Interrogating the Master: Lacan and Radical Politics

Jacques Lacan and Anarchism

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One of the central questions for the social application of psychoanalytic theory is whether it can promote significant social and political change, and to what extent it can provide a theoretical foundation for a radical critique of existing political practices, discourses and institutions. The aim of this paper is to explore the contribution of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to radical politics - in particular, anarchism. This may seem an improbable exercise at the outset. After all, Jacques Lacan was a psychoanalyst, not a political theorist - still less a political activist. Moreover, he was deeply suspicious of the radical politics of the Left, pointing to the ambiguous relationship between revolutionary transgression and authority. However, the purpose here is not to suggest that Lacan was an anarchist, or that his thinking veered in that direction. Rather, it is to examine the implications and relevance of Lacanian ideas – in particular, his theory of the four discourses - to radical political theory and practice. Despite the seeming difficulties of this application, there are a number of points of convergence that can be developed here. Certain Lacanian concepts, when applied to political and social discourse, allow one to explore a number of dimensions that are crucial to radical politics today. These would include: the structural and discursive relationship between authority and resistance; the pitfalls of utopian fantasy; and the contingency and indeterminacy of the political field.

Why anarchism?

The collapse of Communist systems nearly two decades ago led to a profound disillusionment in the West, not only with the Communist project - which had been in a state of crisis for some time - but with radical left-wing politics generally. The subsequent hegemony of neo-liberal, and then Third Way, ideologies, coupled with the conditions of 'postmodern' cultural fragmentation and epistemological relativism, seemed to constitute the dominant political referents for a global capitalist system that was increasingly coming to be seen, as Slavoj Zizek says, as the "only game in town" (Butler, Laclau and Zizek 321). However, in recent years there have been a number of attempts to breathe new life into radical political theory. Utilizing and developing insights from poststructuralism, deconstruction and, in particular, Lacanian psychoanalysis, thinkers like Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Zizek have, in different ways, attempted to reinvigorate the emancipative political project, extracting it from beneath the crumbling edifice of Marxism. The broadly termed 'post-Marxist' or 'discourse analysis' approach involves a radical revision of Marxism, rejecting the economism and class essentialism that it was founded upon, asserting instead the primacy and autonomy of the political dimension, beyond the determinism of class and the dialectic.

It is precisely this emphasis on the primacy and autonomy of the political that also characterizes anarchism, distinguishing it from Marxism. Anarchism offered a radical alternative to Marxism by insisting on the importance and autonomy of the political realm - in particular, the specific power and authority of the State institution - rather than subsuming it, as classical Marxism did, to an analysis of the economy and class relations. Anarchism therefore offered new theoretical tools for the analysis of political power, beyond the economic and class reductionism of Marxism. However, despite anarchism's contribution to radical politics, and its theoretical proximity to current post-Marxist projects, there has been a curious silence about this revolutionary tradition on

the part of contemporary theorists. In this sense, anarchism has always lurked in the shadows of the radical Left, and perhaps may be seen as a kind of dangerous and excessive supplement to Marxism. May '68 for instance - in its fundamental challenge not only to dominant political and social institutions, but also to the conservatism, stagnation and authoritarianism of the Communist Party - perhaps represented the 'return' of anarchist moment in Western Europe, and one could argue that contemporary theoretical strategies like poststructuralism and post-Marxism were, to some extent, inspired by the anarchist critique of Marxism.

The major theoretical achievement of anarchism was precisely to unmask both the specific and autonomous dimension of political power and authority, and the dangers of their reaffirmation in a revolution if neglected. In other words, power and authority were now seen as phenomena that could no longer be reduced to their different class articulations. Rather, they were to be understood in terms of an abstract position or place in the social, and as having their own structural imperative – that of self-perpetuation – which instantiated itself in different guises, including that of the Marxist workers' revolution itself. Therefore, the place of power and authority could not be easily overcome, and was always in danger of being reaffirmed unless addressed specifically. Anarchism therefore exposed the limitations of Marxist theory in dealing with the problem of power and authority. Blinded as it was by its economic determinism, Marxism failed to see power and authority as phenomena that are irreducible to economic factors, requiring their own specific forms of analysis. Anarchism, moreover, pointed to other sites of authority and domination that were neglected in Marxist theory - for example, the Church, the family and patriarchal structures, the law, technology, as well as the structure and hierarchy of the revolutionary party itself.

By insisting, moreover, on seeing power and authority as having their own logic, anarchism also allowed for the theorization, within radical politics, of new domains of struggle and antagonism. The political struggles of today can no longer be defined solely according to the categories of economic class, but rather are increasingly characterized by a resistance to different forms of power and authority - State regulation, racism, workplace surveillance, bureaucratic centralization, and the domination of everyday life (Laclau and Mouffe 159). That is to say, they are anti-authoritarian struggles that can no longer be defined in terms of Marxist class struggles.

The subject and revolution

This struggle against political authority was seen by anarchists as the fundamental struggle of humanity itself. For anarchists, all forms of political authority are dehumanizing and a negation of freedom. Authority is a brutal and unnecessary intrusion, not only on the subject's freedom, but also on the ontological order upon which this freedom is based. Freedom is founded, according to anarchism, upon a naturally functioning social order that is inherently rational and moral. Society therefore has no need for political authority - this only impedes the development of human freedom. Once political authority is abolished, according to anarchists, human freedom will finally flourish.

The possibilities of human freedom are founded on a series of rational and ethical relations that naturally occur in society. The anarchist Peter Kropotkin argues, for instance, that there is a natural sociability found amongst both animals and humans, upon which free and ethical action could be established. Contrary to what he saw as a pseudo-Darwinist approach, Kropotkin main-

tained that co-operation and mutual aid amongst animals were more prevalent and instinctive than competition and aggression. Applying these findings to human society, he argued that the natural and essential principle of human society is mutual aid. This is the organic principle that governs society, and it is out of this that notions of morality, justice and ethics grow (Kropotkin, Ethics 45).

Of course this stands in stark contrast to Freud's notion of human instinct as naturally aggressive and destructive. In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud claims that human beings are characterized, not by an inherent rationality or sociability, but by a primal libidinous urge towards aggression. (122) The external structures of civilization therefore impose a very necessary check upon these instincts, despite the resultant inculcation of superego guilt in the individual. It is only through the intervention of some kind of external or 'artificial' symbolic order that any degree of cohesion can be achieved. In other words, cohesion is not the natural outcome of society, as anarchists would contend, but rather of an artificial intervention that forces a radical separation between the individual and his natural state, bringing the two into opposition.

This highlights the central opposition between the classical anarchist and psychoanalytic accounts of the emergence of the subject from society. For anarchists, the subject emerges from society in a harmonious fashion, according to 'natural law', and there is no essential conflict between the subject and society, except when political authority intervenes. Here Bakunin insists on a strict conceptual division between two ontological orders – one 'natural', the other 'artificial'. The former is the order of organic social relations governed by 'natural laws', which constitute the essential humanity of the subject (Political Philosophy 239). Opposed to this is the artificial order – the realm of institutions, laws and political authority – whose governing principle is 'artificial law', which is inherently immoral, irrational and oppressive. In contrast to natural authority, artificial authority constitutes an external imposition upon the subject - something that impedes the development of his humanity, stultifying his innate rational and moral capacities.

Anarchism is therefore an Enlightenment-based radical political philosophy, at the heart of which is a dialectical relationship between freedom and authority. As I have shown, the possibilities of human freedom in anarchist theory have their basis in an essential rational harmony that has been disrupted by the operation of 'artificial' political authority. However, this harmony constitutes the objective truth of social relations - a truth that lies dormant, waiting to be rediscovered. That is why the secret of the subject's freedom, in anarchist theory, lies in revealing the meaning of this social essence, of rediscovering its laws and restoring harmony and transparency to social relations. Therefore, the subject's struggle for freedom is determined by the dialectical unfolding of this rational truth, and the overcoming of the external limitations of political power and authority. Once centralized political authority is destroyed, social relations will become transparent - hence Bakunin's positivistic faith in the ability of science to perceive the fundamental workings of society, and his belief that the anarchist revolution would be a scientific revolution (Political Philosophy 76). Thus, the anarchist revolution would involve a destruction of authority, but in this destruction there was, at the same time, the restoration of a rational social order. In other words, the anarchist transgression of authority is inseparable from a 'return' to a lost social fullness.

"What you want is another Master!": Lacan's dystopia

Some of the differences between the utopian revolutionary politics of classical anarchism, and the somewhat conservative implications of psychoanalytic theory, have already been touched upon. Indeed, Freud was rather sceptical about the utopian claims of revolutionary politics, having as we have seen a less than sanguine view of human nature.[1] This scepticism about radical politics was also shared by Lacan, and was most notoriously demonstrated in his address to university students in the May 1968 uprising in Paris: "Revolutionary aspirations have only one possibility: always to end up in the discourse of the master. Experience has proven this. What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a master. You will have one!" (Cited in Stavrakakis 12). What exactly did he mean?

As unambiguous as this statement may seem, there are two implications that can be drawn from it in relation to the importance of psychoanalytic theory for radical politics. The first implication is a simple outright dismissal of any form of radical political activity - give up your hysterical revolutionary aspirations, as they will ultimately end in new forms of domination. This would seem to align Lacan with a conservative a-political stance, and put paid to the suggestion that there is anything in Lacanian theory that is of interest to radical politics.[2] However, it is possible to draw another implication here - one that, paradoxically, aligns Lacan with the anarchist position. One may suggest that this statement may be taken as a warning to radical politics about the dangers of reaffirming the structures of power and authority as a consequence of a revolution. Was this not precisely the same warning that the anarchists gave to Marxists regarding the question of the State and political institutions? In this sense, then, both the anarchist and Lacanian positions point to the place of power – that is, the dangers of power and authority being reproduced in one's very attempt to overcome them. Both perspectives address, in other words, the position of the revolutionary vis-à-vis the place of domination he contests - the revolutionary must confront the hidden, disavowed authoritarian implications of his own endeavor. In other words, the revolutionary is asked, is the authority you contest not already immanent in your position as revolutionary, and will your revolution not lead to a perpetuation of this authority? So the question to be addressed here is: how can radical politics be reconfigured in such a way that it can avoid the reaffirmation of power and authority? This was the anarchist question - to some degree it is also the Lacanian question.

Master and Slave: the dialectics of authority

Part of this reconfiguring of radical politics via Lacanian theory would, however, involve a critique of the conceptual structures of anarchism itself. Because anarchism, like Marxism, is a discourse of revolution, it must be submitted to a Lacanian critique of the revolutionary position and its immanent authoritarianism. In other words, does anarchism itself reaffirm the authority it transgresses?; in seeking to overcome the position of the master, will it install a new master in

[1] Yannis Stavrakakis recalls Freud's 'half-conversion' to Bolshevism: "when he was told that communism would bring at first some hard years and then harmony and happiness, he answered that he believed in the first half of this programme." (12)

[2] Indeed Lacan refers dismissively to the "libertarian hook" that supposedly attaches itself to psychoanalysis, pointing to certain attempts to see psychoanalysis as a practice that can free us from the Law (Grigg Seminar XVII Ch8: 2).

its place? That is to say, is anarchism also caught up in the authoritarian discourse of the Master - the very discourse it ostensibly seeks to abolish? It would seem that from a Lacanian perspective, there is a structural link between the position of the revolutionist and the position of the Master - one implying the other. It is precisely this hidden connection between revolutionary desire and the domination it contests, between transgression and authority, that is the central problem of revolutionary political theories like anarchism, and which must be uncovered and explored if radical politics is to avoid the perpetuation of power.

In exploring this connection between revolutionary transgression and authority, we must turn to Lacan's reformulation of Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic. Indeed, in the paradoxical relationship between master and slave, there is reflected the central problem in anarchism – the ambiguous and hidden connection between revolutionary desire and authority. In Hegel's dialectic, desire, which is really the desire of the self, is only realized through the desire of the other. In other words, what is desired is the recognition by the other of one's own desire. This self-recognition therefore involves the negation of the other's self-recognition - as there can be only room for one – thus instigating a relationship of domination between the one who recognizes and desires the other (the slave) and the one who is recognized and desired (the master). However, because self-recognition is based on recognition by the other, the identity of the master – the one who is recognized – is dependent on the identity of the slave – the one who recognizes. This introduces into the relationship a paradoxical ambiguity and potential reversal of positions. We can see this precariousness in all relationships of political and social domination – the authority of the lord is always dependent on the recognition of this authority by the bondsman; without this it would collapse. This opposition is only reconciled, according to Hegel, in the universal and homogeneous State – wherein both the master and slave recognize themselves in each other.

As Borch-Jacobsen argues, however, it is precisely this reconciliation that Lacan rejects, suggesting that even in this universal State, there would still be divisions wrought by rivalries between egos – a mutual envy, for instance, between 'scientists' and non-scientists, particularly over the status of knowledge (90). This was precisely the same contradiction that anarchists pointed to in the concept of the Marxist workers' State, which was supposed to be the institution wherein class divisions would be reconciled. On the contrary, Bakunin predicted that new class divisions would emerge – those between a bureaucratic class of scientists and experts, and the rest of the population (Selected Writings 266). However, there is an important difference here: what the anarchists reject is the notion that dialectical reconciliation can be achieved through the State, while Lacan rejects the notion of dialectical reconciliation altogether.

For Lacan, the self-recognition that was at the heart of the Hegelian dialectic is actually based on a fundamental misrecognition or méconnaissance. That is, one only becomes 'self-conscious' through misperceiving the other's desire, rather than recognizing oneself in it. In other words, one's desire is never desire for oneself – or never a desire to be mirrored in the desire of the other – but rather, it is a desire for something else, something beyond this. That is why desire is always confronted with an abyss – an ultimate emptiness – which can be overcome only in death. However, rather than being confronted with the impossibility of one's desire, one objectivizes it – that is, one invents an external impediment to it that functions as an excuse for it not being realized. Thus, the slave invents the master in the place of his own impossible desire, as an externalized prohibition of it. This is so the slave can effectively say to himself: I could realize my desire if only it were not for the master who stands in the way of it. What this really disguises is the internal deadlock of desire itself – it allows the slave to function 'as if' this deadlock did not

exist, precisely by blaming it on an external barrier. In this way, the master comes to represent the slave's own impossible jouissance - the 'theft' of the slave's enjoyment, which was a satisfaction that he never had in the first place. The obsessional neurotic is a good example of this. According to Lacan, the obsessional engages in a continual deferment or putting off of his desire, awaiting the master's death, thus putting the master in place of the impossibility of his desire. Yet, in doing so, he confines himself to a morbid existence – a sort of living death (Ecrits 100).

Now what if it were the case that the revolutionary dialectics of anarchism functioned in precisely the same way? Central to anarchism, as I have shown, is a dialectic in which the subject seeks to recognize himself and his own humanity through the overcoming of external obstacles such as the State. The State is therefore seen as an external barrier to the progressive self-realization of the subject. This realization is thus always deferred, put off. Paradoxically, however, it is precisely the State, as an external obstacle to the full identity of the subject, which is, at the same time, essential to the formation of this incomplete identity. The identity of the subject is characterized as essentially 'rational' and 'moral' – that is, capable of a full realization of humanity - only in so far as the unfolding of these innate faculties and qualities is prevented by the State. Without the existence of political authority, in other words, the subject would be unable to see itself in this way. His identity is thus complete in its very incompleteness. The existence of political authority is a means of constructing the absent fullness of the subject.

If we were to see this dialectic in Lacanian terms, we could suggest that in the discourse of anarchism, the State occupies the place of the master vis-à-vis that of the slave – in other words, the State functions as an externalization of an internal deadlock in the subject, masking the impossible lack at the heart of revolutionary desire itself. In other words, what the State as an external prohibition is really hiding is the fact that the desired for self-realization of the subject is ultimately impossible – that indeed, there is no rational and moral human essence that has been repressed by political authority and is just waiting to be revealed; that in fact, at the heart of human subjectivity there is an impossible lack or emptiness that cannot be overcome. In this sense, the State in anarchist discourse performs a necessary function in disguising this lack, operating as an excuse so that a confrontation with this lack can be avoided. Paradoxically, then, the existence of political authority allows revolutionary desire to be sustained: I could realize my full humanity if only it were not for the State that stands in my way. So, perhaps we could say that just as the master is the invention of the slave, so too the all-oppressive, all-dominating State is the invention of the revolutionist – functioning as it does as a way of putting off the encounter with the lack in his own subjectivity and the very impossibility of his desire. This would not be to suggest that the State is merely an illusion – rather that, along Foucauldian lines, the State functions as a way of disguising the fact that power has already colonized the subject (see "Power and Strategies" 116). This presents a fundamental problem for anarchism: its revolutionary desire to overcome the State will always be thwarted, as it belies a more troubling need for the State to sustain its desire, and mask its own impossibility.[3] For Lacan, then, revolutionary

[3] Slavoj Zizek makes a similar point here regarding State authority and political opposition to it, suggesting that the traditional liberal individualist attitude to the State - seeing it as a coercive external restriction placed on one's freedom - neglects the problem of the extent to which this 'limitation' is not external but is actually an internal self-limitation that increases one's real freedom. It provides a foundation for the individual as a free rational being, so that the part of the individual that actually resists State authority is the 'unfree' pathological part. In other words, the authority that revolutionaries seek to resist is already internalized, the external Master merely providing a cover for

transgression and authority are caught in a dialectic in which the former is dependent upon the latter, and when external authority disappears, an internalized prohibition comes to the fore:

> A long time ago I observed that for the sentence of the old father Karamazov, 'If God is dead, then everything is permitted', the conclusion that forces itself upon us in the text of our experience is that the response to 'God is dead' is that 'Nothing is permitted anymore'. (Grigg Seminar XVII Ch8: 3)

The four discourses

It would seem, then, that anarchism's revolutionary dialectic is caught in the same paradoxical relationship as Lacan's master and slave – in which opposition to authority is a kind of game which hides the fact that revolutionary subjectivity and desire are actually dependent on this very authority. In adopting the position of the slave, the revolutionary subject of anarchism is playing into the hands of the master. To understand this authoritarian bind more precisely, we must turn to Lacan's theory of the Four Discourses, in which the dialectic of authority and transgression is formalized in structural terms. In Seminar XVII[4] (presented 1969-70, largely in response to the May '68 uprisings) Lacan introduced the theory of the four discourses that constitute the social link. By 'discourse', Lacan means a formal structural position constituted by fundamental relations of language, but which is beyond actual words and utterances: a "discourse without words" (Grigg, Seminar XVII Ch1: 3).

These four discourses are that of the University, Master, Hysteric and Analyst. As Mark Bracher shows, they are a way of understanding major social and political phenomena: educating in the case of the University; governing in the case of the Master; protesting in the case of the Hysteric; and revolutionizing in the case of the Analyst ("On the Psychological" 107). In this sense, they are crucial to the question of radical politics because they are a way of explaining social changes and upheavals. There is a certain order amongst these discourses, and a specific and logical relation between them. Here, we will concern ourselves initially with the discourses of the Master and the Hysteric, and later on with that of the Analyst, as the relations between these show most clearly the problem of authority and its reaffirmation in radical politics. Indeed, these discourses show that the link between revolution and authority is constituted by a structural, and indeed inevitable, relation between discursive positions.

The discourse of the Master is the discourse that embodies self-mastery – the attempt to constitute an autonomous ego, one whose identity is secure in a complete self-knowledge. This discourse is characterized by the dominance of the Master Signifier (S1) - through which the subject sustains the illusion of self-identity, of being identical with his own signifier. In order to sustain this self-identity, this discourse excludes the unconscious - the knowledge that is not known - as this would jeopardize the ego's sense of certainty. Therefore, the discourse of the Master stands in a particular relation of authority to knowledge, seeking to dominate it, and exclude

this - so that once the external Master disappears, the subject is once more at the mercy of his or her own pathological limitations ("From Joyce-the-Symptom" 4).

[4] Here I will be relying on Russell Grigg's unpublished draft translation of The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book 17: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis 1969-1970. Ed., Jacques-Alain Miller, trans., with notes by Grigg. References from this seminar will henceforth be cited in the text under Grigg. (*Note - the pages in this draft copy do not run consecutively from chapter to chapter)

from consciousness the knowledge of the unconscious.[5] This relation to knowledge is, for Lacan, a political question: "the idea that knowledge can make a whole is, if I may say so, immanent to the political as such" (Grigg, Seminar XVII Ch2: 4). The Master's position of authority over knowledge therefore instantiates a position of political authority. Political ideologies are always based on the idea of knowledge being complete, absolute, and being able to grasp the whole of society. Implicated in this discourse, then, is the attempt to use knowledge to gain mastery of the social field. Different discourses, techniques and 'strategies of governance' - to use Foucault's terminology - would be articulations of the discourse of the Master.

Moreover, as Lacan shows, political movements and discourses which seek to transform society, to overthrow the dominant discourse of the Master, are still trapped within this discourse and inevitably perpetuate it. The discourse of the Master encompasses even those revolutionary theories which seek to overthrow it:

> What I mean by this is that it embraces everything, even what thinks of itself as revolutionary, or more exactly what is romantically called Revolution with a capital R. The discourse of the master accomplishes its own revolution in the other sense of doing a complete circle (Grigg, Seminar XVII Ch6: 2).

In other words, what a political revolution succeeds in doing is merely to instantiate itself within the structure of the Master's discourse - thus reaffirming it. It merely completes the circle, once again ending up in the Master's discourse - the very position of authority that it tried to negate. It is here that Lacan seems to reflect the anarchist argument about the 'place of power' or the structural imperative of authority to perpetuate itself, even in revolutionary situations. In other words, both the anarchists and Lacan would see power and authority in terms of a specific structural logic of self-perpetuation, pointing to the dangers of revolutionary endeavors that do not deal directly with this question. This would apply particularly to Marxism, which ends up in a 'changing of the guard'. As anarchists showed, Marxism falls into the trap of the place of power because it thinks it can transform society without transforming the structure of authority; because it seeks merely to put another agent in the position of authority - the worker in place of the bourgeois. "And this is why," as Lacan says "all he has done is change masters." (Grigg, Seminar XVII Ch2: 6).

Given this intractability of authority, how is it possible to effect social change without merely reaffirming it? How is it possible, in other words, to escape the Master? The only way to undermine the Master, for Lacan, is through the discourse of the Analyst. However, this process can only begin once the intermediary discourse of the Hysteric is passed through. What is the particular relationship, then, between the Master and Hysteric, and why does it lead to the Analyst? According to Bracher, because of the dominance of the S1 in the Master discourse, there is produced an excess of enjoyment - the a or plus-de-jour - for which there is no place in this discourse, and which is therefore excluded and projected onto the slave (Lacan 64). Therefore the knowledge of the object-cause of the Master's own desire is denied to him. That is why Lacan says that the essence of the master is to not know what he wants, and the essence of the slave is precisely to know this in place of his master (Grigg, Seminar XVII Ch2: 6). What this means is, however, that the position of the Master is really the position of castration - as he is cut off

[5] Moreover, it is the role of the University Discourse to provide the justification through knowledge, of the discursive 'truth' of the Master's position.

from his object a, from enjoyment (Bracher, Lacan 65). What the Master discourse conceals, then, behind its posture of certainty and fullness of identity, is a fundamental lack.

Now it is precisely this lack that the discourse of the Hysteric, in a paradoxical fashion, hones in on. The position of the Hysteric is characterized by an identification with an unsatisfied desire. Because the agent here realizes her lack - the lack of the object of desire that will complete her identity - her position is characterized by a demand to know who she is and what her desire is (Verhaeghe 28). This demand is always addressed to the other, and it is because of the nature of this demand that the hysteric makes a master out of the other. In other words, the hysteric's demand is addressed to the master, who is expected to provide an answer to the hysteric's desire. However, due to the impossibility of satisfying this desire, the answer that the master provides is always wrong or inadequate. In order to keep his desire alive, the hysteric therefore has a vested interest in sustaining the lack in the master. We can seen, in this complex dialectic, the precise relation between these two discourses - the hysteric is always testing the knowledge and authority of the master who, in trying to conceal his lack and shore up his position of authority, provides answers that only expose his impotence and lack all the more. The hysteric increasingly comes to see the master as an impediment to the realization of her desire; however, at the same time, she has to sustain the position of the Master in order to sustain her desire, for once desire is satisfied, it collapses.

Therefore, the hysteric questions, interrogates and resists the master but, at the same time, needs the master in order to sustain her insurrectionary desire. In political terms, then, we could say that while Marxism, despite its revolutionary aspirations, was ultimately part of the discourse of the Master, anarchism would be part of the Hysteric's discourse. This is because while Marxism, in its revolutionary endeavors, neglected the Master's discourse - the place of power and authority - which was why it remained caught within it, anarchism, like the hysteric, focused on this place authority itself, seeing it as the main impediment to the subject's freedom and fullness. So just as the hysteric sees the master as the cause of her alienation, so the anarchist sees the State as the cause of the subject's alienation. However, despite - or more precisely through - its attempt to negate political authority, anarchism finds itself, paradoxically, reliant upon it in order to form its own revolutionary identity. I have shown the way, for instance, that in anarchist discourse the State functions as both impediment to, and object cause of, revolutionary desire. So, in this analysis, just as the hysteric needs the master to have something to protest against, so the anarchist needs the State to constitute the subject's revolutionary identity.

Traversing the fantasy: the discourse of the analyst

Despite this paradoxical relationship between the master and hysteric, there is still a real revolutionary potential in the Hysteric's discourse. However, in order to break out of the bind with the Master, another discourse must intervene - that of the Analyst. According to Lacan, this discourse is the only real counterpoint to that of the Master (Grigg, Seminar XVII Ch6: 3) and the only way for the subject to escape it. So what happens here? Briefly, the role of analysis is, as Bracher shows, to allow the subject to own his or her alienation and desire, by confronting him with his own unconscious fantasy - producing a gap between the subject and ego ideal - and to accept that the Other, which supports this fantasy structure, is itself deficient, lacking and un-

grounded (see Bracher, Lacan 68-73). This would be what Lacan calls la traversée du fantasme - crossing or traversing the fantasy.

Let us try to understand this process in political terms - that is, in terms of the possibility of anarchism or, radical politics generally, escaping the Master and traversing the political fantasy. We have seen that classical anarchism, as a radical political philosophy, is sustained not only by the idea of a rational social 'object' which determines the revolutionary process, but also by the utopian idea of society on the 'other side' of power - a society, in other words, without the distortions and dislocations wrought by power and authority. That is to say, there is a utopian fantasy of an Edenic state of fullness and reconciliation that would prevail in society once power relations have been eliminated. Furthermore, there is, in anarchism, an idealization of the subject - the subject is seen as embodying an inherent morality and rationality, the full expression of which has been distorted by political authority. In other words, there is a political fantasy that sustains the revolutionary desire at the heart of anarchism - this fantasy consists of a Manichean division between the subject and authority, and the promise of a return to a lost rational and moral social objectivity once this authority has been eliminated.

The problem with this discourse, however, is the essentialist and positivistic assumptions that it relies upon, assumptions that are no longer sustainable in light of the theoretical developments of poststructuralism and discourse analysis. For anarchism to become more relevant to contemporary radical politics and theory, it would have to abandon these assumptions, and in particular the utopian fantasy - the object a - around which its revolutionary desire is structured. Moreover, anarchism must confront what is so disturbing to its own idealizations - that is, the desire for power at the heart of human subjectivity. This desire for power is something that is both acknowledged, yet disavowed in classical anarchism. For instance, Bakunin talks about the 'power principle: "Every man carries within himself the germs of the lust for power, and every germ, as we know, because of a basic law of life, necessarily must develop and grow." (Political Philosophy 248). Perhaps we can say that this 'power principle' is the traumatic unconscious fantasy of classical anarchism - something which disturbs its idealization of the essentially moral and rational subject. So what anarchism needs to do is confront this traumatic realization - to accept that, at the heart of the human subject there is not a latent moral and rational essence, but rather a desire or drive for power. Moreover, this would also involve the acknowledgement that power will always be present to a degree in every political symbolization - even those based on the utopian ideal of a society free from power. The process of political symbolization will always involve an exclusion of a particular element - and this, of course, is the operation of power.

The contingency of the political

But what does this mean for anarchism and emancipative politics generally? Simply, that it must abandon the fantasy of utopian fullness and recognize that the Other is lacking, that there is no natural or essential commonality that holds society together. In other words, what radical politics must acknowledge and, indeed, affirm is that there is no dialectical process or underlying social logic that determines the political - that the political is always radically ungrounded, indeterminate and contingent. Yannis Stavrakakis here talks about the crisis of the utopian project, suggesting that instead "the politics of today is the politics of aporia." (99) Utopian political projects, including anarchism, were based on the fantasy of a society without dislocation and

antagonism, and were attempts to conceal or 'patch up' the very lack in the social itself - the lack which was irreducible and indeed, constitutive of the political itself. That is to say that the very operation of politics is based around this void at the heart of the social - politics is nothing but the attempt to fill or 'suture' this void through different symbolizations based on the promise of fullness.

Traversing the fantasy in the political sense, then, would mean recognizing this irreducible void in the social - the void that jeopardizes and dislocates any political symbolization. It would mean acknowledging the contingency and undecidability of politics, and that transformative and emancipative political projects can never hope to transform the whole of society - there will always be something that eludes them. Society, in other words, is an impossible object that can never be grasped in this way. Indeed, as Stavrakakis argues, Lacanian political theory is based around a fundamental impossibility or lack: "Lacanian political theory aims at bringing to the fore, again and again, the lack in the Other, the same lack that utopian fantasy attempts to mask…" (166). This would mean, moreover, that any kind of radical political critique of institutions and social practices could not be from the perspective of some sort of essentialist subjectivity or social order that institutions are seen to impose themselves upon, but rather would operate within the discursive limits of the institution itself - according to the Lacanian realization that all social practices, even revolutionary ones, are part of, and indeed dependent upon, institutional and discursive structures themselves (see Copjec 51).

Politics of the Event

However, despite the implicit link between social and political practices and the institutional structures that give rise to them, there are still moments of rupture and dislocation in which the indeterminacy of these structures is exposed and in which their dominance is called into question. This moment of rupture might be seen in terms of a fundamental political Event, which is contingent, indeterminate and whose effects are undecidable. In the case of a revolution, for instance, there is something that exceeds or transcends both the concrete conditions that give rise to it and its subsequent reintegration into a State order. Alain Badiou, for instance, believes that the French Revolution, despite its subsequent concretization into a French Republican order, contained an emancipative potential, an 'infinite multiplicity' - expressed in the demand for universal egalitarian democracy - that, although it lies dormant today, can nevertheless be reactivated (see Barker 83-84). Perhaps in Lacanian terms, the Event might refer to that radical transition from one Discourse to another - in which there is a sublime infinitesimal space where everything is momentarily suspended and anything is possible. It would be this kind of space between two structural positions or signifying regimes that could be truly said to be political.

There have been a number contemporary thinkers who have tried to theorize this moment of indeterminacy, seeing it as the basis for politics proper, as that which destabilizes political identities and structures, and allows them to be questioned. Here I will briefly discuss two different approaches to this question - that of Jacques Ranciere and Slavoj Zizek - which illustrate both the liberating potential, and the authoritarian dangers, of the politics of the Event.

Rancière is a thinker for whom the contingent and disruptive element of the politics is central. This disruptive element is based on a constitutive incommensurability or "disagreement" (mésentente) between the demos and the 'police' order, an incommensurability that Ranciere

traces back to its origins in Athenian democracy. The demos, or 'the people', is defined by its exclusion from the polis – it is the formless mass that has 'no part' in the political life of the city and, as such, has been the victim of a fundamental 'wrong' that must be redressed. The 'police' order refers to the status quo, the dominant social and political structures. This order is based on a process of 'calculation' which seeks to separate the individual from the mass and assign each to his place within the dominant order. Its tendency is therefore towards a de-politicization of the mass, and a reduction of the political terrain through a process of individualization. However, this incommensurability gives rise to disputes in which fundamental political questions are raised: "It produces both new inscriptions of equality within liberty and a fresh sphere of visibility for further demonstrations." (42) So for Rancière, there are moments of rupture in which identities become indeterminate, and in which dominant social hierarchies and structures are momentarily dislocated or suspended, allowing new and unpredictable political meanings to be articulated. This would be similar to the transitional spaces between discourses that I have referred to, in which new political meanings - even revolutionary ones - may intervene. The key point here, however, is that there is no utopian goal for politics - or at least there is not one that can ever be reached; rather politics must be seen as a series of clashes or 'disagreements' in which its inherently unstable and contingent nature is brought to the fore.

Slavoj Zizek also sees politics in terms of a fundamental moment of rupture - an event that breaks with accepted political identities and categories, and allows new meanings to be produced. In a number of texts, Zizek has invoked a sort of revolutionary Act that fundamentally breaks the deadlock of the contemporary politico-ideological paradigms of liberal multiculturalism and capitalist globalization: "Today, more than ever, one has to insist that the only way to open the emergence of an Event is that of breaking the vicious cycle of globalization-with-particularization by (re)asserting the dimension of Universality against capitalist globalization." (Ticklish Subject 211) The assertion of this Universal dimension, as an excluded particularity, would be, in Lacanian terms, a kind of passage à l'acte - an ethical decision - that transgresses the dominant symbolic coordinates of society.

However, the political event, if theorized in this way, is fundamentally ambiguous. On the one hand, the ethical decision can refer to a kind of leap into an abyss of contingency and freedom, in which there is an impossible gap between the subject and the pre-established normative criteria that are supposed to guide his action. According to Ernesto Laclau, for instance, this unstable relationship between the ethical and the normative is the basis for a hegemonic politics, in which there is always a gap between the universal and particular, between the empty place of the universal and the particular identity which attempts, ultimately unsuccessfully, to embody it (Butler, Laclau, Zizek 81). This politics of hegemony - or politics of the lack - implies a democratic and emancipative contingency, in which the political field is constituted through its openness to different identities and forms of engagement. For Zizek, on the other hand, however, the politico-ethical decision for Zizek, seems to imply a form of authoritarian or 'terrorist' politics, that at times he openly advocates:

> The only 'realistic' prospect is to ground a new political universality by opting for the impossible, fully assuming the place of the exception, with no taboos, no apriori norms ('human rights', 'democracy'), respect for which would prevent us also from resignifying terror, the ruthless exercise of power, the spirit of sacrifice … if this

> radical choice is decried by some bleeding-heart liberals as Linksfaschismus, so be it!" (Butler, Laclau, Zizek 326).

Perhaps this shows the temptation in radical politics to ground or concretize this inter-discursive space in a new discourse of the Master - something that always has authoritarian implications. Indeed, Zizek argues that in times of revolution or social disintegration "in which the cohesive power of ideology loses its efficiency" it is the Master who provides a new quilting point that stabilizes the situation ("Four Discourses" 77)

An-archism

So it would appear that the Event that can intervene in the transitional spaces between Discourses, is always potentially dangerous, and that this would only seem to confirm Lacan's original warning about radical politics - that it will inevitably end up invoking a new Master. However, one could suggest here that rather than succumbing to the temptation to pass to the act, immediately seeking to reinscribe the political Event within the discourse of the Master as a way of stabilizing the revolution, perhaps instead one could remain faithful to its constitutive openness and its radically contingent possibilities. This would imply a radical political ethics of suspension and indeterminacy that refuses to be grounded in a concrete ontological order. Indeed, we might refer here to a an-archic politico-ethical position, one that distinguishes itself from classical anarchism by rejecting the ontological ground, essentialist identities and utopian structures that it is founded upon. Reiner Schurmann characterizes an-anarchic action as action without a "why?" - that is, action that is not grounded in absolute rationalist principles (Heidegger 10). In a similar way, we might characterize Lacanian an-anarchic action as action without a Master - in other words, action that no longer invokes the Master, instead remaining open to the indeterminacy of the political situation.

As a concrete example of a Lacanian an-anarchic politics in this sense, we could point to what is broadly termed the 'anti-globalization' movement - a protest movement that has exploded across our political horizons in recent years, from Seattle to Cancun. This is series of struggles against the neo-liberal capitalist vision of globalization that so dominates us today. What is radical about this movement is not only the breadth of its political agenda, but the new forms of political action that it entails. It is fundamentally different from both the identity politics that has recently prevailed in Western liberal societies, as well as from the Marxist politics of class struggle. On the one hand, the anti-globalization movement unites different identities around a common struggle; and yet this common ground is not determined in advance, or based on the priority of particular class interests, but rather is articulated in a contingent way during the struggle itself. Having moved beyond cultural and sexual identity struggles - the PC litany of victimizations - radical politics has once again placed capitalism back on the agenda, only not in the same way as Marxism did. It now targets new sites of oppression and domination within the capitalist system: corporate power and greed, G-M products, workplace surveillance, environmental degradation, and so on.

Moreover, what makes this movement radical is its unpredictability and indeterminacy - the way that unexpected links and alliances are formed between different identities and groups that would otherwise have little in common. So while this movement is universal, in the sense that it invokes a common emancipative horizon that interpellates the identities of participants, it

also rejects the false universality of Marxist struggles which deny difference, and subordinate other struggles to the central role of the proletariat - or, to be more precise, to the vanguard role of the Party. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that anarchist groups feature prominently in these protests. It may be seen as an anarchistic form of politics because it rejects centralism and hierarchy, preferring structures that are more democratic and pluralistic.[6] Moreover, it remains open to a plurality of different identities and struggles. Just as classical anarchists insisted, in opposition to Marx, that the revolutionary struggle could not confined or determined by the class interests of the industrial proletariat, and must be open also to peasants, the lumpenproletariat, and intellectuals déclassé, etc, so too the contemporary anti-globalization movement includes a broad range of struggles, identities and interests - trade unions, students, environmentalists, indigenous groups, ethnic minorities, peace activists, and so on.

What this amounts to, then, is a heterogeneous series of struggles that, although 'quilted' around a general politics of resistance to capitalism, does not have a definite Master signifier. Or, perhaps it may be more precise to say that the Master signifier here is empty. Paradoxically, what holds the movement together is a rejection of transcendental identities, or in this case, logos. Naomi Klein, in her exploration of global corporate capitalism and resistance to it, shows the way in which logos have become the universal signifiers of capitalism: "Logos, by the force of ubiquity, have become the closest thing we have to an international language, recognized and understood in many more places than English" (No Logo xxi). In this sense, the logo can be understood in Lacanian terms as a Master signifier - that which provides the consumer with a certain identity[7] and the title of Klein's book implies precisely a rejection, or at least a subversion of logos as signifiers of corporate power. However, this very rejection of logos or master signifiers - No Logo - becomes in itself a sort of empty signifier, a 'stand in' that 'sutures' together in a contingent way the diverse field of struggles.[8]

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[6] See David Graeber's discussion of some of these anarchistic structures and forms of organization in "The New Anarchists".

[7] Indeed Lacan seems to link advertising and consumer products to the discourse of the Master: "We are becoming increasingly familiar with the functions of the agent. We live at a time at which we know what this conveys - fake stuff, advertising stuff, which has to be sold. But we also know that it works with that, at the point we have come to in the expansion, the paroxysm, of the discourse of the master in a society that is founded on it." (Grigg Seminar XVII Ch8: 13).

[8] This notion of the 'empty signifier' is derived from Laclau's understanding of the politics of hegemony, in which a particular identity or signifier comes to represent the empty universality of the political field, thus allowing "chains of equivalence" to be formed between different identities (see "Why do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?" 167).

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