Anarchism and Psychoanalysis

Saul Newman

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> The psychology of the unconscious is the philosophy of revolution: i.e., this is what it is destined to become because it ferments insurrection within the psyche, and liberates individuality from the bonds of its own unconscious. It is destined to make us inwardly capable of freedom, destined to prepare the ground for the revolution.[1]

> Thus I have not the courage to rise up before my fellow-men as a prophet, and I bow to their reproach that I can offer them no consolation: for at bottom that is what they are all demanding—the wildest revolutionaries no less passionately than the most virtuous believers.[2]

Introduction

As the above two quotes suggest, anarchism and psychoanalysis have an ambiguous and somewhat paradoxical relationship. Otto Gross, the psychoanalyst and follower of Freud, declared himself an anarchist and celebrated the revolutionary potential of the unconscious, opening the way to a politically radical articulation of psychoanalytic theory that was taken up by thinkers such as Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse. On the other hand, Freud himself, and later on, Jacques Lacan, while not unsympathetic to ideas of emancipation and social progress, at the same time expressed a cautious skepticism about revolutionary politics, pointing to what they saw as its naïve utopianism. While one could say that both anarchism and psychoanalysis have as their ethical goal the greater autonomy of the individual, anarchists have criticized psychoanalysis—at least in its more traditional forms—as being *individualizing* and ultimately conservative, seeking to adjust the psyche to the pressures and constraints of a repressive society.

There is therefore something both impossible and inevitable about the relationship between psychoanalysis and anarchism. Without an understanding of the psyche, its irrational desires and its passionate attachments to authority figures, there can be no coherent theory of political action, let alone a successful revolution. At the same time, psychoanalytic theory poses fundamental questions to the very concept of revolution, highlighting the utopian fantasies and "wish fulfillment" embodied in such notions, and revealing the deeper problem of the inextricable link between revolutionary desire and the position of the Master. Yet, as suggested by the more radical exponents of the psychoanalytic tradition, there is indeed something potentially transformative and liberating—both individually and sociopolitically—about psychoanalysis. And, if we can speak of a psychoanalytic anarchism, we can perhaps also speak of an anarchistic psychoanalysis. Yet, as I will show, this would involve a different way of thinking about anarchism, in which the desire for greater autonomy is coupled with an awareness of the pitfalls and dangers awaiting revolutionary projects.

In exploring this unavoidable encounter between anarchism and psychoanalysis, this chapter will mainly confine itself to a discussion of the (post)Freudian tradition, including Reich, Marcuse,

[1] Otto Gross, "Overcoming Cultural Crisis," *Die Aktion* (April 1913), reprinted in *Anarchism: a Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 1, From Anarchy to Anarchism* (300CE to 1939), ed. R. Graham (Montreal: Black Rose, 2005), 281–286: 281.

[2] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* [1929], trans. and ed. J. Strachey (New York: W. Norton & Co., 1961), 92.

and Lacan, as different as they are. While there are no doubt many nonFreudian forms of psychotherapy which might, superficially at least, have more in common with anarchist practices,[3] my contention is that it is the Freudian tradition, with its seemingly hierarchical architecture and discourse, that confronts anarchism with fundamental questions about our own relationship with power and authority. So, rather than this being a comprehensive survey of psychotherapeutic practices and their similarities with anarchism, this chapter will focus on specific areas of theoretical controversy in order to test anarchism at its limits.

Voluntary Servitude and the Problem of Human Autonomy

Psychoanalysis and anarchism both have as their central concern the conflicting relationship between the individual and society. For Freud, the story of the individual's entry into society is also the story of his repression—first through the Oedipal dynamics of the family, and then at the hands of external institutions and laws. Thus, the individual chafes against the bars of civilization, a civilization which promised him comfort but brought him only unhappiness and guilt. Freud was keenly aware of the suffering this tension caused, and saw psychoanalytic treatment as a way of relieving unhappiness. Moreover, while some limits upon the individual's behavior were necessary and inevitable, Freud believed there was sufficient scope to relax the undue pressures and constraints imposed by society. While a society entirely without guilt and repression was impossible, there was at least the possibility—indeed, this was the ethical and even perhaps the "political" goal of psychoanalysis—of a society and culture that was less repressive and less guilt-inducing. So, Freudian psychoanalysis rails against the unjustified and excessive demands of the super-ego and the social order, with their irrational moral strictures and prohibitions:

> In our research into, and therapy of, a neurosis, we are led to make two reproaches against the super-ego of the individual. In the severity of its commands and prohibitions it troubles itself too little about the happiness of the ego, in that it takes insufficient account of the resistances against obeying them—of the instinctual strength of the id [in the first place], and of the difficulties presented by the real external environment [in the second]. Consequently we are very often obliged, for therapeutic purposes, to oppose the super-ego, and we endeavor to lower its demands. Exactly the same objections can be made against the ethical demands of the cultural super-ego. It, too, does not trouble itself enough about the facts of the mental constitution of human beings. It issues a command and does not ask whether it is possible for people to obey it. On the contrary, it assumes that a man's ego is psychologically capable of anything that is required of it, that his ego has unlimited mastery over his id. This is a mistake; and even in what are known as normal people the id cannot be controlled beyond certain limits. If more is demanded of a man, a revolt will be produced in him or a neurosis, or he will be made unhappy.[4]

Is there not a clear, strident anti-authoritarianism in Freud's words here; a cry of protest against the excessive constrictions under which the individual is placed? Is there not expressed

[3] I have in mind here various forms of radical group and play psychotherapy, which grew out of the antipsychiatry movement, in particular Somatherapy, which has a distinctly anarchist orientation. Even this, however, was based on the Freudian-inspired theories of Wilhelm Reich.

[4] Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 89–90.

here a desire for greater individual freedom and autonomy, as well as a recognition of the rebellion that lies latent within us — a rebellion which would be fully understandable, even justified, given the severity of social restrictions? The id, for Freud, is the original anarchist—the wild unconscious with its socially unacceptable drives and desires that are only partially contained by the ego and which threaten to explode the very institutional framework of civilization. Indeed, the central fiction of psychoanalysis—the story of Oedipus—is one of rebellion and transgression: the Oedipal subject rebels against the law of the Father, the symbolization of patriarchal authority which blocks and prohibits the child's desire. And it is through this process of rebellion that the child becomes, albeit with varying degrees of success, an autonomous individual.

We have to see psychoanalysis, then, as a critical interrogation of the limits and prohibitions of our society. As Herbert Marcuse said, Freudian psychoanalysis, before its revisionist permutations, was a "radically critical theory."[5] Certainly in Freud's time his ideas were perceived as a radical assault on the moral foundations of bourgeois society; his theory of the unconscious, with its illicit and inadmissible impulses and wishes, and his discovery of childhood sexuality, were just as damaging to the Victorian moral universe and its own selfimage as Darwin's theory of evolution. Indeed, in many ways Freud is just as disturbing to our sensibilities today as he was in his own time.

Surely, then, psychoanalysis finds some preliminary common ground with anarchism, that most heretical and revolutionary of political doctrines, in which the freedom of the individual from repressive social constraints is paramount. Central to both discourses is the story of human rebellion and freedom. Furthermore, anarchism, perhaps more than other revolutionary philosophies, is concerned with what might be called the psychosocial domain—the domain of inter-subjective relationships, in which one's everyday relations with others are of real ethical and political concern.[6] Hence the importance to anarchism of "prefiguration"—achieving the revolution first in terms of one's everyday relations with others, as a condition for the achievement of the revolution at the broader societal level; and the rejection of strategic means-ends thinking. A central problem for anarchists is the desire for authority which, as Bakunin recognized, lurked within our breasts, and which would, given the temptations of power, lead to authoritarian behavior if the apparatus of command— the state—were not demolished as the first revolutionary act:

> Man's nature is so constituted that, given the possibility of doing evil, that is, of feeding his vanity, his ambition, and his cupidity at the expense of someone else, he surely will make full use of such an opportunity. We are all of course sincere Socialists and revolutionists; and still, were we to be endowed with power, even for a short duration of a few months, we would not be where we are now.[7]

Here we have Bakunin sounding very much like Freud, expressing a fundamental distrust of human nature and its desire for power and authority, which must be tempered by creating

[5] H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* [1955] (London: Routledge, 1998), 238.

[6] The anarchist Gustav Landauer saw the state primarily as a relationship, one that could only be destroyed by 'contracting' other kinds of relationships and by behaving differently. See G. Landauer, "Schwache Staatsmänner, Schwächeres Volk!", *Der Sozialist* (June 15,1910), reprinted and translated as "Weak State, Weaker People," in *Revolution and Other Writings: A Political Reader,* ed. and trans. G. Kuhn (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), 213–214.

[7] Mikhail Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism,* ed. G.P Maximoff (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1953), 249.

alternative social arrangements, or, rather, by removing the structures which allow such desires to be realized. My point is that anarchism, as a revolutionary philosophy, was keenly aware of the subject's latent authoritarian tendencies and desires—which, if not checked, would only condemn the revolution to reinstituting authoritarian political and social structures—and therefore of the importance of encouraging alternative, non-authoritarian relationships on a micro-political level.

Therefore, both anarchism and psychoanalysis are concerned with the way that power not only coerces externally, but also becomes internalized within the psyche, producing authoritarian and patriarchal attitudes as well as a desire for one's own repression and domination. Perhaps the central problem that both psychoanalysis and anarchism confront, or ought to confront, is that of *voluntary servitude:* the strange desire, observed long ago by La Boétie, which led people to voluntarily obey even tyrannical forms of power when it was clearly against their own interests to do so.[8] For La Boétie, power did not need to be coercive or violent: induced by a wayward, misdirected desire, people relinquished their own freedom and became willing slaves of the tyrant. Surely, the phenomenon of voluntary obedience to authority is the central problem for radical politics, a problem no less apparent today— perhaps even more so—than in La Boétie's time. Anarchists have long been aware of this problem. Kropotkin attributed the emergence of the modern state in part to people becoming "enamoured of authority."[9] Stirner spoke of the way that we carry "the gendarme" in our breast pocket.[10]

Freud also endeavored to explain our passionate attachments to figures of authority. In his study of the psychodynamics of groups, Freud considers the question posed by the social psychologist, Gustave Le Bon, of why people, particularly in crowds, display a "thirst for obedience." As Freud says, paraphrasing Le Bon, "A group is an obedient herd, which could never live without a master. It has such a thirst for obedience that it submits instinctively to anyone who appoints himself its master."[11] For Freud, as with La Boétie, voluntary obedience to another's will is an enigma requiring explanation, as well as constituting a genuine ethical problem. Freud claims to be disturbed by the power of suggestion, such as that which the hypnotist exercises over the hypnotized—something which he equates with a kind of violence—and he seeks to understand how this works, not only in individual situations, but, more importantly, in group settings where the individual instinct for self-preservation seems more readily abandoned and rendered up to the leader of the group, who is a kind of grand hypnotist. Freud observed an emotional contagion at work in group situations which emanates from the libido; individuals, who otherwise have little in common, are bound together within a group through the love instinct. For Freud, what makes this libidinal bond possible is the figure of the leader, who acts as a cipher of love and identification.[12] The relation of the group member to his or her leader is thus a one of love and idealization—the leader becomes something like a love object which comes to supplant the individual's own ego ideal, which is why the follower often loses any sense of selfpreservation and autonomy, and is even prepared to sacrifice himself for this object.[13]

[8] Étienne La Boétie, *The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*, [1576], trans. H. Kurz (Auburn, AL: The Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2008).

[9] Peter Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historic Role* [1896] (London: Freedom Press, 1943), 28.

[10] Max Stirner, *The Ego and its Own* [1844], ed. D. Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 50.

[11] Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" [1921], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* trans., J. Strachey, Vol. 18: 1920–1922 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 67–143: 81.

[12] Ibid., 95.

[13] Ibid., 113.

To deepen this analysis of the phenomenon of voluntary obedience, Freud returns to the myth of the Primal Father, first explored in *Totem and Taboo.*[14] According to this social myth, the primal father—the ultimate and original patriarch—has absolute power over his sons and demands from them devotion and obedience. The sons fear the primal father equally, thus creating a bond and sense of equality and community between them. However, as the father—the archetypal absolute sovereign—enjoys unrestricted access to all the women of tribe, prohibiting it to the sons, the sons band together to kill and devour the father. Yet, so the myth goes, this ultimate transgression creates a sense of collective guilt amongst the sons, and thus the law against incest arises. I will return to this later, as it has important consequences for this discussion: the removal of one form of prohibition does not necessarily free us as *internalized* constraints come to the fore to take its place.

Nevertheless, Freud's point here is to illustrate the ways in which we become attached to figures of social and political authority through a complex relation of desire and identification. As he says: "The leader of the group is still the dreaded primal father; the group still wishes to be governed by unrestricted force; it has an extreme passion for authority…"[15] Our blind, voluntary submission to figures of authority is as much an ethical (indeed one could also say political) problem for psychoanalysis as it is for anarchism. Indeed, if there is an ethics of psychoanalysis it is, to use the words of Mikkel BorchJacobsen, "a libertarian protest against the hypnotist's power and an authoritarian theory of the social bond."[16] A deeper understanding of the human psyche, and the way it becomes libidinally integrated into systems of power and authority such that the subject obeys without even thinking about it, is surely crucial for any radical political theory. Psychoanalysis is in this sense indispensable to anarchism. This is perhaps more so the case today, where, for the most part, capitalist societies control their populations not through outright coercion— although there is this too—but what might be considered as generalized psychological manipulation.

This is not so much a question of ideology or what the Marxists used to call "false consciousness"—although here I take Slavoj Žižek's point about the way that ideology permeates external social practices, as well operating through our cynical distance from it.[17] Indeed, this alone raises extremely important questions about voluntary servitude and the way it operates—through habits of obedience, work, and consumption—in contemporary neoliberal societies, in which La Boétie's figure of the Tyrant or Freud's figure of the Father/Master is, for the most part, absent. Perhaps the sadness of our times lies in the fact that there is no longer any Father/Master who might serve as a cover or excuse for our voluntary obedience, and yet we obey like never before, perhaps more so than if there were a clear figure of authority to rebel against.

However, by psychological manipulation I am also referring to the whole panoply of techniques which aim to control and normalize people at the level of their psyche: everything from the widespread use of anti-depressants and drugs to control behavior such as ADHD, to the prevalence of CBT as a form of therapy, to the largely unquestioned power of the pharmaceuti-

[14] Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo" [1913], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans., James Strachey, Vol. 13: 1913–1914 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 1–164.

[15] Ibid., 127.

[16] M. Borch-Jacobsen, *The Freudian Subject,* trans. C. Porter (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 156.

[17] See S. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989).

cal industry and the psychiatric establishment in the "treatment" of mental disorders.[18] We can add to this a much more pervasive form of psychological control, which consists in the over-stimulation of the psyche—and through this the shaping of behavior— enabled by ubiquitous and overlapping electronic circuits and communications technologies.

We are utterly immersed today in the hyper-real universe of electronic media and instantaneous communication, and while this no doubt equips us with potentially important tools of political mobilization, more often than not, it has an utterly disabling and alienating effect. For instance, we suffer not from a lack of information, but rather from an *excess* of it, more than the human organism can possibly cope with, and this is what makes us feel impotent, as well conditioning and programming our behavior such that we are increasingly reduced to a bundle of reactions and reflexes, unable to concentrate on anything for more than a few seconds. Franco "Bifo" Berardi has explored the condition of the human soul under contemporary semiocapitalism: the psychopathological states generated by constant over-stimulation from media images, advertising, information, semioflows, all of which result in a generalized loss of meaning and states of psychic despair.[19] The epidemic rise of depression and anxiety in contemporary capitalist societies is no doubt symptomatic of this. Such forms of psychological manipulation and normalization seriously place in jeopardy the very idea of individual autonomy. The kinds of nervous stimulation and neural marketing that we are subject to today are reminiscent of the crudest of behaviorist experiments popular in the 1950s and 60s. Even the forms of treatment on offer today for psychological maladies—medication and cognitive behavioral therapy, driven as they are by the neoliberal logic of economic efficiency and the "quick-fix"—amount to nothing less than a bastardization of the human condition. While in certain cases psychoanalysis has been complicit in these processes of normalization (indeed, this was Lacan's charge against the "ego-psychologists" who misapplied Freudian theory in the US), and while Freud's notorious nephew Edward Bernays recruited crude, popularized versions of psychoanalytic theory into the marketing of everything from cigarettes and motor cars to the American war effort, psychoanalysis on the whole refuses the superficial and degrading conception of the human subject on offer today. Central to the ethics of psychoanalysis, I would argue, is actually a resistance to normalization and a respect for the dignity and absolute singularity of the human subject—and this is where, once again, psychoanalysis finds important common ground with anarchism.

Yet, what of the claim often made, including by anarchists, that psychoanalysis is politically irrelevant, even conservative, because it is *individualizing*? The contention here is that because psychoanalysis is focused on individual therapy, it simply cannot offer any radical analysis, let alone any possibility of transforming, the broader social field—something which would require collective consciousness and action. I hope to have shown already that psychoanalysis does indeed provide us with the means to critically analyze the broader social field, particularly with regards to the subject's relationship to external authority, as well as his behavior in groups and social collectivities. Freud insisted that psychoanalysis, insofar as it explores the individual's relations with others starting from the earliest stages of life, is always an individual *and* a social psychology.[20]

[18] The "anti-psychiatry" movement, prominent in the 1960s and 70s, seems much less so today.

[19] See F. Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy,* trans. F. Cadel and G. Mecchia (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 2009).

[20] Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," 2.

However, a second criticism of psychoanalysis perhaps bears more weight: this is the claim, made by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their famous work, *Anti-Oedipus,*[21] that psychoanalysis is "representational"—that is, that psychoanalysis, particularly the Freudian kind, seeks to represent or "speak for" the subject's desire by interpreting it within the reductionist "theater" of Oedipus, thus doing a real violence to desire. Furthermore, in trapping desire within the discursive framework of Oedipus, psychoanalysis has the effect of closing desire off from social connections, thereby limiting its revolutionary potential. There is of course a parallel here with the anarchist critique of representative political structures and parties which seek to "speak for" and lead the people, interpreting their own political desires back to them in a distorted form and thus alienating and disempowering them. The subject's desire, for Deleuze and Guattari and for the anarchists, should be allowed to "speak for itself"; to try to speak for someone else establishes a position of epistemic and therefore political authority over that person.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the real problem with psychoanalysis is the way that it founds desire on *lack*—the lack of the lost object of desire, the lack of the Mother and so on—whereas desire is actually about plenitude and productivity, and always moves in the direction of rhizomatic connections with others, in the manner of "desiring machines." By reducing desire to lack, psychoanalysis, it is claimed, does not repress desire so much as *represents it as repressed*, and this is precisely what traps desire within normalized social codes and structures:

> Oedipal desires are the bait, the disfigured image by means of which repression catches desire in the trap. If desire is repressed, this is not because it is desire for the mother and for the death of the father; on the contrary, desire becomes that only because it is repressed, it takes on that mask only under the reign of the repression that models the mask for it and plasters it on its face… If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society: not that desire is asocial, on the contrary. But it is explosive; there is no desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors. Despite what some revolutionaries think about this, desire is revolutionary in its essence-desire, not left-wing holidays!-and no society can tolerate a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy being compromised.[22]

While I am less convinced than these two May 68ers of the essentially revolutionary nature of desire, they nevertheless touch on a crucial theme that begins to mark an important point of difference between psychoanalysis and anarchism: while anarchism might be said to work on a model of liberation—desires are repressed by external prohibitions, and must therefore be liberated—psychoanalysis is more cautious here.

If human desire is actually *constituted* through a certain repression—that is through Oedipal prohibition, through the lack of the object of desire—then not only does desire need some sort of limit to sustain itself, but, if such external limits were removed, then internalized ones would simply emerge to take their place. In other words, from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, it is too simple to talk about the liberation of desire from external constraints; liberation does not solve the

[21] G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1972], trans. R. Hurley, et al. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

[22] Ibid., 116.

problem of repression— indeed, it may actually intensify it. That is to say, if there is a conceptual difference between anarchism and psychoanalysis, it lies in their different approaches to the relationship between desire and limit, freedom and constraint; for psychoanalysis, this relationship, as we shall see, is highly paradoxical, complicating the revolutionary narrative.

Radical Psychoanalysis: Gross, Reich, and Marcuse

Before addressing this difficulty, however, it is important to explore the politically radical tradition of psychoanalytic theory, and here I turn to three post-Freudian thinkers—Otto Gross, Wilhelm Reich, and Herbert Marcuse—all of whom developed revolutionary articulations of psychoanalysis which, in important ways, found common ground with anarchism. However, the point here is not to show that psychoanalysis fits perfectly with anarchism—as I have said it does not—but rather to argue, against claims to the contrary, that psychoanalytic theory has no application to questions of social and political transformation.

Otto Gross, the 'anarchist psychoanalyst' as he came to be known,[23] and forerunner of the sexual revolution and the countercultural movement, was an early disciple of Freud's, although he later came to reject certain aspects of Freud's theory. He saw in psychoanalysis the potential for a revolt against patriarchal authority and the means to emancipate the individual from his or her own internalized guilt and repression. The unconscious was essentially revolutionary and, by tapping into the unconscious, psychoanalysis could provide the individual with the tools of his or her own liberation. Psychoanalysis was therefore, for Gross, a revolutionary practice which could be used to overthrow the repressive social order and to promote greater individual and sexual freedom.

He proposed, moreover, that the existing social order, founded on patriarchal authority, should be replaced by a less repressive and more cooperative matriarchal order. Indeed, as Gottfried M. Heuer points out, Gross's concern with cooperative and mutual relationships, which he saw as the innate orientation of the ego and whose promotion should be the ethical goal of the revolution, rather than what he called the "will to power," paralleled and drew upon Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid, which he also regarded as instinctive.[24] In the case of both theories, the interpersonal and intersubjective dimension is central and provides the impetus and means to achieve the social revolution.

At the same time, we find in Gross a certain sense of caution about the prospects of revolution. There is an acknowledgement that revolutions in the past have failed to achieve their aim of liberation, only reinventing the structures of authority and class hierarchy they sought to overthrow. For Gross, this was because of the internalized authoritarianism that we bear within us, which the revolutionary struggle often fails to dislodge:

> None of the revolutions in the course of history succeeded in establishing freedom for the individual. They all fell flat, each the forerunner of a new bourgeoisie, they

[23] Gross told the psychiatrists who examined him in 1913: "I have only mixed with anarchists and declare myself to be an anarchist… I am a psychoanalyst and from my experience I have gained the insight that the existing order […] is a bad one […A]nd since I want everything changed, I am an anarchist." [Cited in G. Heuer, "The Birth of Intersubjectivity: Otto Gross and the Development of Psychoanalytic Theory and Clinical Practice," *Sexual Revolutions: Psychoanalysis, History and the Father*, ed. G. Heuer (London: Routledge, 2011), 122–140: 122.]

[24] Ibid., 130–131.

> ended in a hurried desire to conform to general norms. They all failed because the revolutionary of yesterday carried within himself the authority… that puts any individuality in chains.[25]

Psychoanalysis therefore had an important role to play in allowing the individual to recognize and free himself from this internalized authoritarianism, and this was a pre-condition for any successful revolution. In other words, for Gross, psychoanalysis was a means of extending the revolution *all the way down* into the psyche and engaging in a personal struggle against one's own "will to power"—against the desire to dominate and the desire to be dominated, which, after all, are two sides of the same coin.

A similar theme is pursued by Wilhelm Reich, whose own interest in sexual liberation and revolutionary politics might be seen as directly descending from Gross's radical interpretation of psychoanalysis, as well as from Freudian ideas about libido, repression, sexual neuroses, and the mind-body connection. For Reich, not only would internalized authoritarianism—if it is not properly addressed—condemn the outcome of revolutions, but, worse still, would produce utterly reactionary and monstrous forms of politics. In his study *The Mass Psychology of Fascism,* written in 1933, Reich set out to conduct a psychoanalytic or what he called "sex-economic" investigation of the appeal of Nazism to ordinary Germans. The explanation was to be sought not within the Marxist theory of 'false consciousness' but, rather, in the real desire on the part of the masses for their own domination, a desire that originates, he argued, in sexual repression. Crucially, then, the success of the Nazis was attributable not to Hitler and his supposed charisma, but rather to the masses themselves, who in a sense created him:

> *But the success of this mass organization* [the NSDAP] *is to be ascribed to the masses not to Hitler.* It was man's authoritarian freedom-fearing structure that enabled his propaganda to take root. Hence, what is important about Hitler sociologically does not issue from his personality but from the importance attached to him *by the masses.*[26]

This desire for the Fascist Master arises from, as Reich puts it, an 'authoritarian freedomfearing' structure on the part of the masses and, in particular, from the conservative attitudes and values of the lower-middle classes, which stemmed ultimately from sexual repression. These included conservative attitudes towards sexuality, a reverence for authority, an ideology of "honor" and "duty," and traditional patriarchal beliefs. Patriarchal authority within the family translated into the desire for an authoritarian state; the father was seen as a mini-Fuhrer, and this allowed people to identify with, and at the same time obey—according to the dynamic set out earlier by Freud in his study of the psychology of groups—the Fuhrer: "Notwithstanding his vassalage, every National Socialist felt himself to be a 'little Hitler.'"[27] There is, as he put it, an 'authority craving' psychic structure within the people which the Nazis exploited and which made their tyranny possible.

For Reich, there is a direct link between sexual repression and political repression; as he shows, the self-repression of one's sexual desire—due to an internalization of conservative attitudes, moral prejudices, and mystical and obscurantist beliefs and the fears of sexuality they

[25] Cited in ibid., 132.

[26] Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* [1933], ed. M. Higgins and C.M. Raphael (New York: Farrar, 1970), 40. Emphasis in original.

[27] Ibid., 80.

engender—leads to a desire to be repressed politically. Repressed sexual energy is channeled against one's own freedom. Therefore it is only by relaxing this sexual repression, so that the individual can achieve healthy sexual gratification, that he or she has any hope of living more freely and autonomously. Thus, the struggle for greater sexual freedom is directly linked to the struggle for political freedom and against economic exploitation and hierarchy; this was how Reich understood the goals of "sex-economic" practice.

The importance and centrality of sex and sexual freedom to revolutionary politics, however, has often not been sufficiently recognized by revolutionary movements themselves. Reich takes issue with Marxist-Leninism for neglecting the question of sexual freedom, and indeed for continuing to repress it in the name of a new kind of moralism in the postrevolutionary Soviet Union.[28] Furthermore, Reich attributes the stagnation of the Bolshevik Revolution and its deterioration into Stalinist totalitarianism in part to the failure to come to terms with people's repressive psychic structure: the Bolshevik revolution "was a politicoideological and not a genuine social revolution."[29] In other words, the Revolution failed to achieve a real transformation in the human structure. The problem here was the idea that a certain model of freedom and social organization could be imposed from above, in a hierarchical and authoritarian fashion, rather than being allowed to develop spontaneously. There are important parallels, then, between Reich's political thought and anarchism: the post-repressive society was in a sense already immanent in social relations, and should be allowed to develop spontaneously and organically. While the masses were currently incapable of freedom, they could be guided in this direction by a new kind of "democraticrevolutionary" movement, whose task was not to lead the masses from above in the manner of a vanguard, but rather to empower them to achieve their own autonomy and emancipation. This would involve the ethical task of inculcating a sense of responsibility on the part of the masses for their own freedom.[30] It is here that the notion of "work-democracy," which would be the basis of the post-repressive society, becomes important. Work-democracy, which implies a collaborative, egalitarian and non-exploitative relationship to work, is based on the recognition that sexual energy and daily working activity are closely related, and that this activity should be free and self-regulated so that people can derive genuine libidinal satisfaction from their work. Once again, according to Reich, this is not an ideological or political goal that can be imposed from the top. Rather, as he puts it: "Work democracy is the sum total of all naturally developed and developing life functions which organically govern rational human relationships."[31]

We have the very anarchistic idea, then, that rather than a certain institutional model being imposed upon society in the name of freedom, natural social relationships and impulses should be allowed to develop organically from below:

> To establish new, artificial, political systems would be not only unnecessary; it would be catastrophic. What is necessary is that the determination of the social process be given over to the natural life functions. Nothing new has to be created; all that has to be done is to eliminate the obstacles which stand in the way of the natural social functions.[32]

[28] Ibid., 161–162.
[29] Ibid., 201.
[30] Ibid., 220.
[31] Ibid., 264.
[32] Ibid., 267.

Just as the health of the psyche depends on a certain free development of the libido, so too does the health of society depend on the free development of natural forces and energies.

The aspiration for a non-repressive society is also central to thought of Herbert Marcuse, who combined Freudian and Marxist theory into a radical psychoanalytical critique of social domination. In his work, *Eros and Civilization* (1955) which is a radical re-reading of Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, Marcuse argues, against what he sees as Freud's pessimism, that our civilization, which is founded on repression, also contains the seeds of a non-repressive society. So, in accepting Freud's premise that the social order thus far has been based on the inhibition of sexual instincts—their diversion from gratification towards work and production—Marcuse, at the same time, rejects the position that the sacrifice of happiness to the needs of civilization is necessary and inevitable. In other words, contrary to Freud, the idea of a non-repressive civilization in which human happiness is allowed to flourish, is not a utopian speculation but is actually immanent within the existing social order: "the very achievements of repressive civilization seem to create the preconditions for the gradual abolition of repression."[33] Freud had argued that social cohesion and cultural progress requires that the "pleasure principle" gives way to the "reality principle," with its demands of work, sacrifice, and delaying gratification. While Marcuse acknowledges the need for certain limits to be placed on the instincts—if repression were completely removed and absolutely free play given to the pleasure principle, then civilization could not be sustained—he argues that in the existing social order, the basic level of repression required for social cohesion has been overtaken by what he calls *surplus repression*, which operates in the interests of social domination and economic exploitation. Here, the "performance principle" holds sway, demanding the absolute sacrifice of happiness and gratification to the toil and drudgery of alienated labor; thus the pleasure principle is completely negated.[34] Existing society represses its members far in excess of what is necessary for its own survival, forcing them into a life of alienation and unhappiness for the benefit of a capitalist apparatus of domination and social hierarchy which they do not understand and have no control over. However, for Marcuse, the performance principle which results in a surplus of production has solved the problem of scarcity, thereby creating the conditions for greater freedom and autonomy and a relaxation of surplus repression—paralleling the Marxian argument that capitalist society, in its production of surplus wealth, creates the conditions for its own overcoming. Furthermore, the repression of erotic instincts is never complete; there is always an excess that escapes repression, and which finds its expression in fantasy and imagination, which, according to Marcuse, provide the libidinal drive for projects of emancipation and the impetus for a non-repressive culture in which work is transformed into play, in a manner similar to Reich's notion of "work democracy," as well as evoking Fourier's utopian vision of eroticized work: "if work were accompanied by a reactivation of pregenital polymorphous eroticism, it would tend to become more gratifying in itself without losing its *work* content."[35] There is the idea here of a certain non-repressive "self-sublimation" of sex instincts into other spheres of life, producing an eroticization of relations between people.[36] Yet, this newfound freedom is neither a return to primitive barbarism nor a condition of unrestrained sexual license. On the contrary, as Marcuse envisions, it produces a new kind of non-repressive order and harmony: "liberated from the tyranny of repressive rea-

[33] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 5.

[34] Ibid., 4.

[35] Ibid., 215. Emphasis in original.

[36] Ibid., 199.

son, the instincts tend towards free and lasting relations—they generate a *new* reality principle."[37] This is similar to the claim central to anarchism: that freedom generates spontaneous order.

At the same time, however, Marcuse introduces an important qualification here, recognizing the difficulty in realizing freedom in a society which currently mistakes unfreedom for freedom: he gives the example of the capitalist entertainment industry which is itself repressive, and yet which assumes the form of freedom, such that its repression in the interests of a more genuine freedom would be perceived by people as an assault on their freedom of enjoyment.[38] Yet, the difficulties in attaining freedom through the spontaneous play of instincts reflect a much deeper ambiguity in the very structure of instincts themselves. Marcuse speculates, following Freud, that there may be a structural limit *internal* to the instincts themselves which, paradoxically, generates and sustains them:

> But is there perhaps in the instinct itself an inner barrier which "contains" its driving power? Is there perhaps a "natural" self-restraint in Eros so that its genuine gratification would call for delay, detour, and arrest? Then there would be obstructions and limitations imposed not from the outside, by a repressive reality principle, but set and accepted by the instinct itself because they have inherent libidinal value.[39]

Moreover, Marcuse says that this notion of an internalized self-limit within the drives was already present in Freud: "He [Freud] thought that 'unrestrained sexual liberty from the beginning' results in lack of full satisfaction… Moreover, he considered the 'strange' possibility that 'something in the nature of the sexual instinct is unfavorable to the achievement of absolute gratification.'"[40]

Here Marcuse stumbles up against a major paradox in the structure of human desire, one that creates problems for the conceptual model of repression and freedom which he largely subscribes to: this is not simply the problem that we may not actually desire freedom, but rather that full freedom might itself act as a barrier to our gratification. In other words, what is being suggested here—and what Freud, as Marcuse acknowledges, was already half aware of—is that the very condition of the instincts is their own self-limitation; and rather than the problem being their external repression, they contain their own *internal* limit which is what, paradoxically, gives them their energy and impels them forward. The implication— and it has extremely important consequences for any radical application of psychoanalysis— is that the removal of external constrains and limits, in so far as they *can* be removed or relaxed, will not necessarily bring about either freedom or satisfaction: it may be that a new kind of prohibition will simply emerge from the very heart of desire itself. Put simply, if instincts need some sort of limit, barrier, law, prohibition to sustain themselves—to resist, transgress, rub up against—then we have to at the very least question the narrative being proposed here of the instincts shaping and driving the project of human emancipation.

I am not suggesting that the three radical thinkers discussed in this section are in any sense naïve about this project: as I have tried to show, they all sound a certain note of caution about the prospects of revolution, the possibilities of full freedom, and indeed about whether people are

[37] Ibid., 197. Emphasis in original.
[38] Ibid., 224–225.
[39] Ibid., 226.
[40] Ibid.

actually ready for freedom. Nevertheless, they all tend to work within the logic of what Foucault called the "repressive hypothesis": the model according to which desire (modeled on libido) is repressed, prohibited and constrained by external forces and therefore demands to be liberated. Indeed, it is Reich specifically that Foucault makes reference to here.[41] The problem, for Foucault, was that these external forces—power—which supposedly repress pre-existing desire, actually work to produce and elicit it, shaping them it such a way that we believe it to be repressed; which would mean that the liberation of desire would play right into the hands of the institutions and discourses of power which constructed it. However, the problem with the repression/liberation model that Freud and, more particularly Lacan, draw attention to is a slightly different one: it is not so much that external social forces produce desire, but rather that desire to some extent *demands* its own prohibition—for what would desire be if there were no limit to transgress and if it were allowed to fully realize itself? This claim, as we can see, complicates the radical narrative of the liberation of desire, and to understand its implications for politics we need to turn to the more "skeptical" psychoanalytic theories of Freud himself, and Lacan.

Repression, Super-Ego and the Death Drive: Freud

For a psychoanalytic analysis of the tension between the individual's desire for freedom and the repressive restrictions of the social order, one is obliged to start with Freud's essay, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1929), which is as much a work of political theory as it is a psychoanalytic investigation of the sources of neurotic guilt. Indeed, as Freud maintains, neurotic suffering and guilt are symptomatic of our being ill at ease with our civilization, the sacrifices it demands and the restrictions it imposes upon our behavior, particularly our sexual life, which it severely impairs. While our civilization gives us many great things—not only security but comforts and conveniences, cultural developments, and so on—the phenomenon of human unhappiness indicates that many of us feel that the price we have paid for these, the restriction of our instincts, is too high. In a version of social contract theory, Freud proposes that our civilization was essentially founded on a trade-off of the unfettered freedom of our primitive condition in return for security and the possibility of peaceful coexistence. However, this required the repression of the individual's more aggressive and sexualized instincts, which were dangerous to civilized co-existence. Moreover, the survival of community life depends, according to Freud, on the sublimation of erotic drives into the development of relations with others, as well as into cultural achievements. Therefore, the principle of individual freedom and that of civilized community are in tension with one another. As Freud puts it, "The liberty of the individual is no gift of civilization."[42] Civilization and community life are based on a progressive taming of the individual and the repression and diversion of his instincts and desires.

Most fundamentally, civilization must hold in check the death instinct, the aggressive drive towards destruction. While Eros, the love instinct, which is directed towards union with others, may be sublimated into community life, Thanatos, the death instinct, is fundamentally hostile to civilization and destructive of all social bonds, and must therefore be restrained. Freud's well-known argument here is that the individuals' encounter with external laws and prohibitions, first

[41] M. Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, trans., R. Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), 131.

[42] Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 42.

through the patriarchal authority of the family, and then through an interaction with social institutions, induces him to internalise his aggressive instincts, to turn them back upon himself and towards his own ego, so that he is more likely to chafe against himself rather than against those around him. Thus we have the invention of guilt, the "bad conscience" upon which civilization is built. This death drive, turned back onto the individual, takes the form of the super-ego, the voice of moral conscience, in which, as Freud observes, there is a strong element of aggression, and which constitutes an internalized agency of self-policing and moral censorship:

> The tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego that is subjected to it, is called by us the sense of guilt; it expresses itself as a need for punishment. Civilization, therefore, obtains mastery over the individual's dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city.[43]

The individual appears as always guilty before the all-seeing panoptic eye of the Super-ego, which castigates him as much as much for what he hasn't done as for what he has done, punishing the saint more than the sinner. Transgressive thoughts are as morally blameworthy as transgressive deeds in the eyes of the super-ego, and, as Freud observes, the guilty, neurotic individual within civilization, so far from seeking freedom, often demands punishment.

So, as Freud would have it, the history of our civilization is the history of our repression – a repression which operates externally in the form of legal and social-moral norms prohibitions, and, more importantly, internally, in the form of moral consciousness and Super-egoic guilt. While repression and guilt are often excessive—and indeed it was the role of psychoanalysis to help the individual alleviate the neurotic guilt that was literally making him sick—they are at the same time inevitable. Some degree of constraint, repression, inhibition is necessary for there to be any possibility of peaceful coexistence and community life, and guilt is the inevitable price we pay for this possibility. Our progressive taming and disciplining, firstly of the Oedipal child within the family, and later of the individual within broader society, is a necessary developmental process. There is a certain tension here, then, between Freud's cry of protest against the severity of moral constraints and the demands of the Superego discussed earlier, and his acceptance of the need for limits and constraints in order to hold civilization together.

As we have seen, the reason why repression is necessary is because of the aggressive and dangerously anti-social drives within us, which threaten to rend civilization apart. Here Freud expresses a fundamental pessimism about human nature, reminiscent of Hobbes:

> The element of truth behind this, which people are so ready to disavow, is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. *Homo homini lupus.*[44]

[43] Ibid., 70–71.

[44] Ibid., 58. Emphasis in original.

There is a clear disagreement here with anarchism which, while not in any sense naïve about the human condition, nevertheless supposes a more or less natural instinct towards sociability, cooperation, and mutual aid. For Freud, on the contrary, the fundamentally *antisocial* individual must be disciplined into sociability and altruism; it does not come naturally or easily to him, and is arrived at only with great effort and sacrifice, and a large measure of suffering.[45] This is why Freud, while not entirely unsympathetic to the goals of revolutionary movements, was at the same time skeptical about their success.[46]

There seems at this juncture little to redeem Freud from an anarchist point of view. However, what if we were to suggest that the two interrelated aspirations of anarchism— individual autonomy and harmonious communal coexistence—actually presuppose a certain disciplining of the instincts? By this I mean not only that if an individual is to live with others in a community, there must be some curbs on his behavior, something which anarchists certainly acknowledge. In an anarchist community there would indeed be rules and ethical limits, which are democratically decided ("rules without rulers"); indeed, rules, limitations and boundaries are inherent in the very notion of community, which requires some form of obligation placed upon the individual, or which the individual voluntary places himself under.[47] However, I also mean that the very possibility of freedom and autonomy requires a certain (self-) discipline.

As I have suggested earlier in the chapter, it is by no means clear that our instincts *naturally* tend towards greater freedom; on the contrary, they often tend in pathological directions towards psychic attachments to authority. Such tendencies point to the dangers posed to the self and one's own freedom by one's wayward and undisciplined desires. Thus we arrive at the old problem of positive freedom, and the need for a certain discipline in order to be free—something that was recognised by Rousseau and Kant, and also in a different sense by Foucault in his discussion of "ascesis" as an ethics of self-mastery.[48] After all, autonomy means "self-government," which implies the ability to master one's own desires and instincts: to be master of one's self. As Richard Flathman argues, within oneself there are tendencies, desires, and dependencies that make one more susceptible to the power of others, and therefore without discipline there is no agency and therefore no possibility of freedom.[49] From a Freudian perspective, it could be argued that one only has a hope of becoming an autonomous adult by first going through a process of Oedipal disciplining, by which the child encounters, and therefore has a chance of resisting, the Oedipal position of the Father; and it is only through this encounter with the position of symbolic authority that the child's instincts can be partially mastered, and that the child, in rebelling against this authority, can gain a greater sense of himself.

So, what I am proposing here—and I think this is present in Freudian theory—is that autonomy is only possible through an *agonistic* relationship with some form of authority or limit, and this of

[45] Freud, for instance, mentions how unnatural it is to be expected to "love thy neighbour"—and yet this is what our civilization commands us to do (ibid., 56–59).

[46] Freud makes reference to the Bolshevik revolution and the aspiration to a communist society in Russia, which, he believes derives its energy from a relation of enmity and would only result in further aggression and violence once property relations are abolished: "One only wonders, with concern, what the Soviets will do after they have wiped out their bourgeois" (ibid., 62).

[47] See, for instance, M. Taylor, *Community, Anarchy and Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[48] M. Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: Interview with Michel Foucault," *Ethics: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Volume One,* ed. P. Rabinow, trans. R. Hurley, et al. (London: Penguin, 2000), 281–302.

[49] See R. Flathman, *Freedom and its Conditions: Discipline, Autonomy, and Resistance* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

course necessitates the existence of such a limit. Moreover, we could say, again following Freud, that projects of political emancipation depend upon a certain collective discipline, as well as being "cultural" artifices, and as such, are only possible *within* civilization, and emerge from within the constraints which civilization imposes. The very fact that movements of political and social emancipation, including anarchism itself, are founded on ethical norms and political ideas which have only emerged as a result of the cultural achievements of civilization and the disciplining it entails, points to this.[50]

Desire, Law, and Limit: Jacques Lacan

In developing this idea of an interdependent relationship between freedom and limit, we now turn to the thought of Jacques Lacan, who was best known for reading Freudian theory through the framework of structuralist linguistics, mostly via Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and Jakobson. Lacan's famous formulation—that the unconscious is "*structured like a language*"[51]—points once again to the *social* dimension—in Lacan's case the external order of language and signification—within which the unconscious is situated and which psychoanalysis takes as its proper field of investigation.

Freud's concern with the conflicting relationship between the individual and broader society is taken up by Lacan in his psychoanalytic approach to ethics. It is here that we must reconsider the relationship between desire and law, particularly moral law. As I have suggested, the "repressive hypothesis" central to the radical articulations of psychoanalytic theory discussed previously, works on the assumption that the Law—by which we can understand legal and social constraints and moral prohibitions of all kinds—restricts and represses desire. However, Lacan's insight is to show that the relationship between desire and Law is much more ambiguous and complex: rather than law simply acting as a limit upon desire, it actually *stimulates* and *incites* it, and it does this by holding out the promise of an impossible enjoyment—*jouissance*—on the other side of the law. In the creating a barrier between the subject and his enjoyment, the Law sustains the illusion of an ultimate satisfaction (the lost object of enjoyment, the *Thing*) awaiting him on the other side of this limit. So, in saying '"no" to desire, the Law actually invites its own transgression. In other words, the Law of prohibition acts as a veil which shrouds the emptiness and impossibility of full enjoyment, which is essentially equivalent to death, thus eliciting desire. The Thing, the ultimate object of our desires, only exists insofar as there is a law to prohibit it. As Lacan says, in relation to biblical commandments: "Yet I can only know the Thing by means of the Law. In effect, I would not have had the idea to covet it if the Law hadn't said: 'Thou shalt not covet it.'"[52] So, we might propose a dialectical relationship between desire and law which, as Lacan says, "causes our desire to flare up only in relation to Law."[53]

[50] I have the utmost respect for the "anti-civilizational" or "primitivist" tendency in anarchism—especially the thought of John Zerzan. However, Zerzan's radical critique of our technological civilization is still beholden to civilization and the cultural and intellectual developments which made such critiques possible.

[51] J. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, ed. J.A. Miller and trans. A. Sheridan (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 20. Emphasis in original.

[52] J. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII,* ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. D. Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 83.

[53] Ibid., 83–84.

To illustrate this paradoxical relationship between desire and Law, Lacan gives the example of courtly love in the Middle Ages, which was a series of rituals and discourses— indeed, an entire system of ethics and codes of behavior—involved in the courtship of the Lady. However, so far from this being a romantic enterprise, Lacan shows that this was actually an elaborately coded set of behaviors designed to put off—to infinitely postpone through ever more exacting hurdles and capricious demands—any real sexual encounter with the Lady, whose desire must remain enigmatic and inaccessible.[54] The sexual encounter was thus sublimated by the male subject into a series of barriers placed in the way of love's consummation, precisely in order that desire could be sustained. This curious ritual of courtly love might be seen as a paradigm of male desire—and indeed of the rather fraught relationship between men and women—in which the trauma of the real encounter with the Other is continually avoided, so that, as Lacan would put it, the emptiness and structural impossibility of the sexual relationship ("*Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*") can remain masked. More generally, is there not something in the nature of human desire which demands precisely to *not* be satisfied, and whereby the encounter with the imagined object of desire is one of anxiety, or the degradation and diminishment of what was once desired? The fulfillment of desire is at the same time its eclipse; that which must be avoided at any cost so that we can go on desiring.

What are the political implications of this? It would appear to strike at the very heart of political desire, forcing us perhaps to question what we imagine to be the ultimate aim of our political projects, and the fantasies invested in the idea of attainment of full freedom or the liberated society awaiting us on the other side of power and law. I am not suggesting that these aspirations and visions are not important to radical political mobilization; but we also need to recognize their necessarily fantasmatic role in the structuring of political desire. More importantly, however, what if it were the case that the revolutionary drive actually *needed* law and prohibition—the repressive structure of political and social authority—in order to sustain itself and to have something to oppose and transgress? And what if this were so precisely to preserve the illusion that full freedom (the satisfaction of revolutionary desire) was attainable if only this structure of authority were removed?

As a hypothesis, what I am suggesting here is not simply that symbolic authority—the prohibitive figure of the Master, or in political terms, the State—is necessary in order to sustain revolutionary desire, but that it might even serve as a sort of cover or excuse justifying a certain revolutionary pathos. In other words, might it not be the case that a certain figure of absolute and repressive political authority allows us to say, effectively: *we would be truly free if it were not for the State that stands in our way?* Is there not a sense in which anarchists fantasize about the all-powerful State that denies their freedom, in the same way that they fantasize about the freedom that awaits them once the state is destroyed? We have at least to consider the possibility that the revolutionary narrative actually needs the State to sustain its desire, and, indeed, that this might even prevent us from living freely in the here and now.

Furthermore, given this dialectical relationship between the desire for freedom and the law of prohibition identified by Lacan, what actually happens when the law breaks down and when the restrictions and barriers to our freedom are removed? Does that mean that we are now free? Alas, things are not quite so simple. Because, according to Lacan, an encounter with the object of desire would be traumatic and anxiety-provoking, and because, as Freud himself noticed, desire

[54] Ibid., 145–154.

needs its own limit, the removal of the Law of prohibition does not mean that we are finally free, but rather that a new form of *internalized* prohibition comes to fore in its place, rendering us even more unfree. Like the obsessive who fantasizes about the death of his father, whom he imagines acts as a barrier to his freedom, and yet who, when his father finally does die, cannot enjoy his freedom and is instead wracked by guilt, the collapse of one form of social and symbolic authority actually intensifies prohibition and incapacity. In reversing the line from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* ("God is dead; now everything is permitted"), Lacan says: "God is dead, nothing is permitted anymore."[55] In other words, the removal from the modern consciousness of this ultimate patriarchal Father, this symbol of traditional authority and prohibition, so far from liberating us, is the final confirmation of our repression.

That is why there is, according to Lacan, a structural correspondence between the moral law of Kant and the perverse universe of Sade. The perversity of the Kantian attachment to the moral law—beyond any pathological considerations or interests—finds its logical counterpart and echo in the strange morality of Sadeian universal law of perversion, whose morbid injunction to the unadulterated use and enjoyment of bodies, the absolute right to *jouissance*, becomes something like a categorical imperative.[56] So, the point here is that the breakdown of traditional forms of moral and social authority does not inaugurate the reign of freedom, but rather instantiates a new regime of prohibition—and here we should pay attention to Lacan's remark about the failure of the libertarian project: "The naturalist liberation of desire has failed historically. We do not find ourselves in the presence of a man less weighed down with laws and duties than before the great critical experience of so-called libertine thought."[57]

Many of the experiments of sexual liberation in the 1960s and 70s proved failures, with free sex communes ending up as rather boring and sad spaces of routinized sex, subject to their own injunctions and rules, driven by a kind of desperate and morbid desire for a *jouissance* which at the same time runs up against its own internal barrier.[58] So the removal of one limit engenders another, as there is no greater threat to desire than the absence of limits. Today's era of sexual permissiveness—at least in most liberal-democratic societies— seems to me to be permeated by a kind of sadness and loss of enjoyment, as we appear to have reached a point of saturation and boredom in matters of sex; the ever more transgressive and extreme forms of pornography on offer today are same time indicative of a kind of despair at a sexual revolution that has now run out of ideas.

More broadly, in contemporary societies, in which traditional, patriarchal authority no longer functions, in which law is no longer taken seriously and political leaders are figures of popular ridicule—a transformation which Lacan characterized long ago by the "decline of the paternal function"—can we not see the emergence of new forms of control which are all the more terrifying for their "formlessness" and lack of hierarchy? In today's neoliberal societies, in which voluntary obedience to the dictates of the market and consumer culture replaces traditional au-

[55] J. Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII,* trans. R. Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 106.

[56] J. Lacan, "Kant with Sade," in *Ecrits*, trans. B. Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 645–667.

[57] Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 4.

[58] David Bennett discusses the history of sexual revolutions, and in particular of the Friedrichshof sex commune in Austria, whose initial celebration of free and spontaneous sexuality quickly deteriorated into a routinized and ordered regime of sex, complete with computer-generated "fuck lists." See "Sexual Revolutions: Towards a Brief History, From the Fall of Man to the Present," in Heuer, *Sexual Revolution*, 35–51.

thoritarianism, control takes the very form of individual freedom and enjoyment. As Žižek, following Lacan's insight, remarks, there is now a Superegoic injunction to Enjoy! which is much more compelling than the strictest of moral prohibitions.[59] Furthermore, the proliferation today, in these supposedly freer and more permissive times, of rules governing the minutiae of everyday behavior—everything from restrictions on smoking in public places, to rules on sexual harassment in the workplace, to the PC policing of language itself, and to the prevalence of "ethics committees" in all kinds of institutions—points to the new kind of obsessiveness which has come to take the place of traditional forms of authority.

That our liberal societies, with their formal rights and freedoms, are, on an everyday level, highly *illiberal* and have come to resemble many of the traits of the fundamentalist societies they like to proclaim their distance from, should come as no surprise. Moreover, the decline of the traditional figure of the Father, as the symbol of prohibition and law, does not, once again, mean the end of authority, but simply a different kind of authority. Instead, we see the proliferation of what might be called "perverse fathers": no longer, in Zizek's example, the father who says "no" to his son's enjoyment—thus allowing a space for transgression when his back is turned—but who rather, with a glint in his eye, says "yes,"— thus effectively making any kind of transgression, and therefore any kind of enjoyment, impossible.[60] We see this figure in politicians too—perhaps most paradigmatically, in recent times, in Silvio Berlusconi, who, far from being the austere leader aspiring to moral authority, more or less openly embodied his own corruption, debauchery, and farcicality. Political authority today, it would seem, invites its own transgression, even its own ridicule, with politicians routinely lampooning themselves on idiotic "reality TV" shows.

What You Want Is Another Master!

We can see here, then, how problematic and ambiguous the notion of liberation from repression has become, at a time when control takes the form of freedom, and when liberal permissiveness and the relaxation of sexual constraints produces guilt and anxiety, and ends up in the demand for new restrictions and limits. No doubt Lacan foresaw this when he responded to his rebellious students during the May '68 uprising with these enigmatic words: "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!"[61] However, while this might appear to damn revolutionary endeavors from the very start and align Lacan with a conservative and apolitical position, I propose an alternative reading: is there not a warning here, addressed to revolutionaries, that unless they come to terms with their own hidden desire for mastery, they risk replicating one form of authority and power for another; and was this not precisely the same warning that the anarchists addressed to Marxists? These words might therefore be taken as an admonition to confront and interrogate the vagaries of one's own

[59] S. Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (London: Routledge, 2008). See also T. McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction?: Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Society of Enjoyment* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004).

[60] As Jana Costas and Alireza Taheri have argued, the collapse of traditional symbolic authority in our societies has led to the uncanny return of the persecutory fantasy of the Primal Father—the ultimate figure of unconstrained *jouissance*—which becomes omnipresent and produces guilt and anxiety everywhere. See "'The Return of the Primal Father' in Postmodernity? A Lacanian Analysis of Authentic Leadership," *Organization Studies*, 33:9 (2012), 1195–1216.

[61] Cited in Y. Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), 12.

revolutionary desire, the fascination with power and the aggressive and authoritarian impulses that lie in all of our breasts—something that was recognized, in different ways, by both Bakunin and Freud, as well as Gross and Reich.

In his Seminar XVII (presented 1969–70, largely in response to May '68), 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 speech.*"[62] These four discourses are that of the University, Master, Hysteric, and Analyst. These discourses are important to the question of radical politics because they are a way of explaining social changes and upheavals. Moreover, these discourses show that the link between transgression and authority is constituted by a structural, and indeed inevitable, relation between discursive positions.

The discourse of the Master embodies *self-mastery* and sovereignty—the attempt to constitute an autonomous ego, one whose identity is secure in 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. The discourse of the Master stands in a particular relation of authority to knowledge, seeking to dominate it, and exclude from consciousness the knowledge of the unconscious—the *knowledge that is not known*—as this would jeopardize the ego's sense of certainty.[63] The Master's attempt to gain authority over knowledge instantiates a position of political sovereignty and an attempt to gain mastery over the social field.[64] As Lacan shows, moreover, political movements and discourses which seek to transform society, to overthrow the dominant discourse of the Master, are still trapped within this discourse and ultimately perpetuate it, ending up in the same place of power and authority. The discourse of the Master thus 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.[65]

Central here is the relationship between the Master and the Hysteric. Because of the dominance of the S1 in the Master discourse, an excess of enjoyment is produced—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, as in Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic. Therefore the knowledge of the object-cause of the Master's own desire is denied to him. What this means, however, is that the position of the Master is really the position of *castration*, as he is cut off from his *object a*, from enjoyment. What the Master discourse conceals, then, behind its posture of certainty and fullness of identity, is a fundamental lack. It is precisely this lack that the discourse of the Hysteric, in a paradoxical fashion, homes 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

[62] Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 12. Emphasis in orginal.

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

[64] Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 31.

[65] Ibid., 99.

identity—her position is characterized by a demand to know who she is and what her desire is.[66] 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 her 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. The Hysteric is thus 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 reveal his impotence and lack all the more. The Hysteric thus exposes the imposture of sovereign authority. 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. Do we not have here the very pathos of revolutionary politics?

While things might appear to be an impasse, Lacan proposes a way of breaking out of this bind between transgression and authority. Here another discourse must intervene—that of the Analyst—which, according to Lacan, offers the only genuine counterpoint to and subversion of the position of the Master. The role of analysis, in Lacanian terms, is 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 idea—and to accept that the Other, which supports this fantasy structure, is itself deficient, lacking, and ungrounded. This would be what Lacan calls *la traversée du fantasme*—crossing or traversing the fantasy. In other words, the intervention of the Analyst offers the subject the possibility of achieving greater autonomy: while master signifiers continue to exist for the subject, they are ungrounded and lack ultimate authority, and the contingency of the social field and the subject's place within it becomes fully visible. In other words, while the subject cannot entirely escape the Master's discourse—escape into what, apart from another Master's discourse?—he or she is able to gain a greater distance and autonomy from it, and is able to bring about change.[67]

Let us try to understand this process in political terms. Going through the Analyst's position might involve, on the one hand, a questioning of the fundamental fantasy that has sustained revolutionary projects in the past—the idea of total liberation and social transformation, and the image of the harmonious and free society "on the other side" of power and authority. Here I would invoke Foucault's warning that revolutionary liberation does not necessarily solve the problem of power, and that what is more important are the "practices of freedom" in the present, whereby one engages agonistically with the specific power relations.[68] Furthermore, we can also think about the way in which the Analyst's discourse fosters a greater autonomy within the political subject by revealing the imposture and impotence of political authority, unmasking the essential powerless of power. We have seen the way in which the fantasy of the all-powerful State serves as both a provocation and an impediment to revolutionary action. The anarchist's desire to destroy the State is caught within a strange dialectic in which the State is both needed as an incitement to revolution, as well as serving as a kind of cover or excuse for an internal deadlock. Perhaps it would be more effective to say that the Master (or the State) exists but that

[66] See P. Verhaeghe, "From Impossibility to Inability: Lacan's Theory on the Four Discourses," *The Letter: Lacanian Perspectives on Psychoanalysis* 3 (Spring 1995), 91–108.

[67] Costas and Taheri, "'The Return of the Primal Father,'" 1201.

[68] Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom."

it has no real authority; that it is nothing more than an empty symbolic shell whose existence is entirely contingent and ungrounded, and whose only power is the power that we give it.

The Analyst's position teaches us that all symbolic authority is ultimately a fake, and that while it might continue to exist in some abstract sense, it has no real determination over our lives. Perhaps, in other words, the Analyst's discourse allows us to realize that while Power exists it has no real power over us, and that we are *always already free*. It seems we have returned to La Boetie's astonishing insight: people, living under tyranny, had the power all along and the Tyrant's power was essentially an illusion; freedom was therefore simply a matter of recognizing this and willing to be free. La Boetie's problematic of voluntary servitude—which has as its radical flipside voluntary *inservitude*—might be seen as an example of the Analyst's intervention. So, too, might Stirner's idea of insurrection, as opposed to revolution:

> Revolution and insurrection must not be looked upon as synonymous. The former consists in an overturning of conditions, of the established condition or *status*, the state or society, and is accordingly a *political* or *social* act; the latter has indeed for its unavoidable consequence a transformation of circumstances, yet does not start from it but from men's discontent with themselves, is not an armed rising but a rising of individuals, a getting up without regard to the *arrangements* that spring from it. The Revolution aimed at new arrangements; insurrection leads us no longer to *let* ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and sets no glittering hopes on "institutions." It is not a fight against the established, since, if it prospers, the established collapses of itself; it is only a working forth of me out of the established.[69] (Stirner 1995: 279–80 [emphasis in original])

Unlike the revolution, which springs from the Hysteric's condition of powerlessness—which is why it seeks to insert itself within the position of the Master—the insurrection signifies an *indifference* to power, and it starts from the condition of *ontological freedom.* So it is not a question of seeking to transform social relations, although this might be one of its outcomes, but rather of the subject distancing himself from power, turning his back upon it, whereupon power collapses. Stirner, the Analyst of the anarchist tradition, shows us not how we might become free on the back of a revolution—which would only re-establish authority—but how we are already free, and how we might come to recognize this, beyond the "spooks" and apparitions of power.

Conclusion

The ontological freedom and autonomy made possible by the realization of the radically contingent nature of social reality and the ungroundedness of authority, does not render political action unnecessary or superfluous. On the contrary, it frees political action from, on the one hand, utopian promises, and on the other, from disabling fantasies about omnipotent power and insurmountable authority. It allows political desire to traverse its own fundamental fantasy. While it is certainly the case that anarchism's encounter with psychoanalysis complicates the narrative of revolution and liberation—revealing its paradoxical dependence on law and limit—it also allows not only a deeper understanding of the political psyche, but also provides important ethical tools

[69] Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 279–280. Emphasis in original.

with which to interrogate the subject's desire. The opening up of the social-symbolic space might be seen as a common goal of these two traditions of thought which are, in different ways, both committed to human freedom and autonomy.

Saul Newman
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