

Building Houses of Being

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According to one literary legend, the critic Vissarion Belinsky, while hosting guests, did not allow them to start dinner until the debate about the existence of God reached a critical point.

In his youth, the father of the democratic trend in artistic journalism of the Russian Empire usually visited the Bakunin family's estate in Pryamukhino, where over tea and during long walks in the grove adjacent to the estate, he absorbed from the retellings of the young idealist Mikhail Bakunin the latest concepts of German philosophers. The informal Pryamukhino circle of writers and intellectuals - whose history gained fame in Europe largely thanks to the epic staging of the British playwright Tom Stoppard's "The Coast of Utopia" - focused its attention on the most complex ontological questions, which may seem to pragmatists too far removed from the current agenda. Reflecting on the nature of the sensual, intellectual and aesthetic coherence of life, they quietly and imperceptibly paved the way for political projects in areas that have no direct relation to politics. It was impossible to talk about politics openly, let alone engage in it in the empire. Nevertheless, starting in the 1830s, on the pages of literary and critical journals and in hazy theological treatises, the utopian break of the Great Revolution with the old imperial order was being prepared. Without these abstract reflections on the role of art, transcendence and dialectics in interpersonal relationships, it is difficult to imagine those few years of uprisings, liberal-democratic reforms and experiments in self-government in countries under the yoke of Moscow-Petersburg Tsarism, which marked the twentieth century.

Anarchist philosophy, which encompassed not only politics but many other areas of humanitarian knowledge, was formed in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia on two plateaus: preserving grassroots folk culture

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and the tasks of modernization. Within the populist movement, anarchists participated in the intellectual reformation of the communal peasant system into a political and economic socialist system. As romantics, they defended the intellectual and civil independence of the individual from the colonial state. In the wake of the positivist turn, they sought to understand the “silent majority,” which, despite its alienation from the cultural achievements of modernity, according to the conviction of young revolutionaries, needed to be learned from. All this activity was conducted underground - and in order to manifest itself in public discourse, which was under the constant control of Tsarist censors, it employed the guise of literary works, theological treatises, open letters, criticism, or “strictly scientific” ethnographic reports.

The tension that arose between the desire to uncover the liberating potential in the peasant tradition and the complexities associated with the transition to an industrial mode of production gave rise to a unique practice of anarchist thinking, full of remarkable paradoxes and (sometimes tragic) contradictions.

In the anarchist writings of Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian philosophers, we find a commitment to fact as a positive basis for reflection, and at the same time, a desire to escape the control of rationality and structural predetermination. There is faith in progress, in the transcendent logic of the development of cultural and historical processes, while simultaneously celebrating the private, unique, and local, not in a hurry to take the place prescribed by European history on the train of modernization. Utopian dreams of a new world, described in invented languages in cosmogonic terms, coexist with existential heroic pessimism, celebrating the lack of rootedness of man in anything, his rebellious multifacetedness, and the tragedy of the experience of existence as such, which no revolution can overcome. These epistemological and axiological collisions acquired the greatest drama in the territory of language. Logocentrism, which is one of the foundations of Orthodox culture, still serves as the most important means of individual and social subjectification. Anarchist intellectuals, even when they turned to the word as a means of capturing those patterns that, in their opinion, more accurately and

correctly represented reality, often found themselves on the other side of multiple normative restrictions, in the grip of which the public space was located. Thanks to this, in a culture where it was easy to end up in hard labor for an incautiously expressed opinion, epistemological temporary autonomous zones were formed for future social experiments closed to prying eyes.

The modern state that emerged during the reign of Ivan IV had no formal limitations on its actions. It drew its legitimacy from Byzantine religious ideas about the elevating “symphony” of secular authorities, the church, and the estate society. The idea of a “special path” of the Russian state (which in our time has been revived in the concepts of the “empire of positive action” and the “Russian world,” inheriting the theories of “internal colonization” and “flourishing diversity”) justified all forms of political repression, the monopolistic exploitation of land and the population working on it, the practice of violent expropriations, as well as a huge corpus of class privileges, the guilt for which several generations of radicals tried to atone for. The imperial government did not shirk from any methods in its quest to eliminate the nascent opposition. The practices of political assassinations and the agonizing physical destruction of opponents were adopted and perfected by the Bolsheviks,¹ and from them—by the modern Putinist statocracy. The uncompromising and radical denial of statehood as a form of social life, most vividly expressed in the anarchism of Bakunin and Kropotkin, was due to the fact that the imperial Russian power spoke only one language—the language of force. And with such a concentration of resources and repressive power, a direct confrontation with it remained impossible for a long time.

The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 led to the destruction of the anarchist movement in the countries that were previously part of the Russian empire, interrupting the development of liberation thought for almost 70 years. The movement was deprived of its roots, the ability to maintain tradition and communicate with other anarchists around the world. This loss of connection, the loss of fundamental logics, the wound left in memory, still requires a lot of work from us to restore, educate and heal. After the fall of the communist regime, it became very important for us to master as deeply as possible the

languages in which people spoke and dreamed openly in other places. We are still trying to understand what we have experienced, return to the basics and find in culture those guiding threads that will reactivate our utopian imagination as a creative tool of political practice. The “apogee of groundlessness” of the dictatorship deprived our “house of being” of everything that makes a house a home.

Today, when the Russian state has been waging a predatory imperialist war against the people of Ukraine for the fourth year, the ideological heirs of the Bolsheviks are speaking out in Europe against providing military assistance to the victim of aggression and are conducting a campaign in their media and social networks to discredit Ukrainian civil society, which turned out to be not sufficiently “class-conscious,” according to the standards of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Anarchist activists from Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus are once again forced to create underground communication channels to exchange resources, knowledge, and contacts in order to resist the Russian war machine and protect from destruction what is so dear to each of us: life, culture, friendship, freedom. From the very beginning of the war, anarchist mutual aid groups have been supporting the Ukrainian front, engaging in sabotage and partisan warfare inside Russia, protect political prisoners and secretly evacuating those being persecuted, opening independent spaces for communication and intellectual exchange in emigration, undermining the ideological barriers built by the authorities with solidarity.

In my opinion, the historical commitment to 1917 as an “event of truth” should remain in the past. Our current situation is much closer to that of those very Pryamukhino idealist revolutionaries who were forced to act without hoping for success, but believing that without their desperate actions, the darkness of power could not be dispelled. Like them, we continue to unearth the stories of our martyrs, deepening our tragic worldview. We seek contacts with Others on multiple ontological plateaus, even when we simply watch movies or shoot them. We try to understand what we can offer to overcome the crisis of industrial urbanism, and at the same time we study the experience of grassroots resistance to occupation and mutual aid practices in the context of military operations.

The examples of anarchist thought presented in this issue of ADCS are nothing more than heteroglossia, interrupting the insistent orders of the authorities to surrender and lay down their arms.

This is an act of protecting those territories that are still inaccessible to any aggressor, no matter how powerful he may be.

Notes

1 In the course of the Russian Revolution “Bolshevik” became shorthand for the Russian Communist Party/government. The designation dates to a split during the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party’s Second Congress (1903), which was convened in exile (first Brussels, then London). At issue was whether the party be restricted to professional revolutionaries (Lenin’s proposal) or opened up to a broad membership. Lenin’s proposal was outvoted, but his faction did secure majorities in the party’s central committee and on the editorial board of the party newspaper, *Iskra*. On this fallacious basis, Lenin dubbed his own faction the “Bolsheviks” (majority) and labelled his opponents “Mensheviks” (minority). In 1912, Lenin and his followers split from the larger “Menshevik”-led Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party and formed the sectarian Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (Bolshevik). Having seized state power, Lenin rebranded his faction as the “Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)” in March 1918.