

Counter-theses on Walter Benjamin, the messianic tradition, and its apostate descendants

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We would have preferred to stay out of the recent Internet bickering, but we saw that Walter Benjamin's name got dragged into the mix, so we decided to say something. "Ten Theses on Anti-(((Tiqqunism)))" is a disingenuous defense of an ideological tendency that the authors stridently insist does not exist. It finally commits to print a strategy of deflection long practiced by a North American milieu which denies its existence in the face of the countless comrades who know it all too well. If the term "Tiqqunism" is objectionable, let's speak instead of lineage. The authors of "Ten Theses" acknowledge that the Tiqqun journal, *The Coming Insurrection*, and *The Call* (L'appel) came out of a specific milieu in France which considered Benjamin a "major reference." We all know that there is a North American communist milieu which, in turn, has historically looked to the French milieu as its major reference. It's unfortunate that neither group heeded the advice in *The Coming Insurrection*: "Beware of all existing social milieus, and above all, don't become one." Others have already and no doubt will continue to critique the authoritarian and counter-revolutionary political positions that people from the American milieu (i.e. *Inhabit, Ill Will Editions*, the *Vitalist International*, the theoretical wing of *Woodbine*, etc.) have publicly and privately taken. Our concern here is with the legacy of the Benjaminian and messianic tradition, within which we situate ourselves directly and without mediation. We write this to our strange and woefully misguided cousins, for as Giorgio Agamben (whose students included several editors of *Tiqqun*) noted in *Stasis*, one of the defining characteristics of civil war is that "the factional bond moves into the household to the same extent to which the family bond is estranged in the faction" (15). All those who invoke Benjamin as an ancestor must be prepared to give a full citation of their actions on the day of the Last Judgment.

1. "In every epoch, the attempt must be made to deliver tradition anew from the conformism which is on the point of overwhelming it. For the Messiah arrives not merely as the Redeemer; he also arrives as the vanquisher of the Anti-Christ." (VI)

The authors of "Ten Theses" point out a seeming contradiction in the position that they attribute to their critics: "Every struggle that emerges, from the George Floyd Uprising to mass ecological struggles taking place in France, to the struggle against Cop City, is simultaneously

the result of an organic upwelling of resistance in which no organized force could or should play a decisive role, and in danger of being coopted by these so-called “Tiqunists.”

From a magical and animist perspective, it is indeed important to avoid giving more power to people or thought-forms than they actually have. We remind our friends of this point too. The American milieu descended from L’appel (call them what you will) does not in reality constitute an invisible vanguard with any appreciable power, but the problem lies precisely in the fact that many of them have grandiose delusions of becoming one. One can critique would-be vanguards without overinflating their influence and certainly without being structurally antisemitic. If the authors of “Ten Theses” are in fact “some anarchists,” we would expect that they do not disagree with these two assertions and are willing to critique their own friends when they see vanguardist aspirations arise.

The anarchist tradition struggles in every epoch with its own tendencies towards conformism, too. With some exceptions, however, many of the Americans who draw inspiration from L’appel consider themselves to have actively split from the anarchist tradition, which they consider to be too “subcultural” (read: too queer, too Black, too ethical). They publicly use anti-anarchist rhetoric (“the police are the real anarchists”) and privately delight in this (“the anarchists don’t like us very much”). Nonetheless, in reality, they merely reinvent the wheel in their little corner of the anarchist galaxy when it comes to infrastructural projects such as the social center or the land project. More importantly, they inevitably rely upon the participation of anarchists, and the widespread use of our methods, in any social struggle in which they take part, such as Stop Cop City. Without those in the forest and those attacking from coast to coast, there’d be nothing to manage (sorry, compose!) Their fetishization of “opacity” and “a low barrier to entry” (a dogwhistle apologism for the mainstream American class, race, and gender dynamics reproduced in their milieu) is in fact an abject capitulation to conformism.

Maurice Blanchot critiqued earlier practitioners of this entirely unoriginal strategy in *The Unavowable Community* in 1983:

“Hence the ambiguity of the committees that multiplied, pretending to organize disorganization while respecting the latter, and that were not supposed to distinguish themselves from the “anonymous and innumerable crowd, from the people spontaneously demonstrating.” Thus the actionless action-committee’s difficulty of being, or that of the circle of friends who disavowed their previous friendship in order to call upon friendship (camaraderie without preliminaries) vehiculated by the requirement of being there, not as a person or subject, but as the demonstrators of a movement fraternally anonymous and impersonal.”

“Friends who disavowed their previous friendship in order to call upon friendship,” indeed.

2. “The conformism which has dwelt within social democracy from the very beginning rests not merely on its political tactics, but also on its economic conceptions. It is a fundamental cause of the later collapse. There is nothing which has corrupted the German working-class so much as the opinion that they were swimming with the tide.” (XI)

From Woodbine tweeting about Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez coming to their food pantry on October 28, 2020 and hosting a socialist State Senate candidate on April 5, 2022 to Hugh Farrell gushing about how the strategy of composition “allows lawsuits to coexist with regular clashes with police at the edge of the forest,” many of the American would-be-Sabbateans are in such a rush to apostasize themselves in the name of “opacity” and “composition” that they have preemptively bypassed the messianic tradition in favor of immediately jumping into secular politics and participation (however cynical) within social democracy. While they are not historical deter-

minists in the same way that the vulgar Marxists whom Benjamin critiqued are, their voluntarist fixation on “building power” ends up taking on a linear and progressivist dimension of its own. They have lost sight of the view of time in which “every second was the narrow gate, through which the Messiah could enter.” (B) Theirs is the position of despair in the face of defeat, masked as “the opinion that they were swimming with the tide” of history. By contrast, “the historical materialist thus moves as far away from this as measurably possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.” (VII)

3. “The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘emergency situation’ in which we live is the rule. We must arrive at a concept of history which corresponds to this. Then it will become clear that the task before us is the introduction of a real state of emergency; and our position in the struggle against Fascism will thereby improve.” (VIII)

From the New York L’appel-fanboys glorifying the Nazi-infested Maidan putsch and publishing a text entitled “Nomos of the Earth” (named after the book of the same title by Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt), to the Vitalist International and Ill Will Editions defending the former’s use of the Gadsden flag while calling for de-escalation mere hours after Michael Reinhoehl shot a Patriot Prayer fascist, to the Northwest milieu taking an avowedly neutral position on confronting the esoteric Hitlerism of Sadie and Exile and the communist cadre Ultra “learning from” and training with Jack Donovan of Wolves of Vinland, members of the American lineage of L’appel have failed to introduce a real state of emergency while flirting with third positionism and “unholy alliances” with fascists. This makes the accusation of antisemitism towards any critique of their tendency all the more disingenuous and manipulative, unless the authors are actually confronting these reactionary positions within themselves and among their friends. It is not the American appeliste milieu’s theoretical Jewishness which bothers us, but its evidenced and undeniable Whiteness. Hopefully it bothers you too.

Insofar as the editors of *Tiqun* included students of Agamben, they and their ideological descendants have inherited Agamben’s deeply unfortunate misreading of Benjamin as being in some sort of archetypal “unholy alliance” with Carl Schmitt. Alexander Ghedi Weheliye critiques Agamben’s mistranslation and appropriation of Benjamin in *Habeas Viscus*. This forced reading glosses over the violence of “colonialism, racial slavery, [and] indigenous genocide” because they are part of the “normal legal order” under white supremacy:

“The problem lies not so much in Agamben’s linking of Schmitt’s and Benjamin’s ideas, but rather in the alacrity with which he postulates direct historical connections between these two thinkers. These philological canards become indicative of Agamben’s overall appropriation of Benjamin, which has at its goal the annexing — by any means necessary — of Benjamin into the mainstream at the cost of disregarding Benjamin’s liminal status in Germany during his lifetime; it also downplays both the Marxist elements, as fractured as they may have been, and those aspects regarding the revolutionary potentiality of the oppressed in Benjamin’s philosophy. As a result, the homo sacer’s social death appears as the only feature of his or her subjectivity. Taking in other instantiations of mere life such as colonialism, racial slavery, or indigenous genocide opens up a sociopolitical sphere in which different modalities of life and death, power and oppression, pain and pleasure, inclusion and exclusion form a continuum that embody the hidden and not-so-veiled matrices of contemporary sovereignty.”

While Agamben’s shortcoming is theoretical, American appelistes have applied it in far worse directions in practice.

4. “[Social democracy] contented itself with assigning the working-class the role of the savior of future generations. It thereby severed the sinews of its greatest power. Through this schooling the class forgot its hate as much as its spirit of sacrifice. For both nourish themselves on the picture of enslaved forebears, not on the ideal of the emancipated heirs.” (XII)

The authors of “Ten Theses” claim that “There is no debate between ‘insurrectionalism’ and ‘Tiqqunism.’ There are only those who seek to make the truth of the global uprisings the new common sense.” The “new common sense” is what Benjamin scornfully called “the ideal of the emancipated heirs.” By contrast, the insurrectionary anarchist concept of “affinity” comes from Latin *affinitas*, signifying non-biological kinship. Wherever anarchists seem to share revolutionary ancestors in common with someone else, we must examine the similarities and differences in how we actually embody and transmit those lineages. If there is a genuine shared commitment to liberation and autonomy, affinity is possible, but that affinity can only be grown through shared experience in struggle. However, if there proves to be no basis for trust due to ongoing patterns of authoritarian and manipulative behavior, we will not forget Benjamin’s words about not forgetting hate. We reject an empty and homogeneous unity in the name of “the new common sense.” As we’ve seen, this deliberately vague phrase can and has been interpreted to include both social democrats and fascists in its composition.

We agree with the authors of “Ten Theses” that “it is the height of hubris for anyone to believe that they, and they alone, have unlocked the true key to liberation.” We invite them to look into the Mirror themselves and especially to hold it up to those they consider to be their friends. We’ve looked at ourselves in that Mirror, confronted our own reflections (distorted and otherwise), and affirmed what we have seen. Following Benjamin’s friends in *Acéphale*, we “assume the function of destruction and decomposition, but as fulfillment and not as negation of being” and “fight to decompose and exclude all communities – whether the national, socialist, communist, or churchly – other than [the] universal community.” As another comrade once said, “the destituent urge is also a destructive urge.” We will see you in the here-and-now, in the tiger’s leap into the open sky of history, in the blow of the tiger’s claw that rips and does not make distinctions.

We only needed four.

– some other anarchists

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