

In a moving river nothing can ever be set in stone: A letter for insurgent dreamers

scott crow

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“The one thing that doesn’t abide by majority rule is a person’s conscience.”

-Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird

What is anarchy? That question and its impacts have reverberated before and since the elusive IDEA was named in the 1800s Europe. The concepts of freedom and liberation from authority, whether individual, community or state has existed probably since before humans could speak. For as long as there has been domination by one or by groups over others there has always been an opposing resistance and rebellion to being ruled. In the last hundred plus years words have been spilled by countless before me-and many smarter than myself-as we seek to grasp and possibly contain that which cannot be boxed in. When language came along it went by many names over the eons. Naming it wasn’t as important as the ideas.

Mythistory It has been proposed that for some groups from hunter gatherers to latter indigenous societies there were probably forms of anarchy that existed as communities developed long before empires, capitalism or industrialization. If you lived in Europe, the US or Canada in the 1800’s-1930’s anarchy would most likely have looked like class war waged for survival and empowerment against the industrial and war machines of Power by the anarcho-communists, *propaganda by the deed* in the ‘Belle Époque’, or in smaller circles experiments in the communitarian utopian back to the land movements or the occasional individualist fighting for personal or sexual liberation. If you came into anarchy in the mid to late 20th century Europe, US or Canada it would have looked like art interventions of the situationists and surrealists, anarcha-feminism, green anarchy, modern class war built on disintegrating communities and continued job loss and later activism or punk rock from the lost promises of failed revolutions.

Since the turn of the millennium with the explosions of the post-modern age we have entered an anarchist renaissance of ideas, literature and actions that are having huge impacts and influence on international political discourse. Within this renaissance many tendencies have emerged or synthesized from the past as well as an outgrowth of contemporary thought.

In addition to the above mentioned tendencies that have continued, added to this list would be nihilism, insurrectionary, primitivism, *especificismo*, platformist, post-left anarchy, individualism, post anarchism; and my favorite ‘just questioning’. All of which has lead those with too much

leisure on our hands as the world burns to ask and debate “what is ‘real’ anarchy” and who can claim it? To which my humble and confusing reply simply would be—yes! We can debate the minutia, the labels, the histories, words, influences and meanings, but in the end my question is does it really matter?

We haven’t been able to stuff all of these ideas into one single box yet, but people often internet fight like their lives depend on it instead of letting anarchy be the fluid and dynamic set of ideals that it is. Anarchy is not an ideology to institute crusades around.

In a moving river nothing can ever be set in stone For me anarchy is a set of ideas, dreams, a politics, practices, philosophies, ways to see differently; offering approaches to trust ourselves. Anarchy proposes that we can live and engage autonomously or collectively as individuals, groups or communities, rooted in history—oral and written. The ideas are alive in the present and suggest ways to see our futures differently. Anarchy asks us to question ourselves and our varied environments. Anarchy reveals spaces where our futures are wide open.

There are no leaders—even if some seem to have greater influence, no programs or marketing plan. There are no dues, oaths, memberships or questionnaires. It is a set of ideas, beliefs and philosophies that simply affirms we all can and should be free to live our lives without being exploited or oppressed. A wide array of tendencies carries the banner anarchy and even more share the same ideas and dreams without the labels. It is a point of reference, like many others that can be confusing, misconstrued and sometimes meaningless. Anarchy doesn’t define those of us who carry the banner, but is a naming of us who want to live these ideals. Don’t get me wrong, I would burn our black flags and toss the labels into the garbage heap if we agreed that it had outlived its usefulness.

A redneck for anarchy In my interactions with anarchism, mostly through political libertarian individualist and anarcho-communist circles, I transformed my views and my political practices. I went from knowing all the answers and having plans on how to fix the world to stumbling along and asking deeper and much harder questions of myself and others. I came to an understanding that these are revolutionary paths of unknown outcomes.

There weren’t going to be three steps to revolution, and if there were, it would probably end in a travesty of unintended outcomes. I have found solace in knowing that we don’t have to be right and we don’t have to have the answers, just a willingness to explore, to resist domination, and for us all to strive for collective liberation.

The ideas within anarchy are not vague and disassociated from life. In fact there are some powerful root concepts within the anarchist traditions that bond many people and movements to this day, even those that don’t call it by name. Mutual aid, autonomy, anti-capitalist, solidarity, direct action and liberation are ideas and practices that we engage in with each other throughout our lives. We don’t need social theorists, academics, philosophers or professional *politicos* to help us understand the above. I might argue these are innate within us and that we are drawn to them because they express common sense. People often act on these ideas without ever needing an explanation by professionals. I found liberation in anarchist thinkers’ attempts to look at the natural world and all of its inhabitants complexly, rather than just reduce us all to simplistic one-dimensional identities for a *proletarian revolution*.

For possibilities *The idea*, as it was known, has mainstreamed in the 21st century and more people are looking to anarchism’s rich and storied past. We must recognize that those who named it, thought or wrote about it are not to be treated as saints with enshrined and consecrated words

to be quoted and memorized as the truth. We cannot canonize them or their words and follow them. They would have hated that.

Instead, my hope is that we would take those liberatory foundations and continue to build on them by seeing ourselves as part of the ongoing and growing dialogue. Anarchy is more than opposition to capitalism and domination maintained by Power[i]. Refusal is only the first step. We are challenged to think of the possibilities associated with our freedom and liberation with our *emergency hearts*[ii] wide open.

We don't know the future and we cannot control it – but anarchy offers a crack in history to revisit long forgotten paths. This enables us to forge new passages, daring us to take risks towards freedom on our own terms – for ourselves and those around us.

Until we're all free! From the concrete jungle in the Gulf Coast Basin scott crow

[i] concentrations of authority and privilege in economic, political, or cultural institutions that exercise undue influence on the world. In this sense, Power is identical with the state, multinational corporations, or the rich, who are not accountable to and derisive of civil society. This power operates through bureaucracies, executive boards, the military, and transnational corporations and corporate media of all forms. It is exercised through brute force, neglect, and manipulation or corruption of economies, for example. It results in control over resources as well as social and cultural norms.

[ii] Emergency hearts is a phrase I use to describe the immediacy of our feelings of empathy and compassion that motivates us to act to end oppression, exploitation and destruction. Our emergency heart are what motivate people into the streets to resist injustice and create something better.

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