Review of The Politics of Attack

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The Politics of Attack: Communiques and Insurrectionary Violence by Michael Loadenthal. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2018; 263 pages. £25.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781526114440.

Not for the faint of heart, even for those within radical communities, The Politics of Attack outlines diverse connotations for communiques and political violence through fresh readings of critical theory. Attempting to overcome overemphasis that media places upon anarchist violence instead of the critiques that insurrection symbolizes, Michael Loadenthal offers theories for textualizing anarchist agitation. Frequently applying his earlier quantitative work on violent measures used against the neoliberal state, Loadenthal provides discursive analysis to explore questions of theoretical significance for violent acts. Consistently defining that the modern state is the most effective terrorist, Politics of Attack searches anarchist hostility for productive theory that can emerge out of communiques and insurrectionary violence.

The first chapter introduces applications of Foucauldian theory to histories of anarchism. Resisting a dominant historiography based in work from Eric Hobsbawm, which defined anarchist actions as savage, middling, and unorganized, The Politics of Attack searches the philosophies of anarchism through acts of violence that are frequently sensationalized as too radical to be deemed ideologically potent. These discursive goals add emphasis to the recent field of Critical Security Studies and Critical Terrorism Studies that read insurrectionary actions as motivated by sometimes potent ideologies, rather than irrational and emanating only from primitive rebels, social bandits, or part of only local networks. Applying poststructural and feminist theories to read violence and communiques through literary criticism, Loadenthal finds theoretical validity within many violent critiques against everyday terrorism from the state.

Politics of Attack continues a history of anarchism through categories of aggression and social revolt. This reading looks upon poststructural theory to engage discourses of anarchism outside of Marxist structuralism, especially concerning nineteenth-century cells within Europe and anarchy in the United States at events like Haymarket in 1886. The propaganda of the deed is vital here, such as within the remorseless violence of the Bonnot Gang in France and the Galleanists in Italy, because violent agitations are understood by many of these anarchists as texts within a social discourse. Symbolic acts are then read through the history of the Spanish Civil War and modern anarchism with the Zapatistas, the black bloc, and as part of anti-state networks that faced the superior forces of state power after 9/11. This discussion also focuses on how discourse often frames the majority of insurrectionary actions through prejudicial associations to Al-Qaeda and Islamism.

The activist reading of Chapter 3 links these antecedents of modern anarchism with contemporary social movements and the development of connections among cells, especially within Europe, with the Informal Anarchist Federation, the internationalization of the Conspiracy of Cells of Fire, and as part of broader digitally mediated environments. The fourth chapter reads insurrection in fields of social warfare and revolutionary design to link tactics between the digitally mediated cells of modern

insurrection to precedents of insurrectionary violence against property that also employed ethical codes asserting the values of symbolic violence. This analysis reads a change over time that associates recent movements with tactical targeting rather than the centrality of broadly symbolic acts within previous anarchism.

The fifth chapter returns to the central thesis of the work to look at discursive interpretations that can be gained from examining forms of political violence in context. Following theory from Louis Auguste Blanqui, Alfredo Bonanno, Tiqqun, and modern insurrectionists who apply queer theory, this chapter examines how the focus of modern anarchism relies on a belief in a constant attack and exposure of state violence through targeted symbolic acts rather than raising consciousness for a wide-scale revolutionary movement from the masses.

The sixth chapter looks at this move beyond structural Marxism to examine how insurrectionist actions derive from a set of changing values. These culturally constructed value systems can produce fresh standards as part of knowledge creation for a shared political and social movement that rises against a Right promoted through the fetishes of modern capitalism and a Left that prizes democracy, technology, and reform above attacking the constant and continued violence of the neoliberal state and its domineering totality. Thus, the final chapter, which includes flow charts representing patterns of knowledge creation, focuses on how insurrectionists continue to articulate a theory of antisecuritization through a performativity that can be potently used within other discourses that defy the spectacles of the state.

Finding within anarchist movements and terrorist actions attempts at knowledge creation, as opposed to knowledge production from the state and media, Loadenthal works to avoid the romantic narratives associated to his often controversial characters. As part of this compassionate yet unromantic description of anarchism, he chooses the term "insurrectionist" to describe violent acts. Overturning the idea that the anarchists who commit these minor acts of violence are Robin Hood characters with little motivation outside of local concerns, Loadenthal adeptly searches the history of anarchism and exposes broad resistance against advanced modern state technologies meant to control insurrectionist impulses.

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