

Libertarian Culture, The Invention of Existences

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The composer asks: “Existing, what is the purpose?” . . . and concludes: “Only life’s material was that delicate.” The song is called *Cajuína*¹ and it permeates the gatherings, celebrations, and parties of Nu-Sol (Nucleus of Libertarian Sociability)², where we routinely pair it with a second ‘folk’ tune, *Cuitelinho*.³ These songs make us strong: they stir a lively sense of anarchy inscribed in poetry, music, dance, meals, aphorisms, and disagreements. Then there are the words of Chilean novelist Roberto Bolaño: “In a thousand years nothing will be left of all that’s been written this century. They’ll read loose sentences, traces of lost women, fragments of motionless children” (Bolaño, 2021, p. 32-33). Or the Polish writer Olga Tokarczuk: “To me, of course, the river paid no attention, caring only for itself, those changing, roving waters into which – as I later learned – you can never step twice. (...) Standing there on the embankment, staring into the current, I realized that, in spite of all the risks involved, a thing in motion will always be better than a thing at rest; that change will always be a nobler thing than permanence; that that which is static will degenerate and decay, turn to ash.” (Tokarczuk, 2021, p. 13) Neither composers nor writers identify explicitly as anarchists, but they are among those exceptional artists who break with traditional canons in a bid to energize life as such. In this way art affirms life by upending “anarchy’s” equation with chaos, violence, and misrule or with a dogmatic commitment to past formulations.

Anti-politics

Anarchy/anarchism (s) is an anti-politics, whether framed as classi-

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cal, historical, or post-anarchist. In a nutshell, anarchists live and coexist. They attract and push away. They avoid absolute truths but, being human, can slip into idealizations, embrace dreams of harmony, or succumb to consoling utopias. Most fundamentally, as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (2011), underlines, anarchists provoke permanent war against centralizing authorities.

Anarchists do not seek to govern anyone, nor to impose a singular 'truth' based on a theory or supposed consensus encompassing a totality or fictive unanimity. It was anarchists, after all, who, in the course of the nineteenth century, called into question the idea of a sovereign, Godly or otherwise, imbued with a benevolent societal mission. An internalized will toward self-subjection requires a sovereign who exercises punishments and rewards; whose imperatives become commands; who demands obedience; who perpetuates relationships of submission. The government of subjects by subjects in State-based systems is accomplished through the perpetuation of hierarchy founded on a centralized authority that embodies sovereignty.

Anarchists fight against the centralizing tendencies of hierarchy as such, whereas heterodox Marxists claiming to be libertarians persist with a style of politics that nourishes it. Anarchists know that power is not limited to the legitimacy of authority. To speak of legitimacy is to aspire toward consensus concerning the governance of some over others. Legitimacy can be mixed, but it will never be provisional; it is deployed to sustain relationships based on centralizing hierarchies. The great anarchist challenge is to escape from the networks and flows of power that premise continuity on the centrality of hierarchy disguised as such or combined with horizontal relations. For these and other reasons, anarchists are advised to avoid establishing close relationships with any left-wing political tendencies. The 'left' is a political designation dating to the era of the first French Republic (1792-1804): the term is anchored in representational structures of governance in which one party or tendency asserts sovereignty over other competing parties or tendencies. If there is a so-called 'dialectical spiral' figuring in leftist politics, it is the constant reformulation of this style of governance in Marxist regimes, where factions jostle for

domination within a hegemonic state-party structure.

Proudhon, in his debate with Karl Marx, made it clear that the ‘Hegelian synthesis’ foundational to “historical materialism” – thesis, antithesis, synthesis -- was nothing more than an abstract configuration presupposing sovereignty over others as a constantly replicating process. It has always been clear to some anarchists that Mikhail Bakunin’s (2003) adherence to Marx’s theory of historical progression through dialectically driven social change opened the door to negotiations with Marxists who call themselves libertarians: this has led to bland impasses experienced to this day. Has any Marxist come forward to engage in a respectful way with anarchist critiques of Marx’s conception of historical materialism? Reflect on how consistently Marxists of all persuasions have attacked the anarchist heterotopia of abolishing property and the State. Who is interested in maintaining this one-way relationship, apart from a scattering of academics in the United States and Europe? We can create anarchist heterotopias (Passetti, 2002) in the here-and-now: we can transform customs, dissolve hierarchies, and develop the dynamic *problematizations* (Passetti, 2016) that generate a libertarian culture (Passetti and Augusto, 2008). In the process, we can nurture anarchist associations of free unique friendships permeating the workplace. Anarchists are anti-political. They constitute a vital force that refuses monocultures of unification, a force that strengthens societal diversity. Anarchism rejects the universalizing leftist ideal of social transformation through State-based “revolutions” and the ideology of “democracy” which the United States projects as the universal form of governance in our era of ecopolitics (Passetti et. al., 2019).

against the sovereign

Examining the societal relations of government-generating “subjects” -- that is, ascending and descending power relations, including how subjects govern themselves – a timely opportunity arises to consider the persistence, reform, or abolition of sovereign power. Liberals and the legal-political philosophers are aware of how sovereign power generates and benefits property regimes (private, mixed, and state-based) and their continuity. Contemporary structures of sover-

eign power can be traced in Europe back to the peace of Westphalia (1648) and John Locke's *The Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1690). The art of governing, the modern way of leadership from above, of sovereignty, is theoretically based on reason decoupled from religious imperatives (which is not to say such governance is free from religion). Sovereignty over others is circular: it turns in on itself, and there is no way to destroy sovereignty through the exercise of such sovereignty. We have, according to Foucault (Foucault, 1979), the governmentalization of the State in a drive to master power and control over captive subjects designated as "citizens" (this involves ever intensifying knowledge about the population derived from political economy, statistics, political science, and security monitoring, with specific apparatuses of governance armed with access to peculiar knowledge banks). Those concerned with the legalities of "human rights" are marooned in this system of subservience to sovereign power. Proudhon summarized government as a relationship in which a sovereign entity exercises instruments of control from birth to death by inscribing its values on us in a bid to internalize them:

To be governed is to be watched, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, regulated, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, checked, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right nor the wisdom nor the virtue to do so. To be governed is to be at every operation, at every transaction noted, registered, counted, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, prevented, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be place[d] under contribution, drilled, fleeced, exploited, monopolized, extorted from, squeezed, hoaxed, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, vilified, harassed, hunted down, abused, clubbed, disarmed, bound, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and to crown all, mocked, ridiculed,

derided, outraged, dishonored. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality. (Proudhon, 2003, p. 8)

Demolishing the overpowering sovereign, the calcifying societal practices of centralizing authorities, depends on the invention of new customs, of a libertarian culture. Ruptures and transformations in everyday life are what matter. It is necessary, before anything else, to destroy 'the sovereign in oneself' -- the idea of the sovereign, the desire for a sovereign.

Libertarian culture is not founded on identities, nor is it made and reproduced as a closed entity, autonomous from the society it seeks to transform. It gains larger and more intense dimensions according to the events which it inevitably engages with. Libertarian culture is no safe haven, much less a contemporary version of the Epicurean 'garden of delights'. Its most immediate struggle involves creating new ways of being, new social spaces of freedom, and their temporary consolidation as a disruptive force. Thus, it values educational processes for children and young people that are free from fear; free from the use of force to impose order; free from antagonistic competition; free from the imposition of societal views that stifle self-directed learning. It affirms libertarian relations by subjecting 'rational certainties' to free intuition. Nurturing a 'warrior attitude' in education, it anarchizes anarchism, as envisaged by Max Stirner in *The Ego and Its Own*. Anarchism promotes parrhesia as a path of learning (Foucault, 2011). A practitioner of parrhesia never restricts themselves to one source of knowledge because their challenging spirit of inquiry grinds against hierarchies of authority. Anarchism exercises problematizations; it cultivates the intransigence of radicalism through which practices of freedom can spread and affirm themselves. In short, libertarian culture is not a goal for the future, but an urgency in the present. Nothing is more indispensable than affirming practices of freedom that dissolve authorities *into nothing*.

Notes

¹ *Cajuína* by Caetano Veloso. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-nIMtLqI7Y>

² <https://www.nu-sol.org>

³ *Cuitelinho*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sANzim7D_oI

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