

Otherworlds Review #7: Spiritual Anarchism

The Otherworlds Review

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Sun in Pisces · New Moon in Pisces

The puppet, called “historical materialism,” is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is small and ugly and has to keep out of sight.

– Walter Benjamin

The new moon has always been the ally of runaways, anarchists, and insurgents. In the darkness, guided only by the stars, we make our escapes, we hide from our enemies, we attack. The doors to these possibilities are especially open during Pisces, the watery sign of all things hidden and the last sign before the cycle begins once again with fire. A Piscean origin story tells of Aphrodite and Eros leaping into the Euphrates and taking the form of fish in order to evade the Leviathanic monster Typhon. And like love and desire, anarchy always finds a way to elude its would-be captors, shapeshift, and survive.

Pisces is the sign of the spiritual and the occult. The word “occult” simply means “hidden,” after all. The anarchist tradition, with its black masks and clandestine associations, has always had a strong affinity for the hidden. For some anarchists, the spiritual world is a refuge and a sanctuary and a place to receive and transmit knowledge that is necessary to keep encrypted. But it is also a disputed territory.

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A decade ago, an anarchist named Kirsten Brydum, left San Francisco – itself a city with a more than century long unbroken continuum of anarchist tradition stretching from the present back through the counterculture to the Galleanists and other immigrant insurgents – to travel the country in search of manifestations of the dream of collective autonomy. She took up the sacred art of wandering to weave connections and share visions with fellow travelers and schemers of the anarchist way. She visited occupied gardens and blockades, anarchist houses and social spaces. Her journey ended in the ninth ward of New Orleans where she was fatefully murdered, shot to death while biking home from a night of dancing, sending waves of shock through the network she had only just begun to trace.

The ancient Greeks understood that certain factors could prevent a spirit from entering the underworld after its death. Such a spirit, whatever the reason its departure is barred, becomes a

ghost. Jake Stratton-Kent elaborates essential types of spirits in this class: “those denied proper funeral rites, ... those who had died before their time, who wandered for the intended period of their earthly life, those who had suffered a violent death, and the unburied. Murder victims and executed criminals belong essentially to the same class. Since none of these can cross the River Styx, they are restless spirits. As a result, they can and will haunt of their own volition, or through magical manipulation.” Especially included in this cosmology were the spirits of women who were denied the fulfillment of their dreams and ambitions in their lifetimes.

Kirsten certainly received funeral rites and has been held in loving memory by many throughout the anarchist galaxy, but still she hits many of the marks of the ancient standards of haunting. She was a wanderer who died violently before her time. Her dreams were only just entering our world, and her ambition was surely otherworldly. By way of a theory of a multiplicity of soul-parts we can assume that she remained, there in New Orleans, at least in part, for most of the last decade. Skilled in evasion and adept in matters of spirit, we know that she was not “stuck” in the classical sense. Rather, while she waited for the fullness of her story to be told, she remained and learned from the veritable spiritual ecosystem of the city where she died.

We can only imagine the adventures she led and the mysteries she uncovered there. New Orleans is a modern day necropolis, swarming with spirits and strangers. The ancestors of countless traditions – indigenous, colonial, and diasporic – have passed through that delta and left their marks. The Gods and the dead are celebrated in revelrous rites of death and rebirth. Practitioners of magical systems forged as means of survival and escape still offer their services on the streets and in the storefronts, for a price. New Orleans is a crossroads of travelers, traditions and ancestral lines.

As part of a contribution to a volume of recent explorations of traditions which meet at such crossroads, Stratton-Kent again emphasizes the importance of the dead in any living tradition. He contends that the role of the dead, which was prominent in the magical workings of antiquity, has largely been excised and alienated from the western magical tradition. He says that, “once western magic acknowledges and reconnects with the central neglected aspect of its origins, occultism becomes more nourishing and meaningful for practitioners and aspirants, but also potentially for the wider community.” Stratton-Kent’s work swims within a school of studied magicians and occultists who are beginning the work of reprising and restoring this crucial necromantic element.

We’d wager this centrality of the spirits surfaced in the course of Kirsten’s inquiry. New Orleans would surely be the place where it would. The anarchist tradition continued to re-learn this key throughout that same winter, as all of Greece burned in haunting by Alexis Grigoropoulos’s ghost. We say re-learn because we re-member that our color is black for the blood of the communards. Over the course of the following decade, wave after wave of struggle against the murderous police and the attempted desecration of sacred places have continued to drive this point home. As practitioners of anarchist magic we delight in the simultaneous efforts to return the dead to their rightful place within both anarchist and magical traditions.

Situated as we are at this crossroads, the *Otherworlds Review* is honored to welcome Kirsten Brydum as an ancestor of tradition.

In February of 2018, after a decade shrouded in mystery, her murder was solved: a man named Joseph Brant confessed to killing her and three others in the surrounding year. Though we place no stock or faith in the farcical justice system, we know Kirsten’s spirit rests easier for this latter chapter of her story being told.

And her story is not over. The same day that we learned of her murderer's confession, a day amidst several weeks of fecund and frenzied anarchist spirit work, a parcel was passed to the editors of this newsletter containing a copy of a paper written by Kirsten during her travels: a paper titled "Spiritual Anarchism."

In this humble and brilliant work Kirsten blends a bricolage of influences – the Situationists, Taoism, Ursula K. Le Guin, Crimethinc, Hakim Bey, Emma Goldman, and her own childhood heresies – in order to present a case for the necessary cultivation of a specifically anarchist spirituality. She cites theories of the social necessity of religion, not to apologize for any of the intrinsically colonial and authoritarian expressions of religion in this society, but to emphasize the importance of the spirit to the creation of another. Departing from the necessity of religion to so-called society, we might insist on more: the worldly necessity of cosmology. If anarchists are to dream and unleash new worlds, we must understand and engage with the cosmos into which those worlds are to be born.

Kirsten's text opposes enlightenment thinking and secularization, which was always already a continuation of the Christian project of excising the divine from the world. It differentiates between traditions that describe an absent transcendental God from those that understand the divine as immanent. In doing so, she combats the theological reification of the logic of subordination to an external authority. Instead she lays the foundations to conjure an anarchist tradition of spiritism which views all the world, including ourselves, as divine beings. She calls this tradition "spiritual anarchism, which recognizes God as the self."

Spiritual anarchism, as laid out in the text, takes this contradiction between transcendence and immanence as its point of departure. It argues that the Church, the State and the Workplace function to alienate us from our divinity and from one another's. From there Kirsten encodes the crucial elements for the emergence of a robust and thriving tradition to remediate this core alienation. She names that such a tradition needs techniques for collectivizing energy and conducting power, journeying, methods of self-discovery and self-healing, divinatory methods of interpreting nature-based reasoning. In short, Ways. Citing Crimethinc's most influential pamphlet, she transmits: "Anarchy is a mode of being, a manner of responding to conditions and relating to others... This isn't a utopian vision, or a program or ideal to serve; it's simply a way of proceeding, of approaching relationships, of dealing with problems now..." She understands this Way as being the Tao, which like anarchy, she describes as water eroding the material and spiritual edifice of domination.

Or as Ursula K. LeGuin renders the *Tao Te Ching*:

Nothing in the world
is as soft, as weak, as water;
nothing else can wear away
the hard, the strong,
and remain unaltered.
Soft overcomes hard,
weak overcomes strong.

Kirsten tells us that while we cannot know an anarchist spirituality before it arrives, we can begin the work of recognizing its arrival. "Spiritual recognition means acknowledging the divinity

in others and oneself. It means viewing all eco-systems as part of an intricate web of interdependent being. It means understanding ourselves, not as separate entities but as connected. Therefore, we might see that our self-interests are intrinsically linked to the interests of others, both human and non.”

The Way does not begin with us, but we are still called to recognition. May we live in ways which anticipate the coming of spiritual anarchism. Its arrival is not deferred, but is immanent. “This is happening already and has always been happening.”

Kirsten understood her text as a rough beginning. To quote her once more: “much work is still to be done.”

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Saint Peter will not open the doors of Paradise and I will be sent to Hell with Ravachol, Henry and Vaillant, and there, among the four, we will organize a revolution among the damned, we will stab the devil and we will tear down the doors of Paradise.

– Sante Geronimo Caserio, anarchist assassin

Ten years later, spiritual anarchism remains necessary as always, especially in the struggle against fascism.

We all know that many fascists at least superficially incorporate religion and spirituality into their politics, and that some pursue occult and esoteric studies. Many of them do this poorly: they confuse the paradoxical and monolithic thought-form of whiteness with the inherently complex and interwoven web of ancestry, they practice with inconsistent or insincere theology, they do not actually believe in or respect gods and spirits. Identity Europa recently staged a photo-op outside the Parthenon in Nashville, though they surely did not actually make any offerings to Pallas Athena. And still, even a poorly-thrown curse can be dangerous. And the ones who do know what they are doing are a genuine threat: witness, for example, the rise of the alt-right through chaos magic involving frogs and memes.

Even if you haven’t yet had direct experience of spirits and are agnostic to their existence, the themes and social forces that fascist occultists engage with should not be taken lightly. They paint their most sinister symbols upon their shields. Fascists recruit by telling stories, by offering meaning in a world where meaning is increasingly hard to find. The collapse of secular liberalism is their recruiting ground. Alienation, nihilism, and despair feed fascism, which claims to offer a solution, but which is in fact an agent of those forces, especially in its extremist underground manifestations.

With fascists experiencing setbacks to public organizing such as Richard Spencer cancelling future speeches and excommunicated phyletist heretic Matthew Heimbach getting arrested for domestic violence after having an affair with his mother-in-law, we can expect underground formations such as Atomwaffen Division, the Rise Above Movement (aka DIY Division), and the Wolves of Vinland to gain further traction. These groups are more dangerous than their aboveground, movement-building counterparts. The traditional antifascist whack-a-mole tactics of doxxing and opposing public organizing whenever fascists rear their ugly heads from the underground are good, but something more is needed when they choose to scuttle back to the underground. Spiritually speaking, the nest of the fascist insect needs to be burned out.

To fight fascism without understanding its spiritual dimensions is to go into battle with poor intelligence. To reject all spirituality and occultism as crypto-fascist is even worse: it is ceding

territory to the ancestral enemy without firing a shot. There is never an excuse for anarchists betraying their comrades and switching sides, but if there is no explicitly anarchist spirituality, then unfortunately it comes as no surprise when weak-willed and spineless spiritual seekers do indeed fall into the trap of crypto-fascism. This disgusting tendency can and should be combated. What is needed is a uniquely anarchist occultism to strengthen our existing practices, to occupy and defend territory, and to attack on all levels, including the spiritual. The stakes are high: this world, and the others.

The unbreakable continuity between material and spiritual struggle is eloquently expressed by the antifascist prophet Walter Benjamin:

The class struggle...is a fight for the crude and material things without which no refined and spritual things could exist. But these latter things, which are present in class struggle, are not present as a vision of spoils that fall to the victor. They are alive in this struggle as confidence, courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude, and have effects that reach far back into the past. They constantly call into question every victory, past and present, of the rulers.

The process of bringing out the refined and spiritual from the crude and material is called sacrifice, and it is through sacrifice that we will contest the supposed victories of the enemy. The word “sacrifice,” in addition to its colloquial sense “to give something up,” originally meant “to make something sacred.” Anarchists already do this subconsciously. For example, when we give up our ideological ties with work or school or the nuclear family (even if we continue to operate within those institutions for reasons of survival), what we are really doing is taking the concepts of “activity” and “learning” and “home” out of the profane context of capitalism and making them sacred to Anarchy. What would it look like to sacrifice occultism, to sacrifice the very concept of “sacrifice,” to Anarchy? We aim to find out. We invite you to join us.

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What can a witch do when Nazis march proudly in the streets? When laws are made attacking immigrants, people of color, and LGBTQ people? When religious minorities face daily violence and vandalism? When cities are left to burn or drown due to unchecked climate change? What are a witch’s capabilities and responsibilities in a time of injustice, from the courts to the streets to our own homes, from protecting vulnerable communities to public advocacy to anti-fascist hex campaigns? Join an experienced, dedicated panel of activist magic-workers for a discussion of what we can – and must – bravely do together.

My initial understanding of timbre grew intuitively from a Platonic idea elaborated in Timaeus that vibration is, at essence, all-encompassing creative license for the imaginary. Recast as sonopoietic space, it is the vessel, the sphere that invisibly holds materialization.

The Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD) is an acoustic hailing device developed by LRAD Corporation to send messages and warning tones over longer distances or at higher volume than normal loudspeakers.

When asked “Who are you?” an anarchist, sitting alongside other practitioners of Resistance answers “I’m an insurgent.” There, in the identification, is an emptying. The most successful among the protectors of the sacred, among the initiated warriors for freedom, are the guided ones: those adept at ridding the self of the self, of the past, the future, the fear.

Anarchists must understand every interaction as an act of social war. That there is Between in the distance between what is communicated and the landing. Exchanges, in varying timbres, spelled by casting into the Air, will meet Many before the fall. Where each’s Otherworlds collide, there in the liminal drift, is Anotherworld entirely. Like how a ball both spins and rolls, there is layered energy; like how a wheel both turns and flips, there is infinite dimension.

The space between thought is the immortal hearth of the anarchist’s Guides. It is also a colonized space that must be kept cleansed and ritually decolonized. Like how sacred timbres are colonized to become LRADs. The insurgent’s identification is a moveable altar. Fed by the insurgent’s Ghosts and Guides to promote moves always in the direction of their divine suggestion.

Up where words hang between Otherworlds, identification is determined with Pause (not Hesitation). The guided practitioner of insurgent resistance floats in the Pause to be emptied. There Instant meets Infinite. Bellowing and roaring come the ancestors and gods. The anarchist’s myths unfold in the airs of Anotherworld, ruled by Aether, who is the offspring of Inevitability and Time.

Brightness is an entity, did you know? Birthed by Night, of course. Day is an entity as well and maybe more clearly. Chaos we know as a powerful deity, but do we respect the power carried by the entity Betrayal? Do we know Willingness as intimately as Doom? We might recognize Night from its regular appearance but what about Darkness, our closer consort? Risk, our eternal conspirator, must surely conspire with Courage. Comfort together with Vulnerability are destined to create Purpose. In Anotherworld, we can say, in the house of Day or Night or Shadow, Fear encounters Acceptance. Faith pours over the protected insurgent when Fear first appears. Gift is an entity, did you know? Make offerings to Focus, pray that the will of the Insurgent’s Hearth be done, at the very least. And Focus will appear.

Anotherworld is the lush container of Blessing and Grace. If the only thing that we can truly give another is information, then the urgency of care that needs to be faithfully reproduced (this time) is our constant decision to make offerings to Pause, not Hesitation. The insurgent, as the altar of the gods, is tasked to let the mouths of the already orphaned descendants of our world have the first word, to make the first divine move. By the blessed union of Reception and Transmission, Action is born into Brightness who is birthed by Night, of course.

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After the war
between the Titans and the Gods
primordial Hekate
three-formed dread goddess
was given dominion
over all three realms
and so under
darkest Night

of the lunar month
we clean our altars
and bring out our dead
to join the tomb spirits reveling
at the threeway crossroads
marked by three masks
and offer generously
and walk away
without looking back

now is the time for cleansing
now is the time of silence
now is the time to remember

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Hail Kirsten Brydum! We welcome and honor you as an ancestor of the spiritual anarchist tradition.

Rise in Power Adolpho “Doph” Delgado, Mmame Mbage, Santo Hilaro Garcia, Marcelina Garcia Profecto, and all those who have lost their lives to police violence! May you have justice and vengeance!

Strength and liberation and protection for the rebels in the prisons from Yuma, Arizona, to Santa Cruz, Bolivia! May the fallen Rise in Power!

Strength and solidarity and protection for the communities and the fighters of Afrin! Martyrs are immortal: Şehid Namirin!

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