



THE ANARCHIST TURN

EDITED BY JACOB BLUMENFELD,
CHIARA BOTTICI AND SIMON CRITCHLEY

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INTRODUCTION

Simon Critchley

The contributions that make up this book are derived from papers presented at a conference called ‘The Anarchist Turn’, which took place at the New School for Social Research in New York on May 5–6, 2011. The three editors of this book – myself, Jacob Blumenfeld and Chiara Bottici – were also the conference organizers. I have left this Introduction in almost exactly the form in which it was initially composed because the multiplicity of events that we could summarize with the word OCCUPY that erupted in the autumn of 2011 would have required separate and sustained analysis and revision. Let’s just say that some of the hope that Jacob, Chiara and the other contributors to ‘The Anarchist Turn’ expressed in their talks, which the reader will find in the chapters of this book, found unanticipated and glorious expression in events later in the year. And that was only the beginning.

I would like to begin with a text co-written by the three people who collaborated on the organization of ‘The Anarchist Turn’. Collaboration, or working together, is the key here. It is the very ethos of the anarchism that we intend to both discuss and try to enact with this conference. The three of us have worked together closely over the past year in order to make something happen that might simply be interesting, maybe even worthwhile. But we do not know what is going to happen. This could be rubbish. This could be a disaster. We hope not, but you never know.

For a long time, the word ‘anarchist’ has been used as an insult. This is because, at least since Hobbes and maybe for a lot longer, the concept of anarchy has been extended from its etymological meaning (absence of centralized government) to that of pure disorder – the idea being that, without a sovereign, with a sovereign state, the life of individuals can only be miserable, brutish and short. This shift in the meaning of anarchy was certainly useful in the ideological discourse of justification of

modern sovereign states, but it does not provide an understanding of what anarchy might be, particularly when those states have either died, or shriveled, or transformed, or become an imperium that desperately tries to shore up its authority through a politics of the external and internal enemy.

However, in the last decade, maybe longer, this caricature of anarchy and anarchism has begun to crack. What we a little too easily call 'globalization' and the social movements it spawned seem to have proven what anarchists have long been advocating: an anarchical order is not just desirable, but also feasible, practicable and enactable. This has led to a revitalized interest in the subterranean anarchist tradition and the understanding of anarchy as collective self-organization without centralized authority. But the ban on 'anarchism' has not yet been lifted.

(Blumenfeld, Bottici and Critchley, 2011)

The aim of this conference is to help lift that ban and argue for an 'anarchist turn' in politics and in our thinking of the political. We want to discuss anarchism with specific reference to political philosophy in its many historical and geographical variants, but also in relation to other disciplines, like politics, anthropology (where anarchism has had a long influence), economics, history, sociology, and of course geography (why are so many anarchists geographers, cartographers or explorers, like Kropotkin? We need new maps). Our approach is, first, transdisciplinary; second, it also wants to put theory and praxis into some sort of communication, and that is why we have the work of academics here alongside activists, and many of the academics are activists. By bringing together academics and activists – activists in some case past and in other cases very present – this conference will assess the nature and effectiveness of anarchist politics in our times.

Of all the political visions of another social order or another way of conceiving and practising social relations, anarchism has proved the most condemned, and yet the most resilient. Outlawed, repudiated, ridiculed by liberals, by neoliberals, but most of all, of course, by Marxists (from the expulsion of the anarchists from the meeting of the International in the Hague in 1872 onwards), the anarchist idea simply will not die.

There are multiple motivations behind this conference, including the facts that anarchism is still scoffed at and laughed at by political philosophers, that it still has a minor academic presence in relation to liberalism or Marxism or Frankfurt School critical theory (which

have always done such good academic business), that it consists of many thinkers – like Stirner, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta – who are not read as widely as they should be. I could go on.

But there are other motivations. We might recall that this is the ‘Arendt–Schürmann Conference in Political Philosophy’ at the New School for Social Research. For obvious and perhaps understandable reasons, people tend to prioritize the work of Hannah Arendt over Reiner Schürmann. Now, although Arendt was no particular friend of anarchism, her work might be harnessed for a thinking-through of the politics of the street, as Judith Butler recently attempted (2011). But it is perhaps the political dimension of Schürmann’s work that should be emphasized here, in particular *Le principe d’anarchie: Heidegger et la question de l’agir* (1982), a nicely oxymoronic title that was mysteriously rendered into English as *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From principles to anarchy* (1987). This was a hugely important book when I was a graduate student in France in the 1980s. My teacher, Dominique Janicaud, was a close friend of Reiner’s, and it was through him that I first read Schürmann. Indeed, as readers of Miguel Abensour’s decisively important book, *La démocratie contre l’état* (1997), which has finally been published as *Democracy Against the State* (2011), will know, Abensour tries to bring together Arendtian and Schurmannian themes in a defence of what the very young Marx called ‘true democracy’ in 1843. True democracy, or what Abensour also calls ‘insurgent democracy’, reactivates the anarchic impulse and might allow us to imagine a deconstitution of the political field based on the primacy of an *arche* (a first principle, a supreme power, an act of sovereignty or dominion), and the cultivation of what we might call an anarchic meta-politics.

There is also a very local and nicely ironic motivation for this conference. A little – in fact very little – over two years ago, in April 2009, 65 Fifth Avenue, the former home of the New School for Social Research, was occupied for a second time, by a small number of students who were protesting peacefully for improved study conditions and for accountability and transparency from the school administration – wild anarchist claims, as you can tell. Someone, some say the former president of the New School (although he denied it), dialled operation COBRA and hundreds of police descended on the building with dogs, hostage negotiators, the whole paranoid security apparatus of the Homeland. Students were chased down the street, and force was used against them; many were

arrested. Then, of course, lies were told about what had happened. A long, rancorous situation ensued. For those of us who came to work at the New School for Social Research because of its radical traditions of intellectual freedom, activism, disobedience and protest – and the New School is an institution born out of protest at a war and established as a place of refuge for those threatened by war – this was a deeply troubling and painful period. I remember being in 65 Fifth Avenue during the first occupation in December 2008 and being given some photocopied texts by *Tiqqun* to read, which came out last year in *Introduction to Civil War* (2010). They had just been translated as part of the occupation itself. I am really happy that some of the accused of Tarnac are here with us today.

Chiara, Jacob and I spent a lot of time thinking about whom we might invite to contribute, and we were delighted and flattered that so many people accepted our invitation. In addition to the people I have already mentioned, we are immensely grateful for the presence of Laura Corradi, Andrej Grubačić, Alberto Toscano, Ben Morea and Cindy Milstein. I would also like to thank Jacob and Chiara themselves, Todd May, Cinzia Arruzza, Banu Bargu, Stephen Duncombe, Stephanie Wakefield, Mitchell Verter and Judith Butler.

Anarchism is not so much a grand unified theory of revolution based on a socio-economic metaphysics and a philosophy of history, as a moral conviction, an ethical disposition that finds expression in practice and as practice. Anarchism is a different way of conceiving and enacting social relations between people, where they are not defined by the authority of the state, the law and the police, but by free agreement between them. Its aspiration was perhaps best described by the English poet Shelley in ‘Prometheus unbound’:

Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
 Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless
 Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
 Over himself; just, gentle, wise ...

(Shelley, 1820–2010, pp. 3.4.194–7)

Because of my distaste for the macho mannerism and fake virility of contemporary neo-Leninism – I name no names – I personally favour the rather quiet and indeed crappy, small-scale and rather English version of anarchism that you find in writers like Colin Ward and George Woodcock, where anarchism begins with planting vegetables and designing playgrounds for kids. Arguably, this tradition goes back to 1381, the Peasants’ Revolt and the Lollards. The only extant

fragment from John Ball, preserved and probably embellished by chroniclers, is worth recalling here:

Things cannot go well in England, nor ever will, until all goods are held in common, and until there will be neither serfs nor gentlemen, and we shall be equal. For what reason have they, whom we call lords, got the best of us? How did they deserve it? Why do they keep us in bondage? If we all descended from one father and one mother, Adam and Eve, how can they assert or prove that they are more masters than ourselves? Except perhaps that they make us work and produce for them to spend!

(Ball, as cited in Froissart, 1968, pp. 212–13)

Things did not go well in England, sadly.

I have been combing through my books for an articulation, if not a definition, of anarchism with which we might begin. The best example I know is from Errico Malatesta, from his wonderful pamphlet *Anarchy* from 1891. He writes:

Abolition of government does not and cannot signify destruction of the social bond. Quite the opposite: the cooperation which today is forced and which is today directly beneficial to a few, will be free, voluntary and direct, working to the advantage of all and will be all the more intense and effective for that.

... Out of the free collaboration of everyone, thanks to the spontaneous combination of men in accordance with their needs and sympathies, from the bottom up, from the simple to the complex, starting from the most immediate interests and working towards the most general, there will arise a social organization, the goal of which will be the greatest well-being and fullest freedom of all Such a society of free human beings, such a society of friends, is Anarchy.

(Malatesta, 1891)

We hope something of that friendship, something of that social bond, will be in evidence in the next couple of days.

Simon Critchley
May 5, 2011

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For their editorial assistance in the preparation of this book, we are grateful to Elizabeth Suergiu and Jacob Parkinson.

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PART I

SUBVERTING BOUNDARIES

1

BLACK AND RED: THE FREEDOM OF EQUALS

Chiara Bottici

Today the immense development of production, the growth of those requirements which can only be satisfied by the participation of large numbers of people in all countries, the means of communication, with travel becoming a commonplace, science, literature, businesses and even wars, all have drawn mankind into an ever tighter single body whose constituent parts, united among themselves, can only find fulfilment and freedom to develop through the wellbeing of the other constituent parts as well as of the whole.

(Malatesta, *Anarchy*)

Omnia sunt communia.

(Luther Blissett, *Q*)

In 1967, Italian anarchist Belgrado Pedrini wrote a poem entitled 'The Galleon'. The image is that of a miserable galleon, in which everybody works as a slave, deprived of freedom. Days and nights pass but nothing changes, until someone starts to incite their fellow slaves to revolt by pointing out that they have nothing to lose and all to gain from the rebellion. As the poem reads:

Siamo la ciurma anemica
d'una galera infame
su cui ratta la morte
miete per lenta fame.

We are the anaemic crew
of an infamous galley
which quick death
cuts down slowly as we grow hungry.

Mai orizzonti limpidi

Never do clear horizons

schiede la nostra aurora
e sulla tolda squallida
urla la scolta ognora.

open up our dawn
and on the squalid deck
cries the guard all day long.

I nostri dì si involano
fra fetide carene,
siam magri smunti schiavi
stretti in ferro catene.

Our days pass as we sail
in fetid-bottomed boats,
we are thin and pale slaves
bound together by iron chains.

Sorge sul mar la luna
ruotan le stelle in cielo
ma sulle nostre luci
steso è un funereo velo.

The moon rises above the sea
stars revolve in the sky at night
but, for us, a funeral veil
lies draped over our lights.

Torme di schiavi adusti
chini a gemer sul remo
spezziam queste catene
o chini a remar morremo!

Swarms of scorched slaves
bent to groan over the oar,
let us break these chains
or we will die bent to row!

Cos'è gementi schiavi
questo remar remare?
Meglio morir tra i flutti
sul biancheggiar del mare.

Tell me, groaning slaves,
why do we row just to row?
Better to die among the waves
on a sea of whitening foam.

Remiam finché la nave
si schianti sui frangenti,
alte le rossonere
fra il sibilar dei venti!

Let us row until the ship
dashes upon the reef,
raise the black and red
upon the whistling breeze!

E sia pietosa coltrice
l'onda spumosa e ria
ma sorga un dì sui martiri
il sol dell'anarchia.

And let the frothy wave
be a pitiful place to lay
but let the sun of anarchy
rise o'er the martyrs one day.

Su schiavi all'armi,
all'armi!
L'onda gorgoglia e sale
tuoni baleni e fulmini
sul galeon fatale.

Rise, slaves, to arms, to arms!

O, gurgling waves and brine
thunder and lightening clash
above the fateful galleon.

Su schiavi all'armi,
all'armi!

Rise, slaves, to arms, to arms!

Pugnam col braccio forte! Let us strike with all our strength
 Giuriam giuriam giustizia! Justice, we swear, justice!
 O libertà o morte! Give us liberty or give us death!
 (Pedrini, 2001a, p. 69; translation mine)

The image of the galleon conveys a crucial political message. If you are on the side of the oppressed, you do not have anything to lose from the revolt. On the contrary, you have all to gain, as slaves are the overwhelming majority that makes the galleon work. This is because on a galleon, we are so dependent on one another that it becomes impossible to be free alone. Even if you are the master, you will constantly be threatened by the slavery of others. There is no intermediate: we are either all free or all slaves.

Pedrini's biography is similar to that of many anarchists who lived through the troubled years of the Italian fascist regime.¹ Chased for his antifascism, he was finally imprisoned for the death of a fascist policeman in a clash between a group of anarchists and the fascist secret police (Pedrini, 2001b). A few years later, he was liberated by the partisans and fought with the Resistance against fascists and the Nazi's army for a couple of years. After the end of the war in 1945, the newly constituted Italian Republic recognized the importance of his fight against fascism, but then put him back in jail. He remained there for 30 years, notwithstanding the numerous international campaigns for his liberation. Why?

For the Italian state, Pedrini was a criminal, a normal murderer. The fact that he had killed the policeman because he was a fascist and was just about to shoot Pedrini and his comrades did not matter. His crime: being an anarchist. Like many of his anarchist comrades he had to be banned. The fact that the minister of justice was then the communist Palmiro Togliatti did not help: quite the opposite. In those days, the hostility between communists and anarchists was perhaps even stronger than that between communists and fascists.

Yet, precisely in Pedrini's galleon, in his invitation to raise the black and red flag, we find the symbol of a peculiar view of freedom which, so I will argue, represents the platform for the convergence of anarchism and Marxism. Pedrini's metaphor tells us two important things: first, that we are all in the same boat, and second, that the freedom of every individual strictly depends on that of all others. You cannot be free alone, because freedom can only be realized as freedom of equals. With this expression, I do not mean that we have to be free *and* equals, but that we cannot be free unless we are all equally so.

The aim of this chapter is to argue that there is a significant convergence between Marxism and anarchism in that they both conceive of freedom in this way. After first exploring the meaning of this conception of freedom, and second, distinguishing it from that of autonomy, I shall, third, argue that today's social, economic and political conditions render this view particularly timely, and fourth, call for an overcoming of the historical divisions between anarchism and Marxism. The ban on the black and red that led Pedrini to prison is still there, but time has come to lift it.

THE FREEDOM OF EQUALS

At the beginning was freedom. It is commonplace to say that freedom is the crucial issue for anarchism, so much so that some have claimed that this word summarizes the sense of the entire anarchic doctrine and credo. There are good reasons to argue that freedom is also the crucial concern for Marx, who from his very early writings is concerned with the conditions for human emancipation. Indeed, the entire path of his thought could be described as a reflection on the conditions for freedom, understood first as a more general human emancipation, and later on, as freedom from exploitation in light of his theory of surplus value.² In this section, I illustrate this view of freedom and distinguish it from that of freedom as autonomy, and in the following one, I will show that Marxism and anarchism can provide each other with the antidote to their possible degeneration.

But why freedom at the beginning, and moreover what freedom? Max Stirner has a very helpful way to phrase the answer. In *The Ego and its Own*, he observes that most theories of society pursue the issue of 'What is the essence of man? What is its nature?' (1990), and as such, they either expressly begin with such a question or take it as their implicit starting point. However, Stirner observes, the question is not *what* is the human being, but rather *who*: and the answer is that 'I', in my uniqueness, am the human being (1990). In other words, we should not start with an abstract theory about a presumed essence or (which is equivalent) the nature of the human being, but with the simple fact that 'I' am, here and now, in my uniqueness. Otherwise said, there is no other possible beginning because, as an answer to the 'who?' question, 'I've set my cause on nothing' (*Ich hab' mein' Sach' auf nichts gestellt*) (Stirner, 1990, pp. 41, 351).

It may appear paradoxical to start with a quotation from Stirner, an author who has been very much criticized within both Marxism