

Why Only an Anarchist Can Bereave

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“[F]irst you sacrifice everything for the (Communist) cause, then you are rejected by (the bearers of) this Cause itself, finding yourself in a kind of empty space with nothing, no point of identification, to hold on to.” – Žižek

My claim, borrowed in its modified form from George Bataille, is that sacrifice sometimes occurs where servitude is assumed. Bataille lamented the fact that sacrifice often appears today in the guise of servitude. Within the domain of politics, for example, there is certainly a servitude assumed in all forms of appearing in public and this thereby renders impossible the ability to discern within the visual field that which itself limits the appearance, namely the aperture. Bataille's claim was that the aperture promises the foundation for that which appears while nonetheless hiding itself, as foundation, from view. A similar claim is of course made in the field of Lacanian psychoanalysis. We should follow Jacques-Alain Miller in distinguishing lack (i.e., the aperture itself, as that which is missing from the appearance) from hole (i.e., appearance itself as missing). In the shift from lack toward hole one also shifts from the psychoanalytical domain of desire toward that of drive. The Lacanian move from desire toward drive is often accomplished by a traversal whereby the subject intensively identifies with his or her fantasies so as to see them at their conclusion or end-point. The subject thereby gives up on the expectation of a non-dominating response from the master, and, in return for this victory over the master, the subject's *jouissance* becomes his own. However, at the point of drive one reaches a fork in the road: shall the subject take pleasure in all of the repeated failures that structure his or her *jouissance*, simply taking them as his own, or, more radically, shall the subject take the leap into affirming something new. The latter, a veritable break in the circuits of drive, requires the properly Lacanian solution to move from the zero-point of drive toward something new, it is “a will to create from zero, a will to begin again” (Lacan).

At this point we have reached the truly radical innovation of anarchist political philosophy over all other forms of philosophy, including Marxism; in all of anarchisms' hysterical desires (direct actions, cop baiting, and so on) and repeated circuits of enjoyed failures (the Haymarket riot, the Spanish Revolution, and so on), anarchism is marked by an inversion of politics. By this I mean that anarchism, as a specific political framework, permits its subjects to truly “get off” on their inability to construct new political orders. Anarchists thereby enjoy, on behalf of the state. But here I maintain that something much more inspiring and revolutionary is at play in the

anarchist framework: my claim is that it is only anarchism that has the ethical grounds required to bring to fruition what Alain Badiou calls “an accepted authority.” That is, while Marxism and other political philosophies must argue, as Badiou does, that an accepted authority is required because it is on behalf of the people (a universal claim made on behalf of generic humanity), anarchism, as an anti-political project at its heart, has the unique ability to argue that an accepted authority is absolutely not required (a generic claim made on behalf of the universal humanity).

Does this move, on behalf of the anarchists, not unintentionally open up the space required to ensure that only those who absolutely believe in the universality of the uprising – namely, those who are willing to be ex-communicated from their immediate community in order to sustain their fidelity into an historical community – will continue this work through the universality of the political organization? In other words, in the realm of politics, only an anarchist is capable of breaking the circuits of drive to such an extent that he deprives himself of everything – his friends, his ideological ground, his family, his belief in god, and even, finally, his desire for a master – for the sake of that one beautiful Idea. This is how we should read the nihilist (and young lover of Mikhail Bakunin) Sergey Nechayev’s first thesis in “The Revolutionary Catechism”:

The revolutionary is a doomed man. He has no personal interests, no business affairs, no emotions, no attachments, no property, and no name. Everything in him is wholly absorbed in the single thought and the single passion for revolution.

We should therefore argue, contra the post-anarchism of Saul Newman, against in-voluntary servitude. What we in fact need is voluntary servitude: we need militants willing to carry out their dangerous ideas as far as they can go, and be willing to be ex-communicated, killed, mocked, and so on, for that one beautiful Idea. Only an anarchist can make possible the possibility of a truly historical riot.

Is it any wonder that anarchists have not only claimed responsibility for the uprisings in Athens but also of the Occupy Movement in the United States? In the movement from riot to organization, one also necessarily moves from riot to insurrection (to borrow a phrase from Alfredo Bonanno). The immediate riot, being largely irrational, pre-political, and nihilistic, offers the rupture itself and without it the possibility of the possibility of a historical riot would not be available in the first place; and neither would any organization which springs forth from its source. The historical riot of historical community occurs only when the subject of the immediate riot has found something for which it is worth sacrificing the experiences of his immediate community. This is the coming-into-consciousness of the immediate riot and reawakening of History. If the anarchists are correct to argue that immediate riots tend to spring from anarchistic tactics and sensibilities then could we not also suggest that participating non-anarchists become, for those brief moments of time, practising anarchists? For Badiou, this movement is the opening up of an affirmation or novelty through the figure of the militant hero. For the anarchist, this is an opening up of the space within the old as a negation with the figure of the martyr, or more properly called, the “sell-out”. Does this not naturally follow from Badiou’s claim that “[i]n [the] appearance at least [everything is democratic]: seasoned militants know how to prepare for an assembly by a prior closed meeting that will in fact remain secret.” The secret – the silence – of the militant is perhaps the figure of the anti-democratic but nonetheless insurrectional subject who realizes that there is no pure place outside of power from which one could forever mount an attack against capitalism. These were the dreams of yesterday’s anarchisms. Today’s anarchisms realize that a certain amount of complicity with power is the very condition of politics.

Sacrifice sometimes occurs where servitude is assumed because the insurrectional militant is typically presumed to be a part of the apparatuses of power; and so, shouldn't he be viewed with intense suspicion? There is no view, no angle of perspective, which will allow another to see through the appearance. Badiou teaches us that to follow through on one's anarchism requires the dedication of a militant willing to go all of the way – from hysterical resentment, through to Nihilistic Stirnerianism (“All Things are Nothing to Me”) and, finally, to Nechayev's active nihilism which calls for revolutionaries to “continue to live [inside of power] only in order to destroy [it] more speedily.” What I mean here is that Badiou's call for a transition from pre-political historical riots to political organization has no safeguards, and safeguards are essential for the dangerous seductions of power and the state. One might claim that the withering away of the state is only possible when an anarchist is at the wheel – and yet, that would never happen. Badiou claims that “[a] negative emotion cannot replace the affirmative Idea and its organization, any more than a nihilistic riot can claim to be a politics.” Can we not argue, then, that an anti-politics is persistently carried along with every genuine political gesture, and, in some cases, quite wilfully and truly? For, if there is one thing about the aesthetics of the lumpen, it is that they always speak their truth: home is where the heart is. The lumpen, figure of the anarchist revolutionary subject par excellence, carries the history of his families oppression on the bottom of his shoe like a determined piece of chewed up bubble gum. And does this not affirm the Lacanian dictum that the real is that which always returns to its place? Anarchisms' political agent is the lumpen because it is the lumpen who can migrate into the middle class and yet bring with him the memory of from where he came (i.e., his parents who gave him everything to support him while they themselves survived off of bread).

Badiou's book provides us with a number of points of departure for rethinking anarchist political philosophy today: (a) we have the unfolding of three different pre-political moments in the life of a riot, including: (1) immediate riot, (2) latent riot, and (3) historical riot; (b) we have the movement away from the forms of meta-ethical universalism that have been under attack by various schools of thought in the contemporary period, but this movement occurs without recourse to meta-ethical relativism – we thus have a paradoxical form of universalism; (c) a radical critique and suspicion of the state and all forms of politics that work in and through the state (including the new social movement paradigm and its associated ‘politics of demand’); (d) a radical critique of the Westernization of the outcomes of popular riots (in the form of imposed democracies, and so on); (e) a rejection of Western social movements' claims to prefigure a new society in the shell of the old, a rejection of claims to have an alternative, and; (f) a celebration of the in-existent who make themselves existent (have we no better figure here than the lumpen?).

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