

**Posudek disertační práce Bohuslava Kuříka, *Revolutionary Amoebas: Political Versatility as the Art of Resistance in Germany***

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The dissertation under review represents an important contribution to the scholarly understanding of a broad set of phenomena that have remained, until recently, largely outside the scope and attentions of social science. The doctoral candidate Bohuslav Kuřík has succeeded in shedding rich ethnographic light on the mechanisms of rioting and revolutionary activity, specifically in the context of the so-called Black Blocs that have regularly accompanied large political demonstrations throughout Europe and North America for several decades, and which came into public view especially in the wake of the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999. This phenomenon, though widely observed, has been the subject of little understanding, often presented in journalistic fashion as a manifestation of uncontrolled rage or thoughtless youthful rebellion. Kuřík's in-depth study shows that the Black Blocs function within a highly disciplined and thoroughly thought-out political order; that they form part of broader strategies and tendencies of political change; and, further, that they themselves have changed over times.

One of the dissertation's most important contributions, in my view, is its attempt to understand the specific case of a group of Black Bloc participants based in Germany as part of a broad attempt to rethink and re-form revolutionary activity in what Kuřík calls (following Barša and Císař) a "post-revolutionary epoch," when revolution is no longer generally considered to be a real, imminent possibility—and in which, nonetheless, revolutionaries have not ceased to exist. Kuřík effectively draws on Foucault's reflections on the subjectivity of resistance—even attempting, somewhat ambitiously, to carry out a research program that Foucault had set for himself before his own death—to describe what I would describe as a shifting mode of revolution-making. Revolution thus appears as a continual part of modern subjectivity, and yet it must be reshaped in an epoch when "the revolution," a singular moment of thorough social change, is no longer the order of the day (here I add my own interpretation of something that, I think, might be further developed by Kuřík). Kuřík shows how the current mode of revolution among the participants in his research has risen out of certain tensions or perceived inadequacies of an earlier political tendency, the *Autonomen*, with the result that today's "post-*Autonomen*" are situated within a specific revolutionary tradition as well as a specific configuration of power that they rebel against.

Kuřík's remarkable ethnographic detail gives this movement, so to speak, a face, even while he describes and explains the movement's commitment to facelessness, both as a situationally specific tactic during illegal protest actions and as part of revolutionary commitment to overcoming bourgeois individuality, emphasizing the collective—without, however, absolutizing the collective, but moving readily between the individual and the collective—in contrast, for example, to their predecessors' more radical rejection of individual identity. Kuřík's central concept of "revolutionary amoebas" captures both this will to overcome individualized subjectivity—because "amoebas" shift between multiple, and not wholly contained selves—and this ambivalent, tentative acceptance of mainstream subjectivity—as amoebas shift between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the quiescent and the disobedient, etc. I think this concept offers a way into understanding a relatively new mode of political subjectivity, even while Kuřík refrains from one-sidedly favoring it, but maintains a critical distance (in spite of his active

participant observation in the movement), showing the amoebic figure as complex, not immediately or unproblematically emancipatory, yet pointing toward certain potentialities for change.

The dissertation opens many questions and debates, providing many suggestive ideas—not all of which, I feel, are thoroughly tied together. I'd like to point, here, to several moments where connections between these ideas are, in my view, not yet sufficiently drawn out. None of these moments are fatal to the research. On the contrary, they provide opportunities for deepening the analysis as the author continues his work.

- The dissertation's rich analysis demonstrates the ethnographic value of the Foucauldian paradigm. Nevertheless, this framework raises a couple of not-fully-resolved issues for the analysis. First, Foucault himself, as far as I'm aware, was rather uninterested in collective revolutionary subjects. He did not turn to individuals, but he focused on disarticulated persons and groups. Kuřík does not seem to share this lack of interest, but uses the Foucauldian turn to subjectivity as a way of understanding the search for a collective subject, not by giving up on the search, but—at least this becomes clear in the conclusion—by showing how amoebic subjectivity switches readily between individuality and collectivity. Perhaps this tension between the author and his Foucauldian paradigm could be addressed; this would also help clarify why and how the author uses Foucault, whose value is more asserted than argued in the beginning of the dissertation—though, as I say, by the end the value of Foucault, as well as several ways the author seems to move beyond Foucault, seems clearer.
- Further, Foucault consistently showed how regimes of power and discourse structure whatever modes of resistance emerge within them. He was much more reluctant to acknowledge the success of particular modes of resistance, or their ability to move “outside” of (established) discourse and point to something new. Yet the latter seems to be central to Kuřík's analysis of the post-Automen. Here, too, the tension with Foucault seems to call for comment. But more importantly, it calls for very precise work in pointing to how certain practices might point beyond a given regime of power and discourse even while being produced by that regime. I think there are several moments in the dissertation where this moment, this guarded potential, could be more explicitly and critically laid out.
- The revolutionary amoebas move readily between what appears as an ordinary, civic subject and a “disobedient” one. Yet Kuřík gives hints throughout the dissertation that the post-Automen are not entirely normal even in their normal, civic personae. They still believe in revolution, talk about revolution (just not about their own participation in illegal activity), and generally favor certain prefigurative-emancipatory modes of living, though they are not as uncompromising in their everyday life as earlier Automen. They seek to disseminate this prefigurative way of living beyond their own community. But this dimension of their lives is not explored in much detail by the dissertation, which focuses on their activity in Black Blocs. It is understandable that the dissertation maintains its focus on one aspect, which necessarily comes at the expense of others. But the impression given is that in their non-illegal life, they are pretty ordinary; even though the dissertation offers numerous clues that this is not wholly the case. I think that there could have been a few more words addressing this tension—which, after all, seems to me to lie at the heart of revolutionary amoebic subjectivity as such. They are amoebas not

only between ordinary and riotous life, but also in their ordinary life they shift between numerous selves, it seems, as they employ multiple tactics to disseminate the revolution that no longer appears as “the” Revolution, but which has fragmented and, in fragmentary form, spread.

- This is a relatively banal formal point, but: I think the author could have done more to clarify exactly what group he worked with (was it a single affinity group? Or a loose network that overlapped in multiple groups?) and how exactly what this ethnographic case contributes to the understanding of revolutionary subjectivity that previous cases or other potential cases have not shown. The author, for example, cites a couple of other ethnographies of contemporary first-world protest movements, but he does not clearly say how his differs from theirs; i.e. why it was useful to do a new one. I believe it was very useful, but that use value could have been spelled out more explicitly.
- Finally: The structure of the dissertation does not appear as fully motivated. That is to say, it isn't clear why the author has chosen to order his chapters in just this way (especially chs. 4-7), or why he has chosen just these chapters and not others. Of course a certain degree of arbitrariness is unavoidable. But the more explanation the better. For example, why discuss communication first rather than last? Why devote a whole chapter to appearance, when appearance was discussed in each of the other chapters? Why separate the body from the in/dividual? All these questions may have good answers, and I'd like to see those answers in the text of a future version of the dissertation when prepared for eventual publication as a book—which I strongly recommend.

As stated above, these are criticisms which, I hope, will help lead to further work in the promising direction begun in this dissertation. I fully recommend the dissertation for defense and acceptance as fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree.

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