On Authenticity

Theorizing Intersections of Race and Class in Consensus Process and Beyond

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This essay is dedicated to Bev Skeggs and in memory of Bernice Johnson Reagon, bell hooks, Jeff Juris and David Graeber.

In 2008 I attended the Renewing the Anarchist Tradition (RAT) conference in Vermont, US. Like many academic conferences that reference "anarchism," the event drew scholars with an academic relationship to anarchism and activists who had (more) recently entered graduate school.[1] Pondering the aesthetics upon arrival, I noticed how the acronym "RAT" symbolically retrieves the filth of the street at the same moment militants wash it off to position themselves as transcendent subjects of knowledge. Someone handed me a program pamphlet inviting me to a workshop called "The Everyday Anarchist." It suggested we "take lifestyle seriously as a significant aspect of anarchist politics and identity." "Everyday anarchism," the blurb elaborated, means "working against hierarchy in our personal relationships," "refraining from consumption practices that promote cruelty" and "being part of an anarchist subculture that is identifiable by its stylistic markers."

Below I elaborate on this RAT workshop as an ethnographic departure to explore intersections of racialized and class subjectivity that inform contradictions within North American anarchist social movements. I then review my ethnography of Mexican and Venezuelan anarchist organizing (Lagalisse 2017), and of the Montreal-based Zapatista collective about which I have published over the years (e.g. Lagalisse 2011a, 2014, 2019a), to consider the experiences of the political refugees and graduate students involved in this Zapatista collective in relation to the *Coop sur Généreux* that hosted our events, a largely white middle class housing collective of 15–20 activists (see also Lagalisse 2010).[2] In this exercise I engage intersectionality as methodology (see Collins 2019; Nash 2008; Maguire 2008) by taking lead from the words and practices of Mexican collective members, local activists of colour, and white working-class people on the borders of the anarchist movement, with attention to gendered difference in each case, to explore subcultural practices of "consensus," as well as activists' own understandings of intersectionality, race and class. I organize my exposition to intervene constructively in anarchist movement debates regarding "consensus process" (Polletta 2005; Graeber 2009, 2013; Juris 2013) as well as in dialogue with activist and academic debates regarding intersectionality and epistemology (e.g. Crenshaw 1991; Haraway 1990; Collins 2004, 2019). By mobilizing intersectional analyses of ethnographic intersections of race and class in activist practices of "consensus," I illustrate how and why it is important for both scholars and militants concerned with "intersectionality" to avoid collapsing analyses of race and class in this instance and beyond, including in relation to studies of "authenticity" and its longing.

"The Everyday Anarchist"

As I arrived at The Everyday Anarchist workshop, I took a seat in a semi-circle of plastic chairs surrounding a man and woman in their 30s, each holding a microphone. The man co-animator

[1] This is also true, for e.g., of the Anarchist Studies Network (ASN) conference in Loughborough, UK; and the North American Anarchist Studies Network (NAASN) conference.

[2] See Nash (2001) regarding the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico; see Khasnabish (2008) regarding the Zapatistas' role in developing the Peoples' Global Action (PGA) network, and inspiring the generation of activists in my study

introduced the event saying: “How we live, what we buy, how we dress, what media we use, and what we eat are all practices that stitch together a narrative of the self. They are communicative acts, propaganda by the deed. People not involved in politically radical movements can start by constructing a lifestyle that expresses what they believe in.” Propaganda of the deed is a phrase associated with Errico Malatesta, a subculturally famous anarchist figure from the 19thcentury. It did mean to teach by example, yet the traditional reference was to armed rebellion, not stylistic markers (see e.g. Richards 1965).

The woman co-animator of the workshop continued on to say that, “it’s important, when we talk about identity like this, to differentiate between identities that are choiceful and identities that are not. I can’t reject being white or middle-class, these are not choiceful, but I can choose to identify as an anarchist, and I can reject things that aren’t anarchist. It’s these choices that are important. We live in collective houses not because our parents did, but because we are trying to be strictly different. It is important to see how we can live the ideals of anarchism through things we *can* control, through the things we *choose* to be associated with, or not….”After framing the topic in this way, the two animators said they wanted to open the floor for discussion. “Like, where are we at?” asked the man animator, “As for me, I used to be a vegetarian, but it’s an ethics I have since moved away from, and am now more into the idea of eating whole foods. I also ask myself new questions like: Should I travel by air? What about the question of fuel?” Participants began to raise their hands.

“Lately I’ve been thinking about the issue of consumption, and what it says about who we are — “we are what we eat”, right? Going vegan is something I would like to do, but I haven’t been successful yet, anyway, just a comment….”

“Yeah, I have been struggling with some of these questions a lot. Right now, I live on campus and I have a meal plan, right? And it’s this horrible corporate cafeteria food, and I don’t believe in it but I eat it… I don’t actually have much control over it, and in the end, consumption is just a small aspect of being an anarchist I figure….”

“But, y’know, I am interested in this point about consumption. The question comes down to “to buy or not to buy” … I mean not to judge, but it’s so important.”

“Yes, I think this is important, to remove ourselves from the mainstream economy, look for alternative ways to live.”

“It’s a tricky thing, you know, non-participation is powerful, like dumpster-diving and stuff… but so many traveler types come through our collective house and they just live off of us!”

“Yeah, although we should be careful not to judge… but it’s true that it’s one thing to dumpster-dive, like, because you need to, or don’t want to work, and to do so as a specific political statement. It’s all valid, but doesn’t it matter in terms of it being specifically anarchist?.”

The discussion expanded over time, briefly addressing hierarchy in social relations and political identities of race, class and gender, but certain patterns presented here continued. At least 17 of the 25 participants offered disclaimers about either not “judging” or “excluding” people, or about respecting anarchist “self-identification,” and then went on to define anarchist lifestyle objectively, focusing heavily on consumption practices. After almost an hour a participant who had been quiet so far, dressed in a rural outfit and trucker cap, broke the flow: “Well, I’m a *bad* anarchist, I eat meat and drive everywhere, y’know?” He started laughing. “And whatever,” he continued, “if we disagree about something for whatever reason, let’s have it out, this is just a pissing contest…!”

Participants fidgeted and cast around nervous looks. The man animator stepped into the circle holding up his hands, palms facing outward, as if to gesture "stop" or "Praise Jesus" — "Um… I think we can get bogged down in criticizing people" he said, followed by "I will respond to the previous question first…." He then directed himself to the person who spoke before the bad anarchist, subsequently giving the floor to a new speaker who continued the pattern of discussing how its bad to exclude people followed by exclusive definitions of anarchist identity.

Later on, some workshop participants commented that the bad anarchist was "disruptive," with others elaborating how this man was "problematic." The bad anarchist was sarcastic and vulgar ("pissing contests"), and when he said: "Let's have it out," he swooshed his hands out to the sides and above his head, made fists, and shook them around. The fact that he did this with a smile on his face appeared to be irrelevant. Rather than signifying the unliklihood of him actually swinging his fists into another person, the smile even bothered some — he was not taking the discussion seriously. All of this compromised the "safety of the space."[3]

I lead with this story, selected from my fieldwork among anarchist social movements across Quebec, the US, Venezuela and Mexico (2005–2017), because it is useful to quickly communicate multiple features of middle class English-speaking anarchist sociality thrown into relief by my multisited study. The focus on ascetic consumer practices is representative, for example, reflecting the moral dilemmas of those who experience a relative burden of «choice» in their consumer habits. The translation of «choice» itself into «good politics» is another broad ethnographic pattern that also surfaces here in workshop speech about sifting through the trash for food not counting as anarchist if done out of necessity. Here Bourdieu's (1984) insight that distance from material necessity defines «good taste» appears to apply, with the privilege of such distance misrecognized as «good politics» instead. Elsewhere I have written about «good politics» in relation to classed propensities to mobilize identity as property (e.g. Lagalisse 2022), whereas here we explore the self of «good politics» in other conversations, perceiving its features that exist before and beyond any activity related to identity politics. Here too observations of form and content invite us to see that «good politics» only command respect and authority when they are communicated in ways that suggest one is the sort of person who would have «good politics» in the first place.

One of the "engaged universals" (Tsing 2005) that in some way defines the "anarchist world" is "consensus process" (see e.g. Lagalisse 2017, ch. 1). In Graeber's ethnographies of the "new anarchist movements" (2002, 2009, 2013) for example, he emphasizes at length how practices of consensus decision-making vs. voting are related to anarchist belonging. In his ethnographic imaginary and that of many of our contemporaries (Maeckelbergh 2009; Juris and Khasnabish 2013), anarchist collectives ("nodes") are egalitarian by virtue of the fact that they use consensus process to make decisions, whereas the "network" (of "nodes") is egalitarian in turn since it is a decentralized, and therefore non-hierarchical, web of these same collectives. I concur as to this broadly shared ideological position, yet in my ethnography I focus on how features of "consensus process" interact with local cultural codes, styles of speech, body language and emotional expression, unspoken rules about eye contact and laughter, place-based ideas around whose voice(s) matter more, and even culturally distinct notions around what counts as "agreement."

[3] In 2008 the formal "safe space policy" that later became common among anarchist social movements across Canada, the US and UK ca. 2010–2015 did not yet exist, but "safe space" was increasingly discussed— Lagalisse (2017, ch. 6) offers a rudimentary analysis of this development in relation to intersectional feminist genealogies; see also Grohmann (2020).

Anarchist subjects involve complexes of desires, manners, ideas, aspirations and embodied values that betray both where and how they grew up, and which inspire them to interpret and practice "consensus" in different ways. The common claim that anarchists most everywhere reject the majority vote is fair (Graeber 2004, 2009; see also Lagalisse 2017, ch. 1), yet it is also true that in no two places is "consensus process" actually the same — there is no global, cross-cultural consensus on consensus.

Graeber approaches this problem in *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (2009) when he writes that "there was a fine line between creating a "safe" environment … and playing the role of the gracious upper-middle-class hostess, who is expected to perform the endless work of smoothing over differences, and maintain a constant agreeable façade so as to keep the business of sociality running effectively" (*ibidem*, 332–333, see also f.n. 19). Below I scrutinize this "fine line" in an effort to enrich the U.S. activist debate on whether or not consensus is "white," qualifying Graeber's later intervention in *Some Remarks on Consensus* (2013). I think and "speak nearby" (Minh-ha in Chen 1992) the participants of my research because as Gramsci (1971), Lorde (2007), Fanon (2005) and others have shown, dual commitment to political struggle and intellectual work yields important practical and theoretical interventions; studying social movements on their own terms does not mean taking activists' self-understandings for granted (see also Gordon 2007, 278). One of my purposes in this work is to consider how activist arguments around "consensus" manage and mask conflicts related to structural power to intervene constructively in activist practice. In the process my ethnographic analyses indicate why it is important to consider the intersectionality of race and class, in lieu of collapsing these categories like some activists in my study, thus also contributing methodological reflections relevant to the theorization of intersectionality and epistemology.

The Diversity of Consensus

David Graeber (2009) focuses on assembly and spokes council formats to illustrate North American consensus process in action, while Maeckelbergh (2009) does the same in Europe, together offering a detailed picture of formalized consensus process among anarchists in the Global North during recent decades, as well as how anarchists interpret the phenomenon and explicate its central importance. As explained by Graeber (2009), the particular technologies of consensus used by North American anarchists today were largely inherited from feminists via the anti-nuclear movement (which had picked up various techniques from the Quakers). Some of the techniques used in the very large "spokes councils" or "consultas" that Graeber (2009) and Maeckelbergh (2009) depict specifically reflect the organizational demands of very large meetings, yet even in the *Coop sur Généreux* (herein the Coop) where our Zapatista collective (herein the *La Otra Campaña* collective, or simply *La Otra*) held fundraisers, "consensus process" was formalized much in the way they describe: Special silent signals were used to convey agreement (wavy fingers pointing up), disagreement (wavy fingers pointing down), to ask for clarification (a C-shape with one's hand), and so on, while spontaneous sounds (laughter, groaning, sighing, verbal expression out of turn) were frowned upon, often literally (see also Lagalisse 2010). At the Coop, a speakers-list was kept by a designated person while a different facilitator moderated the discussion, keeping track of specific proposals and checking to make sure they achieve "consensus." At the Coop, we also experimented with another figure, a "vibes-watcher," whose job

it was to encourage silent people to speak in order to ensure a "diversity of voices." As long as one person was strongly opposed ("blocked" / vetoed the decision) "consensus" was not in effect. Achieving "consensus" meant hearing a detractor out and modifying the proposal until the detractor was comfortable with it as well. Note that when a proposal did not necessarily involve everyone at the house (for e.g. "Hey let's go bring food to the Homelessness Marathon"), it was fine that only two thirds of the coop members were interested (eight people is enough to cook and carry food down the block). As Graeber (2013) also emphasized, full consensus is always most important when the decision will necessarily affect everyone (e.g. "Hey let's increase rent from $300 to $350 to cover the installation of a wheatgrass lawn on the roof").

Not every anarchist collective in North America does all of this precisely the same way, yet among English-speaking anarchists this sign-language and repertoire of technologies was widely recognized during the "Battle of Seattle" (1999), "Occupy Wall Street" (2011) and the years in between, and continues among many anarchist groups active today (it is sobering to note at the time of publication in 2024 that the large and small live anarchist meetings that I discuss may be less frequent overall).[4]

The invented hand signs might be understood as a sort of anarchist "Esperanto." No one grew up speaking it as a first language, but they nonetheless facilitate communication among a certain group of cosmopolitan activists.[5]

As explored in my ethnography of the Alternative Social Forum in Caracas, Venezuela in 2006 (Lagalisse 2017, ch. 1), anarchist organizing against the UN climate summit (COP16) in Cancún, Mexico in 2010 (ivi, 1–25), and the Congreso Anarquista in Mexico City in 2011 (ivi, 203–215), this set of signs is not practiced in Latin America. The small meetings and large assemblies in Cancún, Caracas and Mexico City during my research did not involve body-language unique to the anarchist scene learned as an adult. Similarly, within our Montreal-based Zapatista collective where the majority of the members were Mexican, no special invented signals were used to convey agreement or disagreement either. If participants were not happy with the direction of the discussion they shook their heads, rolled their eyes, groaned, waved their index finger back and forth, or sat there frowning. If people were happy about the way a conversation was going, they smiled, laughed, or bent their index finger up and down, which is a silent "yes" gesture well-known in Mexico.[6] The handful of collective members who were not Mexican were familiar with these codes and used them as well, just as we all spoke (different levels of) Mexican Spanish.

Culturally different rules around interrupting also inform the diversity of consensus processes. In our *La Otra* collective, if someone was really upset about how a conversation was going then he or she would hiss loudly and proceed to offer a counterpoint, but if others wanted to hear the first person out, a chorus of: "Shut up, let them finish!" would corral the interrupter back into silence. If no one interrupted the interrupter, it was because we all welcomed the interruption (or did we?).[7] This norm accomplishes more or less what the "straw poll" does in the

[4] Regarding the "Battle of Seattle" in 1999 see Yuen *et al.* (2001); regarding "Occupy Wall Street" in 2011 see Lagalisse (2011b). I invite readers to consider how this essay may be read as a celebration of live consensus-making.

[5] I do not unpack "cosmopolitanism" specifically in this piece, yet note that I follow Skeggs (2004).

[6] This finger gesture can be traced back to a gesture of the character Chespirito from the *El Chavo del Ocho* TV series (1971). It is common to the extent that many people who use it do not know its origin.

[7] For a counterpoint in my own work regarding the gender politics of this phenomenon see "Gossip as Direct Action" (Lagalisse 2014), yet note also how the direct exchanges and interrupting in the meeting dialogue depicted in that work correspond to my description here.

formalized consensus process of the English-speaking anarchist world, in which verbal interrupting of any kind is considered unacceptable, and wherein the facilitator (or "vibes-watcher") asks for a show of hands to "get the feeling" of a room at a designated moment. This practice was not necessary at *La Otra* meetings, where the "feeling" of the room was immediate, both in the sense of obvious right away, and unmediated. Note that this does not mean that Mexicans as a group are necessarily transparent about their thoughts and feelings in general — Mexicans have their own ways of coolly glossing over conflicts and differences in a variety of contexts. Yet a wider range of normative non-verbal interactivity in everyday life is available to draw upon, and can make it easier to "read a room." Widely recognized hand signals and non-verbal sounds like whistling or hissing mean there is less need to invent new non-verbal codes to deduce "vibe."[8]

My previous intersectional analyses of anarchist social movements have focused on gender and race (e.g. Lagalisse 2011a, 2014), to which we may add here that formalized consensus process often involves yet another shift of caring labour for activist women. It is women who do the lion's share of the social labour involved in facilitating, animating, and "vibes-watching" anarchist meetings (see Lagalisse 2017; Graeber 2009). Indeed, one of the few ways that women can and do exert informal power within the anarchist network is by assuming the gendered role of facilitator or minute-taker, which leads to a certain amount of control over meeting outcomes and institutional memory (Maeckelbergh 2009, 25). Parsing the racialized class character of formalized consensus process in North America requires a different set of lenses, however — ones which throw into relief that it is women of a certain class and race experience who are favoured as facilitators.

In/authenticity and Violence

As early as the "Battle of Seattle" in 1999, anarchist activists across North Amer-ica were debating whether the consensus processes of the anarchist movements de-scribed above were exclusive and elitist, or served to perpetuate white power within social movements. "When labor people or African American people have to organize within the consensus model they are uncomfortable with it and the culture that comes with it," said Paul Engler (in Tarleton 2001). Rajah (2000) pointed out that "the reality is that certain individuals play roles (whether by choice or not) that are similar to de facto traditional leadership roles." Other critics observed that the longer hours involved in consensus process means that working people and people of colour are indirectly excluded (e.g. Treloar 2003). For her part, Larimore-Hall (2000) pointed out that consensus-decision-making, along with veganism and "not raising your voice in meetings," are white cultural norms that alienate people of colour. These critiques are just a few of those found in print. Anyone who has participated in these social movements has also witnessed many similar live arguments. In 2011, David Graeber and I even participated together in one at an "Occupy Anthropology" assembly at the "Triple-A" (American Anthropology Association Annual Meeting) in Montreal.[9]

[8] See Lagalisse (2017, ch. 5) regarding whistling in Mexico. In this work I concentrate on the internal meeting dynamics of La Otra; regarding our solidarity campaigns, speaking tours and other activist organizing, see e.g. Lagalisse (2011, 2013, 2017).

[9] David Graeber reviewed the present study in the form of Chapter 7 of my PhD dissertation (Lagalisse 2017), commenting on a paper draft in 2016 — footnotes below that reference "Marginalia by David Graeber, 2016" refer to this reading. Regarding my relationship with Graeber see Lagalisse (2020).

Another pattern obvious to long-time participants is that the anarchist response to such critiques is often to accuse the racialized critic of consensus of being an authoritarian Marxist who is "pulling a race card." This rhetorical maneuver is so in-famous that essays like Francesca Polletta's *How Participatory Democracy Became White: Culture and Organizational Choice* (2005), and Graeber's *Some Remarks on Consensus* (2013), which works off of Polletta's essay, developed as attempts to intervene more thoughtfully in this debate. Graeber (2013) and Polletta (2005) discuss how in the US consensus process became historically associated with whiteness due to complex factional politics within the SNCC (The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) during the civil rights movement. Graeber nonetheless insisted that "none of those who challenged consensus did so in the name of a different form of direct democracy" (2013). In the same piece Graeber also makes the point that most pre-colonial indigenous social organization involved consensus process: if anything is "white" it is the concept and practice of the majority vote (see also Graeber 2004). Yet the same year, Juris (2013) celebrated white middle class anarchists not interfering with the leadership of people of colour in the first US social forum when they wanted to make decisions by vote, noting this as a special occurrence. As I once chided Graeber in everyday life, two white male scholars of "consensus" speaking past each other on the topic ironically mimics a dysfunctional activist meeting —what if we were to seek consensus on "consensus?"

As my own effort, below I parse intersections of race and class in activist practices of formalized consensus process and critiques thereof. I begin by drawing out classed components of formalized consensus process and then return to the specificity of racialized exclusion, highlighting intersections of experience between the critical activists of colour cited above and white working-class detractors like the "bad anarchist" we met at the "Everyday Anarchist" RAT workshop.

First note how the bad anarchist's words at RAT were echoed by another white working-class participant in my research, "Those guys never say what they really think, they're just play-acting at being better than other people with their fancy bullshit lingo." Note how both working-class participants anticipate Bourdieu (1984) regarding feigned neutrality as a bourgeois phenomenon, and class distinction a bourgeois prerogative — as one RAT workshop member himself emphasized, "we are trying to be strictly different." The working-class critics also notice as does the social scientist how university educated elites, in particular, assume a less personal viewpoint than non-elites, and interrupt their own narratives to give evaluative statements cast in an impersonal style as a performance of reflexivity that serves to constitute their personal viewpoint as that of an objective third party (see e.g. Labov 1969; Belanoff 1993; Skeggs 2002). I discuss such performances in relation to classed citations of identity elsewhere (Lagalisse 2022), including the important role of the "disclaimer" (see also Lagalisse 2017, 297). Here we are simply interested in noting that working-class speakers are more likely to express their viewpoints as such, and allow their emotions to be more transparent both to themselves and others (see e.g. Fay and Tokarczyk 1993). There are various overlapping explanations for this, including Bourdieu's (1984) theory of "habitus" wherein performed "disinterestedness" correlates with a "life of economic ease." A posture of objectivity is also specifically refined through academic instruction (e.g. Johnson 1993). Analyses such as those of Erving Goffman (1959) and Norbert Elias (1994) illustrate how performed neutrality is a talent learned by the privileged to acquire and preserve prestige, and proceed to focus on how this game of reputation transforms everyday life into a theatre of calculated self-presentations.

In sum, the performance of objectivity and emotional restraint that is unmarked in bourgeois sociality is highly esteemed in North American anarchist social movement spaces, which are dominated by university student participants. Whether in workshops, meetings, assemblies or spokes councils, participants are encouraged to suspend their personal interests and consider the common good, as are they discouraged from betraying feelings of anger or frustration in the interests of maintaining a "safe space" for the exchange of ideas. Joking, sarcasm and other forms of humour are discouraged for the same reason. In recent years (beginning ca. 2015), requests for advance "trigger warnings" attached to statements add a further need for speech to be reflexive and premeditated, yet it is nothing new for facilitators to encourage participants to be succinct, clear and "efficient," effectively expecting participants to speak in thesis statements, nominally to not "waste time," apparently without knowing that this is a specific classed genre.

To complexify matters further, the highly-codified nature of activist meetings, governed by speakers-lists, university-educated facilitators, "vibes-watchers," minute-takers, formal agendas and well-contained, formalized body language, itself tends to stir up negative feelings among non-elites.[10] Many feel uncomfortable or frustrated in this context because they realize they will not be seen to speak properly or taken seriously; they know they lack the authority to speak in public (see e.g. Bourdieu 1984; Charlesworth 2000; as well as Habermas 1989; cf. Fraser 1992). Graeber (2013) points out that "the power to block is like giving the power to take on the role of Supreme Court… to anyone who has the courage to stand up in front of the entire group to use it." His intended point is that the "block" is not often abused, wherein my rejoinder is that the children of lawyers may be more likely to make use of "blocks" while the children of janitors may be more likely to not have the courage to speak at all, much less "block" a proposal (the ones that try may easily be cast as "wing nuts").[11] These discrepancies in participation are exacerbated rather than resolved by introductory workshops, lessons and pamphlets regarding meeting rules and "process" (cf. Maeckelbergh 2009, 164–170), with the result that many working-class participants who show up either fall silent, speak without being heard, or use humour to break the tension of formality, as we saw in the case of the bad anarchist at RAT, which doesn't work in their favour.

Anger presents a specific problem. Throughout the remainder of this section I attend to its particularity, moving beyond consideration of who gets angry and why to study the displacement of anger as constitutive of the bourgeois subject itself, as well as bourgeois longing for authenticity.

As we saw at the RAT conference, even a playful call to "have it out" may be considered aggressive. Beyond indicating a lack of self-restraint (as do laughter and tears), anger is marked as "violence" because in upper class life conflict is displaced to behind the scenes, be it removed to the "private sphere" or to institutions that wield violence on one's behalf — consider how being able to call a lawyer on one's behalf allows the caller to think of herself as not being physically violent because the police who implement the decisions of lawyers are different people than her. Note also that the people who lawyers and bureaucrats deploy with sticks and guns are of a lower class than them, reinforcing further the associations of upper class/non-violent and lower class/violent.

Precisely because intersectional subjects with economic power may more easily mobilize the violence of bureaucrats, lawyers and miscellaneous formal grievance procedures in their favour,

[10] "This was my point," Marginalia by David Graeber (2016).

[11] Regarding activists' classed designation of "wing nut" see also Graeber (2009, 343–350).

they do not have as much reason to get angry, nor need to display emotions in order to secure their interests, whereas the opposite is true for people without class power. Regarding the first part (causes of anger), when people living in material poverty face a problem, note how the stakes are high — without the $500 in question, a child will die or a family will be evicted from their home: Precarity involves emotional swings, feelings of anxiety, fear, anger, joy and relief that tend to replace each other suddenly as there is no economic means to mediate, or institutional force to soften, the fickle force of fate (that does not swing in favour of the working-class). Regarding the second part (purposes of anger), there is no need to hide these emotions, and specific reasons to display them: Negative emotions are the most immanent expression of injury, and serve to persuade others to help resolve the problem at hand (if something doesn't seem to really bother someone, they probably don't need help).

In short, people without class power, i.e. institutional backing, "must" resolve conflicts via direct verbal communication and/or by directly exerting pressure by withholding resources or aid, by sabotage or property destruction (e.g. slashing a client's tires who refuses to pay you), and/or, in extreme cases, direct physical violence or the threat thereof. No matter which, the process necessarily involves communication and cooperation among people who must appeal to one another to join forces, to decide what measures must be taken, and to carry them out, which is necessarily done by the means of dialogue and emotional display. These features constitute ordinary unmarked working-class "consensus processes" that (must) happen all the time, whether the extended network in question is white, black, Mexican or an unruly working-class combination of these (or more), and however the network is otherwise shaped by intersectional dynamics of gender and racialization (see also Skeggs 2011). Studies in psychology (e.g. Kraus *et al.* 2010) that suggest working-class people are better at reading facial expression than wealthier people should not be at all surprising given these observations.[12] People without class power actually need to be able to read others' emotions for practical operations of cooperation and conflict on an everyday basis, whereas wealthier people can and do pay to make problems go away, and have relatively little experience of equivalent "consensus processes" in everyday life as a consequence.[13]

Academic accounts of white/bourgeois longing for "authenticity" are plenty, including that of Paul Gilroy (1987) who highlights how attributing authenticity to particular groups always ultimately reinforces associations of blackness and nature. In this vein my contemporary A.K. Thompson (2010, 83) compares the anarchists of our generation to the white radicals described by Carmichael and Hamilton in *Black Power* (1967) who "wanted to "come alive" through black communities and black groups." Thompson illustrates activists' "epistemic habits of whiteness" of feeling "everywhere and nowhere at once," wherein unalienated social relations ("community" / "locality") are attached to the racialized other (see Thompson 2010, ch. 3). Thompson's work (2010) is directly relevant to the white "anarcoturismo" (anarcho-tourism) that local militants

[12] Kraus *et al.* (2011, 248) find that "upper-class rank perceptions trigger a focus away from the context toward the self…." Upper-class individuals appear to be less cognizant of others [and] worse at identifying the emotions that others feel (Kraus *et al.* 2010), as well as more disengaged during social interactions —for example, checking their cell phones or doodling on a questionnaire — compared with their lower-class peers (Piff *et al.* 2010). "Tho might be interesting here to look at work on ritual and "sincerity", "ritual and its consequences" Puett etc.," Marginalia by David Graeber (2016).

[13] "Tho this is complex as it implies they're better able to read subtle cues and thus need dramatic display less," Marginalia by David Graeber (2016).

complain about in Mexico and Venezuela (e.g. Lagalisse 2017, ch. 1, 4, 5), yet the ethnography here also invites us to perceive how white middle class activists' preoccupation with "authenticity" may also be partially explained by the fact that the bourgeois continually lie to themselves and others about what they think and feel in uniquely bourgeois ways, whether they are white or not. Gilroy's (1987) point stands either way. Recall the Everyday Anarchist workshop participant who said she had "no control" over whether to eat the cafeteria food being served on campus — this comment can only make sense because attending university is taken absolutely for granted. The "anti-capitalist" bourgeois subject's political practice is, by logical necessity and in unique ways, not what it preaches, which lead to particular neuroses around "authenticity." Note that here I refer to a phenomenon beyond the "false consciousness" or any lop-sided structure of imagination any privileged person may have in relation to their specific form of privilege. The bourgeois subject is unique in glossing dishonesty itself with positive valences in vocabulary such as "tact," "discretion" and "professionalism," these being ethnographic categories referring to lies one must tell to keep one's social capital stocked and protected.[14] The bourgeois subject lies to itself about this fact as well — or, in Bourdieu's own restrained tongue, misrecognizes its own unique relationship to misrecognition. As Skeggs (2004, 186) writes, it is precisely the rarity of integrity among the bourgeois that precedes their longing for authenticity— authenticity and integrity cannot "be harnessed by those intent on increasing their value at the expense of others."[15] Meanwhile, an always-attendant desire for "authenticity" (wherever it may be projected) reflects partial consciousness of dishonesty as a lynchpin of bourgeois life.

This is relevant to our ethnographic case insofar as activists' scrutiny of anger as "violent," compared to a lack of scrutiny regarding the channeling of violence in upper class life (which allows activists to consider themselves "non-violent" on the basis of calm affect in the first place), is a key mechanism by which middle class activists misrecognize bourgeois sociality as "good" or "safe." This classed slip is particularly unfortunate and ironic in the anarchist milieu insofar as the expressive orientations of diverse working-class cultures emerge from, and are better adapted to, the autonomous organizing and collective self-management that anarchists aim to manifest with "consensus processes."

Theorizing Intersections of Race and Class

To recapitulate, the anarchists in my study are interested to develop radical democracy via "consensus" processes, and do so in ways attentive to intersecting structures of power. In internal debates regarding this unfinished project, the performance of objectivity, self-restraint and lack of emotivity that characterizes North American for-malized consensus process is addressed as both wealthy and white. Conceptual slip-page between these categories, versus their intersectional analysis, occurs in North American political discourse in both scholarship and activist practice. Maeckelbergh (2009, 145) notices that the public sphere of the global justice movement "maintains as part of the rules of engagement a severely logical and emotionless style of dis-

[14] Bourgeois subjects betray partial consciousness of class (as well as whiteness) precluding "authentic-ity" when they suggest that people of colour are not "authentically" black or Indian (e.g.) when they are not also working-class (see Patrick Johnson 2005, 134–135; Simpson 2015, 127).

[15] "It is the rarity of integrity that makes it in such demand, for it is one of the cultural practices that is difficult for the accumulative self to access, the prosthetic self to play with, or the omnivore to taste"(Skeggs 2004, 186; see also Skeggs 2011)

cussion" but attributes this to "western rationalism" *tout court* noting that it may be subject to "feminist and "southern" critiques" without mentioning class. Thompson (2010, 97), whose discussion of authenticity and racial dis/identification is explored above, likewise occasionally references white middle class activists' tendency to emulate poverty (dressing down, "slumming" as a lifestyle choice) without specific attention to the fact that poverty and racialization are not equivalent. And yet it is specifically productive to notice that the "communities" that activists romanticize and the working-class whose clothing and superficial markers activists are allowed to borrow do not line up. The fact that white middle class activists in my study who adopt accoutrements marked non-white are policed as engaging in (racist) "cultural appropriation" (see Lagalisse 2019a, ch. 9), while there is little equivalent policing of "appropriation" in regard to (inauthentically) wearing painters' clothing as decoration, i.e. without having worked as a painter, invites insight.[16] White middle class anarchists seek white redemption by flocking to communities of colour — these days especially indigenous ones (see e.g. Lagalisse 2011a; Dupuis-Déri and Pillet 2019)— hoping the authenticity of others will enable them to "come alive," yet also work to construct a redeemable white identity via distinction from poor ("racist") whites, and while appropriating markers of working-class-ness in an effort to signify "authenticity" itself, seeking class redemption as well (see also Ahmed 2004; Skeggs 2004; Lagalisse 2017, ch. 8).[17]

A word often used in Mexico for the composite of bourgeois affects I discuss in this piece is *apretado*. Literally, *apretar* means to squeeze, tighten, constrict or push, whereas in reference to a person it means "uptight," including "vain" and "presumptuous" in its family of meanings (see Portilla 1984).

Mexicans notice transparticular confluences of class and self-containment as well — perhaps inspiring credibility for transhistorical claims about property and propriety (Graeber 2007; Lagalisse 2022).[18] And yet here too we notice that the Mexican epithet *apretado* referring to "uptight" snobs is racialized, often associated with foreigners, and specifically British or American ones (Portilla 1984). Consider also bell hooks's (1997) analysis of dynamics in her classroom.

> Several white women students complained that the atmosphere in the class was "too hostile." They cited the noise level and the direct confrontations that took place in the room prior to class starting as an example of this hostility. Our response was

[16] In both cases plundered attributes fix the group from which they are extracted (as constitutive limit to value) while becoming mobile resources for others (subjects of value). See Skeggs (2004) regarding how the phobia/mania of "primitivism" is replicated in relation to the working-class, who are "likewise divided by their exchange value to others who want to attach authenticity to themselves and to those who require boundary markers to signify their own propriety" (ivi, 107, see also 187).

[17] The middle-class subject eschews restraint without losing privileges through "calculated decontrol"(Featherstone 1991), including by appropriating (masculine) aesthetics associated with working-class-ness, distancing themselves from wealth and artifice itself at once (see also Lury 1997). See Skeggs (2004, 105–107) regarding white working-class subjects appropriating the symbols associated with black masculinity (in the vein of Gilroy 1990), as well as white upper- and middle-class men adopting symbolisms of both black and white working-class men. Skeggs (2004, 169) addresses why working-class women are not a site from which the bourgeois subject appropriates value but instead "the real from which tasteful distance must be drawn" (see also Skeggs 1997).

[18] Note that in Portilla's *Fenomenología del relajo* (1984), the *apretado* is contrasted with the *relajiento*, a person without a future who does not take anything seriously. *Relajientos* are good company because of their sense of humour and willingness to engage in conversation at any time (a dialogical orientation). See Graeber (2007) regarding possessive individualism (Macpherson 1962) contra the grotesque (Bakhtin 1984), and the propertizing self of liberal- ism (cf. Dumont 1970); see Lagalisse (2022) in dialogue regarding the propertizing self of neoliberalism (see also Skeggs 2004).

> to explain that what they perceived as hostility and aggression, we considered playful teasing and affectionate expressions of our pleasure at being together. We saw our tendency to talk loudly as a consequence of our often being in rooms where many people were speaking, as a consequence of cultural background: many of us were raised in families where individuals speak loudly. In their upbringing as white, middle-class females, the complaining students had been taught to identify loud and direct speech with anger. We explained that we did not identify loud or direct speech in this way and encouraged them to switch codes, to think of it as an affirming gesture. Once they switched codes, they not only began to have a more creative joyful experience in the class but also learned that silence and quiet speech can in some cultures indicate hostility and aggression (ivi, 405).

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1989, 168), Max Weber studies self-restraint in connection with the rise of Puritanism, which "descended like a frost on Merrie old England." Works such as those of Weber (1989), hooks (1997) and Portilla (1984) provide important historical particularist qualifications to structural class analyses such as those of Bourdieu (1984), or that of Elias (1994) in regard to the state. Weber (1989, 119) describes how the "destruction of spontaneous, impulsive enjoyment" was to be replaced by the "quiet self control which still distinguishes the best type of English or American gentlemen today."

And yet Weber is also discussing a classed subject as well as a cultural, geographic one. The two concepts also overlap in hooks (1997), who refers to both crowded quarters and cultural specificity in her take above. Stallybrass and White's historical particularist take on the modern bourgeois topology of value becomes relevant — Stallybrass and White (1986, 167) study the symbolic logic of culture in England to find that the bourgeois subject defines himself through the exclusion of the "low," wherein the "low" is the racialized other, the female, and the dirty masses all at once, wherein "control of the boundaries of the body (in breathing, eating, defecating)" worked to secure an emergent bourgeois identity. In short, the notion that the alienating trappings of formalized consensus process are "white" is sensible — not all white people have the "habitus" of English gentlemen, but the majority of those who act like English gentlemen are indeed white. While working-class people of colour articulate many complaints that are similar to those of white working-class activists, when people of colour experience the repressive sanctions of white middle class anarchist meetings they do so by a racially dominant group, which makes it even more intolerable.

Elsewhere I have written critically about the reductive linear mathematics mobilized in vernacular practices of "intersectionality" among activists in my study (Lagalisse 2017, 2019b, 2022; see also Collins 2019), yet if we indulge in the simplifying satisfaction of quantification and ranking in the mode of the anarchist activists' own anti-oppression workshops (see Lagalisse 2017, ch. 8) — and to emphasize that even reductive intersectional analyses can be epistemologically and politically productive— we might end up with an ethnographic scheme along the following lines.[19] Rich white people are the only ones who feel genuinely comfortable with the middle class anarchists' formalized consensus process; whereas rich people of colour struggle with feelings of ambivalence and frustration but often integrate to some degree; whereas poor white men experience it as a hostile environment yet sometimes integrate as well; whereas white women

[19] See e.g. Lagalisse (2022, 739–741) regarding the statistical operations that wittingly and unwittingly characterize activist operationalizations of intersectionality

from a working-class background and poor men of colour both experience a double-whammy of hostility and rarely return if they show up in the first place; whereas women of colour are virtually absent or struggle with stereotypes of themselves as "angry."

Intersectional analyses of race and class in this ethnographic instance help us understand why some activists of colour are very well-versed and comfortable in the realm of formalized consensus process, despite so much public discourse to the contrary. These relatively comfortable people of colour are also comfortably middle or upper class, and easily display relatively little spontaneous body language, smoothly effecting site-specific hand signals while otherwise appearing emotionally neutral. They are often sought-after facilitators — like women, all people of colour are expected to do extra work in the name of anti-racism itself (they will no doubt conduct the meeting in a less racist fashion, so the logic goes). These activists of colour become tired of the surrounding wealthy whites as well (they continually have to listen to various ill-informed comments regarding "communities of colour"), but they do not feel immediately anxious and ill-at-ease due to basic features of bourgeois sociality, because they themselves went to elite schools or were otherwise effectively socialized from a young age in the professional culture of the (predominantly white) wealthy, North American bourgoisie. Importantly for our purposes, the prominent faciliation roles of many wealthy people of colour at meetings is partly why the "consensus = white" argument is simply not compelling for many white anarchists who observe the movement debates depicted above. A failure to articulate classed components of "consensus process" and related debate makes it easier for white middle class activists to dismiss the entire critique.

Conclusion

To close I return to Bourdieu's (1984) notion of "habitus," wherein cultural capital is embodied in a person's manner. In the performance of "consensus," form and content are equally important. The person with "good politics" embodies restraint, performing objectivity, reflexivity and a deliberate distance from one's emotions and "baser" nature. The subject of "good politics" is a serious, self-contained, self-conscious person — one who represents the self in a "choiceful" manner while longing for authenticity.

The "bad anarchist" of RAT failed in this operation. He admitted to eating meat and driving, but perhaps worse, he did not seem to feel guilty or self-conscious about it (unlike the apologetic university student with the meal plan). Neither was the bad anarchist self-contained — he laughed, exhibited multiple emotions, and swung his hands in the air. He exposed the paradox of saying that anarchist identity is meaningful because it is choiceful and exclusive while also saying its important to be "inclusive." To use the phrase as Erving Goffman did (1959), he made a "scene" by exposing a dimension of the workshop that participants preferred to misrecognize. Attendees were using the workshop to establish their "good politics" *vis-à-vis* others present, and he pointed that out ("pissing contest"). The "bad anarchist" attempted to break the spirit of competition (distinction) by pointing out ways in which he himself did not live up to all the stated ideals (his own political formation was incomplete —Bakhtin 1984), thus creating room for others to do the same (enacting and inviting dialogism), yet others were less interested in this activity. Engaging the inherent tension might have been productive, yet this would have required "having it out," and the highest priority for everyone else was "keeping it in."

Here it does become inviting to think with Bakhtin (1984) about the grotesque vs. classical body, and Radcliffe Brown (1940) on joking and avoidance. In Lagalisse (2022) all of this ethnographic material is considered in dialogue with these works, as well as in relation to Graeber's (2007) work on "manners" and the liberal self as property, and both Skeggs' (2004) and Brown's (1995) work on neoliberal self-identity as property.[20]Here it is sufficient to conclude that it would be practical for participants in anarchist movements with transnational, intersectional, anti-capitalist aspirations to consider the "consensus processes" that already exist in everyday life close to home, whether they be found in the cultural milieus of present-day African Americans, the white working-class, or Mexican migrants such as those in the *La Otra* collective. It is impractical as well as colonial for anarchists to claim to "take lead" from "communities of colour" by projecting "consensus processes" onto far-away indigenous communities while also implying that local people of colour are incapable of collective organization unless it looks like the *Coop sur Généreux*, or Marxists organize them into command structures. Anarchist activists interested in a global social revolution should arguably be interested in learning the different living languages of consensus around them both because of the practical realities of transnational organizing (inclusivity), and because an authentic dialogical orientation in consensus decision-making makes specific logical and practical sense (quality).[21] Whether we prefer to read Elias (1994), hooks (1997), or Bernice Johnson Reagon (1983), another black feminist scholar and forerunner of the "intersectionality" concept who insisted that true coalition never feels "safe," nuanced ethnographic analysis invites us to observe how the activists in my study conflate race and class in ways that make it difficult to counter the replication of both racial and class hierarchy in the movement. We are invited to consider how an authentic engagement with intersectionality can be a useful tool to parse axes of experience when we might otherwise be inclined to conflate them, and how refraining from collapsing racialized and classed experiences allows the possibility of critically dealing with both racism and elitism in more effective ways.

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[20] Skeggs (2004) shows how claiming self-hood in the neoliberal order is reliant on others being made available both as a "resource" and "constitutive limit," a vocabulary suggestive of the double movement of "encompassment" and "exclusion" theorized by Graeber (2007) intervening in Dumont's (1970) theory of hierarchy. In this work Graeber (2007) draws attention to a double movement of encompassment and exclusion in liberalism; in Lagalisse (2022, 737–742, *passim*) I illustrate how identity-based rights involve the same combination of encompassment and exclusion as the original franchise.

[21] Otherwise an "emphasis on form makes the desired content impossible to achieve," concluding Marginalia by David Graeber (2016).

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Erica Lagalisse and David Graeber
2011, Austin TX, USA

By studying ethnographic intersections of racialized and classed subjectivity informing diverse activist practices of "consensus process" in Mexico and Quebec, I illustrate how it is important for scholars and militants concerned with "intersectionality" to avoid collapsing analyses of race and class, including in relation to studies of "authenticity" and its longing. The anti-capitalist bourgeois subject's practice is not what it preaches in unique ways, which lead to unique neuroses around authenticity. This multi-sited study is organized to intervene constructively in social movement debates regarding "consensus process," as well as develop methodological reflections relevant to the theorization of intersectionality and epistemology.

Scrappy Capy Distro

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Erica Lagalisse
On Authenticity
Theorizing Intersections of Race and Class in Consensus Process and Beyond
2024

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