

Anarchy: A letter for insurgent dreamers

scott crow

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

– Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

What is anarchy? That question and its impacts have reverberated before and since the elusive idea was named in the 1800s Europe. The concepts of freedom and liberation from authority, whether individual, community or state have existed probably since before humans could speak.

For as long as there has been domination by one or by groups over others, there has always been an opposing resistance and rebellion to being ruled.

In the last hundred plus years, words have been spilled by countless writers seeking to grasp and possibly contain that which cannot be boxed in. Before language came along with a specific word for anarchy, it went by many names over the eons. Naming it isn’t as important as the ideas.

Mythistory

For some groups, from pre-history hunter gatherers to later indigenous societies, there were forms of anarchy that developed and existed as communities long before empires, capitalism or industrialization.

If you lived in Europe or North America in the 1800s through the 1930’s, anarchy would most likely have looked like class war for survival and empowerment against the industrial and war machines of Power by the anarcho-communists, propaganda by the deed in the Belle Epoque, or in smaller circles, experiments in communitarian utopian, back to the land movements or the occasional individualist fighting for personal or sexual liberation.

If you came into anarchy in the mid- to late-20th century Europe or North America, it could have looked like art interventions of the situationists and surrealists, anarcho-feminism, green anarchy, modern class war built on disintegrating communities and continued job loss and later, activism or punk rock from the lost promises of failed revolutions.

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

In addition to the above mentioned tendencies that have continued, added to this list would be nihilism, insurrectionism, primitivism, especifismo, platformist, post-left anarchy, individualism, post anarchism; and my favorite, just questioning. All of which leads those with too much leisure time on our hands as the world burns to ask and debate, “What is real anarchy?”

To which my humble and confusing reply simply would be, “Yes! We can debate the minutia, the labels, the histories, words, influences, and meanings, but in the end, my question is, does it really matter? We haven’t been able to stuff all of this into a box yet, but people often internet-fight like our lives depend on it instead of letting anarchy be the fluid and dynamic ideal it is.

In a moving river, nothing can ever be set in stone

Anarchy is a set of ideas, dreams, politics, practices, philosophies, ways to see differently, and approaches to begin to trust ourselves. Anarchy proposes that we can live autonomously or collectively as individuals, groups or communities.

It is rooted in history, oral and written. It is alive in the present and offers ways to see our futures differently. Anarchy asks questions of ourselves and our environments. Anarchy opens spaces where our futures are wide open. There are no leaders, no programs or marketing plan. There are no dues, oaths, memberships or questionnaires. It is a set of ideas, beliefs, philosophies that simply affirms the notion that we all can and should be free to live our lives without being exploited or oppressed.

A wide array of tendencies carries the anarchy banner and even more share the same ideas and dreams without labels. It is a point of reference, like many others that can be confusing, misconstrued, and sometimes meaningless. Anarchy doesn't define those of us who carry the banner, but is a naming of us who want to live these ideals.

We would burn our black flags and toss the labels to the garbage heap if many of us agreed that they had outlived their usefulness. In my interactions with anarchism, mostly through political libertarian individualist and anarcho-communist circles, my views and political practices were transformed from thinking I knew all the answers and having plans on how to fix the world to stumbling along and asking deeper and much harder questions of myself and others; to an understanding that these are revolutionary paths of unknown outcomes. There aren't three steps to revolution, and if there were, it would probably end in a travesty of unintended outcomes.

There is solace in knowing that we don't have to have all the answers; just a willingness to explore, resist domination, and strive for collective liberation. Ideas within anarchy are not vague and disassociated from life. In fact, there are powerful core ideas within anarchist traditions that bond many people and movements together to this day, even those intellectual curmudgeons that don't call it by its name.

Mutual aid, autonomy, anti-capitalist, solidarity, direct action, and liberation are ideas and practices that we engage in with each other throughout our lives.

We don't need social theorists, academics, philosophers, or professional politicians to help us understand these concepts. They are innate within us and we are drawn to them because they are part of the human fabric as opposed to those in hierarchical structures. People act on these ideas without needing them explained or labeled. I found liberation in anarchist thinkers attempts to look at the natural world and all of its inhabitants complexly rather than just reduce us all to simplistic one dimensional identities for a proletarian revolution.

For possibilities

As the idea of anarchy has become almost mainstream in recent years, showing up everywhere from popular culture to its consensus decision-making process in mass movements such as Occupy, more people are looking to anarchism's rich and storied past for both a visionary alternative, we must recognize that those who named it, thought or wrote about it are not to be treated as saints with enshrined and consecrated words to be quoted and memorized as the truth.

We cannot canonize them or their words. They would have despised that. Instead, we should take those liberatory foundations and continue to build on them by seeing ourselves as part of an ongoing and growing dialog.

Anarchy is more than opposition to capitalism and domination. Refusal is only the first step. It also challenges us to think of the possibilities associated with our freedom and liberation with our emergency hearts wide open.

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

Until we are all free!

scott crow has spent his varied life as an author, speaker, underground musician, coop business owner, political organizer, trainer, strategist and 'green collar worker' advocating for anarchism. He is the author of *Black Flags and Windmills* (PM Press) and can be found at scottcrow.org.

fifth Estate

scott crow

Anarchy: A letter for insurgent dreamers

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/391-springsummer-2014/anarchy-letter-insurgent-dreamers-2>

Fifth Estate #391, Spring/Summer 2014 — Anarchy!

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net