

Maximalist Anarchism/Anarchist Maximalism

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In pre-revolutionary Russia, the Socialist Revolutionaries divided into two factions, the radicals and the moderates. The former were known as the Maximalists, the latter as the Minimalists. I want to appropriate this terminology in order to identify two general tendencies within contemporary anarchism. My intention is not to add to the 57 varieties of existing anarchism. Anarchism already encompasses a broad spectrum of positions: individualist, communist, mutualist, collectivist, primitivist and so on. The focus of this essay is not on the variations and shifts in emphasis which result in the differentiation of these positions. Rather, the aim remains to aid clarity, to provide an interpretive grid, a map which will allow individuals to make sense of the field of anarchism and situate themselves within it.

Maximalist anarchism encompasses those forms of anarchism which aim at the exponential exposure, challenging and abolition of power. Such a project involves a comprehensive questioning of the totality – the totality of power relations and the ensemble of control structures which embody those relations – or what, for shorthand purposes, I call the control complex. Power is not seen as located in any single institution such as patriarchy or the state, but as pervasive in everyday life. The focus of maximalism thus remains the dismantlement of the control complex, of the totality, of life structured by governance and coercion, of power itself in all its multiple forms.

Given power's pervasiveness and its capacity to insinuate itself into all manner of relations and situations (even the most intimate and apparently depoliticised), the maximalist stance involves a relentless interrogation of every aspect of daily life. Everything is open to question and challenge. Nothing is off limits for investigation and revision. Power, in all its overt and subtle forms, must be rooted out if life is to become free. Maximalism remains ruthlessly iconoclastic, not least when coming into contact with those icons that are vestiges of classical anarchism or earlier modes of radicalism (e.g., work, workerism, history) or those icons characteristic of contemporary anarchism (e.g., the primitive, community, desire and – above all – nature). Nothing is sacred, least of all the fetishised, reified shibboleths of anarchism. Maximalism entails a renewal and extension of the Nietzschean project of a transvaluation of all values in order to open possibilities for new ways of thought, perception, behaviour, action and ways of life, in short anarchist epistemologies and ontologies.

In contrast, minimalist anarchism encompasses those forms of anarchism which have not made the post-Situationist quantum leap toward the maximalist positions outlined above. From the

revolutionary perspective of maximalism, minimalist anarchism appears reformist, unable or unwilling to make the break with the control complex in its entirety, or inadequate to the project of freely creating life through the eradication of all forms of power, and thus doomed to failure. Maximalism remains radical in the etymological sense of getting to the root of problems, while minimalism remains prepared to accommodate itself to those forms of power it finds convenient or unwilling to confront. Minimalism remains stalled in the nostalgic politics of ‘if only...’, whereas maximalism proceeds to the anti-politics of the very science fictional question of ‘What if ...?’

The urgent priority of maximalism constitutes the development and implementation of an anarchist psychology. Other dimensions of the anarchist project remain subsidiary to this aim. Abandoning the baggage of Enlightenment rationality, maximalism needs to recognise that human beings are first and foremost creatures of passion and irrationality, and only secondarily reasonable beings. Central to the emancipation of life from governance and control remains the exploration of desire and the free, joyful pursuit of individual lines of interest. But in the world defined and determined by the control complex, desire and interest are deformed, limited and channelled into forms which maximise profit and social control.

In order to combat this process, maximalists need to be able to answer Perlman’s fundamental question: Why do people desire their own oppression? This is essentially a psychological question, concerned with the issue of deciphering hidden (or unconscious) motivations – motives hidden by, for and from oneself and others by power. The flipside of this question is equally significant: What makes some individuals into anarchists or radical anti-authoritarians? Anarchism will not proceed in any substantial fashion until these issues are addressed. And as these issues are psychological in nature, the project of developing a distinctively anarchist psychology remains primary. Maximalism needs to foster psychological understanding of the mechanisms of oppression and liberation in order that the process of human (and concomitantly ecological) regeneration can gather pace. There are precedents for this project in the anarcho-psychological critique of Stirner, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky sketched by John Carroll in *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace*, and continued – not as Carroll thinks, by Freud – but by the anarchist psychoanalyst Otto Gross. This tradition needs to be renewed and reformulated to address the intensified and integrated forms of control that have emerged in contemporary techno-managerialist mass society. Suggestive as the ideas of Freudian Marxists might be in this context, it would be well to remember that both Freudianism and Marxism are managerialist ideologies and thus completely at odds with the anti-ideological struggles of maximalist anarchism.

Maximalism can only make progress if it recognises the inutility of political and political philosophy discourses as a way of articulating and communicating anarchist concerns. Politics, ‘the science and art of government,’ has little or nothing to do with the anti-politics of liberating life from the control complex. Political discourse has at best a very limited role to play in this project. In light of the above discussion of psychological issues, it becomes apparent that maximalism needs to make use of the discourses and practices of the arts if it is to reach out and communicate with people. In the process, art itself will be transformed – realised and superseded, in Situationist terms – into something completely different than its current alienated, commodified condition. The rationalist discourse of Enlightenment political philosophy can only hope to address the rational faculties. For many people, these remain undeveloped, blocked or coded as off-limits, and thus communication at this level remains stymied and ineffectual. Anyway, as indicated earlier, such faculties remain of superficial or limited interest in the process of creating

free life. If anarchism is to touch people then it must reach into their unconscious, and activate their repressed desires for freedom. This is not at all the same process as the psychological manipulation of unconscious desires, fears and anxieties as in fascism, but an opening up of avenues of authentic communication and a prompting of individuals to recognise and acknowledge their own desires through the Nietzschean process of self-overcoming. In other words, it involves a life-affirmative existential assertion of one's self and desires over and against social programming which inculcates obedience to the codes and routines of the control complex. The arts, due to their capacity to bypass inhibitions and connect with or even liberate unconscious concerns and desires, thus remain far more appropriate than political discourse as a means of promoting and expressing the development of autonomy and anti-authoritarian rebellion.

A key focus of anti-totality struggle remains forthright analysis of and combat directed against micro-fascism. Rolando Perez's *On An(archy) and Schizoanalysis* is an excellent and accessible introduction to this crucial area of struggle. Fascist and other totalitarian systems – including the liberal totalitarianism of democratic capitalism – are based on the micro-fascisms which structure, shape and inform everyday life in the control complex. Given that maximalism entails an exponential eradication of all mechanisms and forms of power from the largest through to the most intimate and mundane, the focus on micro-fascism remains far more fundamental than those relatively superficial anti-fascist struggles where fascism is merely understood as an organised political movement. Maximalist anarchism remains resolutely anti-political, anti-ideological, anti-systemic and anti-authoritarian. In its struggle against micro-fascism, it remains anti-capitalist, anti-communist, anti-socialist (in both its twin forms of national and international socialism), and anti-fascist, but above all revolutionary.

On the constructive, life-affirmative side, maximalism remains committed to direct action, the insurrectional project, and hence – given its rejection of all forms of power, authority and order – illegalism. Nothing less than an all-out assault on every front of the control complex remains necessary. Maximalism means a renewal and extension of the individualist anarchist project of war on society to encompass the entirety of the control complex. Everyday life remains the site of conflict, but every aspect of daily life needs re-evaluating from an anarchist perspective (which does not mean that every aspect of daily life and interactions will necessarily be changed, but it does mean that every aspect needs to come under scrutiny). But maximalism also involves the posing of alternatives. Maximalism might be defined as imagination and desire unleashed. Moving beyond politics, maximalism means conducting experiments, freely chosen in line with desire, imagination and interest, in all areas of everyday life, including language, modes of thought, perception, behaviour, relationships, action and interaction. Anarchist maximalism is the optimal means to create our own lives free of the controls exercised by power, authority and order.

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