ART AND CREATION

A society that values the beauty of creation so little is a clear symptom of a society arranged on principles misaligned with life itself. We need look no further than the proliferation of homelessness in the US to see the true worth of human life under capitalism. Art for art’s sake is of little use to capitalism except maybe to provide an illusory form of individuality to satisfy the efficient operation of bureaucracy in “control societies” such as our own.4 Art certainly has its place in capitalist realism, whether in the form of propaganda in more authoritarian, fascist societies or through corporate identification strategies employed by negligent graphic design in neoliberal societies.

Art is powerful, and the more it is restricted, the more restricted are the freedoms of the people. “The society based on production is only productive, not creative,” Camus argues.5 But are we even that? We are the richest nation in the world, but for what? We outsource most of our production to eastern countries where labor is cheaper, if not free, while funding and supplying weapons to countries we know will only use them in the name of fascism. Fisher demonstrates that our societal obsession with production—because it has no particular aim or goal—effects “stagnation and conservatism,” “fear and cynicism,” but not innovation.6 With the economic need for work, most of us are forced to slave away at jobs either ripe for automation or dull to the mind.

I think what people get wrong most often when trying to understand the perspective of anarchists, or even socialists for that matter, is that almost all of them aren’t advocating for the abolition of work. Society as a whole would not be able to give up that much commercial freedom, especially when a good chunk of it helps people feel like themselves—whether it be in finding a personal clothing style or simply having niche interests. Most of us agree that the vast amount of production work can be automated (and some argue that the state should handle such production entirely) and that the work of a just society looks more like individuals chasing after their own passions than just doing what they can because they need to. “Industrial society will only open the way to a new civilization by restoring to the worker the dignity of a creator,” writes Camus in section IV, *Rebellion & Art*. “In other words, by making him apply his interest and his intelligence as much to the work itself as to what it produces.”7 Work, for the rebel, is as much a passion project as it is productive. If we have the privilege to do so, we ought to think about who it is we are benefiting through our work. Modern graphic design is plagued by the studio zombie, reinforcing positive brand identities for corporations that use slave labor and union busting to make more and more of a profit.

Now more than ever, our work has the potential to uplift the spirits of the working class and revolutionize what it means to do work in the first place. Beside making ends meet, work should serve oneself. Work, insofar that it is fulfilling, is ultimately creative at heart. Everyone has the potential to be an artist in their own right, through the pursuit of passion and the expression of compassion in solidarity.

But capitalism bogs us down. It holds our creativity captive and condemns the individual to derive meaning from the proliferation of others, not of themselves. Art becomes something secondary; either invisible to the public or undervalued by limitation of objective worth. What matters then is the drive of the individual. Perhaps they hear a calling deep within their heart, reaching through the mist of a demotivated society. The artist rebels against time, rejecting its complete subjection of their being in the hopes of a greater world. The rebel, by invoking reality, exposes to the world a weakness in the foundation of their lives. Others, through exposure to this reality, begin to dream of a better world like the artist and provide strength in solidarity against the norm. On the basis of values, the artist “makes destiny to measure,”8 transposing the suffering of their absurd life for the beauty of their world. Art is the great liberator—the liberator of self.

The reality of rebellion under capitalism is grim; there are so many forces at play. No one person can influence the tides of revolution. Yet, the sum of individual persons is more powerful than any force yet known. Compassion guides us to founding a better life for everyone by demonstrating a common respect for all beings. No matter what.