

# **Anthropology and Anarchism**

**Learning from stateless societies**

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1998

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There is, in many ways an “elective affinity” between anthropology and anarchism. Although anthropology’s subject matter has been diverse, and its conspectus rather broad—as a study of human culture, historically it has always had a rather specific focus—on the study of pre-state societies. But it is quite misleading to portray the anthropology of the past as being simply the study of so-called “primitive” people or the “exotic” other, and thus largely engaged in a kind of “salvage” operation of “disappearing” cultures. This is a rather biased and inaccurate portrait of anthropology, for the discipline has a long tradition of “anthropology at home,” and many important anthropological studies have their location in India, China and Japan. It is thus noteworthy that James Clifford and George Marcus (1986) in what many have regarded as the founding text of literary or post-modern anthropology, are not only rather dismissive of feminist anthropology, but ignore entirely the ethnographic studies of non-“Western” scholars—Srinivas, Kenyatta, Fei and Aiyappan. But in an important sense anthropology is *the* social science discipline that has put a focal emphasis on those kinds of societies that have been seen as exemplars of anarchy, a society without a state. Indeed, Evans- Pritchard, in his classic study of *The Nuer* (1940), described their political system as “ordered anarchy.” Harold Barclay’s useful and perceptive little book *People without government* (1992) is significantly subtitled “The Anthropology of Anarchism,” and Barclay makes the familiar distinction between anarchy, which is an ordered society without government, and anarchism, which is a political movement and tradition that became articulated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Anthropologists & anarchism: Reclus, Bougle, Mauss, Radcliffe-Brown**

Many anthropologists have had affinities with anarchism. One of the earliest ethnographic texts was a book by Elie Reclus called *Primitive Folk*. It was published in 1903, and carries the sub-title “Studies in Corporative Ethnology.” It is based on information derived from the writings of travellers and missionaries, and it has the evolutionary flavour of books written at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it contains lucid and sympathetic accounts of such people as the Apaches, Nayars, Todas and Inuits. Reclus declares the moral and intellectual equality of these cultures with that of “so-called civilised states”, and it is of interest that Reclus used the now familiar term Inuit, which means “people,” rather than the French term Eskimo. Elie Reclus was the elder brother, and lifetime associate, of Elisée, the more famous anarchist geographer.

Another French anthropologist with anarchist sympathies was Celestin Bougle, who wrote not only a classical study of the Indian caste system (1908)—which had a profound influence on Louis Dumont—but also an important study of Proudhon. Bougle was one of the first to affirm, then (1911) controversially, that Proudhon was a sociological thinker of standing. There was in fact a close relationship between the French sociological tradition, focussed around Durkheim, and both socialism and anarchism, even though Durkheim himself was antagonistic to the anarchist stress on the individual. Durkheim was a kind of guild socialist, but his nephew Marcel Mauss wrote a classical study on *The Gift* (1925) which focussed on reciprocal or gift exchange among pre-literate cultures. This small text is not only in some ways an anarchist tract, but it is one of the foundation texts of anthropology, one read by every budding anthropologist. British anthropologists have less connection with anarchism, but it is worth noting that one of the so-called “fathers” of British anthropology, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown was an anarchist in his early years.

Alfred Brown was a lad from Birmingham. He managed, with the help of his brother, to get to Oxford University. There two influences were important to him. One was the process philosopher Alfred Whitehead, whose organismic theory had a deep influence on Radcliffe-Brown. The other was Kropotkin, whose writings he imbibed. In his student days at Oxford Radcliffe-Brown was known as “Anarchy Brown.” Alas! Oxford got to him. He later became something of an intellectual aristocrat, and changed his name to the hyphenated “A.R. Radcliffe-Brown.” But, as Tim Ingold has written (1986), Radcliffe-Brown’s writings are permeated with a sense that social life is a process, although like most Durkheimian functionalists he tended to play down issues relating to conflict, power and history.

Although anarchism has had a minimal influence on anthropology—though many influential anthropologists can be described as radical liberals and socialists (like Boas, Radin, and Diamond), anarchist writers have drawn extensively on the work of anthropologists. Indeed there is a real contrast between anarchists and Marxists with respect to anthropology, for while anarchists have critically engaged themselves with ethnographic studies, Marxist attitudes to anthropology have usually been dismissive. In this respect Marxists have abandoned the broad historical and ethnographic interests of Marx and Engels. The famous study of Engels on *The origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) is, of course, based almost entirely on Lewis Morgan’s anthropological study of *Ancient Society* (1877). If one examines the writings of all the classical Marxists—Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci, Lukacs—they are distinguished by a wholly Eurocentric perspective, and a complete disregard for anthropology. The entry under “Anthropology” in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Bottomore, 1983), significantly has nothing to report between Marx and Engels in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the arrival on the scene of French Marxist anthropologists in the 1970s (Godelier, Meillassoux). Equally amazing is that one Marxist text, specifically on *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (Hindness and Hirst, 1975), not only suggested that the “objects” of theoretical discourses did not exist—and so rejected history as a worthwhile subject of study, but completely bypassed anthropological knowledge. This is matched of course by the dismissive attitude towards anarchism by Marxist scholars—Perry Anderson, Wallerstein and E.P. Thompson are examples.

## **Anarchists & Anthropology: Kropotkin, Bookchin, Clastres, Zerzan**

Kropotkin is well known. But being a geographer as well as an anarchist, and having travelled widely in Asia, Kropotkin had wide ethnographic interests. This is most clearly expressed in his classic text *Mutual Aid* published in 1903. In this book Kropotkin attempted to show that both organic and social life was not an arena where laissez-faire competition and conflict and the “survival of the fittest” was the only norm, but rather these domains were characterized by “mutuality” and “symbiosis.” It was the ecological dimension of Darwin’s thought, expressed in the last chapter of *On the Origin of Species*, that was crucial for Kropotkin; co-operation not struggle was the important factor in the evolutionary process. This is exemplified by the ubiquitous lichen, one of the most basic forms of life and found practically everywhere. Kropotkin’s book gives lengthy accounts of mutual aid not only among hunter-gatherers and such people as the Buryat and Kabyle (now well-known through Bourdieu’s writings), but also in the medieval city and in contemporary European societies. In a A.S.A. monograph on socialism (edited by Chris Hann,

1993) two articles specifically examine anarchy among contemporary people. Alan Barnard looks at the issues of “primitive communism” and “mutual aid” among the Kalahari hunter-gatherers, while Joanna Overing discusses “anarchy and collectivism” among the horticultural Piaroa of Venezuela. Barnard’s essay has the sub-title “Kropotkin visits the Bushmen,” indicating that anarchism is still a live issue among some anthropologists.

Kropotkin was concerned to examine the “creative genius” of people living at what he described as the “clan period” of human history, and the development of institutions of mutual aid. But this did not entail the repudiation of individual self-assertion, and, unlike many contemporary anthropologists, Kropotkin made a distinction between individuality and self-affirmation, and individualism.

Murray Bookchin is a controversial figure. His advocacy of citizen’s councils and municipal self management, his emphasis on the city as a potential ecological community, and his strident critiques of the misanthropy and eco-mysticism of the deep ecologists are perhaps well known, and the centre of many debates—much of it acrimonious. But Bookchin’s process-oriented dialectical approach and his sense of history—alive to the achievements of the human spirit—inevitably led Bookchin to draw on anthropological studies. The main influences on his work were Paul Radin and Dorothy Lee, both sensitive scholars of native American culture. In his *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982), Bookchin devotes a chapter to what he describes as “organic society,” emphasizing the important features of early human tribal-society: a primordial equality and the absence of coercive and domineering values, a feeling of unity between the individual and the kin community, a sense of communal property and an emphasis on mutual aid and usufruct rights, and a relationship with the natural world which is one of reciprocal harmony rather than of domination. But Bookchin is concerned that we draw lessons from the past, and learn from the culture of pre-literate people, rather than romanticising the life of hunter-gatherers. Still less, that we should try to emulate them.

Pierre Clastres was both an anarchist and an anthropologist. His minor classic, on the Indian communities of South America—specifically the forest Guayaki (Ache)—is significantly titled *Society Against the State* (1977). Like Tom Paine and the early anarchists, Clastres makes a clear distinction between society, as a pattern of social relations, and the state, and argues that the essence of what he describes as “archaic” societies—whether hunter-gatherers or horticultural (neolithic) peoples—is that effective means are institutionalized to prevent power being separated from social life. He bewails the fact that western political philosophy is unable to see power except in terms of “hierarchized and authoritarian relations of command and obedience,” (p.9) and thus equates power with coercive power. Reviewing the ethnographic literature of the people of South America—apart from the Inca State—Clastres argues that they were distinguished by their “sense of democracy and taste for equality,” and that even local chiefs lacked coercive power. What constituted the basic fabric of archaic society, according to Clastres, was exchange, coercive power, in essence, being a negation of reciprocity. He contends that the aggressiveness of tribal communities has been grossly exaggerated, and that a subsistence economy did not imply an endless struggle against starvation, for in normal circumstances there was an abundance and variety of things to eat. Such communities were essentially egalitarian, and people had a high degree of control over their own lives and work activities. But the decisive “break” for Clastres, between “archaic” and “historical” societies was not the neolithic revolution and the advent of agriculture, but the “political revolution” involving the intensification of agriculture and the emergence of the state.

The key points of Clastres' analysis have recently been affirmed by John Gledhill (1994, pp.13–15). It provides a valuable critique of western political theory which identifies power with coercive authority; and it suggests looking at history less in terms of typologies than as a process in which human activities have maintained their own autonomy and resisted the centralizing intrusions and exploitation inherent in the state.

While for Clastres and Bookchin political domination and hierarchy begin with the intensification of agriculture, and the rise of the state, for John Zerzan the domestication of plants and animals heralds the demise of an era when humans lived an authentic, free life. Agriculture, *per se*, is a form of alienation; it implies a loss of contact with the world of nature and a controlling mentality. The advent of agriculture thus entails the “end of innocence” and the demise of the “golden age” as humans left the “Garden of Eden,” though Eden is identified not with a garden but with hunter-gathering existence. Given this advocacy of “primitivism,” it is hardly surprising that Zerzan (1988, 1994) draws on anthropological data to validate his claims, and to portray hunter-gatherers as egalitarian, authentic, and as the “most successful and enduring adaptation ever achieved by humankind” (1988, p.66). Even symbolic culture and the shamanism associated with hunter-gatherers is seen by Zerzan as implying an orientation to manipulate and control nature or other humans. Zerzan presents an apocalyptic, even a gnostic vision. Our hunter-gatherer past is described as an idyllic era of virtue and authentic living. The last eight thousand years or so of human history—after the fall (agriculture)—is seen as one of tyranny, hierarchical control, mechanized routine devoid of any spontaneity, and as involving the anesthetization of the senses. All those products of the human creative imagination—farming, art, philosophy, technology, science, urban living, symbolic culture—are viewed negatively by Zerzan—in a monolithic sense. The future we are told is “primitive.” How this is to be achieved in a world that presently sustains almost six billion people (for evidence suggests that the hunter-gather lifestyle is only able to support 1 or 2 people per sq. mile), or whether the “future primitive” actually entails, in gnostic fashion, a return not to the godhead, but to hunter-gathering subsistence, Zerzan does not tell us. While radical ecologists glorify the golden age of peasant agriculture, Zerzan follows the likes of Van Der Post in extolling hunter-gatherer existence—with a selective culling of the anthropological literature. Whether such “illusory images of Green primitivism” are, in themselves, symptomatic of the estrangement of affluent urban dwellers and intellectuals, from the natural (and human) world—as both Bookchin (1995) and Ray Ellen (1986) suggest—I will leave others to judge.

## **Reflections on anarchism**

The term anarchy comes from the Greek, and essentially means “no ruler.” Anarchists are people who reject all forms of government or coercive authority, all forms of hierarchy and domination. They are therefore opposed to what the Mexican anarchist Flores Magon called the “sombre trinity”—state, capital and the church. Anarchists are thus opposed to both capitalism and to the state, as well as to all forms of religious authority. But anarchists also seek to establish or bring about by varying means, a condition of anarchy, that is, a decentralized society without coercive institutions, a society organized through a federation of voluntary associations. Contemporary right-wing “libertarians,” like Milton Friedman, Rothbard and Ayn Rand, who are

often described as “anarcho-capitalists,” and who fervently defend capitalism, are not in any real sense anarchists.

In an important sense anarchists support the rallying cry of the French revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity—and strongly believe that these values are inter-dependent. As Bakunin remarked: “Freedom without socialism is privilege and injustice; and socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality.” Needless to say anarchists have always been critical of soviet communism, and the most powerful and penetrating critiques of Marx, Marxist-Leninism, and the Soviet regime have come from anarchists: people like Berkman, Goldman, and Maximoff. The latter’s work was significantly entitled: *The Guillotine at Work* (1940). Maximoff saw the politics of Lenin and Trotsky as similar to that of the Jacobins in the French revolution, and equally reactionary.

With the collapse of the Soviet regime, Marxists are now in a state of intellectual disarray, and are floundering around looking for a safe political anchorage. They seem to gravitate either towards Hayek or towards Keynes; whichever way their socialism gets lost in the process. Conservative writers like Roger Scruton take great pleasure in berating Marxists for having closed their eyes to the realities of the Soviet regime: they themselves, however, have a myopia when it comes to capitalism. The poverty, famine, sickening social inequalities, political repression and ecological degradation that is generated under capitalism is always underplayed by apologists like Scruton and Fukuyama. They see these as simply “problems” that need to be overcome—not as intrinsically related to capitalism itself.

Anarchism can be looked at in two ways.

On the one hand it can be seen as a kind of “river,” as Peter Marshall describes it in his excellent history of anarchism. It can thus be seen as a “libertarian impulse” or as an “anarchist sensibility” that has existed throughout human history: an impulse that has expressed itself in various ways—in the writings of Lao Tzu and the Taoists, in classical Greek thought, in the mutuality of kin-based societies, in the ethos of various religious sects, in such agrarian movements as the Diggers in England and the Zapatistas of Mexico, in the collectives that sprang up during the Spanish civil war, and currently—in the ideas expressed in the ecology and feminist movements. Anarchist tendencies seem to have expressed themselves in all religious movements, even in Islam. One Islamic sect, the Najadat, believed that “power belongs only to god.” They therefore felt that they did not really need an imam or caliph, but could organize themselves mutually to ensure justice. Many years ago I wrote an article on Lao Tzu, suggesting that the famous *Tao Te Ching* (“The Way and its Power,” as Waley translates it) should not be seen as a mystical religious tract (as it is normally understood), but rather as a political treatise. It is, in fact, the first anarchist tract. For the underlying philosophy of the *Tao Te Ching* is fundamentally anarchist, as Rudolf Rocker long ago noted. On the other hand anarchism may be seen as a historical movement and political theory that had its beginnings at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was expressed in the writings of William Godwin, who wrote the classic anarchist text *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1798), as well as in the actions of the sans-culottes and the enragés during the French revolution, and by radicals like Thomas Spence and William Blake in Britain. The term “anarchist” was first used during the French revolution as a term of abuse in describing the sans-culottes—“without breeches”—the working people of France who during the revolution advocated the abolition of government.

Anarchism, as a social movement, developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its basic social philosophy was formulated by the Russian revolutionary Michael Bakunin. It was the outcome of his clashes with Karl Marx and his followers—who advocated a statist road to socialism—during meet-

ings of the International Working Men's Association in the 1860s. In its classical form, therefore, as it was expressed by Kropotkin, Goldman, Reclus and Malatesta, anarchism was a significant part of the socialist movement in the years before the first World War, but its socialism was libertarian not Marxist. The tendency of writers like David Pepper (1996) to create a dichotomy between socialism and anarchism is, I think, both conceptually and historically misleading.

## Misconceptions of anarchism

Of all political philosophies anarchism has had perhaps the worst press. It has been ignored, maligned, ridiculed, abused, misunderstood, and misrepresented by writers from all sides of the political spectrum—Marxists, liberals, democrats and conservatives. Theodore Roosevelt, the American president, described anarchism as a “crime against the whole human race”—and it has been variously judged as destructive, violent and nihilistic. A number of criticisms have been lodged against anarchism, and I will deal briefly with eight.

1. It is said that anarchists are too innocent, too naive, and have too rosy a picture of human nature. It is said that, like Rousseau, they have a romantic view of human nature which they see as essentially good and peace-loving. But of course real humans are not like this; they are cruel and aggressive and selfish, and so anarchy is just a pipe dream. It is an unrealistic vision of a past golden age that never really existed. This being so, some form of coercive authority is always necessary. The truth is that anarchists do not follow Rousseau. In fact, Bakunin was scathing in his criticisms of the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher. Most anarchists tend to think humans have both good and bad tendencies. If they did think humans all goodness and light, would they mind being ruled? It is because they have a realistic rather than a romantic view of human nature, that they oppose all forms of coercive authority. In essence, anarchists oppose all power which the French describe as “puissance”—“power over” (rather than “pouvoir,” the power to do something), and believe—like Lord Acton—that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. As Paul Goodman wrote: “...the issue is not whether people are ‘good enough’ for a particular type of society; rather it is a matter of developing the kind of social institutions that are most conducive to expanding the potentialities we have for intelligence, grace, sociability and freedom.”
2. Anarchy, it is believed, is a synonym for chaos and disorder. This is, in fact, how people often use the term. But anarchy, as understood by most anarchists, means the exact opposite of this. It means a society based on order. Anarchy means not chaos, or a lack of organisation, but a society based on the autonomy of the individual, on co-operation, one without rulers or coercive authority. As Proudhon put it: liberty is the mother of order. But equally anarchists do not denounce chaos, for they see chaos and disorder as having inherent potentiality—as Bakunin put it: to destroy is a creative act.
3. Another equation made is that between anarchism and violence. Anarchism, it is said, is all about terrorist bombs and violence. And there is a book currently in the bookshops entitled *The Anarchists' Cookbook* all about how to make bombs and dynamite. But as Alexander Berkman wrote: the resort to violence against oppression or to obtain certain political objectives has been practiced throughout human history. Acts of violence have been committed by the followers of every political and religious creed: nationalists, liberals, socialists,



feminists, republicans, monarchists, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, democrats, conservatives, fascists...and every government is based on organized violence. Anarchists who have resorted to violence are no worse than anybody else. But most anarchists have been against violence and terrorism, and there has always been a strong link between anarchism and pacifism. Yet anarchists go one step further: they challenge the violence that most people do not recognize and which is often of the worst possible kind; this is lawful violence.

4. Anarchists have been accused, especially by Marxists, of being theoretical blockheads, of being anti-intellectual, or of making a cult of mindless action. But as a perusal of the anarchist movement will indicate, many anarchists or people with anarchist sympathies have been among the finest intellects of their generations, truly creative people. Moreover, anarchists have produced many seminal texts outlining their own philosophy and their own social doctrines. These are generally free of the jargon and the pretension that passes as scholarship amongst many liberal scholars, Marxists and post-modernists.
5. Another criticism is the opposite of this: it ridicules anarchism for being apolitical, and a doctrine of inaction. Anarchists, according to the ex-doyen of the Green Party in Britain, Jonathan Porritt, do nothing but contemplate their navels. Because they do not engage in party politics, he even suggests that anarchists do not live in the “real world.” All the essential themes of the Green Party manifesto—the call for a society that is decentralized, equitable, ecological, co-operative, with flexible institutions—are of course simply an unacknowledged appropriation of what anarchists like Kropotkin had long ago advocated—but with Porritt this vision is simply hitched to party politics. As a media figure Porritt completely misunderstands what anarchism—and a decentralized society—is all about. Anarchism is not non-political. Nor does it advocate a retreat into prayer, self-indulgence or meditation, whether or not one contemplates one’s navel or chants mantras. It is simply hostile to parliamentary or party politics. The only democracy it thinks valid, is participatory democracy, and considers putting an X on a piece of paper every four or five years is a sham. It serves only to give ideological justification to power holders in a society that is fundamentally hierarchical and undemocratic. Anarchists are of many kinds. They have therefore suggested various ways of challenging and transforming the present system of violence and inequality—through communes, passive resistance, syndicalism, municipal democracy, insurrection, direct action and education. One of the reasons why some anarchists have put a lot of emphasis on publishing propaganda and education, is that they have always eschewed party organization as well as violence. Anarchists have always been critical of the notion of a vanguard party, seeing it as inevitably leading to some form of despotism. And with regard to both the French and Russian revolutions history has proved their premonitions correct.
6. A consistent critique of anarchism offered by Marxists is that it is utopian and romantic, a peasant or petty-bourgeois ideology, or an expression of millennial dreams. Concrete historical studies by John Hart on anarchism and the Mexican working class (1978) and by Jerome Mintz on the anarchists of Casas Viejas in Spain (1982) have more than adequately refuted some of the distortions about anarchism. The anarchist movement has not been confined to peasants: it has flourished among urban workers where anarcho-syndicalism developed. Nor is it utopian or millennial. Anarchists have established real collectives, and

have always been critical of religion. Nobody among the early anarchists expected some immediate or cataclysmic change to occur through “propaganda by deed” or the “general strike”—as the writings of Reclus and Berkman attest. They realised it would be a long haul.

7. Another criticism of anarchism is that it has a narrow view of politics: that it sees the state as the fount of all evil, ignoring other aspects of social and economic life. This is a misrepresentation of anarchism. It partly derives from the way anarchism has been defined, and partly because Marxist historians have tried to exclude anarchism from the broader socialist movement. But when one examines the writings of classical anarchists like Kropotkin, Goldman, Malatesta and Tolstoy, as well as the character of anarchist movements in such places as Italy, Mexico, Spain and France, it is clearly evident that it has never had this limited vision. It has always challenged all forms of authority and exploitation, and has been equally critical of capitalism and religion as it has of the state. Most anarchists were feminists, and many spoke out against racism, as well as defending the freedom of children. A cultural and ecological critique of capitalism has always been an important dimension of anarchist writings. This is why the writings of Tolstoy, Reclus and Kropotkin still have contemporary relevance.
8. A final criticism of anarchism is that it is unrealistic; anarchy will never work. The market socialist David Miller expresses this view very well in his book on Anarchism (1984). His attitude to anarchism is one of heads I win, tails you lose. He admits that communities based on anarcho-communist principles have existed, and “given a chance” have had some degree of “unexpected success.” But due to lack of popular support and state intervention and repression they have, he writes, always been “failures.” On the other hand he also argues that societies could not exist anyway without some form of centralized government. Miller seems oblivious to the fact that what Stanley Diamond called “kin-communities” have long existed within and often in opposition to state systems, and that trading networks have existed throughout history, even among hunter-gatherers, without any state control. The state, in any case, is a recent historical phenomena, and in its modern nation-state form has only existed for a few hundred years. Human communities have long existed without central or coercive authority. Whether a complex technological society is possible without centralized authority is not a question easily answered; neither is it one that can be lightly dismissed. Many anarchists believe that such a society is possible, though technology will have to be on a “human scale.” Complex systems exist in nature without there being any controlling mechanism. Indeed, many global theorists nowadays are beginning to contemplate libertarian social vistas that become possible in an age of computer technology. Needless to say, if Miller had applied the same criteria by which he so adversely adjudges anarchism—distributive justice and social well-being—to capitalism and state “communism” then perhaps he would have declared both these systems unpractical and unrealistic too? But at least Miller wants to rescue anarchism from the dustbin of history—to help us to curb abuses of power, and to keep alive the possibilities of free social relationships.

Society, we are told, by such authorities as Friedrich Hayek, Margaret Thatcher, and Marilyn Strathern, either does not exist, or it is a “confused category” that ought to be excised from theoretical discourse. The word derives, of course, from the Latin, *Societas*, which in turn derives

from Socius, meaning a companion, a friend, a relationship between people, a shared activity. Anarchists have thus always drawn a clear distinction between society, in this sense, and the state: between what the Jewish existentialist scholar Martin Buber called the “political” and the “social” principles. Buber was a close friend of the anarchist Gustav Landauer, and what Landauer basically argued—long before Foucault—was that the state could not be destroyed by revolution: it could only be undermined—by developing other kinds of relationships, by actualizing social patterns and forms of organization that involved mutuality and free co-operation. Such a social domain is always in a sense present, imminent in contemporary society, co-existing with the state. For Landauer, as for Colin Ward, anarchy, therefore, is not something that only existed long ago before the rise of the state, or exists now only among people like the Nharo or Piaroa living at the margins of capitalism. Nor is it simply a speculative vision of some future society: but rather, anarchy is a form of social life which organizes itself without the resort to coercive authority. It is always in existence—albeit often buried and unrecognized beneath the weight of capitalism and the state. It is like “a seed beneath the snow,” as Colin Ward (1973) graphically puts it. Anarchy, then, is simply the idea, to stay with the same writer, “that it is possible and desirable for society to organize itself without government.”

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