

Democracy

Post-Comprehension

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Contents

Part 1: People Rule	3
Part 2: Decisions and Proportions	3
Part 3: Popular Will and Mass Participation	7
Part 4: Anarchy vs. Kratos	10

Part 1: People Rule

The Word Democracy comes from the Greek words, *dēmos* ‘people’ and *Kratos* meaning force, power, strength, or rule which is the most commonly interpreted meaning and so we get people’s Rule. Although, People’s power, People’s force, and people’s strength are possible interpretations but for now, let us stick to the interpretation that *Kratos* means rule. Now, who are these “people” and what is the “rule”? More specifically, how are they supposed to conduct a sense of rulership that exemplifies that of those people? Well, the framework of which can often be thought to encompass certain principles such as:

- Freedom of assembly, speech, inclusiveness, and equality.
- Membership: The actors involved serve as a type of membership, be it through citizenship in relation to a nation, or simply a member through involvement in the decision-making process.
- Consent, the people involved have agreed to the decision-making process.
- Voting, which can be taken as simply punching in a hole on a piece of paper or able to have standing in the decision-making process as an active unit in it. Those unable to vote would be the actors that cannot actively possess active influence in such processes.
- Right to life, the belief that a being has the right to live, and shouldn’t be killed by another entity.
- Minority Rights, can either mean rights to those in minority power standings or minority in relation to population or simply disagreement in relation to the majority.

These are thought to guide the processes known as people rule, or simply democracy. The details of which and even the deepening meanings behind the notions of people’s rulership is extremely complex as the semantics behind which hold many implications and weights, many of which we will explore in the video.

Part 2: Decisions and Proportions

Many forms of democracy exist, in fact, too much for a video to cover, or at least for this video to cover, so we will be focussing on three major types and dissect them, asking whether these forms do in fact exemplify the people’s rule or are in fact exemplifying none of that. So in the previous part, we discussed the definition of the word democracy lightly, as no actual consensus exists as to what it really means and the possible principles encompassing them. The arguments on the exact meaning of people’s rule result in many different variations depending on how people have interpreted the incredibly vague notion. Arguments on:

1. Who is allowed to participate? What are the criteria for participation in decision-making? Is it ethnic, religious, cultural, gender, tied to citizens, or open to all?
2. How is authority shared amongst this participation? Do decision-makers vote on representatives who then create legislation or do the decision-makers vote directly on legislation?

3. What is the mechanism that decides a decision? How do the decision-makers reach a decision? Is it through majority, supermajority, or consensus?

The common three resulting democratic forms that come from these questions are:

- Minoritarian Democracy, decision-making vested in a concentrated minority, be it representatives or limiting those that can participate in the decision-making process to a small segment of the population.

- Majoritarian Democracy, as opposed to constitutional democracy, refers to democracy based upon the majority rule of a society's citizens.

- Consensus Democracy, a decision-making structure that involves and takes into account as broad a range of opinions as possible, as opposed to systems where minority opinions can potentially be ignored by vote-winning majorities.

Firstly, Minoritarian Democracy is often justified through the notion of the "Tyranny of the Majority" and or the "Dumb Masses", and so a centralized and external body is to mediate the decision-making process between the general population and legislation. This is the common framing behind Representative Democracy in places like the United States, as well as the framing behind Authoritarian Democracy, which originated with Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès' maxim of "confidence from below, authority from above", in which Sieyès claimed there must be an enlightened authority that is responsive to the needs and clamor of the people.

What's interesting about Sieyès's conception of democracy is that it exemplifies a lot of the theory around Liberal Democracy, how it detested monarchical and aristocratic rule but at the same time hated mass rule, or more specifically direct mass rulership, in Sieyès "What is The Third Estate?" This reasoning is found.

The Pamphlet argued that the clergy and aristocracy, which constituted the first and second estate, were unneeded "dead weight" and instead the state should be ruled by representatives of the people which made up the third estate.

However, just as the clergy and aristocracy were a dead weight on the people, so too are the business class and the state itself. The "Fourth Estate" is the centralized representative, as the previous estate of the aristocracy has remade itself in capitalism. A lot of liberal arguments against the monarchy and its aristocracy can be pulled even further to be presented against the authorities liberalism tries to justify.

Minoritarian Democracy rests on this line of reasoning, that the majority cannot govern themselves, and thus that majority must be governed by a superior minority. As Madison once famously remarked in the federalist papers, arguing against an inclusive democracy out of fear of agrarian reform, "Landholders ought to have a share in the government, to support these invaluable interests and to balance and check the other. They ought to be so constituted as to protect the minority of the opulent against the majority. The senate, therefore, ought to be this body; and to answer these purposes, they ought to have permanency and stability."

Fascists are another group that likes to justify "authoritarian democracy", as we've exhaustively covered before on this channel, video linked below.

Fascists argue that the most "qualified" should rule instead of a rule by numbers. Maurice Barrès, a great influence of fascist policies, claimed that authoritarian democracy involved a spiritual connection between a leader of a nation and the nation's people, and that true freedom did not arise from individual rights nor parliamentary restraints, but through "heroic leadership" and "national power".

Italian Fascists argued for a corporatist form of Authoritarian Democracy, where state-sanctioned corporate groups would act as representation for the interests of the general will of the nation and thus this was considered a form of popular rule.

In both Liberal and Fascist cases of Minoritarianism, the popular rule is substituted and mediated away from the people themselves, as a centralized institution is pulled in to be the ultimate filter and guide to make sure that any popular will is deteriorated and refocused away and supplanted with the state's will instead, which I would consider being the ultimate source of a democratic deficit.

If you wouldn't call an oligarchy a democracy then there's not any reason to consider any type of Minoritarian rulership as one. At best this type of "Democracy" is simply a guided Democracy.

In which the government controls elections so that the people can exercise all their rights without truly changing public policy. While they follow basic democratic principles, there can be major deviations towards authoritarianism. Under managed democracy, the state's continuous use of propaganda techniques prevents the electorate from having a significant impact on policy.

Be it the state, corporations, and often both, concentrated power centers organize and distribute propaganda that will help in securing their continued existence. Representative Democracy, especially the kind that's meant to protect the opulent, will do everything it can to control public opinion through the media that they consume. Of course, I'm referring to the process of Manufactured Consent, which I've mentioned and further expanded on in my violence video, link below.

Secondly, Majoritarian Democracy, which has an odd contradiction of forms in place whenever a centralized structure claims to be beholden to "Majority rule", as David Graeber once remarked:

"Majority democracy, we might say, can only emerge when two factors coincide:

- A feeling that people should have equal say in making group decisions, and
- A coercive apparatus capable of enforcing those decisions.

For most of human history, it has been extremely unusual to have both at the same time. Where egalitarian societies exist, it is also usually considered wrong to impose systematic coercion. Where a machinery of coercion did exist, it did not even occur to those wielding it that they were enforcing any sort of popular will."

In order to maintain some sort of popular will and a majority government, it has to exist within the framing of an egalitarian society that does not impose coercion on the minority, as that coercion creates the conditions for undoing those egalitarian principles. Oppressing the minority creates stratification and further consolidation of power relations that result in propping up a centralized power source that undoes popular will.

As that centralized power source exists to maintain its position of status over those below it, so whenever a state calls itself a "Majoritarian Democracy", often this is just Minoritarian rule posing itself as the Majority's Will.

Arguably, some standard for maintaining the majority part in said Majority Will is important and that's why respecting minority rights is key here.

Although, there is a democratic paradox to this. If the minority or majority seek to overturn their own will then what process is to stop that? Certainly not the addition of inequality to step in

and oversee, as any established Centralized institution to do so would ironically do the opposite to reinforce the maintenance of the people's rule.

So paradoxically, intolerance to an undemocratic will must be maintained but it ought to come from the people themselves. Of course, what counts as "undemocratic" is its own Pandora's box of deconstruction. The solution to which is some form of defensive democracy, the philosophy that members of a democratic society believe it necessary to limit some rights and freedoms, in order to protect the institutions of the democracy.

As with the paradox of individual freedom, in order to maintain it, there must be some limitation such as the individual's ability to infringe on others individual freedom, of course, exceptions to this are things like self-defense but the general point still stands. The prevention of centralized and undemocratic institutions is how one maintains democracy, even when the majority wills it.

Lastly, Consensus Democracy, which strives to take into account the broadest range of opinions within the decision-making group to reach a consensus. In a way, Consensus Democracy is neither Majoritarian nor Minoritarian. However, if such a consensus cannot be found then what? Well, interestingly Malatesta gave an answer to this question in his work "between peasants", with Characters as stand-ins for questions and answers.

"Bert: But if in a village or association people didn't all see things the same way, what would happen then? The greatest number would win, wouldn't they?"

George: By rights, no, because where truth and justice are concerned numbers don't count, and often one person alone can be right against one hundred or a hundred thousand. In practice one would do what one could; everything is done to reach unanimity, and when this is impossible, one would vote and do what the majority wanted, or else put the decision in the hands of a third party who would act as arbitrator, respecting the inviolability of the principles of equality and justice which the society is based on."

When consensus is impossible than another form of reaching a decision is made, be it majority or arbitration, a fluidity of forms is implied in this. Not one form of decision making, rather many corresponding to the problem itself and to those involved. This multi-methodology approach also helps in solving many different types of problems instead of trying to apply a singular and hegemonic approach to group problems.

A strict focus on consensus can disincentivize dissensus and leave many left wanting. Critique is just as important as Agreement and oftentimes more so as it can help to recognize the individual in the group instead of obsessions with hegemonic agreement over that individual's voice. Harsha Walia goes much deeper into the issues with strict consensus and ways to solve the issues with such a system, and even coming to a similar conclusion to Malatesta:

"A common abuse of consensus, however, is a dogmatic attachment to the structures and forms with which it is associated, which can sometimes be as exclusive and alienating as the systems it seeks to replace. If this is happening, the response should not be 'Well this is how consensus works!' Instead, it is our collective responsibility to delve into the dynamics that might be creating these negative reactions.

There are five common problems with consensus that can create frustration. First, consensus often reproduces majoritarian rule by creating sectarian camps of those

in agreement versus those who are blocking. Contrary to popular belief, consensus does not necessarily mean unanimous agreement. This misconception causes us to wrongly view dissent as a distraction or obstacle, and increases the pressure toward homogenizing opinions. Second, a few voices can dominate the discussion, a problem that tends to perpetuate power imbalances around race, class, gender, and education level. Third, there is often a faulty assumption that silence implies consent, which can end up stifling broader discussion and the consideration of alternative proposals. Fourth, facilitators have an unfortunate tendency to exercise covert forms of power-over rather than power-with by steering the conversation based on their own biases.

The fifth problem with consensus is more fundamental and structural. Ironically, the seemingly benign notion that all voices are equal can hide the uncomfortable truth of systemic inequality. Almost inherently, the consensus process can absolve us of actively examining how privilege and oppression shape our spaces.

In an effort to address these problems, many communities and collectives use modified forms of consensus — for example, prioritizing and taking leadership from women, people of color and those directly affected by decisions being made; facilitating small break-out groups to ensure more engaged participation; encouraging more debate and discussion rather than just asking for blocks; and actively incorporating anti-oppression principles to prevent harmful opinions from further marginalizing historically disadvantaged peoples.

Consensus can be beautiful and transformative, but only when the structures and processes are meeting the needs and desires of those engaging in it. Otherwise, it can be just as shackling as more conventionally authoritative decision-making systems. Remember, consensus is a means to an end, not an end unto itself.”

Part 3: Popular Will and Mass Participation

David Graeber once remarked on the origins of democracy, saying: “We are usually told that democracy originated in ancient Athens—like science or philosophy, it was a Greek invention. It’s never entirely clear what this is supposed to mean. Are we supposed to believe that before the Athenians, it never really occurred to anyone, anywhere, to gather all the members of their community in order to make joint decisions in a way that gave everyone equal say?”

Long before the conceptions of liberalism forms of democracy existed, the earliest known versions were in hunter-gatherer tribes. Taking the form of small community face-to-face discussions in a council, or with a leader backed by elders, or some other cooperative form of government. Other forms of rule, monarchy, tyranny, aristocracy, and oligarchy flourishing in more urban centers with often concentrated populations.

Democracies oldest known conceptualization is in Aeschylus’ “The Suppliants”, 463 B.C.E., with the line sung by the chorus: *dēmou kratousa cheir*, which translates as the “people’s hand of power”, with the context of the play it acts as a counterpoint to the inclination of the votes cast by the people, which means that the authority as implemented by the people in the Assembly has power.

Traditionally it's thought that the concept of democracy and constitution as the government was first developed around the 6th century B.C.E., Athen city-states, as they had a direct democracy but it was exclusive to women, slaves, and Non-Athenians, as they were not allowed to participate. It should be noted that a Direct Democracy is simply acting directly on legislation, how this direct action is taken is another matter, as it can be majoritarian, consensus, or in this case patriarchal. The main distinction is the absence of representatives acting as a substitute for direct participation in said legislation.

Immediately we should recognize the exclusive nature of Athenian democracy which I would argue fosters inequality, as a large portion of the population was left out of the process. This is also discounting the rights of the minority, another principle often thought to exemplify democracy. It seems that the first democracy or at least the first traditionally known doesn't seem to truly be all that democratic when faced with these modern charges but unfortunately at the same time, this supposed democracy is more democratic than most nations proclaiming themselves to be. As any people elected from this process would resemble and recreate the inequalities within the assemblies. From Athens, we can leave behind the patriarchy, slavery, and other such inequality but with it, we can take forward the Popular Assembly.

Speaking of, Popular assemblies seem to be the most universal expression of democracy and often used outside of the state with many revolutionary movements using them. Arguably this is Democracy in its purest form, found outside of the state and in the organizations that seek to rebel against its inability to address the people's grievances. It's actually odd to consider any state a "Democracy" when the Structure of such an institution exists to oppose the people and their popular will. To quote Morpheus, no not the matrix character rather the author behind an interesting piece called "A Brief History of Popular Assemblies and Workers Councils":

"The phenomenon of popular assemblies and workers' councils has appeared many times throughout history. These organs of self-management usually spring up spontaneously during a crisis or revolution when ordinary people begin to organize their own lives. Popular assemblies are meetings of ordinary people which organize against the dominant hierarchical institutions (states, corporations, etc)."

Whenever a revolution birthed from popular will does overtake the state it takes one of two roads. Reinventing the State and thus reinvention the suppression of popular will. The other road is an endless revolution that isn't just waged against the state but any and all attempts at rebuilding it. This is through reinventing not the state but the people's will through constant deconstruction and reconstruction of Assemblies and Councils.

We can see this in many revolutionary movements, including Frances, Russia's, Mexico, Ukraine, and many others. Small glimpses in time in which popular assemblies and worker's councils existed.

To quote Morpheus again: "The most famous systems of mandated & recallable delegates are the workers' councils, which are confederations of worker assemblies. This system of decentralized direct democracy is the embryo of an anarchist society. An anarchist society would be organized by voluntary non-hierarchical associations, such as these assemblies & councils, rather than through authoritarian institutions like corporations and the state." These worker councils and assemblies acted as a foundational floor for a bottom-up organization. Even today we see this form of organization in the Zapatistas, the Autonomous administration of north and east Syria, Federation of Neighborhood Councils-El Alto, and many other movements.

The best quality of Democracy comes from its ability to spring forward from outside minority rule and find itself in the margins, within the voices and minds of those oppressed. The coordination of these voices universally is often in these Assemblies and Councils, or in something less formal and far simpler like in Affinity Groups. It seems that sometimes when a lack of centralized power is present a form of horizontal, inclusive, and loose census decision-making is created among the community.

In essence one could say then when a democratic deficit has emerged, oftentimes the people demand Horizontalism as an answer. Horizontalism, as mentioned a few times before, is a social relationship that advocates the creation, development, and maintenance of social structures for the equitable distribution of management power. These structures and relationships function as a result of dynamic self-management, involving the continuity of participation and exchange between individuals to achieve the larger desired outcomes of the collective whole. Or, as Marina Sitrin summarizes:

“horizontalism, the use of direct democracy, the striving for consensus” and “processes in which everyone is heard and new relationships are created.”

One of the definitions for democratization is “the action of making something accessible to everyone.” Which opens up access to broader participation, and in the way introduces the realm of democracy into a much wider range. Open-source software in a sense is a digitized version of the popular assembly with a far greater degree of individual autonomy. With anyone being able to have access to a forum of information and materials with seemingly endless replication and even more endless ways to communicate and cooperate with that replication of resources.

This would be an example of an E-democracy, which is the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in political and governance processes. More specifically, this is the direct democracy variation of it. As it can be applied to other types since something simple as voting on your phone is considered an example. In fact, technological development can help to facilitate greater individual autonomy so that when collaboration occurs it has less potential for coercion. Making any democratic actively remain participatory and less likely to be co-opted by centralized forces.

The mechanisms of Stigmergy are at play here as they are creating paths towards a better democracy. Stigmergy is a mechanism of indirect coordination, through the environment, between agents or actions. The principle is that the trace left in the environment by an individual action stimulates the performance of a succeeding action by the same or different agent. Agents that respond to traces in the environment receive positive fitness benefits, reinforcing the likelihood of these behaviors becoming fixed within a population over time.

Stigmergy is basically a form of self-organization. Producing complex, seemingly intelligent structures, without need for any planning, control, or even direct communication between the agents. As such it supports efficient collaboration between extremely simple agents, who may lack memory or individual awareness of each other.

As open source allows for a far greater degree of this mechanism to take place, as people endlessly build onto previous work. Applying tons of different altercations and applications to pre-existing materials. Each creating its own structure that can work on itself. The Popular Assembly is transformed into interpersonal and extrapersonal autonomous relations that are constantly building and recreating networks of fluidity.

This as well as advancement in telecommunications has helped to coordinate mass movements and increase the fluidity of information and with it opened up educational opportunities to more people. A common liberal argument against direct democracy was the “ignorance of the masses” and therefore the “educated minority” should rule them. However, applying this centralized power structure to information stagnates it and reinforces the tyranny of obscurity, the people are ignorant, not because of some inherent biological flaw but because of the conditions in which that information is accessible.

The internet itself offers the potential for mass, open, and autonomous self-education. The state, corporations, and other centralized systems have to prevent these things in order to maintain their position of power. If you lessen the fruits of information and you lessen the range in which people can mentally defend themselves and make critical decisions about said information. Hopefully, Being isn't retreading too much here, as I've discussed the liberatory potentials of this technology in my Anarcho-Transhumanism video.

Again, we see democracy finding itself outside of the government and among the people in new forms of coordination through technological means. “The real origin of the democratic spirit – and most likely, many democratic institutions – lies precisely in those spaces of improvisation just outside the control of governments and organized churches.” – David Graeber

Part 4: Anarchy vs. Kratos

“Democracy is a lie, it is oppression and is in reality, oligarchy; that is, government by the few to the advantage of a privileged class. But we can still fight it in the name of freedom and equality, unlike those who have replaced it or want to replace it with something worse.” – Errico Malatesta

The relationship between Democracy and Anarchism is complex, especially when it comes to defining one to the other. If we are Defining Democracy as a Majoritarian Government then the immediate conflicts to anarchism arise. Questions such as are the majority able to oppress the minority? If so then the coercion of the Majority on the Minority is in conflict with Anarchism.

Malatesta is probably one of the most famous of Anarchist thinkers to critique democracy, as you could tell from the quote used at the beginning of this part but also the quote from him far earlier denotes a peculiar distinction. Malatesta both hates democracy and yet, also advocates for many of its forms without directly addressing them as such. I think Zoe Baker best explains this peculiarity:

“When historic anarchists like Malatesta critique democracy they mean representative democracy or systems of government based on majority rule. They don't mean systems of voluntary decision-making based on each person in the group having a vote. They in fact advocated and implemented such decision-making systems. For example, in Malatesta's pamphlet between peasants he writes that people will aim for 'unanimity, and when this is impossible, one would vote and do what the majority wanted.

The difference between these systems of decision-making and what they called democracy is that they are based on free association. If a minority doesn't like a

majority decision they are free to leave or not participate in it. Confusingly modern anarchists often now call these historic anarchist systems of decision-making direct democracy. This represents a change in language but the ideas are the same.”

The Anarchist critique of Democracy is the opposite of the Liberal one, instead of the Collective imposing equality onto the privileged, the collective is imposing inequality on the unprivileged.

So the critique around democracy is often one of two scenarios involving it:

1. Collective Inequality Argument, The people hold inequalities from within the collective that undermines that popular will, or subdues a minority within that will, which deteriorates that will into tyranny that quickly concentrates into a new minority leadership thus dismantling that popular will in the first place.
2. Collective Equality Argument, the people demand equality at the risk of dismantling those who benefit from inequality, for example, the general will, the majority always being those at the bottom demanding resources from the minority at the top. If left unchecked, this majority rule will create a more equal position thus destroying the privileges gained from inequality.

Both arguments say, “the majority will present inequality to a minority, (be it a privileged minority or an underprivileged minority.” Now, the liberals’ conclusion to their Collective Equality argument is we should implement an institution of unequal standing to prevent this inequality from affecting the minority.” If you think about it you could boil this down to, “in order to prevent inequality, we must create more inequality”, which doesn’t solve the initial problems but rather inflates them.

The issue is a grievance of power relations, by worsening that grievance by creating more of an imbalance you’ve essentially recognized a few things, you understand that the power you hold is at a detriment to the majority, and you also understand that in order to maintain that power you must increase it thus creating more detachment to that majority. (Congratulations, you suck and are worse for knowing that and doing nothing to better but in fact, worsen that quality of not only yourself but to impress that onto the rest of humanity)

The conclusion to the Anti-Democratic Anarchist argument of Collective Inequality Argument is to not have democracy, since the obsession with collectivity and community is a source of tyranny, William Gillis remarks: “Democracy’s focus on majorities, rough consensus, and ‘the community’ is a blunderbuss of violent simplification that deprives individuals of agency and everyone of the full extent of cooperation possible.”

Gillis and many Anti-Democratic Anarchists do make fair observations that obsessions with “community” and “masses” ‘ can often hide reactionary elements from within it. Especially the particular sentiment Gillis made about changing our focus away from those obsessions.

I admittedly do not entirely agree with Gillis but at the same time, I cannot deny many of the observations he makes do intrigue Being. But at the other end, I think lessening those inequalities within those groups would help. As any group that oppresses a minority is a collection of individuals that hold within themselves that bigotry. Again, though, we should try as much as possible to decentralize relations so that individual bigotry cannot so easily grow into institutional bigotry.

Arguably, some form of group decision-making and consensus will be necessary for certain activities, so is Gillis against these concepts completely?

Well, In another essay, Gillis's response to this question: "I should also clarify that I have nothing against unanimity, indeed it is often a desirable end. My point was that the way we presently handle consensus process overemphasizes the value of affiliation in a persistent collective organization at the cost of a truer emphasis on freedom of association. Consensus process (done right) encourages people to disassociate and reassociate fluidly. Consensus should ideally be a test applied that dissolves associations and discourages persistent groups just as much as it facilitates the discovery of affinities or detentes."

So what If we were to define democracy loosely within the bounds of a free association as just another term for group decision making then it's possible to see no conflicts, but, the type of democracy involved would have to be immediate, fluid, and not bound to any external government by which any disaffected individual can leave freely, I would like to label this form of democracy as Free Democracy. Even still some semantic problems do arise, Democracy means people rule, Anarchy means without rule. Another Anti-Democratic Anarchist Critique being this semantic relationship.

So any form of organizational decision-making has to abide by both without rule and possess the rule of the people. As you can see we have a contradiction unless we discuss what "people ruling" means and what the absence of a rule is.

When we decentralize power relations we're creating the means of self-governance, a condition of self-rule, so people ruling becomes self-rulership of all and at the same time an absence of rulership. In this relation of free association still comes the necessity for group decision making and in that, I would like to propose a new type of democracy founded within these conditions,

Free Democracy, a non-coercive form of group decision-making formed around a free association, with respect to free disassociation, either through majority, consensus, or dissensus, so long as any disaffected individual is able to freely disassociate. As Free Association also means free dissociation.

How this would work exactly is hard to directly comment on but it would follow from the principle of Associationalism, a political movement in which "human welfare and liberty are both best served when as many of the affairs of a society as possible are managed by voluntary and democratically self-governing associations." Of course, Being is referring to this in relation to Anarchism and not some of its historic role in liberalism.

Also using the pluralistic methodology Malatesta and Walia gave in their works, forming a weak consensus of sorts. Instead of strict obsession with hegemonic agreement strides should be made to account for the complexities in individuals through the use of other decision-making methods mentioned before.

Finally, I would also like to mention that this form of democracy is based on the broadest definitions of both democracy and anarchy. It seems that to me, democracy in its purest form is the most decentralized relation of power, and anarchy is the abolition of all power, and from these observations, they find themselves in a beautiful harmony of contradiction. If power is "abolished" then it is merely translated to all and equalized in its supposed absence, as the source of this power is in the people themselves and in no one else, or put simply, this is the truest form of the People's Power.

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