

Anarchists Need Space Because We're Fighting in All Directions

Emmi Bevensee

Contents

Our Vulnerability is Our Strength	3
Insurrectionary, Parallel, and Creative Spaces for Experimentation	4
Space Changes the Rules	4

Anarchism requires creative experimentation and needs all the spaces possible to achieve its goals. Because these spaces and projects are vulnerable we need all the defenses with the least tradeoffs we can muster. Space-friendly anarchism offers us new horizons to create, explore, and practice while simultaneously generating new and more defensible dynamics for our radical networks. Whether as roaming insurrectionary pirates or horizontalist communes, we must make a case for space-centric anarchism and then work through the intricacies of its ethics and practical requirements.

Our Vulnerability is Our Strength

Our enemies, especially tankies, always gloat over the fact that anarchists always get slaughtered. “An anarchist revolution has never succeeded!” Regardless of this misunderstanding of longstanding anarchist projects and societies, and the backhanded glorification of brutalist authoritarian regimes, they’re right in that it is hard to protect anarchism especially while it blossoms. We abhor unnecessary games of domination and the manipulative power plays that they require. We shy away from the zero-sum outlook that characterizes most of these so-called “successful revolutions” of the authoritarian communist or corporate capitalist varieties alike. We want to build societies where people don’t have to destroy each other to get their needs met. We want societies where people have positive freedom not just social contracts with cartels of state and corporate violence. But we don’t just want it. Anarchists are practical. We dream but we also birth these visions into the world. We struggle against coercion at every level. It’s exhausting but, to an anarchist, everything is a front in the struggle for positive freedom. We are in constant struggle even if many parts of it just look like love and joy.

We don’t take the simple comfort of picking our battles as a movement even if we prioritize projects individually. For this reason our movements are diversely rich... and vulnerable.

Because we don’t focus on the game of thrones for power we are vulnerable to those that do. Our enemies seek to master the weapons that we rightfully fear. It corrupts them but they get better and better at it. It’s no coincidence that so few anarchist societies have thorough weapons training and the ability to practically defend themselves. We don’t want to build power. We’d much rather try to build a world where a focus on offensive violence is unnecessary. So even in places where anarchists, or societies that practice anarchist values have found the ability to defend themselves such as Rojava, Spain, and the Zapatista autonomous zones, our physical defense has often either still eventually failed or succeeded because of their relationship with other, often creative, strategies.

But it’s not just monopolies of violence that we’re bad at, it’s also politics in general. We lean extraparlimentary as a movement and often try to build parallel movements outside of the reign of deeply compromised electoral politics. So while we’re building our own infrastructure and ways of doing things, the career politicians who are intimidated by us are always amassing their forces against us whether through the ballot or the police.

These examples are just a taste of the ways in which our greatest assets, the very core of what we love, are some of our largest attack vectors.

Insurrectionary, Parallel, and Creative Spaces for Experimentation

Because we're vulnerable on all sides, we need space. In the immediate sense we need a place to meet, virtual or physical. We need to spread out. Space can be the abstract and general notion of the distance between two objects or the concrete but expansive area beyond our atmosphere. The fact that they share a word in English (and many other languages) is itself evocative of what we want. In our love of outer space, we are actually committing to our love of the path between things. The heart of anarchism is creative experimentation and the interplay between theory and practice. Our attempts at traversing these paths are often delicate.

Our experiments have the advantage of being decentralized and as such generate resilience. You can't pick off our leaders if we have none. You can't destroy our movement if it's completely dynamic and constantly adapting its edges and vectors. They attack one point and that point just changes form or gets mimicked somewhere else. We have the power of whack-a-mole. But that resilient adaptivity alone isn't enough.

Tankies take this problem and use it to justify authoritarian centralism. "You can't have a revolution without gulagging the saboteurs and enemies of that revolution! You need domination to create freedom!" Because we recognize the interdependent relationship between ends and means we fundamentally doubt the viability of movements that employ such tradeoffs and search for strategies without them.

Insurrectionary anarchism seeks to create these spaces through creative and stigmergic revolutionary pockets. In the joy of liberation people can experiment with alternative modes of self-organization. Insurrection carves out the spaces in time and place that allow us to build without the constant attacks and pressing dynamics of power as it is. The longstanding gradualist processes and parallel infrastructures that we've been working for in the margins are then able to come in and take roots. We defend these spaces from all sides using a variety of means.

Space Changes the Rules

Space travel throws the entire game board up in the air.

The first and most obvious way is that it makes the available places to build much more numerous. The notion that anarchists could have our own spaceships and be exploring and setting up shop on distant rocks might seem absurd now, but it's an eventuality in time. The technology will continue getting cheaper. We will steal and reverse engineer. The radicals will go to space and when we get there, we will find places with no life on them that we're can't introduce microbiomes and decimate and we will be able to practice our ways of being without having to pry the space back from the landlords capitalists and state thugs. Or if there are signs of life, because anarchists actually care about deeply rooted ethics, we'll be thoughtful and considerate about what our presence could mean.

We need to play to our strengths. We should try to avoid war not just because it is fundamentally terrible, but because we're not well suited for it. Guerilla insurrection we can do, but the losses are extreme. Because we'll never have the monopoly on brutality we should try to go somewhere where we're not bothering anyone and can more or less do our own thing. We would obviously still need to be able to defend ourselves but we can completely disentangle ourselves from the imperial geopolitical games of earth.

To those ends, we should avoid trying to militaristically seize territories whenever possible because it sucks and again we suck at it. Assuming colonies will get set up on every rock within humanities ever expanding sphere of reach, we shouldn't just keep to ourselves. We can do our thing and infiltrate and agitate and challenge everywhere we are but the vastness of space gives us more room to be ourselves. We can deter a lot of threats by just being far enough out that we are perceived as a non-threat and that travel costs make attacking us less appealing anyways.

It works similarly with politics. Rather than playing the endless tug-of-war with reform and direct action we can follow our instincts and just leave the whole thing alone. We can actually put our ideas into practice without the constant sabotage of state political repression and counterproductive liberal progressivism.

Obviously anarchist ideas, practices, and victories often make it into the mainstream of society but nonetheless we are often a movement in the margins. This isn't a defeatist view either. It's just because the truly nuanced struggle for freedom is always going to be, in a sense, opposed to the prevailing order. That's why we need to carve out our spaces here on earth, but if we can find them out there, it would be even better.

The typical lefty retort to something like this is to compare the inherent homesteading attitude of these ideas to homesteading as it was practiced by colonists on earth. To be clear, the homesteader movement in the U.S. and most other places is deeply entrenched in the violence of indigenous dispossession and outright genocide. But what makes it bad isn't the desire to move and to explore. Remember, those very same indigenous people also moved and explored depending on the timescale at play. What makes it bad is the murder and dispossession. With space colonization it's a very different situation because the vast majority of places we would go will be completely lifeless. We will not be murdering or dispossessing anyone. In that sense the entire paradigm of colonial extraction is mis-played. So while the explorer mindset is horrifying for brutalist conquistadors, for nerdy anarchist scientists deeply rooted in a desire not to harm, it's a very different situation.

Aside from issues of defensibility and minimizing the need for defensive violence, there's also a range of other practical issues. For example, if we can scrape together some rock hoppers we can ethically harvest materials from asteroids to develop and sustain our societies. No slave labor. No deforestation. No ecocide. We can build research labs unencumbered by the fascist nationalism and capitalism in our present society that massively throttle progress. We can have ecosystems of testing that allow us to try out a wide range of anarchist approaches to existence. The love of space and the love of anarchism are themselves related in the degree to which they provide habitable environments to the other.

Much like anarchists, earth itself faces existential risks from all sides. Whether climate change or the boogey-man of unaligned AI, the human race faces massive threats to continuity. Humans will go to space and it's up to us to decide what that looks like. For anarcho-transhumanists specifically, we know that the existential risks facing humanity will require us to dramatically shift our notions of what being human means at a core level. We need to make ourselves into swarming, stigmergic networks of interconnected minds. We need to technologically, pharmacologically, emotionally, and intellectually widen the bridges between us, increase our abilities, and decrease our needs. We need to develop what consciousness can be and hack ourselves to be able to meet the challenges we face. For climate change we need to change what our bodies need and what conditions we can live under. For AI we need to grow alongside it if we hope to maintain any of what makes being human special and meaningful. Our adaptations to both

AI and climate X-risks aid our ability to go to space and our ability to blossom once there while simultaneously cultivating our adaptive resilience as a weapon for positive change.

Changing what it means to be human is a part of changing what we see as possible in terms of our anarchist visions. One important piece of changing what it means to be human is changing where we associate being human with. For those of us who know that we stand in the lineage that hopes to create paths not just to survive, but to radically thrive in space and a transhumanist world, these are the exciting questions. We know that we want and need space and are more than anything just excited to build and dream.

We are here for the gritty details. How can we steal or build ships to mine asteroids? How will we terraform in a way that promotes non-hierarchical societies of exchange and mutual-aid? To what extent can we cultivate connections that would give us access to the closed source patent world of space-tech monopolies that we need to liberate? What do we need to learn now to survive then? How will we hold up against the sheer expanse of space? What vegetables would grow best on a long-distance space flight? How could we network our minds to catalyze our problem solving abilities? Should we settle-down or stay on the move?

In the anarchist struggle we get tired of fighting battles in all directions at once. When you get tired, I encourage you to take some space and notice the feeling it gives you. Respite and recharging. A revitalization and centering of our vision and faculties. The playful curiosity is born again anew. When we follow that curiosity we often find something amazing hidden in its path. Our eyes get big and glittery with awe. This is a tiny shard of what we want. Space gives us a chance to transform the struggle into a joyous militancy of hope capable of exponentiating our goals.

And if we don't do it... we all die anyways. So we might as well try our damndest to do it and do it radically.

Besides building our own better world and salvaging this one though, who but us will fight the authoritarians and space capitalists and prevent them from expanding their sphere of havoc?

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Emmi Bevensee
Anarchists Need Space Because We're Fighting in All Directions

theanarchistlibrary.org