Mutual Aid, Anarchist Preparedness and COVID-19

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Introduction

In past decades, we have seen a growing trend for the state to rely on spontaneous community responses to compensate for its growing incapacity and indifference and to manipulate media and social media to relay messages in the interests of repressive social control and behavioural nudging. These dynamics reduce the capacity for social insurrection or revolution and can have a de-radicalising effect on social movements. This chapter considers the perspective of 'disaster anarchism' and the practice of mutual aid disaster relief as an alternative to both market- and state-based preparedness solutions. Mutual aid is a practice of community helping with roots in anarchist though and working-class communities which aims to transgress the hierarchies of established charities and erase distinctions between helpers and helped in order to prefigure a more equal—and stateless—society. However, the practice in its recent incarnation within the COVID-19 crisis appears prone to appropriation by a well-meaning middle class embodying the logic of the state: a depoliticised form of relief and reconstruction that is almost entirely compatible with neoliberal capitalism and its institutions, functioning to restore 'normality' (or an even more terrifying 'new normal') in a context of the withdrawal of state welfare functions. Nevertheless, mutual aid retains an important place within a much broader repertoire of anarchist critique and action. This chapter considers the difference in perspective between the state-centred perspective of mainstream disaster studies, which views human co-operation as an anomaly to be harnessed in the interests of capital, and the anarchist perspective which understands mutual aid as an expression of an authentic 'outside' to relations of hierarchy, competition, control and domination. It is argued that anarchists do not draw distinctions between stages of disasters such as preparedness, relief and recovery; nor do they view disasters as ruptures in the smooth running of things. The essence of the anarchist perspective is an understanding of disasters as constitutive of capitalist inequality and state authoritarianism. This chapter presents an imperative for anarchists to resist the classed colonisation of their movements and the recuperation and co-optation of their radical activities into bureaucratised and regulated forms of 'social capital'. In order to do so, anarchists must maintain radical intentionality at the level of desire, raise consciousness via robust structural critique and create strong links between mutual aid and more confrontational activities that defend communities from dispossession such as strikes and occupations as well as longer-term co-operative infrastructure and permaculture projects.

The Emergence of Disaster Studies: Community Response as 'Post-Disaster Utopia'

The perspective on community response to disasters that dominates disaster studies and mainstream consciousness today dates back to the late 1950s and early 1960s, when North American disaster researchers and media reporters would laud the community action that arose in the immediate aftermath of a 'natural disaster' such as a hurricane, tornado or food. The term 'post-disaster utopia' was used in early texts to describe a period where feelings of camaraderie and euphoria would lead people to put aside prior differences in order to roll up their sleeves and work together to selflessly help others during the recovery effort (Wolfenstein 1957). One of the first renowned sociologists of disaster, Charles Fritz, argued contrary to others of his era who feared widespread panic and chaos, that large-scale disasters paradoxically appear to produce

'mentally healthy' conditions and that people living in heavily bombed cities in Britain during WWII had 'significantly higher morale' than people living in lighter bombed cities (Fritz 1966: 6). Fritz pre-empts later structuralists by arguing that disasters bring into focus the impact of ongoing systemic crisis on everyday life by erasing the contrast between normal conditions and 'disaster'. In particular, he highlights the failure of modern societies to meet 'human needs for community' (Ibid: 25) and argues that disasters produce a societal shock that helps people to build bonds through shared experiences. Drawing on Fritz, later researchers use the term 'therapeutic community' (Barton 1969). According to these accounts, the 'utopian' period of solidarity, consensus and mutual aid unavoidably recedes after the initial relief efforts as the everyday divisions

and differences settle in, at which point it is necessary for a specialised bureaucracy to step in to administer the longer-term tasks of recovery (Erikson 1991). The anthropological/structural approach shows 'disasters do not just happen' (Oliver-Smith and Hofman 2002) and are compounded by not only human infrastructures but also by political structures and cultural values and norms. However, despite this somewhat relativist stance, these writers view 'post-disaster solidarity' as an almost universal human response, that cannot be explained by rational choice, resource mobilisation or other social movement theories that dichotomise reason and emotion (Oliver-Smith 1999).

These accounts are interesting, because they all link the sociology of disasters to human psychology, pre-empting neoliberal discourses of 'resilience' which mobilise notions of 'emergent togetherness' to place agency and responsibility for recovering from higher-level shocks onto lower-level communities and individuals (Drury et al. 2009). The currently hegemonic public health model is inseparable from disaster management, cybernetic co-ordination and behavioural nudge psychology. This thread was developed by Enrico Quarantelli, a leading name in disaster studies from the late 1970s until the present day. Quarantelli was a student of Fritz, and similarly critiqued the top-down 'command and control' approach to risk management that saw the potential for disaster planning and management to manipulate 'prosocial behaviour' in the interests of restoring 'normalcy' (Quarantelli 1998). Following a cybernetic model which valorises feedback systems he argued that disasters impact differently on different segments of society and communities have their own pre-existing 'patterns of authority' and 'autonomous decision-making' (Ibid: 9) that ought to be left in place. Disaster planning deals with aggregate data and ought to 'focus on general principles and not specific details' (Ibid: 10) and should also 'be vertically and horizontally integrated' (Ibid: 12). This initially gives the appearance of equal treatment and a role for horizontalist organisations such as mutual aid groups. However, the integration of the horizontal with the vertical relies on the planning and management functions of (secretive) state agencies to oversee and co-ordinate their actions in order to differentiate between 'helpful' and injurious emergent actions—and ultimately to use generic structural adjustments, 'education' and 'nudges' to manipulate the beliefs and behaviour of populations in order to encourage those actions that are seen as helpful to the state (see particularly Quarantelli 1998: 12–14). Actions helpful to the state are not judged via democratic means, but rather via the technocratic knowledge of experts (Ibid: 14). While the discourse seems entirely opposed to hierarchical and top-down control, it relies on the same logic of disposability and exclusion of that which is not useful to the state and capitalism. It is problem-solving rather than critical research, and treats humans as outward-directed nodes who can easily change behaviour based on promises of re-

ward or threats of punishment, ignoring complex and often conflicting dynamics of meaning, belief, trust, desire and the unconscious.

Neoliberal State, Capital and Cybernetic Governance

Quarantelli's approach to disaster is located in the context of wider transformation of the relationship between the state and capital that began in the late twentieth century. The early twentieth century saw the rise of Fordism which is a centralised and organised form of capitalism, based on mass production and consumption, where the state acts as an organiser and stabiliser for capital. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the development of post-Fordist neoliberal capitalism has led the state to significantly relinquish this role, while at the same time, in developed countries, manufacturing has given way to the service economy and more precarious forms of work (Lash and Urry 1987). With the rise of New Public Management from the 1980s onwards, the autonomy of the professional/included stratum in both public and private institutions was largely lost to managerialists, who embodied a state-capitalist logic with decentralised cybernetic components. Rather than acting as rigid Fordist bureaucrats and taking a top-down universalising approach to managing risks, the 'cadres' of 'the new spirit of capitalism' (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005) were trained to build scenario responses to risk in terms of behavioural nudges, proactive measures, quantification and 'flexibility'—which simultaneously fuels uncertainty, insecurity and panic—as well as authoritarianism and top-down control, despite outwardly appearing to resemble decentralised organisation and endowing social actors with a sense of autonomy. Tere is an issue here, not only that technocratic and managerial authority is undemocratic, but also as revealed by Naomi Klein, the unelected managerial class acts in the interests of capital. Klein coined the term 'disaster capitalism' to refer to the way in which, in all kinds of disasters, powerful people use proxy global recovery agencies at a local level to clear out deprived communities and profitably reconstruct them as neoliberal developments (Klein 2007).

The current public health response to COIVD-19 in the United States and UK might be understood to stem partly from this ethos of population management through micro-political behavioural nudges and incentives, instead of relating to specific individuals with their particular needs (as would be the case in a genuinely decentralised system), or applying general principles (as in a centralised system). In health terms, the shift from Fordist centralised bureaucracy to cybernetic managerialism was reflected in a shift from health as a human right embodied in individuals and enacted (unequally and patchily, but ostensibly universally) through welfare provision to a new discourse of 'public health' focusing on the regulation of aggregates through Foucauldian biopower. This cybernetic view tends to treat the sick as the enemy—or at least as dysfunctional nodes that are disruptive to the functioning of the overall system—to be controlled through authoritarian but decentralised behavioural nudges such as (sometimes vague and confusing) social distancing rules, in which the responsibility for interpreting and successfully following the rules rests with the individual. Take for example the UK government's advice on easing lockdown rules and encouraging a return to work, that individuals ought to 'stay alert' in order to 'control the virus' (Alexander 2020). Health becomes a 'game' which the sick are perceived to have failed—for example the advice to 'wash or sanitise hands frequently' assumes constant access to bathroom facilities, running water and soap which are not always readily avail-

able for homeless people for example, and the ability to purchase sanitiser during a panic-buying crisis when prices are exorbitantly inflated. Neoliberal public health emphasises personal responsibility for health outcomes, mimicking a decentralised approach whilst behind the scenes state, military, industrial and pharmaceutical capitalist technocrats are rigging the game to achieve desired (profitable) outcomes.

To complicate matters somewhat, the current conjecture appears to contain social forces towards a gradual discrediting of neoliberal approaches, which is reinforced in the current crisis by the fact that individual health outcomes also affect third parties. This is leading to a resurgence of public health discourses that are basically totalitarian in character; mimicking the increasing securitisation and militarisation of responses to other crises such as the climate-refugee crisis and the increasing bordering of nations. This may be leading to a recomposition of state and capital in new formations that Benjamin Franks calls 'nationalist capitalism' (Franks 2020: 152) and Ian Bruff calls 'authoritarian neoliberalism' (Bruff 2014). There is a new root discourse emerging—away from 'risk management' towards 'new threats' where problems are cast as starting in disorderly zones on the edges of the world system, then filtering inwards, requiring strengthened borders, 'security' and/or neo-colonialism under the guise of 'militant humanitarianism' (Hannigan 2012: 113). Market logic has also devastated the health services in poorer areas of rich countries, so that whereas the margins were once associated with 'tropical' or Third-World areas, one increasingly finds the 'margins' within the core—for example poverty-stricken black communities in post-Katrina New Orleans (Davis 2005). Nevertheless, the new discourse shares the same 'social capital' (Putnam 1993) assumption that the state provides order, cohesion and security to civilised society whilst mobilising its creative energy, and disease and disorder come from a chaotic or barbaric 'outside' or 'elsewhere', in a denial and disavowal of the devastation caused by withdrawing capital, and the knock-on effect for highly interconnected global health outcomes (Davis 2020). This view might be termed 'associationalist' as it assumes that the affairs of society can be managed through voluntary and democratically self-governing associations, and that there is a high degree of complementarity in the association between these groups and the state.

Associationalist views are very prominent in disaster research, the argument usually being that societies with greater social capital are better able to prepare for and mitigate the effects of disasters, and that states can mobilise social capital in their organisation of recovery efforts (e.g. Mathbor 2007; Nakagawa and Shaw 2004; Aldrich 2012). The explicit monetisation of social bonds inherent in the idea of 'social capital' coincided with transformations in ideas around the structure and purpose of both left- and right-wing governments in the UK and United States embodied in initiatives like the Obama administration's 'Open Government Initiative' and David Cameron's 'Big Society', both of which encouraged more socially active citizenry and dispersal of information through an ethos of 'transparency' and decentralisation of knowledge, and the 'co-production of government services and democracy' (The Invisible Committee 2014: 103–4). When society and the state are seen as complimentary and mutually supporting, only the sections of 'civil society' that are legible to the state and it can capitalise upon and control are seen as 'social capital'. Other social forces are a threat to be controlled—through recuperation or repression. This links to disaster policy through the idea of 'risk society' (Beck 2002) where the role of the state is to distribute risk in a similar way in which it distributes welfare. This led to a discourse of 'vulnerability' and 'resilience'. These are often seen as conflicting discourses, with 'vulnerability' cast as a social democratic discourse seeking the redistribution of risks and welfare to reduce

structural inequalities which unfairly expose poorer, racialised and other marginalised communities to hazard; whereas 'resilience' is associated with smaller government and the privatisation of risk alongside the need for individuals and communities to take responsibility for their own exposure to shocks and recovery (Neocleous 2013). Really these discourses are two sides of the same coin, promoting an associationalist public ideology of vulnerable private citizens in need of the state to provide cohesion and help, in return for which they form civil associations which support governance through 'social capital', which renders political radicalism, solidarity and resistance to the state illegible—community action is either something the state can quite explicitly capitalise on as social reproduction and 'resilience' to shocks; or it is a threat to be controlled and suppressed.

These dominant academic and policy discourses in disaster studies and public health are being mobilised in the current crisis around COVID-19. They are important for our purposes here because they shape the policy, social and cultural context within which radical social forces like disaster anarchism and mutual aid operate. Since the rise of disaster studies in the 1950s, we have seen a growing trend for the state to rely on spontaneous community responses to compensate for its growing incapacity and indifference, and to manipulate media and social media to relay messages in the interests of repressive social control and behavioural nudging. At the same time, cybernetic capitalism with underpinnings in behavioural psychology has sought to securitise, quantify, privatise and scenario-build disaster response through a model that increasingly relies on an authoritarian and technocratic global policy-field (Hannigan 2012). This is incredibly profitable for private financial, development and insurance agencies (Klein 2007) but violently disempowering and dispossessive of grassroots democratic forces and movements (Solnit 2010). These dynamics reduce the capacity for social insurrection or revolution and can have a de-radicalising effect on social movements. At the forefront of the antiauthoritarian resistance, we have seen the rise of a widespread international preparedness movement drawing on mutual aid, affinity, solidarity and associated anarchist and autonomist concepts, in particular a proliferation of self-defined 'mutual aid' disaster relief movements. However, as we have already seen, state-centred discourse tends to treat people cooperating for mutual aid as a convenient source of energy to marshal temporarily for community relief action, in the interests of returning to the more 'normal' state of competitive individualism and the functioning circulation of capital. Forms of behavioural nudging are reinforced in media and social media, which many non-radical citizens are inclined to accept. The anarchist Gustav Landauer argued that the state is not only an external state of oppression, but also 'a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships' (Landauer 1911: 141). The middle classes and more privileged sections of society are more likely to embody the logic of the state and to act as agents of the state because they stand to benefit more, they are less likely to need mutual aid from others, and also because the kinds of 'classed practices' discussed in Chap. 3 endow them with more rigid character structures that compel them to separate from and attempt to dominate those perceived as less civilised (Reich 1911; Cudworth and Hobden 2018). In the following sections, I will consider various ways in which anarchists respond to and resist this game-rigging by attempting to situate mutual aid in a wider structural critique of capitalism and resistance to securitisation and social control.

Mutual Aid in Anarchist Theory

Mutual aid is a radical concept with a long history in the anarchist tradition of thought and practice, and is particularly associated with the work of Peter Kropotkin. A vital focus of anarchist theory is the ability to distinguish between authoritarian and anti- or non-authoritarian forms of life. In his seminal treatise on the historical rise of the state, Kropotkin (1897) argues that both reformists and revolutionaries (including Marxists and other vanguardist radicals) seeking to seize state powers are misguided, because the very essence of the state hinders the possibility of equal and free society. It is the 'extinction of local life', the seizure of local institutions for the benefit of dominant minorities, the imposition of servitude before the law and conformity of social roles within institutions. During the process of the rise of the state (which Kropotkin, similar to contemporary world systems analyst Immanuel Wallerstein, situates in the Middle Ages) people are deprived of liberties, and obliged to forget social ties based on free agreement in favour of a system where the state alone is legitimised to create union between subjects. All relationships are mediated by the 'triple alliance' of state, church and military which take on a monopoly in the task of 'watching over the industrial commercial, judicial, artistic, emotional interests' (Kropotkin 1897: 33) for which people used to unite directly. The state demands from each subject 'a direct, personal submission without intermediaries' (Ibid: 48). The political principle is 'the principle that destroys everything' and in the end, 'it is death' (Ibid: 49–59). The state is a technology of transcendental control, measurement and unification which treats people and knowledges as commensurable, therefore exchangeable, and thus creates the conditions for capitalist inequality. This account of the rise of the state as a violent process of dispossession, enclosure and destruction of communal folk knowledge in the interests of transcendental control and commensurability has been echoed and developed from feminist and postcolonial standpoints (Federici 2004; Mies 1986). The perspective of state and capital is linked to the objectification of nature as a machine rather than an organism, in a root metaphor that sanctions domination: of women, workers, animals and the environment (Merchant 1980). Similarly, open and autonomous Marxists (e.g. Hardt and Antonio Negri 2001; De Angelis 2007) and World Systems analysts (Wallerstein 2004; Amin 1990) view the state as an essentially irredeemable form of capital, or a particular alienated form of social life which reifies the political just like any other commodity and has functions which serve the interests of capital.

This literature overlaps with anarchist, eco-anarchist and communalist critiques that welfare creates dependencies which support consumerism, and deny autonomy and self-determination. Unlike classical Marxists who believe forces of production determine all other relations including the state, anarchists, open and autonomous Marxists focus on the dual role of state and capital as linked agents of alienation, with national governments supporting market expansion through colonisation and extractivism in order to secure political domination—requiring a dyadic vertical relation to the state and decomposition of horizontal social associations: people, their environments and their time become commensurable objects. The state permits people to relate only through its own mediation, which organises the people through division of labour to meet the needs of the market. In planning and preparedness, the idea that a transcendental or 'god's-eye' view is essential for coordinated action has been central to modernist democratic and technocratic projects. Standardised rules and data make local conditions 'legible' to agencies of control, but they remove control from people, which devalues local knowledge and disempowers grassroots agency (Scott 1998).

Mutual aid is the practical and economic expression of the social principle. It involves 'solidarity not charity' and seeks social change through direct action rather than reform (Spade 2020). Rather than the alienated transactional relationship assumed between professional NGO workers and 'victim', 'survivor', 'client' or 'served' communities, mutual aid presumes an equal footing—a shared empathy and humanity that means each party benefits from the relationship based on a reciprocal gift exchange (Mauss 1925). The practice aims to prefigure new affective life worlds by recomposing social bonds and community rather than reproducing commodified power relationships whilst creating self-management and autonomy by meeting needs directly. In anarchist theory, mutual aid is a highly politicised phenomenon which links the pleasure and joy of non-hierarchical relationships with structural critiques of capitalism and the state, by illustrating that another world is possible, and practicing it in the here-and-now. While the idea of mutual aid has been applied and advocated within everyday life by anarchists for more than a century, the idea comes into its own in the context of disasters—and in the contemporary risk-addled and disaster-prone zeitgeist, mutual aid groups are popping up at an innumerable rate. Anarchists tend to see capitalism as a disaster anyway—and mutual aid is a small-scale, everyday practice that anyone can take part in, which alleviates problems directly whilst also drawing attention to the ways in which disasters ranging from climate related extreme weather events to biological disease tend to impact unequally on the most oppressed groups in society, who are frequently left to fend for themselves by the state. Proponents of direct-action refuse to separate means from ends and insist that we do not have to wait until tomorrow, or for state recognition, to start improving the world. Mutual aid is a prefigurative and political practice which involves helping ourselves and others directly by creating a new society in the shell of the old (Ward 1973; Gordon 2009).

Mutual Aid Disaster Relief

The first major anarchist-inspired relief efforts to hit the headlines were in the United States, including Common Ground Collective after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005 (crow 2014) and Occupy Sandy which assisted victims of Hurricane Sandy, which hit northeast United States in October 2012 (Firth forthcoming; Bondesson 2017). Mutual aid was happening in communities anyway, but Occupy Sandy drew upon the volunteers, latent skills, networks and platforms of the erstwhile Occupy Wall Street movement to mobilise an incredibly effective relief effort and provided an organisational infrastructure and a way for volunteers who were not already members of existing communities to join the effort. Occupy Sandy illustrated in practice that self-organised networks with low bureaucracy create faster and easier connections than bureaucratic organisations, giving them greater speed, flexibility and connectedness. They also effectively mobilised internet technology and social media, such as Google Docs, Facebook and Twitter to spread news, garner donations and mobilise volunteers, as well as using the Amazon 'gift list' facility, usually used for wedding gifts, to mobilise donations of essential items such as blankets and torches from donors worldwide (Garber 2012). Occupy Sandy was widely acknowledged even in mainstream media to have organised relief more effectively than federal agencies or NGOs (Cornish et al. 2014; Marom 2012). Conversely, the official state and NGO-led effort following Sandy was widely perceived as a failure and produced public anger. Donor agendas led to burdensome bureaucratic requirements which impeded effective projects (Halbfnger 2012). In

short, mutual aid is not only an authentic and pleasurable way of relating, it can also be a highly efficient way of providing relief in emergency situations, even in conventional terms.

Since Occupy Sandy in 2012, decentralised, anarchist-inspired mutual aid disaster relief efforts have arisen after nearly every major hurricane in the United States (e.g. Anon 2020a) and recently in the United States, longer-term preparedness networks, such as Mutual Aid Disaster Relief, have started to form, offering ongoing communications platforms, skill shares and training (Mutual Aid Disaster Relief 2020). Anarchist-inspired, autonomous and non-hierarchical movements have also mobilised disaster relief efforts in other countries, for example the self-managed autonomous brigades in Mexico after 2017 earthquakes (Anon 2019), grassroots village solidarity networks in Indonesia after the 2004 tsunamis (Jon and Purcell 2018), anarchist responses to Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines in 2013 (Anon 2013, 2014) and self-management and direct action against the militarisation of disaster zones after earthquakes in Italy in 2012 and 2009 (Anon 2012a, b).

It is important to note that mutual aid is two things at once. Mutual aid is something that happens in communities anyway—during disasters and during the ongoing disaster of capitalism. It has particular roots in black and working-class communities; however, they may not always choose to term it 'mutual aid' (Zuri 2020). 'Mutual aid' is thus an epistemological concept that can be used to understand a social phenomenon that would exist aside from what anarchists and other radicals decide to call it. In anarchist theory, 'mutual aid' is also a normative concept—it is something to be valued, nurtured, furthered, supported and promoted by anarchists as a fundamental part of their ideology. This phenomenon has been labelled, politicised and valorised in other ways too, for example in the United States The Black Panther Party often used the terminology of 'community social programmes', which led to a somewhat different emphasis to anarchism, particularly on the racialised aspects of oppression and exclusion, but has not prevented former Black Panther members forming projects in solidarity and alliance with anarchists, such as the Common Ground Collective hurricane relief movement after Katrina in 2005 (crow 2014). Similarly, autonomists have tended to emphasise the classed aspects of oppression and autonomy from capitalism, but in practice many projects and solidarities exist with anarchists. Anarchists are against all forms of authoritarianism and domination, including racism and classism so their ideology works well with other anti-authoritarian movements. There is a common trope, recently repeated by Donald Trump in reference to the Black Lives Matter movement, that anarchists appropriate black and working-class movements, or they are 'outside agitators' who bring violence to protests. This trope serves to undermine historical solidarities between these movements, falsely stereotypes anarchist movements as predominantly white and middle class and acts as form of erasure of the existence of many black and working-class anarchists (Beauchamp 2020). It also serves to undermine the ways in which violence in protests and riots is often secondary, stemming from police repression of communities trying to meet their own needs through mutual aid (Robinson and Starodub 2018: 261). Therefore, while mutual aid is an incredibly effective and practical resource, it is also a radical concept and is linked to a wide-ranging critique of capitalism, racism, patriarchy and ecological domination in anarchist movements. In the following sections I will consider some of the reactions by anarchists to the COVID-19 crisis.

Mutual Aid and COVID-19

In many ways, the COVID-19 crisis and the anarchist response are similar to previous mobilisations around disasters. Similarly to environmental disasters, the communities most likely to need mutual aid are those that are hit hardest by the pandemic. In disaster research, communities identified as 'vulnerable' are those with longstanding patterns of poverty and deprivation, caused by structural factors such as inequality and austerity. Existing patterns of discrimination such as race, gender and class are likely to render people more vulnerable to a pandemic, just as they would to an earthquake or hurricane. Mutual aid tends to occur through a collaboration of radical activists who have been involved in previous actions, alongside spontaneous action that arises in communities. As a longstanding movement, current anarchist actions and projects are tied to a shared history and political culture and mobilise pre-existing networks of activists and resources. There may even be considerable overlap of people involved. This means that similar political language, organising models, skills and technologies are used, drawing on the knowledge and experience of those involved.

However, the current crisis also presents a very different context, and as such some challenges to conventional anarchist organising and models of mutual aid. COVID-19 represents an entirely new and different kind of disaster and threat to others experienced within most Western anarchists' lifetimes. In the past, mutual aid and prefigurative anarchist actions have tended to encourage face-to-face meetings and action and have conflated physical and social closeness (Firth 2012). The current context presents the challenge of an invisible contagious virus, which although it might impact more heavily on vulnerable people at a population level, potentially affects everyone, and can also be spread by everyone. Tis forms the basis of various 'social distancing' policies and recommendations put in place by governments and other institutions to reduce the spread of the virus through close physical contact. These measures range from the wearing of medical or home-made masks, to standing two meters apart from other people in public, reducing time spent outside the house, avoiding meeting or visiting relatives or friends from other households, and in some countries there has been a need for official documentation in order to leave one's own home. Not all anarchists are on board with all of the recommendations, and critiques will be considered in more detail below. However, a context where social distancing is backed up by heavy policing and diffuse social pressure will have an impact on all anarchists' activities whether they agree or not and is likely to make the traditionally face-to-face, tactile and physical nature of mutual aid incredibly different. A pandemic also lacks the suddenness of traditional disaster work, since the agent (a virus) is much more 'complex and diffusive' and more likely to cause chronic and long-term issues (Hannigan 2012: 13–14) requiring groups to plan and sustain action over a longer timeframe. This slower pace affords some benefits: 'unlike terror attacks or natural disasters, the slow burn of the pandemic allows space for critical discussions to take place as the situation unfolds' (Donaghey 2020).

Furthermore, while there has been a growing anarchist-inspired global movement around disasters ensuing from climate-related extreme weather events, some parts of the world that are not usually affected by extreme weather events or other environmental disasters, for example the UK, have until now seen very little action related to mutual aid disaster relief. Networks and groups are being formed and having to learn skills and organising techniques from scratch. Unsurprisingly, while they draw on the history of anarchist thought and practice, movements mobilising around the pandemic have had to adapt and also exhibit some differences to those that

have previously arisen in response to weather, climate and seismic events. This is unsurprising given the differences in context: COVID-19 is a disease, a biological phenomenon affecting human health directly, rather than an environmental phenomenon affecting humans through the more visible social mediation of infrastructure collapse— although the threat of this is also an ever-present feature of the crisis, with healthcare systems particularly at risk, alongside concerns over the supply of food and essential items. COVID-19 is much more global in its effects than even the largest scale environmental emergencies, except perhaps climate change, although in some ways this difference is redundant since anarchists tend to view local problems and political activity as interconnected and inseparable from larger structural dynamics—for example Occupy Sandy provided hurricane relief whilst raising awareness of the link between extreme weather events and climate change (Solnit 2012), and COVID-19 has shown us that the vastly unequal health outcomes between rich and poor are also connected (Solnit 2020).

At the time of writing the first draft of this chapter, just over two months since the virus emerged in China, and a matter of weeks since its spread was declared a pandemic and it arrived in my home town London, dozens of mutual aid groups had already started to spring up. At the time of editing and revising the draft, in mid-May 2020, there are more than forty groups in London, organised into hundreds of sub-groups (Freedom News 2020a), and there are over 1000 throughout the UK (Lynch and Khoo 2020). In the UK and United States, the focus of the movement appears to be a proliferation of self-described 'mutual aid' groups. These seem to have branched out well beyond customary anarchist circles and have entered mainstream consciousness. Even the American teenage magazine *Teen Vogue* has taken an anarchist stance, adopting the concept of mutual aid, and explicitly citing Kropotkin, to encourage its young readers to ensure the survival of their communities in the midst of the shortcomings and failure of political and economic systems, whilst also critiquing the authoritarian overstep of the Trump administration (Diavolo 2020).

The mutual aid movement is international and there are examples of radical action from every continent. Mutual aid groups have mobilised throughout Canada and the United States (Anon 2020b). Examples of mutual aid in the United States have included disabled activists who have produced coronavirus kits for homeless people in Oakland, California (Green 2020). Throughout the United States there are Prisoner and Migrant Detention Phone Zaps (Anon 2020b) intended to check that prisoners are being offered proper care and to overwhelm prison calling facilities with demands for increased social and healthcare rights for detainees (fight-toxic-prisons.org). Many groups have also arisen in Germany (listing.org); and there are ongoing efforts in Poland (Enough14 2020a). In Spain many grassroots organisations have arisen that were not involved in politics before, supported by the networks, knowledge and infrastructure of previous movements, including 15 M, antiracist, feminist and migrant movements (Martinez 2020). Movements have arisen in Brazil to support precarious cultural workers (Holanda and Lima 2020) and in Haiti to protect miners from exploitation (Delorus 2020). In Delhi, India, civil society actors including NGO and social workers engaged in extra-institutional direct action to resist state violence against oppressed Muslim minorities and to co-ordinate the supply of food and medicine to communities in need (Mohanty 2020). In China, examples include a group of women who have online support group for women affected by domestic violence (Bau 2020). A movement in Singapore, PinkDot, which is usually associated with protest has directed its community work inward for COVID-19, delivering care packages to LGBT activists in need (Ng 2020).

It is notable that while some of these mutual aid groups arose from pre-existing anarchist networks, others arose from non-anarchist leftist movements or from institutionalised civil society reconfiguring their actions to embrace a more direct style of action, more usually associated with anarchism, but without necessarily taking on the label of anarchist. Some, but not all, use the term 'mutual aid', and not all who use this term are anarchist, and some are unaware that the concept originates in anarchist thought. In what follows, I largely focus on the UK movement, and particularly London, where I live, and in line with the focus on the UK policy context in previous chapters. There are many parallels between the movement in London and further afield, in particular the UK and US movements seem to draw on very similar organisational models and discourse. Anarchism is a truly international movement, which does not recognise the authority of the nation state and places emphasis on local action tied to global critique. Therefore, it does not make sense to bound 'case studies' by national borders, as one might in a more conventional sociological or political analysis. Therefore, where appropriate, I have also drawn on examples from further afield to illustrate the range and variety of actions taking place. There are clearly differences in context between countries and cultures and one cannot seek to generalise too far, yet there is wider relevance and parallels with movements elsewhere.

Dean Spade (2020: 136) argues that resistant left movements model three kinds of action that directly change material conditions: '(a) work to dismantle harmful systems … (b) work to directly provide for people targeted by such systems … and (c) work to build an alternative infrastructure through which people can get their needs met'. Mutual aid addresses (b) but as has been argued above this alone is not sufficient to end capitalism and create a society without hierarchies and borders. In what follows, I will consider some of the actions that anarchists have undertaken during the COVID-19 crisis that address Spade's criteria (a) and (c), whilst adding a fourth practice, which is not often covered under the rubric of action but ought to be: (d) publishing critique—in particular, I focus on anarchist critiques of securitisation and policing in the COVID-19 crisis, and anarchist critiques of capitalism. The publishing of propaganda and critique has a long and often hidden history in anarchist movement practice (Hoyt 2014; Ferretti 2017) and it is important because it helps to raise awareness of, and identify targets for, the other modes of action. Anarchist critiques during the COVID-19 crisis have largely been online, on blogs and social media, but also through word-of-mouth and exemplary actions while engaging in mutual aid with communities.

In London, the mutual aid groups are organising a very wide range of relief and support work, generally focused around social care. There is a mutual aid group for each local borough, and these are divided by borough, zone and neighbourhood. There are also some London-wide networks and groups that co-ordinate or provide forums for people with specific interests, for example a Radical Assembly which provides a forum for radical left-wing and anarchist organisers, many of whom are dissatisfied with the lack of politicisation in their local ward. Local groups are composed of local community members helping others who are more vulnerable or who need to self-isolate to avoid spreading illness with tasks such as picking up and delivering groceries, medicines and other essentials, offering transportation to medical facilities, offering donations such as cleaning supplies, medical supplies and food for out-of-work people, offering home cooked meals, home/apartment cleaning, offering phone calls, video chats and companionship, online entertainment such as yoga or dance classes, advice and advocacy navigating services, child care and pet care. Anarchists have also been involved in direct actions such as making masks, sewing scrubs and garnering donations of PPE for medical professionals. Similar to Oc-

cupy Sandy, these groups are utilising open source and internet technology, including Google docs with listing of groups, and being used by groups to organise resources, crowd-sourced lists of activities and initiatives, resource guides, webinars, slack channels, online meetups, peer-to-peer loan programmes and other forms of mutual aid emerging online and on-the-ground (Raymond 2020).

The mainstream perspective on disaster relief in general, and the coronavirus epidemic in particular, assumes that humans are selfish and competitive and are in need of a coordinating authority to tell them what to do. Mutual aid turns the conservative idea of the 'disaster utopia' on its head, positing that it is not a momentary suspension of division that leads communities to unite in mutual aid, but that this illustrates an alternative lifeworld that is normally hindered by the minorities in power and by media hegemonies (Solnit 2010: 8–9).

An interesting perspective on the current crisis is that Kropotkin's original treatise on mutual aid was in large partly a critique of the then fashionable 'social Darwinism' of the anarchist's conservative contemporaries. Kropotkin's idea that co-operation helps species thrive more than competition seems ever-more relevant as an alternative perspective in the current conjecture where our Conservative government have been accused of openly Darwinist ideas of 'herd immunity' (Malnick 2020) and pursuing policy lines based around ideas of 'survival of the fittest'. Millstein defines mutual aid as 'collective care' involving 'making sure everyone can take time of work, have a home and enough food, stay hydrated and wash their hands, not feel alone or abandoned, receive health and other care' (Milstein 2020). Commentators have remarked how incredible it is that 'basic bonds of solidarity, empathy and altruism' have remained intact in the UK despite a decade of austerity and political polarisation (Quarshie 2020). Similar to Kropotkin, contemporary anarchists have linked their mutual aid to a radical structural critique of both the authoritarian nature of the state, and the unequal, competitive and exploitative nature of capitalism, for example an activist involved in cooperation Birmingham links the activities of their solidarity kitchen to a crisis of food poverty which has been ongoing since the 2008 crisis, resulting in the widespread use of foodbanks. The author-activist argues that food aid will become one of the most pressing concerns for the working class as we slip into recession again due to COVID-19. The food bank system is critiqued as a form of bureaucratic violence, since applicants are required to engage with a third-sector system who have a huge amount of control over the lives of the working class, who are required to explain their needs and justify themselves to paid professionals who act as gate-keepers for eligibility. This is seen to be part of a deliberate strategy of disempowerment of the working class enacted by both Tories and new Labour. It is argued that anarchists have a huge role to play in leading a radical counter-narrative of working-class empowerment and solidarity, and they argue that the popularity of the solidarity kitchen, providing over 150 free vegan meals a day, with demand far in excess of this, pays testament to the need for a political project to combat food poverty, which should operate on multiple levels: 'Both redistribution projects but also projects creating the conditions for autonomous production'. Such a project would involve not only direct provision through mutual aid, but also challenging land rights, completely re-thinking how farming and agriculture, and radically re-shaping supply chains (Yarrow Way 2020).

In the context of crises of capitalism, understanding mutual aid gets to the very heart of the nature of the relationship between state, capital and society. As described in Chap. 1, in terms of the social/political principle, the very definition of the state for anarchists is that it is parasitic of the creative energies of society. COVID-19 is exposing the fragility of capital, at the same time

as capitalists are attempting to mobilise the crisis in their interests, at least partially through the technologies of the state. Radicals would argue that mutual aid and associated social responses to the pandemic are forms of social recomposition that are essentially in conflict with state and capital. The state/capital formation has at its disposal a repertoire of actions at its disposal for dealing with mutual aid, ranging from securitised and militarised lockdown rules effectively preventing the possibility of mutual aid; to a more laissez-faire neoliberal approach backed up by economic stimulus which might encourage mutual aid to flourish. From the anarchist view both stimulus and securitisation are two sides of the same coin designed to protect the needs of capital by stopping people from revolting in insurrection and/or engaging in exodus from the system by meeting their own needs though social recomposition. However, the controversy rests in the extent to which mutual aid is a radical practice that acts *against* these state-capital formations, rather than being benign or even complicit in supporting them, filling in gaps and mitigating failures. Mutual aid is in fact very convenient for governments and capitalists alike, because it creates social support systems reliant on free volunteer time, where state services are withdrawn—allowing for social and labour reproduction to continue in the midst of austerity, tax cuts for the rich and the decimation of public services. In the UK, this was even quite openly articulated as conservative policy, in the terms of David Cameron's 'Big Society' vision (Quarshie 2020) and has become part of the neoliberal, decentralising consensus. Assuming that authentic anti-authoritarian desire is possible, the political and discursive context has implications for how disaster anarchists and other radicals might seek to act during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This 'social capital' trope reappears in the liberal-Left media on COVID-19, for example Raymond (2020) rehearses phraseology of 'vulnerability' (the assumption that it is communities that are fragile, not capitalism) and 'resilience' (the idea that it is the responsibility of lower level communities to recover from higher-level shocks, inflicted upon them by the policies of states and inequalities of capitalism—with emphasis on recovery rather than resistance or transformation). From this perspective, mutual aid is not radical, but rather creates temporary 'lifelines' for 'when government falls short', yet ultimately mutual aid is complicit with the state insofar as it has the function of restoring the normal running of things—even if the author would rather have a somewhat more social democratic, rather than neoliberal state. Rather than seeking resistance to a destructive and authoritarian complicity between state and capital, Raymond proclaims that 'it's unfortunate that those in power are unwilling to step up adequately' (Raymond 2020). From the perspective of reformist social democratic and left-liberal approaches, local movements are lauded insofar as they embody flexible and responsive local knowledge—but at the same time there is a contradictory desire to control them. Associationalist views can often come across as quite critical— for example Naomi Klein is able to critique the dispossession of communities by disaster capitalists using shock doctrine neoliberalism; yet her alternatives rely on Keynesian economic stimulus and the cooptation of social movements into a state-led social democratic consensus (Klein 2007). Anarchists and other radicals might argue that all state responses are two sides to the same coin—the choice whether to co-opt through economic stimulus and capture movements or control/repress through securitisation is always there.

The state has tried to control previous anarchist movements and community responses to disasters through severe repression. For example, after Hurricane Katrina, John Clark lists forms of oppression ranging from covert or structural violence to outright police brutality, unfair evictions, denial of prisoners' rights, de facto ethnic cleansing, mistreatment and exploitation of migrant labour (Clark 2013: 206; see also crow 2014). Tere has also been evidence of repression

against anarchists already in the COVID-19 crisis, for example the eviction of the 'Pie 'n' Mash Squat Café' in London, which was at the time attempting to reorganise as a donation and distribution mutual aid centre. It was evicted despite the space being some people's homes, some of whom claimed to be attempting to self-isolate for public safety (Freedom News 2020b). Making people homeless during a pandemic where people are being told to 'stay at home' seems a particularly ferocious act of repression.

The state has also tried to depoliticise and de-radicalise movements through co-optation into existing organised state and institutional forms; for example claiming that mutual aid movements are apolitical and are compatible with state efforts and revising policies to attempt to incorporate them into official efforts. During Occupy Sandy, the department for Homeland Security heavily surveilled the movement, as shown in my forthcoming research, activists said they were aware of state agent surveillance and derailing of meetings during the relief process (Firth forthcoming; Smith 2014). The US Department of Homeland Security later wrote a report recommending that the actions of grassroots movements are integrated into a 'Whole Community Response', involving funding, institutionalisation and bureaucratic control of movements (Ambinder et al. 2013). This is against the very spirit of mutual aid, which is characterised by anti-authoritarian horizontal organising, anti-bureaucracy and reciprocal help—meaning no formal separation between helpers and helped. While some people may be stronger or more privileged in certain situations and therefore appear to be providing more help, the premise is that they might expect help in return if they were in a similar situation of need, and that they belong to the community that they are contributing to, rather than belonging to an alienated class of professional charity workers.

There is already evidence that state workers, professional bureaucrats and party politicians are trying to co-opt and de-radicalise mutual aid efforts in London. One activist writes of their decision to disengage with the St Peter's Ward COVID-19 mutual aid group due to a takeover by 'councilors, ex-councilors, higher-ups in NGOs and Labour Party organisers'. The author did not believe their actions to be ill-intentioned, but argued they showed a 'deliberate and willful disregard for the basic principles of mutual aid'. This involved actions such as locking WhatsApp groups to new members, insisting on leading decisions about dividing up coverage areas (citing experience of canvassing for elections), insisting on formal leadership structures with no democratic process, holding up decisions and shutting down conversations about organisational structure. Discussions about potentially more confrontational radical actions such as eviction resistance and rent striking were derailed and shut down, and there was a discussion of working with the council, including having requests for help administered through the council for 'safeguarding' reasons and insisting that volunteers are DBS checked. When the activist tried to remind the group of the principles of grassroots mutual aid, they were accused of 'politicising' a situation during a time when people should come together to help, however as they quite rightly argue in the article 'a mutual aid network during a time of crisis is already highly political…The liberal left has always tried to deflect criticism by accusing others of being inappropriately political, but this is only because their mode of politics is what they see as "normal", and therefore not political' (Rogers 2020).

Another activist raises similar concerns based on their experience of local councilors from the Labour Party purposefully trying to sabotage the mutual aid networks. The activist claims to have observed the same dynamics across many different groups throughout London and the UK more generally and observes that the form of disruption is similar in each case: 'a local councilor

joins a locally organised WhatsApp group and begins to post confusing and/or condescending messages discouraging self-organised action, and trying to assert council control' (Spender 2020). The criticisms and derailing of autonomous action usually revolve around issues of safeguarding, including the obvious problems of using open access spreadsheets to organise deliveries to individuals' addresses who may not want their information to be in the public domain, amongst other issues. However, the 'officials' are ignoring the fact that grassroots activist groups are already providing information, training sessions and resources on this issue (see e.g. COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK 2020). Spender provides a screenshot of a conversation where the councilor attempts to talk from a position of authority about how the energy of the grassroots movement needs to be 'captured and managed in a responsible way' (Spender 2020) illustrating explicitly and vividly the way in which the logic of the state inserts itself into the self-organised affairs of ordinary people and attempts to co-opt, mediate and alienate their energies. Indeed, it appears that the UK government has incorporated the expectation of people providing mutual aid in their communities into its official social care policy for 'extremely vulnerable' people who have been told to undertake an extreme form of social isolation called 'shielding' and are informed that they can have their needs met by taking personal responsibility for reaching out to 'community groups':

> Ask family, friends and neighbours to support you and use online services. If this is not possible, then the public sector, business, charities, and the general public are gearing up to help those advised to stay at home. Please discuss your daily needs during this period of staying at home with carers, family, friends, neighbours or local community groups to see how they can support you. (Public Health England 2020).

It is not only the state which anarchists fear inserting itself into their affairs in an attempt to co-opt and de-radicalise their activities. Another anarchist from Birmingham cites 'public shitty bad-mouthing' from a cohort of Labour party members and representatives, including not only local councilors in official roles, but also a well-meaning but ultimately reformist middle class whose sense of entitlement prompts them to attempt to lead working-class movements in pursuit of selfish careerist goals and self-promotion, and through a sense nurtured by privilege that working-class movements cannot organise themselves (Anon 2020c).

The vanguardist assumption that working-class movements need outside leaders hails not only from reformist positions. It is a common trope within some forms of classical Marxism along with the Lacanian post Marxist Left to criticise anarchist mutual aid projects for mimicking the organisational forms of capital—for example, anarchist networks are argued to mirror and to be easily (or always already) co-opted within the supposedly networked and decentralised structures of neoliberalism (e.g. Harvey 2000). Alternatively, they are too disorganised, local and particular to effect real change and deal with global problems in the absence of a centralised global authority (e.g. Zizek 2020). Ostensibly radical theorists have argued that mutual aid projects simply compensate for the austerity and withdrawal of the welfare state by performing relief work for free, and risk reproducing ideology and buttressing the interests of the wealthy and corporate sector (Chomsky 2013; Illner 2018). From these perspectives, the co-optation and de-radicalisation of anarchist mutual aid projects into the logic of the neoliberal state are no surprise. These thinkers call for anarchists to take a more politically conscious approach and allow themselves to be led by vanguards, or otherwise to form strategic coalitions.

Many anarchist activists and academics have disputed the complicity of anarchists and mutual aid in neoliberalism. Jon Bigger argues that providing social care for elderly neighbours is rad-

ical and revolutionary, because it may involve saving the lives of people that Tories don't care about (Bigger 2020). Rather than reproducing capitalism, mutual aid rather tends to reproduce life—potentially radical life—that is either disposable or a burden to capitalism. Whilst it may compensate for the withdrawal of the state, this does not mean that the state would step in in the absence of mutual aid groups, rather, people, mostly working class or otherwise marginalised, would simply suffer and die. An anonymous activist author decries co-optation by middle-class Labour voters, arguing that the very success of mutual aid lies in reaching huge swathes of vulnerable people, creating an incredible community-led safety net, and showing 'ourselves, the general public and even actual Labour voters that we don't need parties or states. We don't need anyone' (Anon 2020c). In order to understand the radicalism of anarchist mutual aid, it is important to consider it as part of a much wider repertoire of anarchist action, which sometimes brings anarchists into direct conflict with state agencies. At the same time, it is important to note that while the term 'mutual aid' derives from anarchist theory, many activists in the current conjecture see themselves neither as part of an elite vanguard, nor as part of a broader anarchist movement, but merely as normal people helping their communities—as such, they are probably better understood in Colin Ward's terms as 'anarchy in action' (Ward 1973). Nonetheless, the links to more confrontational forms of action help to refute arguments that mutual aid reproduces neoliberal austerity, allowing consideration of how anarchist theory might inform actions to resist the de-radicalisation of mutual aid.

Anarchist Actions Beyond Mutual Aid

Anarchists have called for mutual aid networks to engage in radical actions beyond simply providing food and care, particularly in actions that might be understood as forms of strike, refusal and protest or insurrection, potentially speaking to all three of Spade's criteria of (a) dismantle, (b) provide directly and (c) create infrastructure. This has included mobilising against repression to defend the homes and lives of those facing eviction, whilst also opening up empty buildings through squatting in order to provide safe spaces for homeless people to shelter and self-isolate. These actions are similar to mutual aid insofar as they follow the anarchist ethos of 'ask nothing, demand nothing' yet with the added concomitant to 'occupy and resist' these actions involve seizing 'property' and therefore bring anarchists into a much more direct confrontation with capital (F. 2020). In the UK, most actions in this category relate to occupying property and rent strikes. For example, informal unions have called for new members to join to support rent strikes during the pandemic, when many precarious workers are left unable to pay rent (London Renters Union 2020). On Mayday, squatters from across the UK coordinated a series of decentralised actions to highlight their plight and to address their needs—actions included occupying commercial and residential buildings, banner-drops in support of squatters facing eviction, occupying land to repurpose as open public space and to grow food (The Resi-Rectors 2020). Casting an eye on international examples, one finds a wider array of actions. Examples include students in Ohio and Massachusetts collectively rioting against police and occupied buildings when evicted from their accommodation, as some had no idea where they would go (Anon 2020d, e). Anarchists have been vocal in their support for wildcat strikes, 'sick-outs' and job actions in response to being forced to work (Anon 2020f), including workers expected to continue when one of their assembly-line co-workers already had to quarantine (Jones 2020). Anarchists have also expressed

support for inmates in 30 Italian prisons who rioted and revolted—including many who escaped, and anarchist publications have translated reports from the frontlines of these struggles that otherwise would have not been covered in English-speaking media (Anon 2020g), whilst anarchists have also brought attention to prisoners' hunger strikes (Anon 2020f). Another form of refusal acts against surveillance and identification, and anarchists have raised the possibility that the normalisation of mask wearing may raise possibilities for anonymity and a feeling of security leading to an increased ability to act in public in 'covert and cheerful situations' (Round Robin 2020). Indeed, the current scientific advice that even non-medical masks are to a degree effective in preventing spread of the virus has brought to the surface the conflict between the state's duty to protect its citizens, and its desire to repress and control them—exemplified during German Mayday protests, where the wearing of masks is illegal (Oltermann 2020).

The anarchist tradition also overlaps with and in some cases encompasses the social ecology and degrowth traditions, who have a future oriented vision of decentralising but federated organisations and sustainable technologies, yet seeking action through mobilising groups and forces in the present (Bookchin 1971). This intellectual tradition has a practical aspect, including longer-term, committed projects such as intentional communities, eco-villages, co-operatives permaculture and transition towns. These speak to Spade's third criterion, (c), on building alternative infrastructure. Similar to the broader anarchist movement, these groups aim to inspire and extol action that takes place in the here-and-now, by ordinary people in grassroots communities and movements, rather than deferring to transcendental authorities or vanguards, or to utopias that can only occur in the future, through means which contradict their ends. Groups in this tradition have connected their mutual aid practices with prefiguration and awareness practices towards community self-sufficiency, communing and human self-determination (Anon 2020g). Examples include a self-governed food system in Italy, CampiAperti, where farmers using sustainable agri-ecological methods and a local participatory guarantee system exchange food through networks of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange. This decentralised self-managed system has come into its own during the COVID-19 crisis, when traditional food supply chains have become insecure (Diesner 2020). Similar projects have arisen in Spanish Basque country as part of an international network (URGENCI 2020). Renowned names in the degrowth movement have argued for the nurturing of nature and people within similar projects for 'care-full degrowth' that does not glorify the temporary decline in fossil fuel and energy usage provoked by the crisis with its attendant trauma, death and impoverishment (as have some factions of the environmental Left-media), but seeks to voluntarily slow down global use of material and energy by reorienting values, institutions and worldviews. The authors recount a range of longer-term projects which are advancing degrowth via everyday practices, communal initiatives and scholarly theory (Paulson et al. 2020).

Mutual aid is itself a commoning project: a form of social recomposition whereby activists form bonds that lead to longer-term projects towards living without a state. At the same time, many mutual aid networks arise out of longer-term projects, that are often invisibilised due to the hidden nature of social movement heritage and histories: anarchist and ecological networks do not appear from nowhere nor do they fade to oblivion when the disaster is over (crow 2014: 209). While nearly all anarchist groups tend to be of a fluid and changing nature, specific crises do sometimes spawn longstanding projects, and one would expect the same from COVID-19. Some of these are likely to be absorbed into the capitalist NGO-industrial complex through a process of co-optation and bureaucratisation. While there are frequent appeals from centrists to anarchists

not to politicise disaster relief, it is more often the case that powerful donors or agencies may politicise disasters by highlighting the failings of the recipient, and attaching conditions to funding (Hannigan 2012). I would predict that this will be the fate of some—but not all—of the local mutual aid groups. Alternatively, anarchist projects often endure as freestanding autonomous projects, social centres or co-operatives. There is already a thriving street medic movement in the United States (perhaps due to the ongoing disaster of their healthcare system!), which has a philosophy with roots in anarchist theory (Medic Wiki 2020). One might predict that the emerging mutual aid movement in the UK and Europe might give rise to a similar grassroots healthcare movement, given that public health systems are being decimated through austerity. While it is too early to predict how social movements emerging around the COVID-19 pandemic might crystallise into longer-term self-sufficiency projects, previous disaster anarchist movements have tended to evolve into projects involving the commoning and repurposing of space, for example in community and permaculture gardens, workers' co-operatives, intentional communities, autonomous social centres. Anarchist academic and writer Jon Bigger argues that 'the mutual aid groups springing up have to be the start, not the end. The ongoing project has to be to build real communities back up with people looking after each other beyond this virus … Society can flourish without interference from government' (Bigger 2020). Tere is an important emphasis on small-scale communities, which prevents people from becoming too alienated from nature and from each other, and reduces the population over which any one person or group might dominate, and the territory from which anyone can appropriate and accumulate. To understand the radical nature of the anarchist movement—and its practical instantiation in mutual aid—in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, one might also pay attention to some of the structural critiques written by anarchists, in which they often link local action like mutual aid to a much more global understanding of the operations of power—anarchism aims to destroy authoritarian power and capitalist inequality by re-scaling community, refuting the idea that mutual aid simply exists to 'fill gaps'.

Anarchist Critiques of Statist and Capitalist Disaster Response

Anarchism can be viewed as a form of disaster preparedness as it emerges from, draws on and builds the pre-existing networks, skills and volunteers of anarchist and associated non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian leftist movements. At the same time, anarchists do not presume the same separation between different stages of disaster relief such as preparedness, response, relief and recovery—because rather than viewing disasters as a rupture in the normal running of things which should be remediated in linear fashion as soon as possible, anarchists understand disasters to be constitutive to capitalism—so a return to the normal running of things is not really desirable. Although not explicitly anarchist, Walter Benjamin's (1940) *Theses on the Philosophy of History* offers an excellent critique of idea of progress, to which capitalists and historical materialists alike are committed. He argues that in capitalism, 'state of emergency' is not the exception but the rule. Mainstream discourse on 'natural disasters' aims to depoliticise disasters as unavoidable ruptures in the normal running of capitalist progress. Therefore, conventional disaster relief tends to rest on restoring the normal running of capitalism, often claiming progress and improvement through 'development' even where this frequently means dispossessing huge swathes of communities. Anarchists have drawn attention to the importance

of tying people's immediate experiences of distress and dispossession caused by emergencies to structural critiques of hierarchy and inequality.

As anti-authoritarians, anarchists are particularly aware of the dangers of state repression, securitisation and militarisation. Repressive measures adopted in a 'state of emergency' are easily absorbed into the everyday running of things, especially when backed up by the biopower of citizens in a culture of fear. Disasters are frequently heavily militarised, and policies, laws and norms put in place during a major disaster frequently do not quickly fade away (Lichfield 2020), and are adopted in adapted forms in the post-disaster society; take for instance the increased securitisation of public space and transport hubs after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, where powers the government inferred on itself were never relinquished (The South Essex Heckler 2020). Anarchists are against any increase in state power by definition, and the anarchist perspective views the state always and everywhere as an intrusion on self-governing and autonomous life. Anarchists believe that state claims to legitimacy are based on a fallacious view of human nature as uncooperative, selfish and oppressive. The COVID-19 crisis has given state agents even more claim to legitimacy, playing on the health fears of the population, leading to a situation where large sections of the radical Left—traditionally more allied with anarchism than the right—have been demanding stronger government—even though there is evidence that governments have already abused these powers to suspend workers' rights (Angryworkers 2020).

The cybernetic and behavioural zeitgeist has sought to securitise, quantify, privatise and scenario-build disaster response through a model that increasingly relies on an authoritarian and technocratic global policy field (Hannigan 2012). This is incredibly profitable for private financial, development and insurance agencies (Klein 2007) but violently disempowering and dispossessive of grassroots democratic forces and movements (Solnit 2010). Nationalists and authoritarians set up a false discursive dichotomy between state-supported welfare and well-being programmes backed up by social control; and the vulnerabilities produced by ostensible 'freedoms' of the market. Anarchists refuse to buy into the mainstream narrative that constructs the situation as 'a trade-of between privacy and public health' (Hao 2020) or as a 'double-bind between life and freedom', for which 'we will continue paying the price long after this particular pandemic has passed' (CrimethInc 2020a). The anarchist position highlights the paradox that many non-anarchist liberals and leftists are calling for *more* repressive measures from a right-wing government that they previously criticised for its authoritarianism. Repression may also operate as internal/psychological repression, or in-group repression, or social repression (Reich 1933), for example the kinds of social pressures that are being uniformly applied to people—often by other citizens—regarding social distancing etiquette, often regardless of their particular situation. Consider the example of construction workers being judged, having been compelled to go to work, or another example of NHS workers, permitted to cycle through a park where pandemic regulations limited cycling, being abused by other park-users despite having shown their ID at the gates (Ballinger 2020). Further examples abound. This kind of civil society-based policing replicates the associationalist view of society as commensurate with 'social capital' whose purpose is ultimately to support the needs of the state and capital through cybernetic, decentralised forms of control and governance. Social democratic and left-liberal movements have united in wielding forms of biopower such as social pressure and 'blame and shame' to extol the repressive measures enacted by the state in the name of social-distancing and lockdown; a move which some anarchists have also critiqued as a worrying trend of social authoritarianism that individualises and responsibilises suffering (Round Robin 2020; CrimethInc 2020a), and acts

through docile and compliant subjects who internalise state discourse, while increasing state intervention 'brings out the inner Stasi in some people' (The South Essex Heckler 2020). This dichotomy is replicated through social pressures and biopower in society, with citizens taking it upon themselves to discipline one another through managerial nudges, whilst competing selfishly for essential goods in stores. This technocratic totalitarianism, which hides behind the seemingly benign 'face of Science and Medicine, of neutrality and common interest', produces and justifies decentralised forms of authoritarianism, nurtured by structural adjustments and behavioural nudges of both states and profiteering pharmaceutical and telecommunications industries entrusted with finding a 'solution' (Anon 2020g). This will increasingly lead to cybernetic forms of governance being automated in technological surveillance through mobile devices, facial recognition and social credit systems, which have been in operation for a long time in China, South Korea and Singapore and have ostensibly proven effective in controlling citizen movements in order to track and isolate infected individuals. COVID-19 is likely to form a perfect justification for adapted forms of aggressive surveillance measures to be accelerated by Western governments (Hao 2020; Tirone et al. 2020). While cybernetic systems *appear* decentralised, they in fact rely on a totalitarian social consensus and compliance and, in the last instance, are potentially backed up with state violence. Many anarchist web articles have explicitly decried measures taken ostensibly to combat COVID-19 as authoritarian and even totalitarian, citing examples such as 'unilateral government decrees imposing total travel bans, 24-hour-a-day curfews, veritable martial law, and other dictatorial measures' (CrimethInc 2020b).

The use of the word 'totalitarian' might seem somewhat extreme from a mainstream perspective, and anarchists are often accused of being paranoid, of over-egging their critique of authority, or engaging in conspiracy theories, and in the current conjecture where conspiracy theories issuing from the Libertarian Right are rife, anarchists have seen fit to defend against such accusations. For example, one anarchist writer argues that the virus is as a convenient excuse for an economic depression that was already on the way—and an excuse to repress social movements around austerity, 'it doesn't need to be deliberate policy for it to be exploited in such a way as to exacerbate already existing separations' (Hamblin 2020). A running theme throughout the anarchist and allied anti-state Marxist response to the crisis is the identification of continuity rather than rupture between the 'normal' running of state and capitalism and the 'exceptional' circumstances of disasters. This is particularly evident in an excellent critique that expose the smooth transition and lack of clear division between democracy and authoritarianism—which from an antiauthoritarian perspective is not a digression, but 'a condition for the reproduction of the capitalist market, either at a national or even a "world system" level (Sotiropoulos and Ray 2020). Thus: The transition from a liberal democracy to an authoritarian regime (or vice versa) is usually crisis-laden, yet it still takes place within the state form which is to say, the latter absorbs the interplay between the two as moments of its own reproduction and history' (Ibid.).

As an alternative to the double-bind of the mainstream narrative, anarchists have posited the need for decentralised and un-bordered conceptions of healthcare which focus on interconnectedness and are divorced from state control (CrimethInc 2020a). Anarchist movements have therefore advocated social distancing measures with a vocabulary of co-operation, solidarity and comradeship rather than compulsion: 'Remember: that old lady you see on your grocery shopping, and that comrade you know who is suffering from a long-term illness: it is your job to protect them as much as you can'. They have similarly pointed out that inequalities mean that not ev-

eryone can easily self-isolate, for example it is particularly difficult for those in poverty and the homeless (Freedom News 2020a). Anarchists have asked for social distancing to be grounded in an ethics of care and an understanding of interconnectedness (Milstein 2020), rather than a competitive and selfish mentality reflected in governments' and technocrats' risk management programmes treating people as statistics and numbers—a discourse encouraging social competition and selfishness such as panic-buying. This ethos links to the practice of mutual aid with a supreme consistency, and furthermore, the anarchist lens might help to explain why the population under lockdown have by and large been following an ethos of protective physical distancing despite most of their interactions not being policed. It is the very premise of many seminal anarchist texts, for example Colin Ward's *Anarchy in Action* that most of everyday life is already anarchy, and that people do not need to be explicitly politicised as anarchists to realise that cooperation and solidarity help them to meet their needs better than competition and aggression and that individual needs are usually complimentary rather than in conflict with those of their neighbours and community (Ward 1973).

As an example of how anarchists have adapted their practices to an ethos of physical distancing, one might consider links between the mutual aid movement in some areas of London and newly occupied social centres, as part of a current revival and re-emergence of the social centres movement. Information from public websites reporting on activities shows examples of attempted co-option. For example the Green Radical Anti-capitalist Social Space (GRASS) in Islington. In February 2020 the activists found themselves in the midst of a pandemic where functioning as a traditional anarchist 'social space' was no longer viable so they responded to the virus by cancelling their events and becoming active in the local mutual aid network, transforming their space into a Mutual Aid Centre to provide a hub for community efforts. This involved storing resources needed by the network, including leaflets for outreach and disinfectant and gloves for people delivering food, as well as hosting a free clothes shop and mutual aid books donation point outside the squat and undertaking bike repairs to assist people in avoiding public transport. Whilst the activists closed the centre soon after opening in order to reduce the risk of spreading the virus, they still built and maintained good relations with the local community while following social distancing advice, raising awareness of anarchism and overcoming stereotypes about squatters and anarchists and attempting to spread the message that 'we cannot rely on the government to save us, as it will always prioritise the interests of the rich and the powerful' (GRASS 2020).

Anarchists have always been very diverse in their views, and a much smaller number of anarchists have come out against not only the police enforced lockdown (which all anarchists must be against by definition) but have decried the near consensus with which not only Leftists, but many anarchists, have 'embraced the narrative' (Winter Oak 2020a) of social distancing. They have argued that in practice, other anarchists are not simply following a self-defined or communally decided ethos of social distancing, but rather are following the rules set by the state—a set of rules that assume the need for a coordinating authority, allowing the state to self-define its own legitimacy in an authoritarian power grab. Furthermore, extant social distancing rules permit 'essential' activities— defined as essential to the state, which in all cases are those which keep capitalism running—for example those that involve work and consumption, and deny the necessity of social life and protest activities essential to resistance such as gathering in public for protest.

Writers from this position have decried the tendency for the majority of anarchists to rely on 'dumbed down binary thinking' whereby they refuse to align themselves with anything tainted by the mainstream media with right-wing associations. This grouping has been keen to ally themselves with working-class insurrectionary movements like the Gilets Jaunes/Yellow Vests in France and anti-lockdown protesters in Germany. These have been accused of right-wing tendencies, yet on scrutiny defy simple divisions between right-wing and left-wing (Winter Oak 2020b; Round Robin 2020; Enough14 2020b). This position is not only taken by unknown anarchists posting anonymously online, but has been adopted also by the renowned philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who has denounced the virus as little more than a fu, and an excuse for governing powers to create a panic and institute a 'state of exception' (Agamben 2020). Similarly, another commentator predicts outbreaks of anger, resentment, protests, looting and unrest when people have enough time to think, and too little money to meet their needs—and even go so far as to encourage breaking out of quarantine to occupy public spaces, overcoming fear and risking disease in order to reinstate trust and closeness (Round Robin 2020). While this commentator's early predictions have not yet been realised and seem unlikely to come to pass, one might cite this as evidence of complicity between state and capital insofar as that the surprising initial fiscal generosity of Conservative governments has served to quell uprising. However, other anarchists have responded to this perspective, defending the need for physical/material measures to prevent the spread of the virus from a critical, anti-state perspective. They have argued against a 'deeply worrying tendency' in not only anarchism but critical theory more generally to undermine the veracity of scientific discourse 'or worse the materiality of the physical world'. However, this 'critique of the critique' also risks missing a kernel of truth concerning 'the political effects and affects of the pandemic, namely the affirmation and justification (in a substantial sense) of the state's capacity to adopt authoritarian measures and hence assume more authoritarian shapes' (Sotiropoulos and Ray 2020). Tus, some anarchists have slipped back into a depoliticised position of advocating 'tools for addressing isolation, anxiety and grief' which seem indistinguishable from a mainstream neoliberal wellbeing and resilience narrative that individualises responsibility for structural shocks without offering any practical outlet for resistance (e.g. CrimethInc 2020c; Winstanley 2020).

It is of course much easier for anarchists to remain politically active while also observing social distancing if they have a squat, social centre or commune to retreat to and use as a hub for action, just as it is often easier for middle-class members of the public to 'stay at home' than it is for the working and precarious classes. This is not to draw false equivalence between squatters and the middle class, since the former are always precarious and vulnerable to eviction, but rather to draw attention to the very wide range of structurally differentiated living conditions treated homogeneously as 'home' in public health discourse. Anarchists have been vocal critics of inequality and have critiqued scapegoating in the media and by the public of people whose housing or work precarity has prevented them from toeing the line. Again, inequality and precarity are issues of long duration that are magnified rather than caused by disasters. Repressive top-down 'public health' measures like lockdowns and surveillance are applied to all members of a population universally, despite their different vulnerabilities. These measures can make it look like the state is taking the crisis seriously, whilst covering up and compensating for decades of underfunding and attacks on healthcare services, whilst welfare concessions serve to quell uprising long enough to keep capitalism going (Anon 2020h; ACG 2020). One anarchist has pointed out that healthcare and policing have always been linked—especially evident in the use

of detention, which is 'a continuation of powers which are already used regularly against Mad and Disabled people' (Evanson 2020). Anarchists have attempted to raise public consciousness by linking mutual aid activities to the fact that whilst humans are all susceptible to disease, not everyone has the same opportunities to protect or cure themselves (Anon 2020d). Anarchists have also engaged in structural and policy critique of the ways in which states and disaster capitalists might mobilise the crisis for their own interests and profits. Right-wing and (neo-)Liberal Western governments have been criticised for taking a laissez-faire approach to the health of their citizens, subordinating them to the needs of the market in a move dubbed 'herd immunity', criticised as almost a form of eugenics against older, disabled and immunocompromised people (Anarchist Federation 2020). Anarchists tend to view mutual aid and co-operation as an important constituent of 'human nature' or 'human potential' which contrasts very sharply with the conservative and new right vision of 'survival of the fittest' embedded in the idea of 'herd immunity' (Bigger 2020).

Anarchists' attention to the longue durée has led them to examine not only the ways in which capitalist exploitation is magnified by state policies around the COVID-19 virus, but also the ways in which capitalist relations are at least partly, if not wholly, to blame for the virus in the first place. Linking mutual aid to structural critique is not new—not only was it the very essence of Kropotkin's work, but one can even find a famous example linked to pandemics: in the late nineteenth century a group of anarchists including Errico Malatesta risked their lives to travel to the heart of a cholera epidemic in Naples to treat those suffering. Malatesta's section had a particularly high recovery rate, which he attributed to his ability to procure food and medicine from the city authorities, and after the epidemic the anarchists published a pamphlet declaring that 'the true cause of cholera is poverty, and the true medicine to prevent its return can be nothing less than social revolution' (Fabbri 1936 cited in CrimethInc 2020d). In the current COVID crisis, one can find a version of long-term structural critique issuing from theorists thinking from the intersection of anarchism and deep ecology, which follows a similar pattern to those who seek to link specific events like hurricanes to systemic developments like climate change. While biological viruses and disease ostensibly differ drastically from environmental disasters, they also have social origins, and the ways in which disease spreads and is managed are social and environmental issues. Anarchism offers opportunities for broader critiques of where and how we live together as humans, and our relationships to animals and the natural environment. For example, renowned anthropologist James Scott has blamed human sedentism and increased drudgery during the agricultural revolution, the fragile and vulnerable nature of monocrops and reduced genetic diversity in domesticated animals for creating a perfect 'epidemiological storm' and expands this account to include 'density-dependent diseases' caused by concentration in cities and factory farming of animals (Scott 2017). An excellent article in the radical Chinese journal Chuǎng argues that mainstream perspectives try to depict COVID-19 as the eruption of wildness into civilisation, but in fact it is to do with the extension of capitalist agro-ecological value chains into previously 'wild' spheres, which changes local ecologies and modifies the interface between human and non-human (Chuǎng 2020). These arguments are not simply political or constructivist, but reflect arguments by scientists reported in mainstream media that diseases are emerging more frequently as a result of human encroachment into wild habitat (Gill 2020). Anarchist actions around this issue have included vegan collectives distributing food through mutual aid to raise awareness of the link between the spread of disease and consumption of meat (Dalton 2020).

There is a precedent in anarchist theories for thinking about long-standing and far-reaching 'wicked' problems (Cudworth and Hobden 2018: 72–3) that account for the interconnectedness of humans and nature without seeking top-down solutions. For example a 2014 article on 'An Anarchist Response to Ebola' (Bjork-James 2014a, b) which draws on the practices of non-state groups like Doctors Without Borders to envision what a wider, grassroots anarchist alternative might look like. The author argues that networks of researchers and larger frameworks of virology, medicine and epidemiology are 'among the largest decentralized efforts humans ever created', yet they are also intertwined with the modern state, echoing 'the state's urgent desire to monitor, enumerate, and plan the future of its subjects' (Bjork-James 2014b). The author envisages federated, local alternative epidemiologies that rely on federated, local level care and multiple health organisations, involving the ongoing collection and analysis of patient data yet with secure and effective anonymisation and alongside the absence of any hierarchy of organisation; monopoly of force; and commodification of medicines or data (Ibid.). It is argued that aspects of the Ebola crisis foreshadowed such an alternative, such as community education and preparedness and the volunteer-led nature of the response in many communities. Another recent anarchist precedent which offers inspiration for thinking through 'wicked problems' is the anonymously authored pamphlet *Desert* (Anon 2011). While the author does not consider pandemics directly, the focus is on the unequal and unevenly located collapse and withdrawal of civilisation, with wealth becoming concentrated in cooler areas with some 'hot' parts of the world becoming less civilised through climate change, leading to lesser concentration of capitalism. In the process, the author argues for the resurgence of the commons in areas from which the state withdraws, including collective healthcare. There is also precedent from the British anarchist Colin Ward, who writes about de-institutionalising healthcare in an era of welfare state withdrawal (Ward 1973: 107–121). In current context of COVID-19, the flagrant flouting of lockdown rules by prime ministerial advisor Dominic Cummings has been received with shock and disdain by large sections of the British public. An anarchist might be less surprised by the blatant and disrespectful hypocrisy of an unelected technocrat, since they view hierarchical and representative government as illegitimate in the first place. Indeed, one might be pleased by the prospect that public consciousness may be raised to arouse some from

their Hobbesian mentality of unquestioningly following the rules because technocracy is beyond critique and the state can just confer whatever legitimacy it wants on itself in a crisis. However, the question remains: What is to be done? The flouting of the rules by the self-serving conservative elite has raised a justified fear in sections of the Left that the general populace might follow this example and risk their own families and communities' health. Anarchists would prefer rather the rules were made by communities themselves through consensus decision making or related forms of direct democracy, which included all those who stood to be affected by those rules. This would not preclude decisions informed by scientific knowledge—which might be produced and transmitted through similar models to those described in the context of Ebola, through federated organisations at different scales—for which models already exist, in the UK, for example Radical Routes and the Co-operative movement. The only obstacle we face to this vision is the current lack of infrastructure embedded in communities. Prefigurative forms of direct action such as those currently being undertaken by autonomous and anarchist movements in the UK are the most important contemporary example of such work, and the primary recommendation of this chapter would be that any reader ought—if not to join these movements themselves—to sup-

port and defend them and resist any complicity in their co-optation by the bourgeois capitalist state.

Conclusion

> I'm afraid that those who speak of oppression without acknowledging the war we are a part of, not as metaphor but as a real and current practice, will only succeed in turning a battlefield into a garden, decorating this cemetery of a society with flowers, ensuring equality of access to a graveyard. I don't care to argue that one side or another is more correct, only that revolution becomes impossible when we start believing in civil society and stop noticing that the guns are pointed at us too. (Gelderloos 2010)

The state always has the choice whether to repress mutual aid movements through securitisation or recuperate them and quell uprising through bureaucratisation, fiscal benefits and manipulating media to produce biopower. State violence and recuperation are two sides of the same coin—which come from an epistemological perspective which denies radical agency and autonomy. Right-wing populist governments such as those of the United States and UK appear to be making social democratic concessions, including stimulus packages, moratoriums on loan and mortgage interest and eviction bans, suspending arrests for minor offences; at the same time as securitising the streets through increased police presence and enforcing lockdowns, ostensibly for the public good. People are told to keep of the streets and stay in their homes, whilst vulnerable people in isolation are told to rely on deliveries and care from their 'communities' and the 'general public'. Tere is a mass mobilisation of biopower from leftists and liberals who were previously attacking Johnson and Trump as fascists and are now effectively urging them to be more authoritarian. Some anarchists are optimistic that the crisis might lead to positive change

> In front of us lies the unexplored, the unknown. It is about giving up our own certainties in order to explore the infinite possibilities that await us. We will explore them with a thrill, with the excitement of discovery, with the vision of something completely new.
>
> And we will do it with joy—from the edge of the abyss, towards an uprising and liberation. (Round Robin 2020)

I am less optimistic about the possibilities that this moment will bring radical change. Disaster studies show how even though the hazards that trigger disasters might be natural, the disasters themselves are intensely social—caused by planning and infrastructure as well as the increased vulnerability of marginal populations, who are much more likely to suffer the effects of a disaster. While conspiracy theories about the virus abound, theorists of disaster capitalism, most famously Klein (2007), show how we do not need to think that disasters are man-made through a conspiracy in order to understand that powerful sociopaths will mobilise the fear, panic and momentary lack of scrutiny in their own interests. As Lagalisse (2019) argues, the affective lack of trust expressed by many conspiracies may lead to misplaced targets, but also expresses an embryonic structural analysis that our governments may be lying to us when they imply that their foremost interest is to protect and serve us. The UK and US government policies to date seem to have been about ensuring a certain level of community transmission of the virus by keeping schools, social events and pubs open for much longer in terms of spread of the disease than other nations, while at the same time blaming their own citizens for spreading the disease while acting within

the government advice and law—with government-linked advisors and officials openly speaking of 'herd immunity' to cull 'bed blockers' in hospitals (Giordano 2020). Governments are also using the virus as a premise to increase their powers, creating laws that might effectively ban some forms of political protest well beyond the duration required to deal with the pandemic. The pandemic will ensure that the rich become richer through shares in pharmaceutical companies and medical supplies. The government advice on 'protection' assumes selfish and competitive individuals, rather than mutually co-operative communities, and encourages people to fend for themselves by selfishly panic-buying, blaming and shaming perceived risky (i.e. marginalised) individuals and calling on the government to increase their already terrifying powers of control, whilst signing up for data monitoring technologies that monitor the risk of infection and seem to prefigure the kinds of oppressive social credit systems already seen in China, South Korea and Singapore.

In this chapter, I have shown how anarchists have responded by setting up mutual aid groups, engaging in acts of strike, occupation and refusal including prison breaks and riots, work walk-outs and rent strikes, setting up longer-term social centre, co-operative and food security projects. Anarchists' action is purposively local, yet their outlook is global as they engage in structural critique through their lifestyles, forms of organisation, their political culture and in their writings and publications. In the immediate term, it seems that the greatest danger for anarchists is that their radical efforts will be recuperated into the mainstream as a form of 'social capital'—or those which cannot be recuperated will be repressed through violent policing. In the longer term, anarchists must face a struggle against increasingly insidious forms of surveillance and social exclusion. Part of the argument of this chapter has been that increasingly militarised lockdowns are strengthened and not staved of by social forms of biopower, for example shaming and blaming people's behaviour in the name of promoting social distancing; or the hijacking of radical concepts by people with reformist or authoritarian desires. It is becoming clear that reformism and authoritarianism are not polar opposites as is often assumed: 'coalition politics are almost certain to end up in Popular Fronts that stifle anarchist critiques, prop up Authority, and hoodwink anti-authoritarians into being the shock troops or grunt workers for the left-wing of the system, whether in the guise of NGOs, progressive politicians, or Stalinist parties' (Gelderloos 2010). What is needed is a 'specific and foregrounded critique of recuperation' which under democratic government 'is far more common than repression as a tool for counterinsurgency' (Ibid.). This will require further theorising on how dynamics of repression and recuperation will operate in the context of the increasing automation of social control, and the production of docile and conformist subjects, through technologies such as facial recognition, social credit systems, tracking systems, privatisation and insurance of health and risk. These trends and technologies must be resisted in the hope of a more socially just and ecologically sustainable society based on ideas of mutual aid, not selfish and competitive individualism.

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