some of my interactions with anarchists in other towns, and from general anarchist gatherings like the yearly bookfair. Some people are intent on burning down the aspirations of the young, dismissing their ideas as naive immediately and then leaving them jaded—at 17, 18, 19, 20! What kind of resistance these anarchists think they are inspiring is unknown to me.

They do not, I think, do this intentionally. This world is harsh, and the development of industry has so far been uncompromising. These activists are the ones who sat for months, sometimes years, in a forest, growing close to it, caring for it, loving it—only to see it left in tatters after being clearcut. No one can be blamed for looking at death of that magnitude and then acquiring a sort of threatening “I dare you to say something hopeful” nihilism.

I’ve always thought that resistance is spearheaded by young people so often because of their proclivity to run into a wall of daggers. I still think this is mostly true, although I suspect now that resistance is not, in fact, spearheaded by the young, but by the older generation that has learned how to inspire an appreciation for the beating

drums of struggle, the poetry, the songs. This is the base that allows the more reckless components of resistance to exist.

And the beautiful thing about the artistic components of resistance is that you can still appreciate them as a nihilist. One need not believe that the forest will be saved to believe that it should be and to sing songs about its beauty.

Given that the anarchist, primitivist, and eco-defense movements have been around long enough to catch the nihilistic fever, this appreciation for stories and art is, perhaps, the thing that will allow it to continue to grow. When we young people make mistakes—or even just offer a kooky idea that hasn't been tried yet—a response that reinforces the values these ideas are coming from will sustain the fight for freedom much better than a response that cuts down the idea itself. Who knows? The kooky idea might just work.

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