

# LETTERS

anti-political communist journal

issue 4.5

(the 2011 theatrical supplement)

## [ORIGINAL INTRODUCTION]

Dearest reader,

To be punched in the stomach again and again. To sit in a room of many and feel entirely alone. To remember, too late, that to understand the language of the other, you must understand the other's form of life, and the same for them to understand you. To sit alone and type because one must sit alone and type. Almost blindly. What I have to do. The consequences of certain refusals. The endless war of posts. And for what?

As an experiment, I am producing a half-issue of Letters while slowly working on a full-size issue #5. This half-issue is also an experiment with content. Rather than focusing on the things I care about, I am writing and compiling writing about practical problems and strategy. Principally, I am opposed to practical and strategic thinking, but occasionally one must bring disorder to one's own perspectives, not only the perspectives of others.

The content of this issue is arranged around several assumptions:

- 1. Pro-revolutionaries play a necessary role in the destruction of capitalism. That is, they have agency to initiate or participate in 'revolutionary events'.*
- 2. There is a linear or dialectical relationship between the destruction of capitalism and the creation of communism.*
- 3. It is possible to communicate communist analysis to a large audience; communist ideas can be popular.*
- 4. Communist analysis is rational and is best expressed as economic or political critique.*
- 5. G-d has nothing to do with it. The omniscient Lord is neither here nor anywhere else.*

In general, I understand these assumptions to be false, but in this half-issue they will be considered true. All five assumptions are connected to each other and feed into each other. While they underpin most pro-revolutionary activity, they are usually left unspoken (and thus uncontested). As an enemy to all of them, I will take up their defense.

This issue of the journal is much uglier than the last three. It is a return to the amateurism and lack of design sense of the first issue, which was moreorless undistributed and unnoticed. Of course, issue 4 was well designed and nice looking, but it has had few readers or reviewers and no serious responses either. I imagine this issue will be met with similar silence. Or maybe not. Who knows!

How does it feel to always disagree with everyone? Sometimes it feels horrible, so I'm going to try agreeing. Just this once I will say yes to the Party (invisible or historical), yes to the movement, yes to the dialectic, yes to agency, yes to war, yes to resistance, yes to politics, yes to strategy, yes to activism, yes to action... and find out where those yeses will take me. Alas, not quite like picking up the bow to slaughter the suitors...

feeling pretty awful today,  
the editor

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(note: this mailing address will change beginning August, 2011)

## [SECOND INTRODUCTION]

Dearest reader,

When I write and compile an issue of this journal, I begin with the introduction. Always. I write it first to give myself an idea of what I want the whole thing to be, not as a final expression of what the whole contains. In this case, what emerged after writing that introduction had almost nothing to do with it. Rather than carry out my experiment and write articles based on those (false) assumptions, I wrote the third act to my play. What I intended to be the "practical issue" turned out to be the same meandering, impractical investigations begun in issues 3 and 4.

So, the preceding 'original introduction' turns out to be the introduction to an imaginary journal, the content of which is unrealized. I invited anyone reading this to succeed where I failed.

I further ask that anyone performing or recording the third act of the play refrain from altering the text for performance and that any readers of this journal refrain from putting the contents onto the internet. I make these requests knowing I have no way of enforcing them, possessing only a naive belief in nihilist communist chivalry (or laziness).

Borges intoned that in time, every poem becomes an elegy. This certainly held true in his case. For us, what fate?

feeling better now,  
the editor

ברך השם – אין מלך  
העולם – יחי המלך

EACH MAN JOINING  
PURPOSE AND BECOMING  
ONE FOOL

Headlong cautious this believe trouble indecent heart fall  
beautiful imagine cut tremble he pilot ascend Siberia  
listless avenge troubador silence fasting finishing knives  
we belittle you optimize they move I fasten you kill  
night the polite that swamp poultry monster belief  
time fluid lungs labyrinth libido tremble had God hand  
task went worst tasks fellow forth froth framing  
between afflatus asperity recidivism complicate naked  
absorb is was will be complain never nothing ours  
evaporate victory fierce war toddler crutches botched  
masticate believe fairy title let go jump tossed in  
dinosaur insane skewfff woman  
democracy compartment fat emperor grapple let's invaluable  
devour sing willow okay teeth window new pleasant nice  
dietal tree and day I humbled bird lawyer listened in  
drumming mine love that clothes implicit house husband bin  
ostentive what is yes priest closed skin jazz actual  
crepuscular inference blood pretend halved behaved like  
declivity speculative charmed contaminated felicity values lie  
Summer poetry thing unexpected epic upstairs explosives in  
swimming cross grow high wronged chairs homeless than  
fate put water breathe shadows robe dark horse drinking  
ended writing murder fought human unkempt ran vine ice  
curtail pith why voice lips sorted up grass ocean vessel of  
speech agrestic man father casual dictionary heroic blonde  
acted filicide charming tassied push crazy sport ancient low  
puerile greatest child labored dirty liver cup growing within  
children imprisoned girl beard down library then unstable box  
coughing green school ineluctable fallacy summing the end

# THE ANARCHIST PANEL DISCUSSION

## [ACT THREE]

*(Lights turn on. Don is the only panelist remaining at the table. Jane Doe is the only audience member sitting in front of him. Panelist and audience member stare at each other for an uncomfortably long time without moving or making a sound before beginning their lines.)*

Don: I am afraid I failed to write the others. They are gone and mad at me or confused or annoyed. The audience is gone too. In the last act a girl in the front row actually fell asleep. But the script continues. There are more lines for me.

Jane Doe: And for me as well.

Don: Yes.

Jane Doe: Are you surprised that everyone left? When you began this, you had to know it would end this way.

Don: I don't know. When I began, I did not know how it would end. I did not plan an ending. I'm not entirely innocent, of course. I knew the script would be a provocation and be disruptive, but those were not my primary goals or intentions. I'm really at a loss for how to communicate with you. I wanted to try something I hadn't tried before. As far as I can tell, it didn't work. I didn't communicate anything.

Jane Doe: So now you're talking to yourself.

Don: Yes. I've realized that is what I was doing all along. It's a bit like desiring something the Other has when the Other does not have it. The "something" is projected onto the Other and only exists as this projection. A lot of my ideas are fundamentally expressions of jealousy or desire for these "somethings": I wish I could just get along without getting myself in trouble; I wish I could have a side to fight for; I wish I could give rousing calls to action without vomiting. And a million other "somethings". I desire and flirt with the pragmatism I see in Others. What I need to remind myself again and again is that these "somethings" are not possessed by the Other at all. I possess these "somethings" but only as projections onto the Other. The people around me are equally incapable of communication. What we can communicate is dragged out from endless conversations with the self. On the other hand, all of this seems more and more like a refusal and fear of the religious

belief that is absolutely necessary.

Jane Doe: Clearly I'm a projection as well.

Don: I'm afraid so.

Jane Doe: If I am a projection, can we talk about the implications of gender here? You are a man creating and defining a woman. I am a male projection of femininity. I know I am interrupting your line of thought about religion, but to talk about religion on an anarchist panel seems hateful to me. I'm more interested in gender, even though I know full well that this interest in gender is itself gendered. It's annoying that the female character has to bring up the subject, that you had to write it this way. But this is how it is written.

Don: I think I'm going to get myself in trouble again if we talk about this.

Jane Doe: I think you underestimate the intelligence of women.

Don: You are probably right.

Jane Doe: Unfortunately, almost everyone underestimates or ignores the intelligence of women.

Don: Last weekend I noticed how almost every woman who spoke would end her statement with a self-deprecating comment about not being able to make sense or not saying anything intelligent. It creates a double-bind for the listener. On the one hand, I can take the self-depreciation seriously, which would mean respecting and honoring what is said and taking it at face value. But to do that would mean accepting that the self-depreciation is an honest self-assessment: that the speaker is, in fact, unintelligent or incapable of expressing herself. On the other hand, if I brush aside or do not listen to the self-depreciation, I am adopting a patronising position that the speaker does not know herself and should not be taken seriously. Both present paradoxes. If I take the first approach, it is a classic liar's paradox: the speaker is honestly saying that she cannot honestly say anything. In the second case, if I disregard what is said and insist that despite the speaker's claims to the contrary she is intelligent and so on, why would I disregard the self-deprecating statement in the first place? If I take her seriously, I must conclude that I should not take her seriously. If I do not take her seriously, I must conclude that I should take her seriously. Around and around again.

Jane Doe: Your logic games miss the point entirely. There are always more than two ways to approach a problem or a situation. It's possible to take a statement seriously without accepting it at face value. The statements "I am not intelligent; I don't know how to communicate my ideas to a group; I'm not making any sense right now" can be valid and cogent emotional expressions or attempts at verbalising an impasse or

difficulty even if they are incorrect or untrue as statements of fact.

Don: Nevertheless, a problem remains.

Jane Doe: But the problem is not special or specific to women or gender. It is the same problem you brought up earlier about language in general.

Don: The same problem that emerges constantly.

Jane Doe: It seems unavoidable because of the gulf between language and communication. Language is a logical system, but communication is illogical. Language is a system of propositions, but there are no propositions which, in any absolute sense, are sublime, important, or trivial. All propositions exist on the same level. Our languages used as we use them, or perhaps even as anyone could possibly use them, are vessels capable only of containing and conveying meaning and sense, natural meaning and sense. Communication, if it is anything, is supernatural, illogical, whatever euphemism you want to use. Communication exists outside of facts, but our words will only express facts; as a teacup will only hold a teacup of water and if I were to pour out a gallon over it...

Don: But we can communicate! We're communicating now despite all that. These words are expressing something other than facts. The teacup will only hold a teacup of water, but here is sea held entirely in words.

Jane Doe: There must be another language between or beyond words that ties them together, a bridge between words and communication.

Don: And languages between or beyond that language. A metalanguage for every metalanguage. On and on and on forever.

Jane Doe: Another impasse.

Don: Maybe not. I think there has to be some way of approaching the problem of language. Perhaps theology. No theory of language makes sense without G-d. Maimonides understood Hebrew to be a sacred language not because of its connection to the Jewish people but due to its need for euphemism when talking about base human or animal acts like sex or defecation. I would add that Hebrew can only express G-d through euphemism as well. A different, though not necessarily contradictory, explanation of Hebrew's sacredness is found in the Tanya. The Alter Rebbe talks about the word Rakiyah (רָקִיָּה) itself being an essential part of creation: "these very words and letters stand firmly forever within the firmament of heaven and are forever found within all the heavens to give them life... For if the letters were to depart even for an instant, G-d forbid, and return to their source, all the heavens would become naught and absolute nothingness, and it would be as though they had never existed at all." I know that to posit Hebrew as a sacred

language delivered by G-d and to construct a theory of language from that position requires ignoring or denying the findings of historical and scientific linguistics.

Jane Doe: This religious stuff seems willfully ignorant or irrational. Why have you decided to always return to this idiosyncratic readings of Judaism? What does it have to do with what we were talking about?

Don: Kafka began studying Hebrew in 1921. He was dying and sought a miracle cure. He learned lists of words: "tuberculosis," "to languish," "sorrow," "affliction," "genius," "pestilence," "belt", but none of them cleared his lungs. I like to think my half turn from Marx to Moses was born of less mortal but still immediate dilemma that emerged in my study of agency and the reception of ideas. All problems are ultimately problems of communication (and thus language), and Judaism is a theology of language, born out of the greatest transformation in the history of our species: the Neolithic revolution. The speculative realists talk about the failure of humanity to fully grapple with the Copernican realization; the Tanakh and the subsequent exegeses were and are an attempt by humanity - through G-d - to grapple with the implications of the Neolithic revolution. While certainly not the only attempt at grappling with the Neolithic, I find Talmudic Judaism to be the most compelling.

Jane Doe: Your conflation of primitivism, Marxism, and Judaism might be the most obscurantist ideology in history.

Don: You are not the first person who has accused me of that.

Jane Doe: Can we talk about gender again?

Don: Okay. One of the reasons I'm afraid I will get myself in trouble is that I've decided to be a gender essentialist and, in a rough way, sort of pro-patriarchy. I have never seen or experienced patriarchy, so pro-patriarchy isn't really the right phrase, but I don't know what else to call it. I've come to understand feminism and queer theory as fundamentally homophobic. The problem is that I've only talked about all this with maybe five people. They've all been receptive, though. Nobody has gotten mad at me yet.

Jane Doe: There is so much to unpack in what you just said. What do you mean by gender essentialist?

Don: I think there is an ontological or biological center to gender, even if that center is obscured or veiled by social reproduction and conditioning. The idea that humans are totally malleable by their conditions seems like pure capitalist ideology and does not square with my experiences. I'm also researching how maleness and femaleness are actually expressions of relations to guilt and empathy, but I will save that for another time.



Jane Doe: And the pro-patriarchy bit? That sounds like empty provocation.

Don: Well, I should say first of all that the world I live in is not patriarchal in any real sense of the word. Even strictly misogynist places like Saudi Arabia are not fully patriarchal in the way that, for example, ancient Athens was. The dividing line between misogynist and patriarchal or male dominated society is the absence and repression of homosexuality. Male homosexuality is dominant in patriarchal society but very much not dominant in the world today. Now, of course, the actual content of sexuality in Athens has been obscured by history, but there is a lot of evidence that male homosexuality enjoyed a privileged place in social life, which makes sense when one considers the limited or non-existent role women played in public life. The relationship to the phallus was different as well; remember Alcibiades' great heresy was his role, real or imagined, in the dephallusing of the herms. My utopian vision of gender is not an androgynous, genderless world but a return to Athens, with set and structured gender roles to choose from. Maybe one wants to be a woman for a year, take leave of public life to weave and raise children, then the following year be a man. The openness and specificity of the gender roles would allow revolt to be authentically outside those roles, rather than constantly expanding the corpus of rules and roles, as gender revolt does now. I realize that my Athenian utopia has nothing to do with Athens as a historical reality, whatever 'historical reality' even means. As provocation I'm tempted to further give a defense of halakhic understandings of menstruation and the role of the mikveh, but I've probably lost too many friends with what I've said already.

Jane Doe: Luckily for you, I am the only one in the room. Your friends stopped listening a long time ago.

Don: In that case, I'll press onward to even murkier waters: my disavowal and refutation of feminism.

Jane Doe: As if you had a feminism to disavow...

Don: Yes, this might be a letting go of what I never had, but it feels like a disavowal.

Jane Doe: I'm not sure what you want me to say.

Don: You don't have to say anything. I'm just going to keep talking. A moment ago I mentioned thinking about maleness and femaleness as expressions of relations to empathy and guilt. That idea is part of my wider investigation of friendship and ethics and the fact that friendship and ethics appear to be entirely different things. Ethics deals with the encounter with the stranger or the Other and is characterized by empathy and guilt (that is, femaleness). Friendship, on the other hand, is the encounter with the one who is not a stranger or an Other: the familiar, the friend. Friendship exists without ethics, without empathy or guilt. It is rare, so rare, because a friendship ceases to be a friendship the moment doubt arises and ethical questions

appear, the moment at which the familiar becomes Other. Feminism, as a social project, is an attempt to totalise ethics, to make every encounter and decision ethical. This totalising project necessarily involves the rejection of friendship, and, in an immediate practical sense, the denial of male homosexuality. Gay men are the only social body in history who developed a mass sexual culture rooted in friendship rather than ethics. Heterosexual intercourse is inherently ethical due to the possibility of reproduction, and aethical lesbian sexuality has always been deeply marginalized by feminist hegemony in lesbian social bodies (a reason why aethical lesbian sexuality often existed in gay male spaces). In the 1960's and 70's, feminism failed to impose sexual ethics on gay men. Soon after, what feminism failed to do was realized by the AIDS epidemic.

*(Five minutes of silence. Lights fade to black. The sound of the audience returning.)*

[END ACT 3]

# BRIEF SELECTION FROM LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN'S LECTURE ON ETHICS

"Thus in ethical and religious language we seem constantly to be using similes. But a simile must be the simile for something. And if I can describe a fact by means of a simile I must also be able to drop the simile and to describe the facts without it. Now in our case as soon as we try to drop the simile and simply to state the facts which stand behind it, we find that there are no such facts. And so, what at first appeared to be simile now seems to be mere nonsense.

...

I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just to go beyond the world and that is to say beyond significant language. My whole tendency and, I believe, the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless. Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it."

# CLASSIFIED ADS

## *Seeking Troubadour:*

A musical individual is sought who is prepared to undertake the conversion, for performance and record, of our archive into song. Recognisable qualifications and previous experience unnecessary, but a willingness to accept external formal constraints is required. The successful applicant will look to develop musical approaches that are open to both irreverent and sacred registers. This live-in role is long-term to life, comparable to that of Alan-a-Dale, Cacophonix or the common or garden Village Bard. Our singer will be expected to formally publish ten songs from the archives per year. The title of bard is honorary and no remuneration is available.

Ballads will be composed according to the disciplines and themes listed below:

### *The 7 Disciplines of Communist Retreat*

Chivalry  
Exegesis  
Eschatology  
Theology  
Comedy  
Not going to War  
Psychoanalysis

### *13 Themes in a Communist Approach*

Enumerating losses  
Contemplation of capture  
Defences against optimism  
Releases from belief  
Identities rejecting traditions  
Recordings without redemption  
Problems refusing solutions  
Complexity unpicking reduction  
Theory without acts  
Meanings played against signs  
Persons repudiating subjects  
Therapy before justice

...

### *Seeking Aristocratic Patron:*

We require \$50,000 annually for the full pursuit of our research and publications. In return, we offer only the eternal happiness and satisfaction of knowing you chose the right sect.

### *Seeking Playwright:*

A talented and compassionate playwright is needed to explore our ill-fated relationship with the founder of our Salon. The play must be written in the style of Corneille or Aeschylus (but not both at once).

### *Seeking Professor:*

The founding of the Imaginary Academy requires the hiring of an imaginary faculty. All applications must enclose biography and proposed curriculum. Interviews will be conducted only in the case of a chance encounter.

### *Seeking Primitivist:*

The critique of technology must return to anarchist dialogue.

For all classified ads, please apply in writing to *editor(at)lettersjournal.org*.

**If the working class  
bury their heads,  
that's good.**

**ברך השם**

**They might see the  
root of things.**