Sociological Entrypoints to Anarchism

William Gillis

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there's space for performative martyrdom for those looking for tangible reinforcement of personal narratives or identity.

Academia

One consequence of the left capturing swathes of academia is that you get good little kids looking for approval from adults shoved into radical identities. A kind of symbiosis where students and teachers are both really invested in affirmation from the other. The teachers who arrive with the intent to convert are those most inclined to give more intense and personal validation, thus they often attract the students most hungry for such. And when these teachers pets in turn take faculty roles alongside the initial radicals their need simply flips to the new students. Those that leave academia usually peter out of active radical involvement, the "weekend Democracy Now listeners" phenomenon.

Power fantasies

"Work sucks and I'm anxious about my friends turning their cruelty on me, but wouldn't it be really cool if everything changed, I had all the power and lined all the shitty people up against a wall and shot them." Most everyone dabbles in power fantasies, but they rarely lined up as an entry point to radical politics. Now that's starting to change as far left politics is mainstreamed into the worldviews of millions and the trappings of power fantasies are explicitly catered to. Not just in the form of tankies, but anarchists acting like tankies, fetishizing a single magical rev. Part of this broad rise of tankies is the disconnect of modern radical political identity from practice and in-person community where pragmatism must win out and anti-authoritarian tools for conflict resolution are relatively well developed.

Contents

or circles, sealing off the outside ignorant/oppressive world and its now utterly boring ways as much as possible. Might as well call such sanctuaries anarchism.

Coolness

Radicalism is a site of massive creativity and resonance, if you hunger for social capital you can grab onto this and leech friends/respect/standing from it. An artist might keep her ear to the ground for resonant issues not yet popularized and then utilize them for her work, giving her work a cache, not only among radicals but beyond them as the issue rises to popularity. Additionally you get a lot of normies on the periphery – adult techies with families for example, who read anarchist texts to keep an edge in their circles. The most notable modern variant however are more extreme things like irony twitter and facebook meme groups where what is hungered for is discrete packets with complex signaling of elite positioning within a desirably tiny social group.

Activism

A left-liberal without much to do signs up to save the whales, she gets beaten up by cops at a protest and has her grant proposal rejected. A couple of her friends identify as anarchists and it seems broadly in line with liking things that are good, so she identifies. This is the central means by which the vast majority of anarchists have been recruited for decades. Meetings, potlucks, film screenings and the occasional outing to stand outside together with signs. Despite the trappings of managerialism (ie "organizing") this is almost entirely about setting up the conditions for a sense of community and very little to do with changing tangible things, however

And increasingly common is an experience of radicalism as a kind of unity in negative psychological states, a reassuring and feedbacking community whose bonds are common ailments. Where the sense of community alleviates some of the pain of those mental issues, but where the currency for community standing is precisely leaning into and replicating said issues.

Transgression

The explosive release of pressure has obvious libidinal addictiveness. Today the alt-light has this market largely cornered among the squares, but there are still remnants of early punk. Remember that Bob Black used to do shit like staple rants about how feminism was fascist to phone polls. That current never entirely died and obviously lives on at punk and metal shows, as well as even some queer circles. The important thing is not ever feeling personally constrained, whether by social norms or one's own conscience. Such folks hope to establish circles facilitative of personal escape from responsibility or accountability in part by identifying constraints or norms and spectacularly violating them together in public, and they often see anarchism as such a circle.

Oppressed Identity

It's still most common in America to grow up with certain forms of widespread structural oppression not very explicitly spoken about. The first time you experience being able to admit to being poor like it's no big deal – even *positive* – or talk about sexual assaults you've experienced, or the aspects of racism your family and school never fucking underlined it can feel like sucking down air after drowning your whole life. You never want to surrender this new capacity. And that means aggressive gatekeeping, trying to preserve those rare social contexts

The people, the subcultures, identities and perspectives that a movement recruits from in turn shape what that movement broadly looks like. This has played out rather loudly for the libertarian movement in recent years as the formal ideology was widely abandoned by the majority of its social base for fascism. This does not mean that the entirety of libertarianism was a sham, as most of the academics sincerely stuck to their ideology. But if a movement's mechanism of recruitment implicitly tells a broad body of people who desire a different thing (say a feeling of elitism and insulation from critiques of privilege) that an ideology will grant them this, it shouldn't come as surprise when the formal ideology never settles in as an actual motivation. For many white teenaged or 20-something boys, libertarianism was not an expression of their sincere motivations, but an instrument to acquire things the alt-right was far more efficient at obtaining.

I've had a lot of fun over the last couple years playing I-told-you-so with libertarians aghast at the rapid collapse of their numbers to fascism. But with the return of authoritarian communist ideologies once thought dead and buried, and the recruitment of such scum from anarchist ranks, some of those same libertarians I once lectured are now happily taking their revenge on me. The problem is, of course, general.

Ideologies are frequently adopted in shallow ways, falling to burrow all the way down to one's core motivation. Thus such frameworks serve as shields and weapons between the real combatants, the underlying personalities, identities, or perspectives more broadly of the individuals in question. To many people this is almost so basic a principle of reality it's hard to understand someone violating it. *Desires are not given name or exposed publicly. That's just not how you do things!* They're cloaked behind the phantasms of stated goals. One adopts ideology to serve some deeper hidden agenda and one assumes that others do the same. Indeed the higher aptitude players create concentric tiers of desire/goal pretenses.

Why do we ever get people who see no tension between their identity as an "anarchist" and say encouraging voting Clinton? Or supporting universal health care? Or rejecting ethics? Or defending stalinists as allies? Or defending nationalism in the name of anti-racism? My feeds and DMs get peppered with screenshots of seeming absurdities, flagrant violations of really basic anarchist values and concepts. Or of people defining those core values and concepts in wildly alien and monstrous ways. One can argue for the marginality of such examples but I am still repeatedly asked in exasperation, how could this nonsense ever come about?

But of course a single set of self-consistent values and concepts aren't anarchism to a lot of people. Because anarchism is not just an idea but a body of people, that contains a lot of distinct perspectives or inclinations. Its ideological contours have often been shaped less by good arguments – although this does happen – and more by the social dynamics at play in its base.

To understand modern anarchism you have to understand *why people become anarchists*. Because of our generally laudable "hands off" attitude to indoctrination most people only half convert to anarchism. The moment they get their foot in the door enough to start self-identifying no further normalization happens. Our refusal to operate as a heavy-handed ideology encourages the opportunistic usage of anarchism as a shield or mask over different underlying intentions. Acculturation, if and when it does occur, happens within distinct sub-milieus where different underlying perspectives congeal.

It is absolutely worth taking many schools of anarchism and specific arguments at face value or object-level analysis, but it's always seemed weird to me that we don't *also* talk explicitly about some of the most common recruitment pipelines that pull people into anarchism with different biases and experiences.

Of course we're in a social singularity of rapidly feedbacking complexity thanks to information technologies and so the

pipelines are not only shifting but becoming less and less standardized, but I think there's some very clear clusters of ways in which people are recruited and sustained in the "anarchist" identity. A given individual will often be pulled in by multiple attractors, to varying degrees, but they are nonetheless relatively distinct.

Ethics nerdery

In this pipeline anarchism functions as meeting group for ethics nerds to collaborate in challenging themselves to expand their compassion and consideration. Typically they're people who have bounced between contexts to the point where they value ideas over situatedness and take those concepts to heart in ways others find alien. This is historically the most common origin of self-radicalized anarchists. It involves bullet biting as a way of life and continues to pressure for a variant of self-actualization through challenging their own internal instincts or comfort, "Is all language violence?" "Is symbolic thought the root of oppression?" "Is the concept of 'games' to blame for modern society?" Personal strength is seen as a willingness to reject comfort and embrace weird conclusions of strong arguments.

Mental illness

The interactions between radicalism and mental health are well explored. Is it depression or is the world really structured so that you don't have agency in your conditions? Is it anxiety or is precarity a dominant feature of modern capitalism? Paranoia or just the cyclical FBI raids? And of course the frame of health/illness is innately grounded in social norms, and the instinct to forge one's own way is very radical. But such journeys still often involve unmapped negative challenges.