

Anarchist Meditations, or: Three Wild Interstices of Anarchism and Philosophy

Alejandro de Acosta

2010

Contents

Abstract	3
Failure and the Third	3
Dramatization: Wild Styles	4
First Wild Style: Daydream	6
Second Wild Style: Field Trip	10
Third Wild Style: Psychogeography	12
Interstices	14
References	15

Abstract

Philosophers allude to anarchist practices; philosophers allude to anarchist theorists; anarchists allude to philosophers (usually in search of theory to add to the canon). What is missing in this schema, I note with interest, is anarchists alluding to philosophical practices. These are the wild interstices: zones of outlandish contact for all concerned.

Todo está ya en su punto, y el ser persona en el mayor.

Conocer las cosas en su punto, en su sazón, y saberlas lograr.

— Baltasar Gracián

Failure and the Third

I dare to call certain turbulent interstices of anarchy and philosophy *wild*. I feel that there is a lot of activity there, but not (yet) along predictable lines. For some time now, those interested have been hearing about several other such interstices: tamer ones, from my point of view. Or at least more recognizable. So let us play the familiar game of theory and practice, that game in which we presuppose them as separate and seek to claim them reunited. From within the play of this game, the tame interstices are variations on the following moves: philosophers allude to anarchist practices; philosophers allude to anarchist theorists; anarchists allude to philosophers (usually in search of theory to add to the canon). What is missing in this schema, I note with interest, is anarchists alluding to philosophical practices. These are the wild interstices: zones of outlandish contact for all concerned, I think.

But there are other games to play, even if they are only innocent games of exposition. I think it is important and interesting to stop presupposing separation, to dissolve its painful distribution of thinking and action. That is, we might hazard the risky game (which is also an experience, an exercise) in which *there are no theories, no practices*; just more or less remarkable enactments of ways of life, available in principle to absolutely anyone, absolutely anywhere.¹

Anecdotally, these reflections have a double genesis. The first occurred some years ago, when I was asked at an anarchist gathering to participate in a panel on “anarchism and post-structuralism.” It was around the time some began speaking of and writing about post-anarchism. The conversation failed, I think, in that no one learned anything. Of the four speakers, two were roughly in favour of engaging with post-structuralism and two against. I write *roughly* because we seemed to agree that “post-structuralism” is at best an umbrella term, at worst a garbage term, not acknowledged by most of the authors classed within it, and not particularly helpful in conversations such as that one. As if there really were two massive aggregates on either side of the “and” we were being asked to discuss! Indeed, the *worst* possible sense that something called post-anarchism could have would be the imaginary collusion of two crudely conceived imaginary aggregates. During the discussion, a participant asked the panel a question: “how do post-structuralist anarchists organize?” Of course the question went unanswered, though some of us tried to point out that there just aren’t, and cannot be, post-structuralist anarchists in the same sense that there are or may be anarcho-communists or anarcha-feminists or primitivists,

¹I feel strongly about those last two phrases. But I would add that such experiments should interest us in philosophy outside of universities and anarchism — better, anarchy — beyond activist groups.

etc. The operative reason was that our interlocutor seemed to be (involuntarily?) imagining post-structuralism as a form of theory, and anarchism primarily as a form of practice with no spontaneous or considered theory of its own. This is a variant of the familiar schema of separation, in which theory offers the analysis that informs practices, a.k.a. “organizing.” No go.

That night, I also posed a question, one that went unanswered: “is there a third?” I meant to ask both about the status of anarchism and post-structuralism as massive, clumsy imaginary aggregates, and also about the presupposed separation in their implicit status as forms of practice and theory. Or perhaps merely to hint at the unacknowledged efficacy of the *and*, its silent labour, its gesture towards possible experiences. What I have to say here is my own attempt to answer that question as provocatively as possible. I will begin with this claim (which I think does not presuppose separation): it is precisely the apparent political failures of what I am now glad to have done with referring to as post-structuralism that could make certain texts and authors interesting. And it is precisely the supposed theoretical failures of what it is still a little silly to call anarchism that could make its peculiar sensibilities attractive.

Indeed, the great and continuing interest of anarchism for philosophers (and for anarchists, if they are willing to learn this lesson) could be that it has never successfully manifested itself as a theoretical system. Every attempt at an anarchist system is happily incomplete. That is what I suppose concerned our interlocutor that night: he was worried, perhaps, about the theoretical insufficiency of anarchism compared with what appeared to be an overwhelming array of theories and concepts on the other side. In this anxious picture, the array seeks to vampirically attach itself to whatever practice, interpreting, applying itself to, *dominating*, ultimately, its motions. ‘Theories without movements: *run!*’ I would prefer to invert the terms and claim the apparent theoretical weakness of anarchism as one of its greatest virtues. For its commonplaces (direct action, mutual aid, solidarity, affinity groups, etc.) are not concepts but forms of social practice. As such, they continually, virally, infect every even remotely extraparliamentary or grassroots form of political action. And, beyond politics, they compose a kind of interminable reserve of social intelligence. In all this they neither require a movement to become manifest nor compose one by default of tendentially existing. In this sense, what anarchism offers to philosophers (to the philosophers any of us are or might be) is that it has been and remains primarily a way of life. Its asystematicity and its persistent recreation as a way of life probably account for the fact that anarchism, as theory, has never been incorporated into or as an academic discipline.²

Anarchism acts as an untimely echo of how philosophy was once lived, and how, indirectly and in a subterranean fashion, it continues to be lived. And, paradoxically, we might learn something about how it is lived by reference to philosophical practices.

Dramatization: Wild Styles

Practices, or simply philosophy as a way of life: that is the second genesis of what I have to say here. This idea crystallized in studying, of all things, the ancient Stoics. Seeking to give a

²Cf., David Graeber’s remarks in *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (2004: 2–7). One might also consider here Lacan’s theory of the four discourses, proposed, among other places, in *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*: first, in his problematization of the status of psychoanalysis in its relation to the university discourse (there are interesting parallels with what I have written about anarchist theory); secondly, in light of the connections he implies between the hysterical discourse, the master’s discourse, and revolutionary movements. To show the singular status of the analyst’s discourse, Lacan often provoked his audience by wondering aloud if there were any analysts. My way

(pedagogical) sense to Stoic logic, physics, and ethics as a lived unity and not as components of what they already called a “theoretical discourse,”³ I had recourse to the elaboration of the practice of spiritual exercises by Pierre Hadot. He describes them as follows: “practices which could be physical, as in dietary regimes, or discursive, as in dialogue and meditation, or intuitive, as in contemplation, but were all intended to effect a modification and a transformation in the subject who practised them” (Hadot, 2005: 6).⁴ Or, again: “The philosophical act is not situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that of the self and of being. It is a progress which causes us to *be* more fully, and makes us better. It is a conversion which turns our entire life upside down, changing the life of the person who goes through it” (Hadot, 1995: 83). Briefly, it’s that every statement that is still remarkable in the fragments and doxographical reports is so in light of its staging (dramatization, theatricalization) as part of a meditative practice that might have been that of a Stoic.

Hadot offers several examples from the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius demonstrating that logic and physics, the purportedly theoretical components of Stoicism, were already and immediately part of ethical practice. Logic as a “mastery of inner discourse” (Hadot, 2005: 135): “always to define or describe to oneself the object of our perception so that we can grasp its essential nature unadorned, a separate and distinct whole, to tell oneself its particular name as well as the names of the elements from which it was made and into which it will be dissolved” (Aurelius, 1983: III, 11). Physics as “recognizing oneself as part of the Whole” (Hadot, 2005: 137), but also the practice of seeing things in constant transformation: “Acquire a systematic view of how all things change into one another; consistently apply your mind to, and train yourself in, this aspect of the universe” (Aurelius, 1983: X, 11).

I contend that such spiritual exercises are theories *dramatized* as subjective attitudes. As the pivot of the whole system or at least of its comprehensibility as such, the role of logic and physics for the Stoics must have been precisely that of a training for ethical thought and action. But in some sense the converse is even more compelling: subjective attitudes, their theatre, seem to secrete theory as a detritus in need of being taken up again — precisely in the form of a new or repeated exercise, a renewed dramatization. Setting aside the labyrinthine complications of the entanglement with what is still badly understood as Fate, I would like to retain this much of Stoic ethics in my anarchist meditations: to find if there is anything to affirm in what confronts us, what we encounter. Concluding a recent essay, I shared a desire “to affirm something, perhaps all, of our present conditions, without recourse to stupid optimism, or faith” (de Acosta, 2009: 34). I would like to speculatively expand on the practice of such affirmations. As Gilles Deleuze once put it: “either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us”⁵ (Deleuze, 1990: 49). What we encounter cannot but provoke thought; if it can, meaning, if we allow it to, there is something to affirm, and this affirmation is immediately joyful. How we might thoughtfully allow events, places, actions,

of adopting this humorous provocation would be to ask if there are any anarchists. Finally, I recall here Monsieur Dupont’s text on experience: “Nobody can be an anarchist in the sense that the ideology of anarchism proposes” (*Nihilist Communism*, 2009: 202).

³That is, philosophical *logos*. See Diogenes Laërtius, in *The Stoics Reader*, 8. I was trying to teach that these spiritual exercises cannot be taught, only modelled and perhaps imitated.

⁴The discursive and intuitive senses indicated in the definition are the most relevant here.

⁵Or, more obscurely: “not being inferior to the event, becoming the child of one’s own events” (Deleuze, 1987: 65).

scenes, phrases — “what happen to us,” in short — to unfold in the direction of joy is the explicit or implicit question of every spiritual exercise.

I propose, then, an interlinked series of fantastic spiritual exercises: meditations for anarchists — or on anarchy. They have, I suppose, been implicit in every significant anarchist discourse so far (including, of course, the many that have not called themselves anarchist) (cf., de Acosta, 2009). They have been buried, indirect, assumed but unstated, in these discourses. Or at least in much of their reception. In each of these three forms (or styles) of exercise what is pivotal is some use of the imagination — at least the imaginative-ideational uptake, Stoic *phantasia* or *phantasma*, of written or spoken discourse, and of what is given to thought in experience.⁶ So, we are concerned here with experiential dispositions, attitudes that at first seem subjective but are ultimately prior to the separation of subject and object, and perhaps even of possible and real.

Whatever happens, these exercises are *available*. I will not opine on their ultimate importance, especially not on their relevance to existing movements, groups, strategies, or tactics. In what fashion and to what degree any of these exercises can be applied to another activity — if that is even possible — is ultimately up to any of us to decide upon in the circumstances that we find ourselves in, or through situations that we create. The status of these meditations is that of a series of experiments, or experiences, whose outcome and importance is unknown at the outset and perhaps even at the conclusion.

I will have recourse in what follows to texts and authors that preceded what is now called anarchism, or were, or *are*, its difficult contemporaries, so as to underline that what matters in anarchist meditations are the attitudes that they make available, not any actual or possible theory or group that they may eventually secrete. The secret importance of anarchy is the short-circuit it interminably introduces between such attitudes and action, and back — what is badly conceived as spontaneity. (Or worse, “voluntarism,” in the words of our enemies...)

Perhaps, then, the truly compelling reason to call the three forms of meditation *wild styles* is that anarchists have no *archon*, no school, no real training in or modelling of these activities outside of scattered and temporary communities and the lives of unusual individuals. *But* they can and do happen: interminably, yes, and also informally, irregularly, and unpredictably. That is their interest and their attraction.

First Wild Style: Daydream

A Daydream may take the form of a *meditative affirmation* that informs how we might read so-called utopian writers. Of these I will discuss the absolutely most fascinating. It is Fourier, with his taxonomy of the passions; with his communal phalansteries; with his tropical new earth, *aigresel* oceans, and kaleidoscopic solar system; ultimately, with his Harmonian future. What are we to do today with such a discourse? A version of this first wild style is beautifully laid out in the following remarks by Peter Lamborn Wilson:

Fourier’s *future* would impose an injustice on *our present*, since we Civilizees cannot hope to witness more than a foretaste of Harmony, if it were not for his highly origi-

⁶On *phantasia* and *phantasma*, see Inwood & Gerson (2008: 12). As will become evident further on, there is also some question here of the madness/ordinariness of *speaking to oneself*, silently or aloud, and of a concomitant

nal and somewhat mad eschatology. [...] One of the things we can do with Fourier's system is to hold it within our consciousness and attention in the form of a mandala, not questioning whether it be literally factually true, but whether we can achieve some sort of "liberation" through this strange meditation. The future becoming of the solar system, with its re-arrangement of planets to form dances of colored lights, can be visualized as a tantric adept uses a yantra of cosmogenic significance, like a Sufi meditation on "photisms" or series of visionary lights, to focus and integralize our own individual realization of the potential of harmony within us, to overcome our "prejudices against matter, which is represented to us as a vile principle" by philosophers and priests (Lamborn, 1998: 17–17).

From which I would like to retain at least the following: first, we can affirm nothing in the present unless we acknowledge that the future is unthinkable, unimaginable. Fourier did write, after all, that if we sorry Civilizees could grasp the ramifications of the entire Combined Order, we would be immediately struck dead (Fourier, 1996: 67). (This, by the way, seems to be why he was more given to examples about Harmonian banquets than ones about Harmonian orgies.) So, with respect to direct action, his intention is clear enough: one does not build Harmony as such, because it is unimaginable; one builds the commune, the phalanstery. (That is why so much of *The Theory of the Four Movements*, for example, is dedicated to a discussion of transitional phases, e.g. "Guaranteeism").⁷ This practice is focused, however, through a contemplation in which we are not planning for a future that is, after all, unforeseeable; we are dreaming, fantasizing, but in a peculiarly concentrated way, acting on ourselves in the present.

Secondly, setting aside the future, one can somehow meditate on Fourier's system. And not just the system as totality; perhaps the most effective form of this meditative affirmation that I can report on is that which focuses on one single and exceptionally absurd element of Fourier's speculations: for example, the *archibras*, a prehensile tail he claims humans will develop, good, as Lamborn Wilson notes, for fruit-picking as well as orgies. Or the sixteen kinds of strawberries, or the lemonade ocean, or the anti-giraffe.⁸ Fourier is as dumbfounding when he describes the industrial armies of Harmony as he is when he suddenly reveals one of these strange Harmonian monads to his audience.

It seems to me that Lamborn Wilson suggests an entirely different mode of reading and experiencing Fourier's writings than either the impatient critique of so-called scientific socialism or the predictably tolerant pick-and-choose of the other socialists and anarchists. To focus on what is systematic, or appears to be so, in Fourier, is to try to recreate for ourselves his precise derangement, to train our thinking in the paths of his mad logic, the voice of his desires, without for all that believing in anything. Especially Harmony. As he wrote: "passionate attraction is the interpreter of nature" (Fourier, 1996: 189). I will accept this only if it can be agreed that interpretation is already an action, on ourselves first of all. (For example, it might be a healthy use of the same imaginative faculties that many of us squander on video feeds of one sort or another.)

recognition of familiar and unfamiliar phrases, with their differends. I will take this up in a future essay.

⁷Compare, in this light, the delirious foldout "Table of the Progress of Social Movement" spanning 80,000 years with the utterly practical propositions of the "Note to the Civilized Concerning the Coming Social Metamorphosis."

⁸See (Fourier, 1996: 50n, 284). The anti-giraffe is one of the new animals of Harmony, "a great and magnificent servant whose qualities will far surpass the good qualities of the reindeer."

A similar meditative affirmation could allow one to make good use of “P.M.’s” infamous zero-work tract *bolo’bolo*. The text opens with a short predictive narrative about the “substruction of the planetary work machine” by the construction of small autonomous communes or *bolos* networked together into the global *bolo’bolo*. We are, by the way, twenty-two years too late; *bolo’bolo* should have emerged in 1988. The bulk of this tract, however, is taken up by a series of systematic elements that may become themes for Daydreams. It is the ideographic sign language of *bolo’bolo*, *asa’pili*, the series IBU, BOLO, SILA, TAKU ... each coupled with an invented ideograph. As with the hexagrams of the *Classic of Changes*, each heading encapsulates and illustrates a concept with a simple sign. Imagine the use of this artificial *lingua franca*: the ideographs and odd bisyllabic words could aid a certain meditative translation. IBU is and is not an ego; NIMA is and is not beliefs; TAKU is and is not private property; YAKA is and is not a duel. And so on. Confronted, then, with egos, beliefs, private property, or duels, I may always perform an exercise that translates them to *asa’pili*. This means asking, speculating on, the question: and what would do we do with all this in *bolo’bolo*? This language is said to be of a future and yet we are already using it, making new sense or even new worlds of sense with it.

The second systematic series occurs only once: it is an incredible list of sample *bolos*. “In a larger city, we could find the following *bolos*: Alco-bolo, Sym-bolo, Sado-bolo, Maso-bolo, Vegi-bolo, Les-bolo, Franko-bolo, Italo-bolo, Play-bolo, No-bolo, Retro-bolo, Thai-bolo, Sun-bolo [...]”⁹ It is again a linguistic operation at first, which is obvious since so many of these are puns. Once we are amused, the imagination begins its playful reverie. Once the suffix takes on consistency, we are dreaming other dreams. Imagine, not just Sado-bolo and Maso-bolo, but the relations between them. What are the parties in Dada-bolo like? The art of Tao-bolo? The dialect of Freak-bolo? As with the punctual things, events, or practices denoted by the terms of *asa’pili*, we have some initial sense, but our imagination is pushed to a new and more voluptuous level of complication and creation in conceiving each *bolo*, its inner workings, and the interrelations, or lack thereof, among *bolos*.

In neither case is there anything to believe in. Certainly not *bolo’bolo*! I maintain rather that to gather and concentrate one’s thought process using these signs or examples is to accept their provocation, to undertake a deviation, *détournement*, of the imaginative flux. In so doing we find, paradoxically, that we have names for otherwise unimaginable relations. We are in an even better position to do so than when the book first appeared since, according to its chronology, *bolo’bolo* should have already come about. So the more credulous among us, those unhappy souls awaiting some anarchist version of 2012 or the Apocalypse of John, will be stumped and disappointed. It can no longer be read as a book concerning (do please laugh here) ‘the current conjuncture.’ Two mostly unhappy decades have returned it to its fetal form: a wish, a mad dream, that models its madness in an exemplary fashion, precisely by drawing us into its codes. Each ideogram, each *bolo*’s name, is a monad. To meditatively grasp it is to attain a perspective on the otherwise impossible: to be a witness to *bolo’bolo*. It is only when we hopelessly use these monads that they

⁹ “[...] Blue-bolo, Paleo-bolo, Dia-bolo, Punk-bolo, Krishna-bolo, Taro-bolo, Jesu-bolo, Tao-bolo, Marl-bolo, Necro-bolo, Pussy-bolo, Para-bolo, Basket-bolo, Coca-bolo, Incapa-bolo, HighTech-bolo, Indio-bolo, Alp-bolo, Mono-bolo, Metro-bolo, Acro-bolo, Soho-bolo, Proto-bolo, Herb-bolo, Macho-bolo, Hebro-bolo, Ara-bolo, Freak-bolo, Straight-bolo, Pyramido-bolo, Marx-bolo, Sol-bolo, Tara-bolo, Uto-bolo, Sparta-bolo, Bala-bolo, Gam-bolo, Tri-bolo, Logo-bolo, Mago-bolo, Anarcho-bolo, Eco-bolo, Dada-bolo, Digito-bolo, Subur-bolo, Bom-bolo, Hyper-bolo, Rock n’-bolo, etc. Moreover, there are also just good old regular *bolos*, where people live normal, reasonable and healthy lives (whatever those are)” (P.M., 1985: 80–1).

can have an effect on our thinking-in-the-event: a healthy use of what Bergson called *la fonction fabulatrice*, perhaps even what Freud conceived as the wish-fulfillment involved in dreams.

Another sort of Daydream, the *meditative negation*, manifests in a similar way, as a summoning up of powerful, almost unthinkable images of destruction, specifically of consumption. I consider this strange passage by Max Stirner to be paradigmatic:

Around the altar rise the arches of the church and its walls keep moving further and further out. What they enclose is *sacred*. You can no longer get to it, no longer touch it. Shrieking with the hunger that devours you, you wander around about these walls and search for the little that is profane. And the circles of your course keep getting more and more extended. Soon that church will embrace the whole world, and you will be driven out to the extreme edge. Another step and the *world of the sacred* has conquered: you sink into the abyss. Therefore take courage while there it is yet time, wander about no longer in the profane where now it is dry feeding, dare the leap and rush the gates into the sanctuary itself. If you *devour the sacred* you have made it your *own*. Digest the sacramental wafer and you are rid of it (Stirner, 1995: 88–9).¹⁰

This is perhaps the most excessive of many such passages in *The Ego and its Own*. What is the status of this discourse? Just who is speaking here? What I is addressing me, presenting its ideas as my own? What is the altar, the church, its walls? What is the *sacred* exactly? What is the *hunger* referred to here? The *courage*? What does this apparently metaphorical act of eating entail in practice? As I have posed them, abstractly, these questions are unanswerable. I propose rather that the interest of passages such as these, their significance in Stirner's text, is that, functioning as a model, they allow one to project a parallel thought pattern onto one or more given sets of circumstances. This meditation could help me to divest myself of my allegiance to a stupid political group that I have made the mistake of joining; or it could save me from a noxious commonplace of sexual morality. In each case I would find the sacred element, identify its will to power, feel my impotence for a moment ("hunger") and then strike with courage, undoing the sacrificial logic that has possessed me.

The difference between meditative affirmation and negation is that in affirming I actively imagine a future that I do not take to be real; I explore its details to act on my own imagination, on my thought process, to contract other habits. In negation, as in affirmation, there is no future, just this present I must evacuate of its meaning. This meditation is a voiding process, a clearing of stupidities. It is what I do when I can find nothing to affirm in the present.

That is not the only form a meditative negation can take. Throughout *The Ego and its Own*, Stirner also deploys countless brief, pithy phrases that are not imagistic, but rather almost speech acts, cases of a kind of disruptive *direct action* in discourse: "I do not step shyly back from your property, but look upon it always as my property, in which I need to 'respect' nothing. Pray do the like with what you call my property!" (Stirner, 1995: 220). "I do not love [the world], I annihilate it as I annihilate myself; I dissolve it" (*ibid.*, 262). I do not know what could possibly follow such statements, though something must. These phrases could be ironically spoken aloud to a coarse interlocutor as the mark of a necessary distance; they could also be thought silently to oneself,

¹⁰I have already commented on this passage, with reference to related alimentary imagery in Nietzsche, in my "How the Stirner Eats Gods" (de Acosta, 2009).

as so many available elements of an egoist *tetrapharmakon* that could recall us to ourselves in even the most alienating moments.¹¹ The I that speaks in Stirner's text is more often than not offered as a common property, that is to say, not a property at all. It is a model, a case. It is there to be taken up, imitated, if we have the courage to be the confessed egoists we could be. Stirner was not describing the world, he was acting on it; so we too might act if we study and train ourselves in such imaginary and discursive exercises. Like anarchism, egoism cannot be taught, only modelled and perhaps imitated.

Second Wild Style: Field Trip

Although careful and generous acts of reading are vital to anarchist meditations, the exercises I am describing could also take the form of concentrations of thought developed not through engagement with written or spoken discourse but with the materiality of places. In affirmative or negative meditations, the question is that of another attitude, another tone of thought, another voice. And reading bizarre books is only one way to achieve it. A second form of exercise, the Field Trip, is a kind of *speculative anthropology of geographical spaces*. I will elaborate it through a detailed examination of one example, both for its richness and because I suppose many of my readers are unfamiliar with its source, a recent text from the sometime proponent of a "nihilist communism." In a tone sometimes echoing Bakunin, sometimes Bataille, "Frere Dupont," the pseudonymous author of *species being*, proposes that revolt is a sort of anthropological constant. It corresponds not so much to the organizations that seek to bring it about, or at least stimulate and channel it, but rather to an existential dimension of the human. Borrowing from another lexicon, I would say that for Dupont revolt is anthropogenetic. "The untheorized and non-included aspects of human existence is [*sic*] our platform" (Dupont, 2007: 47). I suppose the term "platform" is used here with tongue fully in cheek. What is this ironic project, then? "Our purpose is to develop a feral subject [...]" (*ibid.*). Very well: how is this subject *developed*?

Setting aside, perhaps even ignorant of, the procedures of scientific anthropology or archeology, Frere Dupont enters an archeological site in the East of England and reports:

It is noon on the Tenth of May. The year is Two Thousand and Six. I am crouching, my hands on the floorstone, in Pit One of Grime's Graves, a retrieved neolithic flint mining complex in Norfolk's Breckland. I have chosen this place to begin my investigation into the tendency within society to modify itself through the chosen activities that it undertakes in response to the perceived limits of itself. I have asked myself whether this tendency of transformation out of stability is explicable in terms of a motivational sense of lack and/or a sense of abundance (*ibid.*, 48).

The question Dupont is asking could be understood to belong to political philosophy, ethics, anthropology, or any number of other disciplines. It is also, of course, a variant of the old anarchist question about the inception of the State-form and authoritarian politics: the institutionalized concentration of power.¹² This text bears with it the rare sense of a situated thought ("I have

¹¹I am referring, of course, to the Epicurean *tetrapharmakon* or "four-part cure," the briefest epitome of their philosophy.

¹²The "centripetal" social organization, that is, whose emergence Pierre Clastres tried to understand in the essays collected in *Society Against the State* (1989).

chosen this place”), the unusual idea that it matters *where* one is when one thinks; or, again, the fantastic intuition that one can conceive of the activities that have unfolded in a place, *even thousands of years later*:

I am crouching in Pit One of the complex. It is dark because the custodians of the site have put a roof over the site, but four thousand years ago, at midday, on a day like today in bright summer light, the chalk walls would be dazzlingly intense. To increase this effect the miners built angled walls from the chalk spoil at the surface of the shaft to further reflect light down into the galleries. My first impressions are of the miners’ appreciation for the actual process of mining as an activity in itself, which they must have valued in their society above the flint that was mined. Also, I felt an awareness of their creation of an architecture, their carving out of underground spaces, and the separations and connections between these and the world above. Somewhat self-consciously, I crouch at the centre of the shaft and announce my short, prepared thesis, “organization appears only where existence is thwarted” (Dupont, 2007: 51).

The three key components of this exercise seem to be location in an unfamiliar and significant place (“I am crouching”), affective engagement with the history and arrangement of the space (“My first impressions [...] I felt an awareness ...”), and the conscious, explicit introduction of what would otherwise be an abstract “thesis” into that experience (“I [...] announce”). I suggest that in so doing an aleatory element is introduced into thought, a tendency that unfolds, at least in this case, in solitude. Perhaps the place and its intuitive reconstruction act as a sort of externalized primary process on speculation, inflecting or declining it. It is an analytic moment. Not: what does this thesis mean? But: what does it mean that *I* said it *here*? Dupont offers up the thesis to the mute walls of the pit. And then something happens: new thought. The “thesis” thickens, taking on a new consistency.

Organization appears only where existence is thwarted [...] And existence appears only where organization is thwarted. But is this because the appearance of existence-in-revolt is a negatively constituted movement (a mere inversion of what is, a substantiation of the possibilities of the form), or is it an indication of a crisis within organization, the breakdown of the holding/defining of the scene – or rather, is the recurrence of existence-counter-to-present-structure an intimation of organization yet to come? The question here concerns capture, and return – the possibility of getting back to a previous stage where the problems of any given structure, or structure itself, have yet to appear (ibid., 56).

What Dupont discovered, perhaps, is some way to imaginatively recreate precisely what is lost of prehistoric peoples – their anarchy: a kind of vanished attitude modelled anew. Dupont does not claim to speak the truth of those peoples. Who could ever claim to know what they thought? Or even if they experienced thought as a relatively autonomous faculty, the presupposition, by the way, of all our amusing contentions about “theory”? Rather, speculating in a place that is still somehow theirs, and letting the speculation remain what it is – a hallucination, ultimately – she or he moves to a speculative or archeological reconstruction of our own problems. Dupont is able to speculate on some Neolithic transformation from existence to organization (whatever else this

means, I suppose it has to do with the stabilization of proto-states, ritual structures, divisions of labour, etc.) insofar as she or he locates, imaginatively, analogous or even genealogically related elements in our present. Namely, the vast, unthought but available, background of the thesis! I might encapsulate that background by reference to a feeling: the terrible sense that the group one is in is becoming rigid, static, that a hierarchy, hierogamy, or hierophany is developing where initially only some sort of kinship or friendship existed. The place (here, the pit) concretizes, materializes, or grounds thought in a provisional, momentary, but remarkable way. Could this be the birth of the feral subject?

Elsewhere in the book Dupont quotes Krishnamurti: “Meditation is to find out if there is a field which is not already contaminated by the known” (ibid., 114). Whatever this statement could have meant in its original context, I understand Dupont to be suggesting that we always need new practices of thought, new contemplations, that habituate us to overcoming our profoundly limited common sense about what is human, what the human or its societies can do and be. The *field*, then, in this example is both the pit *and* the attitude or wishes one brings there — though the latter may only become evident in the pit.

There is, in short, a tentative anthropology here¹³, and it is overtly speculative and intuitive. The interest of its statements lies not in their truth-value but in their importance, their success — their felicity, as one says of a performative utterance. They are felicitous if they can meditatively restage some or all of a fantastic anthropogenetic moment in a present itself rendered fantastic.

Third Wild Style: Psychogeography

A third wild style bears as its name a Situationist term, which they defined as follows:

Psychogeography: the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behavior of individuals (Knabb, 2006: 52).

I mean it somewhat differently, however, since the question is not merely to understand effects, but to act on them, to generate other effects inasmuch as one becomes capable of experiencing places and spaces differently.¹⁴ One could view this style as a complex combination of the first (affirmation especially) and the second (though the speculative anthropology here refers not to the past but to a perspective on our world). A first simple form of Psychogeography could take up, for example, the long lists Kropotkin made of what in his present already manifested mutual aid: public libraries, the international postal system, cooperatives of every sort (Kropotkin, 1955: Chapters 7 & 8, *et passim*). Kropotkin argued that mutual aid is an evolutionary constant, as generic and vital as competition, or what was called the struggle for existence. But we would be mistaken if we thought his books, essays, speeches, etc. had as their only rhetorical mode the one perhaps most evident on a first reading, that of scientific proof. His *examples*, his repeated and lengthy enumerations of actual *cases* of mutual aid, offer up an entirely new world, an uncanny

¹³That someone can speak to a wall is already a marvelous and irreducible fact of a future anarchist anthropology! This magical speech, the natural converse of speaking to oneself, also belongs to a future essay.

¹⁴I might note here that the definition, in French, seems to be ambiguous as to whether it is the effects or the study of the effects that acts on our affective life. But the conjoined definition of “psychogeographical” makes clear that it is a question of the “direct action” of the milieu on affectivity. Compare *Internationale Situationniste* (1997: 13).

symptomatology of a familiar world. It is our world, seen through a new and clear lens.¹⁵ One could then travel to the places revealed in this new world, buildings or events, and meditate on the activity there so as to eventually grasp what is anarchist about them immediately and not potentially. I am referring to what is colloquially called “hanging out.” Going to the public library, for example, for no other reason than to witness what in it is anarchic — or, again, to a potluck. This practice involves another way of inhabiting familiar spaces. It brings out what in them is uncannily, because tendentially, anarchic. It multiplies our sites of action and engagement and could shape our interventions there.

Those interested could expand the range of this exercise, making the goal not only arrival at the sites of mutual aid (or other anarchic activities), but also the journey. Here again a Situationist term is relevant: the *dérive*, that “experimental behaviour” (Knabb, 2006: 52) of wandering across an urban space with no determinate destination. I suppose that if one has begun to master the affirmation of certain places as anarchic, one could begin expanding the range of the exercise, meditating as one walks or rides a bicycle or bus, affirming new forms of movement, escape, or evasion, as well as creative flights of fancy. Soon many places in urban space will emerge, detached from their everydayness, as remarkable: places of intensity, or of *virtual anarchy*. (I think here, for example, of the great significance some friends put on visiting certain garbage dumpsters.)

Indeed, it is likely that Fourier’s preferred examples may have emerged in just this way. Reading his finest descriptions of Harmony, we find innumerable *parades*. He plans Harmonian processions: “Parade Series: In a societary canton all the members of the industrial phalanx [...] are divided into 16 choirs of different ages; each choir is composed of 2 quadrilles, one of men and one of women, making a total of 32 quadrilles, 16 male and 16 female, each with its distinctive banners, decorations, officers and costumes, both for winter and summer” (Fourier, 1996: 293). It is strange and lovely to suppose that all of this began with the solitary tradesman Charles Fourier looking on as a military parade passed by, spontaneously inventing his version of this exercise by asking himself: what can we do with the passions set to work in this array? It seems these people like costumes, display, fanfare, and ordered group movements. How do these passions fit in Harmony, given that the constraint in thinking harmonically is to affirm every passion? Once the question is asked, our experience reveals the details to be meditatively rearranged. For Fourier, parades are not only great fun; they also presage the serial organization of the Combined Order. “All this pomp may be thought unnecessary to the cultivation of flowers and fruits, wheat and wine, etc., but baubles and honorific titles do not cost anything, and they are incitements to greater enthusiasm in the work of the Series” (ibid., 299). “You will come in the end to recognize that there are no bad or useless passions, and that all characteristics are good in themselves, that all passions must be intensified, not moderated” (ibid., 303). Psychogeography could show us where each passion, intensified, may bloom.

One night in the mid-nineties I had dinner with Peter Lamborn Wilson. We spoke about Fourier and he told me of a group of friends who had set off from New York into Canada in an expedition that had as its goal to trigger the birth of the Northern Crown, that “shining ring of light,” which,

¹⁵Perhaps then a more relevant reference is not science but science fiction. As Deleuze wrote of Hume’s empiricism: “As in science fiction, one has the impression of a fictive, foreign world, seen by other creatures, but also the presentiment that this world is already ours, and these creatures, ourselves” (Deleuze, 2001: 35).

in Fourier's system, "will appear after two centuries of combined order" (ibid., 33–4). I do not remember all the details, but, since it has been fifteen years, and the Northern Crown has yet to emerge, I am led to wonder what this journey could have meant for its participants. I am reminded here of the great and catastrophic Tupi migrations of the sixteenth century documented by H el ene Clastres: ambiguous wanderings of whole peoples who abandoned a sad and sedentary way of life and danced off (literally!) in search of a land of immortality that they expected to find in the Andes or across the Atlantic (Clastres, 1995: 49–57). Or so it is said. We read of such journeys and perhaps conceive of them as pointless – fanatical, even. We suppose, perhaps, that they were primarily religious, missing what is remarkable about the absolute desertion of agricultural labour, marriage customs, etc. Religion might be the operative discourse, and prophetism the power mechanism, but the lived practice seems like something else entirely: "The quest for the Land-Without-Evil is [...] the active denial of society. It is a genuinely collective asceticism" (ibid., 56). Should we say the poor Tupi were duped by their own prophets? What if the journey were its own reason? How did the Tupi experience what Clastres calls the "auto-destruction" of their own societies? What could the wanderers Lamborn Wilson told me of have felt and thought as they made their way north?¹⁶

Interstices

Let me return to the question, "how do post-structuralist anarchists organize?" I have suggested that what perhaps went unthought in it was the presupposition of separation. In this case that meant that the prized goal of the game, the theory-practice intersection, ought to be (to embody or resemble) organizing or an organization. Here I recall Dupont's thesis: *organization appears where existence is thwarted*. Could we rewrite that last word with the phrase *separated from itself*?

Indeed, my three wild styles concern forms of existence that are more and less than organizations, or, to be direct, *organisms*, since in the unconscious hylomorphic background of the schema, theory is the soul, practice is the body, and progress is the organism's health. To maintain that anarchist meditations are interstitial is to propose that something or someone thrives and swarms ahead of, behind, among, inside of, and between the slow-moving theory-practice compounds that we call organizations. The vital question is: do organizations ever do anything at all? Or are they something like remnants, the clumsy carapaces of what has been and is already being done? David Hume wrote: "The chief benefit which results from philosophy arises in an indirect manner, and proceeds more from its secret insensible influence, than from its immediate application" (Hume, 2008: 104). *A secret insensible influence*: that is all I would claim for my wild styles. They are good practices, and good practice. They do not dictate action; action is its own reason and its own model. But they have had a long-standing, indirect, and insensible influence on what anarchists and many others in fact do.

Unlike a theory that purposely or accidentally posits an ideal state or a goal, they have no implicit or explicit teleology. I have long felt, and remain convinced, that there is nothing to be gained by positing a goal for action other than in the most irreducibly local sense (and even then!). Although I have my reasons for maintaining this near-metaphysical proposition, I will restrict myself here to underlining the contemporary phenomenon of non-ideological political actions,

¹⁶Would it be going too far to write that they perhaps felt the Earth anew?

which could nearly all be called *tactics without strategies*. Or even: punctual acts in the course of detaching themselves from the tactical realm of militant and militarized politics. I prefer not to think such actions as practices in need of theoretical interpretation. If there is anything to praise in them, it is that these actions are wild experiments: ‘what happens when we do *this?*’ They install themselves, impossibly, I admit, on the side of *existence*, and attempt to remain there.

These wild styles ought, eventually, to put into question every political project — first, as project, and, again, as political.¹⁷ That is their virtue, or at least their contribution to virtue. Whatever effects they may or may not have, they exemplify *in thought* that aspect of anarchist practice called *direct action*. The famous and pathetic theses of the innate goodness of humans or of a future utopia have perhaps no value other than their role as themes for meditation and affirmation in the present. Hume, again: “The chief triumph of art and philosophy: it insensibly refines the temper, and it points out to us those dispositions which we should endeavour to attain, by a constant *bent* of mind, and by repeated *habit*” (ibid., 105). This sort of direct action, as it infuses our lives, may succeed or fail. To the extent that it succeeds, we are on the way to anarchy. To the extent that it fails, it succeeds as well, though in a more local way. We have bent our mind, as Hume wrote, and made life “amusing” (ibid., 113).¹⁸

References

- de Acosta, Alejandro. (2009) “Two Undecidable Questions for Thinking in Which Anything Goes.” *Contemporary Anarchist Studies* (Amster et al., Eds.) New York: Routledge.
- . (2009) “How the Stirner Eats Gods,” *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*, 67 (Spring).
- Aurelius, Marcus. (1983) *Meditations*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Clastres, Hélène. (1995) *The Land-Without-Evil*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Clastres, Pierre. (1989) *Society Against the State*. New York: Zone Books.
- Dupont, Frère. (2007) *species being and other stories*. Ardent Press.
- Dupont, Monsieur. (2009) *Nihilist Communism*. Ardent Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. (1990) *Logic of Sense*. New York: Columbia.
- . *Dialogues*. (1987) New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.
- . (2001) “Hume.” In *Pure Immanence*. New York: Zone Books.
- Fourier, Charles. (1996) *The Theory of the Four Movements*. New York: Cambridge.
- Graeber, David. (2004) *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Hadot, Pierre. (2004) *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- . (1995) “Spiritual Exercises.” *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Blackwell.
- Hume, David. (2008) “The Sceptic.” *Selected Essays*. New York: Oxford.
- Internationale Situationniste*. (1997) Édition augmentée. Librairie Arthème Fayard.
- Inwood, Brad., & Lloyd P. Gerson., Eds. (2008) *The Stoics Reader*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Knabb, Ken., Ed. (2006) *Situationist International Anthology*. (Revised and expanded edition) Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets.
- Kropotkin, Petr. (1955) *Mutual Aid*. Boston: Extending Horizons.

¹⁷It is no coincidence that some anarchists and communists have recently posed the problem of what they provocatively call “anti-politics.”

¹⁸Perhaps amusement is the only thing worth hoping for.

Lacan, Jacques. (2007) *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton.
Lamborn Wilson, Peter. (1998) *Escape from the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Autonomedia.
P.M. (1985) *bolo'bolo*. New York: Semiotext(e).
Stirner, Max. (1995) *The Ego and Its Own*. New York: Cambridge.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Alejandro de Acosta
Anarchist Meditations, or: Three Wild Interstices of Anarchism and Philosophy
2010

From *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies*, Volume 2010.1

theanarchistlibrary.org