

Anarchy & the Spirit

an introduction

Sunfrog (Andy “Sunfrog” Smith)

2002

“For those who would see directly into essential nature, the idea of the sacred is a delusion & abstraction: it diverts us from seeing what is before our eyes: plain thusness. No hierarchy, no equality. No occult & exoteric, no gifted kids a slow achievers. No wild & tame, no bound & free, no natural a artificial. Each totally its own frail self. Even though connected all which ways; even because connected all which ways. This, thusness, is the nature of the nature of nature. The wild in wild.”

—Gary Snyder

To those critics who claim the *Fifth Estate* is the new official journal of lifestyle activism, an issue with its central section devoted entirely to spirituality should prove their thesis. First hippie pacifism, now religion. Body-piercing, fire-breathing, and crystal-gazing coming soon.

But yes: even and especially in the theocratic United States of John Ashcroft, Franklin Graham, and Jerry Falwell, we wage rhetoric to challenge their jealous god! Give us an altered state of consciousness over an unaltered state of complacency any day.

Seriously though, anarchists are naturally suspicious of religion and the hierarchical hypocrisy its obedience to Church and God dictates. Wary of any institutionalized thinking that amplifies guilt, orchestrates denial, maximizes masochism, or capitalizes on discontent, many reject strict Judeo-Christian doctrine, dismiss murky New Age mush, and eschew angry atheist cynicism.

Politically, religion deserves the death of so many authoritarian systems. Theologically, it fails because it assumes that the source of inner contentment comes from an outward source: the not-there, un-earthly, anti-physical heavenly patriarch known as God. Assigning supreme goodness to a mythic force beyond our control and perceivable reality denies the undeniable divinity of life itself. Assuming that spirit is “not of this world” renounces the inextricably spiritual aspects of everything earthy and organic.

Yet the fascination with spirit remains: not attempting to sate a deep emotional hunger with paltry intellectual rationalizations and embracing hope, danger, adventure, mystery, and joy. Never consider the soul yet another space contained and contaminated by the imperial conquerors. Never consider a living death.

An anarchic spirituality is very much “of this world” but not of this society, this system of hierarchy and hatred, debt and domination, money and military. The path of the anarchist mystic includes the destruction of the structures that deny multidimensional spiritual and physical depth. Fundamentally critical of all fundamentalisms, remember: the anti-spiritual argument often extends from the same family of dreary, dualistic thinking that makes religion problematic in the first place.

Rejecting dogma does not require discarding a free spirituality. Examining anarchist spirituality demands dismissing assumptions about what that notion might mean. The anarchist spirit is the fire within our bellies that compels us to fight for peace and the planet, justice and freedom, even in these darkest of times.

The time has come to amplify an anti-traditional anarchist mysticism, no matter what the holier-than-me critics of the holy have to say. New modes of ecstatic experience have nothing to do with religion; even the “old reli-

gions” of paganism from which some draw inspiration were not really religions in the sense that civilized people understand the term. Religion comes from the tongue of bureaucracy—let us tap an urge that precedes bureaucracy. Just as religion is built with the bricks of guilt, we breathe the flesh of innocence. Not in original sin but in original ecstasy, a convulsively orgiastic goddess gives birth to the cosmos in multiple big bangs.

Pray not to pie-in-the-sky, not to priest, not to platitude, not to plastic, but practice pleasure, paying attention to the devilishly divine contours of our forests and oceans, our bodies and souls, our lives. Rather than fixate on the inner depravity of inhuman nature perpetuated by stagnant social roles, pursue an egalitarian Eden in the transformation of everyday experience.

To embrace this possibility with philosophical exploration, this section offers the beautiful collages of James Koehline accompanying recent works by Max Cafard and Peter Lamborn Wilson along with a timeless interpretation of the topic by Gary Snyder. To round out the section, Lea Wood reviews Starhawk’s latest book; Maxzine Weinstein critiques anarcho-paganism; and Don LaCoss discusses a recent attempt by corporations to attack ecologists as “fundamentalists.”

—November 2002, Pumpkin Hollow

fifth Estate

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<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/359-winter-2002-2003/anarchy-the-spirit>
Fifth Estate #359, Winter, 2002–2003

fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net