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The Mosaic or An Appeal to Life

Dear Comrades,

I've thought about killing myself. It was a passive suicidality; it crossed my mind. There was never a plan or a genuine intention to do it. The mere thought of it, the way it kept floating and dancing in my head, terrified me. I don't think I've ever told anyone except for that one quiet night when I was talking to my best friend over the phone. She had left to Ohio for college. When she asked me what was going on; why I was so quiet and distant, I felt like a dam within me broke. All the heavy grief that had calcified at the bottom of my stomach; the pressure that had built up in my ears; the itching pain and tears that swelled in my throat culminated into quiet sobs over a facetime screen and the simple phrase: "I feel sad."

Perhaps the 20mg Prozac dose wasn't enough to fortify the dam that day. Or maybe, something is terribly wrong with how we live in the 21st century.

During my early childhood, I didn't play with my father. He worked from 10 am-12 am. My mother worked tirelessly; till her soul damn near left her while dealing with the struggles of being a working-class Latina in a country she had never seen or grown up in; in a country that was foreign to her; a country that didn't love her. This country did not love my parents. In fact, it hated them. Sentenced them to forever remain a part of the underclass: forgotten, undesirable, shoved aside. The days they had off were spent in a tense balance that could only be created by exhaustion. The worst part of it all is that they've accepted it; they believe that they're getting what they deserve. Once, I remember receiving an award in elementary school. I was so proud, I was desperate to make my

parents happy; to let them forget about their stresses. When I walked on the stage in the auditorium to receive it, I scanned the back of the room. Scanning for *any* familiar face by the walls; a face beaming back at me, perhaps holding a camera to capture the moment. I never found that face. I didn't dare blame my parents. Both of them work two jobs to keep us afloat. I have seen the wrinkles of worry, regret, and shame sink into their faces year after year after year. Each new wrinkle that forms and spreads across their face and hands is yet another gash to my heart and lungs; a bloody mess of guilt and helplessness.

The other day I read *Ain't Burned all the Bright* by Jason Reynolds and Jason Griffin with my 8-year-old sister and talked to her about what she's seen in the news and the world for the last two years during the Pandemic. At first, she was defensive, frustrated, and even angry that I had even thought to mention it to her as if she knew or felt anything. Then, she let up a little. Until I finally talked to her about the unsheltered folk that lives under the bridge that she's definitely seen; the roars and fires of the unheard that she's heard over a screen. When I asked her how she felt, her eyes became bloodshot and tears started rolling down her chubby cheeks: "I feel scared," she said., "I feel sad." She hugged me, not letting go for 15 minutes. She cried because she felt scared, and I cried because I felt sad.

You might be confused at this point. Let me make it clear, I am not trauma-dumping. I am not trying to appeal to your sympathy. I am appealing to justice. I am appealing to life. I am telling truth. Some of you probably share similar experiences to me but suffer silently. That's not a coincidence. We are ruled by systems, rules, processes, bureaucracies, norms, power, and authority. Ruled by people who can make decisions that we have no say in. Powerful people with authority who we vastly outnumber but whose power remains because we remain alone and divided and they-- collectivized and organized. The only thing we do by remaining silent, apathetic, and ashamed of our lives is give more power to these systems that give us heartache. Colonial capitalism and

individualism is a disease that has caused us to lead astray from our roots. We have strayed away from our ancestors, our families, and our communities: seldom do people live off of a set of values, beliefs, healthy traditions, and customs gently and beautifully passed down from generation to generation like a flower. Instead, we live in a hyperreal society, an America where the only way we engage with others is through stuff. Buying stuff. Selling stuff. Showing off your stuff. Getting the most expensive and useless stuff. We express forgiveness by buying *Dior*. We express gratitude by buying a *Hallmark* card. We express love by buying flowers from the finest *Stop & Shop* around. Yes, indeed, it appears that our humanity and love now only exist in the buying and selling of stocks, in the exploitation of workers, and in increasing bank accounts. “If you want to buy without looking at the price, you must work without looking at the clock,” they say. Community has ceased to exist: young mothers sit by the window side, nursing their child, alone, while looking out to a world that seems perpetually gray, lonely, and scary. A worker clocks out and heads directly home, exhausted from the day. They lay in bed shaking with dread, for they know they are bound to repeat the cycle the next day. A child stands in front of a crowded auditorium, scanning the back of the room for a familiar face. Even in an overflowing auditorium, the sense of being alone echoes and rings.

In the United States, community only exists as a thought; a concept read out in a dictionary; an ideal philosophized in the academy but never put into practice. It’s up to us to put it into practice, to build a community from scratch.

The need for communal life is evidently clear. “Diseases” and “Deaths of Despair,” coined by Angus Deaton and Anne Case in *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*, describes the fatalities caused by addiction and suicide. They saw that amidst falling union membership, religious affiliation, and an overall decline of communal culture, deaths of despair rose and continue to rise in the United States. Carol Hanisch popularized the term “the personal is political.” In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon said that “the oppressed will always believe the worst about themselves.”

338,289,857 people (and counting) use antidepressants to get through their day (World Population Review).

Comrades.

Do I need to go on?

Should I continue to throw statistics and quotes at you; statistics that you already know; words you've already read and probably glossed over? You see what I see. Maybe you've learned to bury the feelings of disgust and sadness when you witness injustice; the isolation and alienation you feel, even when you're surrounded by other people. Don't you feel what I feel, comrade? Don't you ache and yearn for that lost feeling of warmth? Don't you long for that lost feeling of love?

Comrades, we have so much potential together. Let us stop the bleeding of our youth; the specters of despair that swarm our lives like water. We are so much more than our worst moments, we are more than our ignorance, and we are more than our tears. I don't say this to make you feel nice. I say this to stoke the fires of your heart that cry out for love. Appeals to love and sorrow are empty without action; nothing more than words on paper, sounds from the mouth that ultimately means nothing.

My friend Greg brought up a great quote from *Fight Club*: "this generation has no great war; our great war is a spiritual one."

Winning the spiritual war means taking it upon ourselves to reconstruct the world; to nurture the world that struggles to be born. It will be led by the melancholic, yet hopeful, students and starry-eyed youth. Take pride in this, comrades! Let go of your defense mechanisms, your apathy, your disinterest. Nothing will get better if we continue to shut our blinds to the outside world. You may instinctually say: "but what can *I* do? I can't do anything myself, what's the point?" Here's the honest response: you are right. You can't do anything by yourself, and it would be arrogant of you to think that you could save the world all by yourself. But that's not what I'm imploring you to do. You

don't need to take on the weight of humanity alone. At what point in history have we deviated so much from our primitive gravitation towards community that we've come to believe that? Reconstruction and cultural life is like a fire. To create a bigger, warmer fire; the type of fire that hugs you; you need people. People to gather wood and twigs, people to supervise and stoke the flame, and people whose job it is to simply sit and enjoy it. The same thing applies in the real world. We must engage in what I call the *Mosaic of Reconstruction*. People to create and manage boring spreadsheets, people who make coffee and bake cookies, people who teach and kindle delight in the bright minds of children, people who check up on the neighbors, offer them a beer and a chat, and cultural workers and artists whose job it is, as Toni Cade Bambara says, is to "make the Revolution irresistible."

Unite! Unite! Unite! Unite in labor and tenant unions, student organizations, artist cooperatives, and neighborhood collectives; refrain from burying your misery! Work on your corner of the Mosaic, let us work together to make it a beautiful one; a gorgeous quilt of life because *life* is sacred, comrades. It's beautiful and it's only lived once and we cannot let it slip from our tired hands. Let us unite, create, and mobilize. Let us be the midwife to a new world where we not only *live* but *thrive*. Where we wake up every day, walk onto the street, and engage in communion with one another. Where we share our labor and art; our heart; our hope and worries; our visions and questions. Let's create a world where parents don't have to over-exhaust themselves to make it, a world where children will always see their parents standing at the back of the auditorium, rejuvenated and clapping with pride. A place where 8-year-olds feel excited about the possibilities and potentials of the outside, rather than fear and apprehension. Some people say that all of us are God (Weir). The people who you hug and love are God. The child who was shot and killed a couple of days ago is God. The woman who you locked eyes with and smiled at is God. The infant who

peers intently at the trees around them with a smile is God. Your bus driver is God. Your friend, the one that seems to always say something that makes you laugh is God.

You are God.

I'm not religious, but there is something beautiful in that belief; in the belief that all of us, each and every single one of us, are remarkable and beautiful in our own way-- in a supernatural and incomprehensible way.

Don't you feel what I feel, comrade? Don't you yearn and ache for love, to be recognized for your beauty as a human being? Something is terribly wrong with the way we live, but I am hopeful and ready to create a new way of living. Aren't you, comrade?

Don't you feel what I feel?

This is an appeal to life.

Are you ready, Comrade? Or, better yet, in the spirit of remaining consistent with my arguments and pleas, are you ready my neighbor, my dearest friend; gentle compatriot?

Are you ready to answer the appeal to life, my beloved?

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