

2+2=7

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Winter 2019

“Don’t ever forget that in every revolution there is three quarters of imagination and only one quarter of reality, or put differently – because I see you frowning while reading these lines – life, my friend, is always more expansive than doctrine; life will never fit into a doctrine, even if it is as universal as our anarchist doctrine.” - Mikhail Bakunin

Maybe this jab – life, my friend is always *more expansive than doctrine* – gains intensity when made clear that who pronounced it is no other than the bold insurgent and anarchist agitator from great Russia. Today many vilify his writings without batting an eyelid; too old, too philosophical. Often referred because in his ripe years he called for the destruction of public order and the unleashing of the evil passions. But it’s willingly ignored that in his early years he was above all a big fan of rationalism, having declared moreover – still clinging to Hegel – that “truth is not an abstraction nor the result of a personal whim, but only the most logical expression of the principles that live and act within the masses” or that “all that is natural is logic and all that is logic is realised or has to be realised in the real world; in nature itself and in its subsequent development: the natural history of human society.” So yes, that disclosure slipped into a letter to a friend, has something potent and precious.

At the moment of the passing of power from religious obscurantism to the first conquests of so-called secular thought, the responsibility of all the wrongs of society was blamed on the faith in God and they were under the illusion that humankind could do without belief. That was irrespective of the warning of Stirner who would later show how God can very well pack up and move from heaven to earth. Faith in God became faith in Science, and thereby in Reason. This might have had considerable consequences – and partly positive – humans have nevertheless maintained their need to *believe* in something they consider capable of averting the uncertain, the undetermined. This belief that they are looking for in faith, or in reason (and the logic that flows from it), betrays in both cases the need for a certainty – one dethroning the other once it is proven unfounded. It didn’t take long before Christian messianism was replaced by Marxist messianism, spreading a new belief in the ranks of the exploited. A new hope is constructed, of the revolution of work. That path that theoretically would pass first through the organisation of the productive forces, then through the violent expropriation of the bosses, to end in the construction of a society relieved of class and exploitation.

Condensed to broad brush strokes we could say that also the anarchist movement has been – in large part and over a long period – certain that history had a direction, that society develops

towards Progress and that the role of revolutionaries was to either support evolution or force the pace. A certain anarchism, the “reasoning” anarchism, developed as a reading grid of the world and society, pretending to understand and explain the whole of terrestrial phenomena and their multiple interactions. We could have a hunch from the importance that certain scientific men had over the anarchist movement in their time (for example Kropotkin or Élisée Reclus). It also allows some today to promote anarchism bragging about its *objectivity*, to debate it with complete peace of mind, to speak about it while making abstraction of its practical realisations and its viscosity. All in all totally disembodied ideas: a brain activity, without the emotional turmoil. Going back to the past, operating a sort of mix between historical materialism and determinism (every cause has its effect and every effect is the product of a cause), certain comrades thought in all sincerity that anarchism –by means of elaboration – could be a key capable of rationally guiding their action and that the question of revolution was thus, partly, a case of logic.

Thus, it has been several centuries now that Science tries to assimilate the Universe. Today the research into terrains such as the alleged “artificial intelligence” seeks to reduce humans to a set of algorithms and lines of code. In the same process, the rationality of the machine – which became our daily fate – levels out bit by bit all that is absurd, unexpected, fantastic, passionate, irrational in each of us. A real conquest (with its share of battles) is carried out under our eyes and inside us, seeking to banish risk, the unforeseen, adventure. As our existences are augmented, optimised, assisted, ordered and enlisted in a space-time made up of geographical coordinates and chronometrical readings, saturated with prostheses, devices, norms, symbols, signs and codes; life, fundamentally exuberant and excessive, struggling to find a space-time to experiment that is its own, is absent.

Science and its armed wing, technology, if they might have acquired a power without precedent in the history of human societies, are nonetheless not able to give a sense to our life. On the contrary. The first has been for ages at the service of deadly projects, and its outcomes eliminate, reduce or degrade the conditions of the perpetuation of life itself; as for the second, after having undermined its sense, eroded, deformed, clouded, reduced, falsified, it is driving us, gradually but certainly, to a generalised loss of sense.

That’s why among other things we reject science and technology, and that we scorn them. And together with these, that condition and structure our existences, we reject the rules and presumptions that are at the root, till questioning logic (meaning the whole of rules that determine the work of reason) on which this world is based, and on which also a big majority of its (even fierce) adversaries are based.

This ambitious claim is nothing new. Remember that almost one century ago, one of the driving forces of the surrealist movement – considered as one of the most subversive movements of the century – appealed to pass “the head, then an arm, through the bars thus breaking away from logic, that is, the most hated of prisons.” Think also about that occult poet, who during the same period, had this dialogue with the psychiatrist of the asylum where he was imprisoned:

“- Yes, but look where it [automatic writing] got you. At a point of such unsociability that you cannot get along with your fellows and that you are the prisoner of your images, of your dreams.

- I prefer my spiritual, anguished, hopeless ways over the logical and reasonable ways of intelligence.

- So you don’t want to heal, to become a normal, balanced man, master of your emotions and impressions?

- I loathe that kind of men. I desire to be possessed – even if I am undermined by it in a terrible way – by my thought, my desire and my dream.”

Think finally of this other poet, Ramses Younane, who in 1940 saw that bourgeois society was confronted with a crisis more important than the question of consumption, of subsistence (the problem of bread), namely “a crisis of thirsty and starving hearts, of imagination gone mad; a crisis of poetry, of joy and folly; a crisis of movement, of expansion and opening. A crisis of life.” (An observation that an accursed poet wouldn’t have objected to, who almost a century before and in the middle of the industrial revolution, already warned that the universal ruin – or universal progress, *whatever the name* – would manifest itself in “the depreciation of the hearts.”) According to Younane, in the past the bourgeoisie laboured to replace blind faith with rational logic. The glorification of rationality has bit by bit shaped life in a technological mechanical system allowing neither the twists of imagination nor the pleasure of a free spirit. From then on, the instincts and profound feelings that naturally tend to seek pleasure, were exploited and deformed by the commercial battle, by the competitive struggle or by the military hymns. His conclusion was clear: “The values of bourgeois rationalism are incapable of curing us of the crisis of bourgeois civilisation. If we want to survive and save ourselves, we have to rebel against these values, against rationalism and go beyond – without going back to a humble and servile belief, but rather by confirming the right of the free and rebellious spirit to overcome the limits of reason and the chains of faith.”

In an anarchist perspective, thus of total liberation, I think, as a lot of comrades do, that the destruction of the structures of domination should go hand in hand with the subversion of the existing social relations. Social relations that are at the same time the product and the necessary condition, and the other way around. But I’m as well firmly convinced that we should each, individually, fight against the absolutism of reason and the empire of logic that have been instilled, shaped by centuries of culture and civilisation. On the one hand, it’s a matter of stopping thinking that logic could, in an absolute way, establish the standards of rationality (not more than the rules of non-reason, meaning irrationality). On the other hand, it’s a matter of fighting against the dominant logic, that we have internalised without our knowledge and from which freeing ourselves is not an easy task. That logic that proves to be deeply useful for the perpetuation of power and the existing order that dominates us all and that we reproduce because it grants the majority of people who accept or at least put up with the conditions in which they live, the idea that they reason “well”. That logic that forces them into “reasonable” choices. It’s that logic that, in the course of years, wore down this life that as a child we imagined full of marvels, or at least full of possibilities, till imprisoning it in its image: an existence narrowed by routine, compromise, calculations and constraints.

What are the standards of that dominant logic, pillar of the existing order?

Accommodation and gradualism are the cornerstone of this logic, personified as much by progressives and reformists as by conservatives. The result is they can only formulate *partial modifications* of reality, thus allowing this organisation of the world – based in domination and exploitation – to survive and carry on ruling in exchange for small progressive adjustments. From this perspective we can understand that the classical dichotomy progressive/conservative is a fake opposition: the first try to preserve the old order of things by attaching some devout ornaments, the second try to maintain the order of things through change. On top of that is the reasonable despotism of *one thing at a time*, that feeds and supports the source of voluntary

servitude and assures, thanks to politics, the perpetuation of the existence of masters and slave, more sustainable than the use of force from which the world is nonetheless not spared. Facing this, fighting against the dominant logic means tending towards an “irrational” refusal, *to oppose to the partial and gradual modification the total transformation*, through a destruction that chooses to annihilate rather than going in search of a cure for the incurable.

It is undeniable that dominant logic is inseparable from the reproduction of the organisation of the world. Just as it is undeniable that this logic is based on the *acceptance of what is*, and that it can not at all be recuperated by an anarchist. Because all revolt draws its force and its vibrancy from the refusal of only the things that “are”, from the rejection of the only possibility of what “is”. It is from there that anarchists strive to trace and to travel paths that we can show and incite to take, to reach by trespassing upon what supposedly “is not” even upon what supposedly “cannot be”. And that should strengthen us, because it is both a challenge for ourselves and the first charge in our fight against the dominant logic.

We should thus go beyond the rules of the existent, beyond what is, beyond the rationality in force, to seek a sense for our lives. And this sense, can we seek it in a “counter-logic”, a freeing logic instead of the logic of submission, a “freer” logic? Or should we seek in the magma of suggestions that life offers us, these suggestions that we try to immediately ignore, suppress or repulse?

“Logic may indeed be unshakeable, but it cannot withstand someone who is determined to live.”
- Franz Kafka

The sense we’re searching for our life cannot be given by our existence in this world based on the rules of the dominant logic. Because existence is based on reduction: reduction of life to the material needs of survival, reduction to the vital minimum of our desires, expectations, dreams, instincts, reduction of life to something measurable, quantifiable.

Existence is made of reasoning and “common sense”, small and sparse calculations make us give up on the essential (the adventure, the passion, the dream) to be certain of the mediocre, comfort, order, security. Life – and I say this fully conscious of the lightness of this remark – is expansive, is movement, energy, attraction and drive, is diversity and creativity, and through this, is chaotic. Life is application, essentially, is a matter of self-determination, of discovery, of self-realisation, is an opening to joy. There is in it something upsetting, that consists the opposition to the “course of events” and to the established order, natural or social, familial or divine.

Existence is but a flattened event, without depth and deprived of sense, that finds its *raison d’être* in the preservation and the repeating of models. It is evaluated through duration and quantity, while the criteria of life are intensity and quality. Rather than giving importance to what life is made from only on the base of the dominant logic, conventions and values imposed by society, we should give it to life when it emerges at the surface of our being, consider and receive it as an occurrence, nervous because it is the one and only that we possess, but insanely excited because it can reveal itself as full of marvels. Careful thus, that it can express at best its potentials.

“There has always been a basic flaw in my nature; a love of the fantastic, of extraordinary and unheard-of adventure, of undertakings with boundless horizons the outcome of which no one can predict. In an ordinary and calm existence, I suffocated, I felt out of place. Most men seek tranquillity and consider it the highest good; in me, however, it produces only despair. My spirit is in constant turmoil, demanding action, movement, and life.” - Mikhail Bakunin

What is then this need for action, movement and life? Wouldn’t it be a sign of... vitality?! The anarchist revolution, such as I can conceive of, is as well as a struggle for the annihilation

of exploitation and domination and the subversion of the existing social relations, also the abundance and liberation of this vitality, today weighed down. This vitality, that can manifest itself in thousand and one ways, we can see it in all its magnificence and charged with its wild force in revolt, this balance of awareness and sensitivity, of head and arms. And it's also in this vitality that attack and destruction (that come so often back in, among others, the speech of anarchists) have their roots, not in logic. Our anarchist tension springs from our vitality, from this feeling that life that simmers in us has to emerge. And vice versa, we feel alive because we revolt and because we are able for a moment to leave the terrain of words, thought and reflection, of the rational explanation and the rational construction of our existences, to act. Of course, from the viewpoint of the dominant logic this is illogical, senseless, incomprehensible, even mad. That there are logical foundations for destruction, that it is possible to argue in its favour and to debate it only by reasoning, to reflect on its different aspects – that is still undeniable and necessary. But if we wait until we dispose of a logical faultless and detailed system to start acting, then we will stay prisoners for eternity and be paralysed by shortcomings and uncertainties – because such a system doesn't exist, it cannot exist. Our "personal logic" is not capable of responding in an adequate manner to the madness that is our destructive tension to liberty. Neither do we have complete, detailed and ready-to-use "logics" to propose to those who understand and suffer from the distance that separates their existence from their life, and thus decide to fight.

If we fight for a radically different world, we should also fight to form and circulate ways of *reasoning differently*. We're living in an age where the means subjugate the individuals, rather than the other way round that would consist in adopting the means in function of the ends. And it is the same reversal – where the instrument becomes master – that happened with reason. Moreover, this instrument with which we thought to be able to read, to understand the world and to emancipate ourselves, didn't keep its promises and never did what it pretended to do at the dawn of its first realisations. As a first step we should break away from that deceitful and harmful idea that it's only up to reason (and the logic it produces) to determine our choices and the orientations we want to give to our life. To seize with both hands this idea that our life is a space crossed by countless forces in conflict and to consider of greatest importance the will, the conscience, the desire, the attraction, the intuition, the sense of daring, the dream, the curiosity, the sensitivity, the taste (not only for adventure or discovery, but more prosaic everything that gives pleasure to our senses), the joy in the effort. It shouldn't be something that controls us, keeps us in the boundaries of the reasonable, but something that allows us to orient ourselves beyond this cornered patch. It should also not be the leash on our most generous thoughts and impulses, but on the contrary guide us when we free ourselves from the yoke of realism and we achieve to *think dangerously*: meaning, amongst other things, to not systematically hold in suspicion the ends (and the necessary projects to achieve them) that are not in line, or that exceed, the immediate possibilities and the available means. The dichotomy between that what supposedly is a matter of the reasonable and what pertains to insanity is ready to be thrown out from the moment we become the adventurers of our Idea, determined to create and follow our own path.

"Dreams! Always dreams! And the more ambitious and delicate is the soul, the more its dreams bear it away from possibility. Each man carries in himself his dose of natural opium, incessantly secreted and renewed, and, from birth to death, how many hours can we count that are filled by positive enjoyment, by successful and decisive action? Shall we ever live, shall we ever pass into this image which my soul has painted, this image which resembles you?" - Baudelaire

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