Anarchy Against Hierarchy

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> "Throw away holiness and wisdom, and people will be a hundred times happier. Throw away morality and justice, and people will do the right thing. Throw away industry and profit, and there won't be any thieves."
>
> — Tao te Ching, Chapter 19

Moving forward is impossible unless we learn each other's language. In spite of all our similarities, all our shared wants and concerns, misunderstanding convinces us we are enemies. Emma Goldman wrote, "Someone has said that it requires less mental effort to condemn than to think. The widespread mental indolence, so prevalent in society, proves this to be only too true." Words with multiple definitions that change drastically according to context, group, and setting—like anarchy, communism, nihilism, etc.—contribute to this discord. When most people hear "anarchy", they will often imagine violence and refuse to listen. This hostility frustrates the anarchist, who views it in terms of cooperative, horizontal living.

Even in a movement as broad as the anarchists, the most common agreement you will find is that anarchism in general would be more popular if its language wasn't so tragically misunderstood. For centuries anarchist voices have struggled to correct their negative image—they have not struggled in vain, but there is a lot of slander to battle, and much more unclear rhetoric and outdated theory. I felt the need to make my own contribution with this project. This is not an attempt to promote a fixed program or philosophy—to do more than casually borrow ideas for yourself is missing the point. Furthermore, there is not a single person who can speak outside the limited environments that shaped them and everybody is biased.

It is important to consider the experiences that shape an anarchist perspective and temperament. Since anarchy brings many aspects of humanity to light, there is no single path to it or unlearning the lessons of statism. My own story began before I was born; every recent generation on my mother's mother's side embraced an alegal and free-spirited outlook. My great-grandfather was an Appalachian vagabond who married a like-minded German-American known for her wild nature and iconoclasm. They and their children traveled the West, living out of vehicles in mining towns, campgrounds, and reservations, stealing and working odd jobs to survive. Living in poverty, they learned to value quality over quantity and distrust institutions. Law wasn't sacred, money and nations weren't sacred; wealth was derived from love, freedom, and adventure,

with passionate contempt for everything which mediated and prevented such treasures. These sentiments were passed down to me.

The majority of my childhood was in Idaho, between the gentrified foothills of Boise and the rustic frontier of Council Valley. My first home, in Boise, was a dirty broken-down house which by the summer of 2012 transformed into a base for borderline homeless punk rockers. People called us "the Dustbin"—coined by the psychedelic punk band Mind Drips, who performed there one summer—or "Dirty-6th" because of our location on 36th street. At one point, over a dozen dirty kids crashed there at once. Most of them were friends with my older sister, others were total strangers. Practically all of them were self-described anarchists.

The Dustbin operated on strong communal lines. Personal property existed but needed resources—such as food and clothing—were intuitively shared. Decisions were made through loose consensus and (unless you gave them a good reason not to) everyone treated each other with respect. If you were to ask those who lived there, they would describe the Dustbin as a time of rebellion and fraternity. I would be lying if I said I didn't romanticize it similarly. My "36" tattoo on my right forearm, which I was the third person to get, attests to this.

As a child and young teenager, however, my experience was slightly different. To a moderate extent, aspects of the environment robbed me of security at times when I needed it. Chaos filled the house, and our mother's depression kept her from being fully present most of the time. On the other hand, I was provided a great deal of freedom for someone my age. I could leave the house at any time and roam freely. When people spoke to me they treated me like an adult. Things this simple taught me how to handle and appreciate independence. That which threatened my personal autonomy and ability to happily experience became a lifelong concern.

The politics of the Dustbin were a product of the postmodern and anti-elite sentiments of the Occupy era, my family's rowdy Appalachian roots, as well as the rave and folk-punk scenes in Idaho—by coincidence all of this was associated with anarchist sentiments. Some Dustbin associated projects—such as the Hammer and Wrench Gang, specializing in illegalist burglaries that targeted churches—expressed distinctly anarchistic motives.

We commonly played a scratched CD allegedly gifted to us by a retired train-hopper. It consisted of songs by various anarcho-folk groups[1] that were popular in rural states, covering a range of topics including poverty, depression, insurrection, and especially anarchism. It would take years before I understood anarchism as a family of socio-political philosophies. Despite this, I began to associate the word with feelings of angst and alienation in an imposing society.

The values of the Dustbin became a significant part of my upbringing. The original Dirty-Sixers: Bob! Loudly the revolutionary tramp, Peyton and Cat the melancholic artists, the peace-oriented leaders Fox and Mogli—these were some of the hidden icons of Boise's unique and rugged counter-culture. I now identify more with this culture than anything else.

The Dustbin possessed its own unique culture, influenced by but distinct from the outside of the world. We still have our own traditions, music, norms, and guidelines. The Dustbin Anthem written by Bob! Loudly, "Dirty Rebel Kids" or "The Dustbin", went like this:

[1] The folk-punk bands Ramshackle Glory, Days N Daze, AJJ, Mischief Brew, Against Us!, Ghost Mice, among others, who we still admire today.

I don't have anything to say to you
Anything to play for you
Anything to make it through
To make it all okay for you
You know that's what I'm trying to do
And you know that I would die for you
Steal the sun outta the sky for you
And even if it burns me too
It's all the same
The taste of your name

Dustbin got shut down by the cops
And all those dirty kids in
Dirty-Sixth Street got a job
Yes, we threw our Molotovs,
Yeah, we through our Molotovs

Even if I am just spotting at the
wind, in my heart I'm still a Stupid Rebel Kid
To all my dirty rebel friends at the Dustbin:
Thanks for everything you did!

Mogli put the gas in the van
We were going to move to Portland,
we were in a punk band
Shit happens not planned;
My middle finger to the Man,
My middle finger to the Man

Then it finished with the second verse.

Some religious encounters throughout my life contributed to an anarchistic worldview. Although my family was highly secular, we occasionally attended Friends meetings before I was twelve. I have always admired the Quakers' individualistic, non-hierarchical, meditative, and non-dogmatic way of worshiping and congregating. While most churches I knew involved some leader-figure preaching threats and instructing you how to think, Quakers would sit silently in a circle and look introspectively for answers. Nobody could tell you how to worship and there was a lot of emphasis on developing a personal relationship with the god inside yourself. This was done as a sovereign individual in the company of your own, without the obstruction and undeserved authority of priests, pastors, or bishops.

From Native American spirituality (often advocating harmony with the land and each other) to Taoism (promoting non-materialism, humility, and living in the present in order to find peace, growth, and wisdom) to Luciferianism (advocating self-worship, iconoclasm, respect for your allies, and additionally, in the Urantia Book, a confederal network of autonomous planets and the rejection of a spiritual state), I found deeply anarchistic messages.

At the age of fourteen, I moved north to Council Valley to live with my half-hippy, half-hillbilly grandmother. Council is one of those tiny impoverished towns where organized religion and alcohol are the most booming industries, and the only pastimes besides drinking are gossip and drama. The Valley is a treasure, but the culture of its current inhabitants struggles. The main source of excitement for folks under 21 is often limited to a lifestyle of delinquency. In turn, my relationship with the local sheriff's office turned antagonistic over the years. Bored, brutish bastards, their ranks consisted of officers who relocated from neighboring states for behavioral problems.

Like most police, they did not care about your concerns or want to help you. Their understimulation, sense of elitism, statist morality, and unchallenged authority led them to act aggressively and abuse locals.

Just months before I arrived, two deputies murdered the rancher Jack Yantis. My mother moved to the area soon after and became an organizer with the Justice for Jack campaign, calling for police accountability. Not reform or abolition, just accountability. This branded our family permanent enemies to the department, who ended up harassing us for years.They would circle our block, enter our home without warrants, and stop me nearly every time we crossed paths. I would try to find ways, big and small, to return the favor. Mostly this was to alleviate my existential boredom, but there was always an unconscious political motive.

In my mind, the police were nothing more than a gang of kidnappers and professional liars who were not vindicated by any myth of justice. Both the department and the institutions they enforced were intrusive and fake, invented by something I didn't consent to. Council officers knew nothing about their victims or the laws they stood by, yet they were given every privilege at the community's expense. Retaliation became a matter of self-sovereignty; self-sovereignty was already a matter of protecting reality, of self-assertion and demonstrating my ownness. I could either submit and settle for an insecure way of living or learn to assert every ounce of my substance against them.

School also had an impact on me. Besides teaching me basic knowledge such as reading and writing, it was little more than a long series of embarrassment and spirit-crushing assimilation. The anti-social effects of our education system were worse in the city.[2] I saw a strong closeness and solidarity in my classmates. The town was small, so for both good and ill everyone knew each other, and you couldn't afford to be an ass. Students led anti-bullying campaigns and projects with or without the involvement of the school. On the other hand, the school board was extremely low-budgeted and the faculty consisted of clueless authoritarians.

I have always thrived in environments where I'm left to manage myself without authority figures breathing down my neck. Meanwhile, the U.S. education system goes to great lengths to suppress natural curiosity and promote a logic of submission. Like so many other generations, I was prevented from pursuing my interests and efficiently developing as a person while forced to accept propaganda against my own terms.

It wasn't a place to grow, but a place to be molded into a submissive citizen, an institution bastardized by arbitrary practices in the name of spreading arbitrary beliefs with little concern for individuality or growth. Stand up for the special flag and never for yourself, tell us why our government is a harbinger of liberty and goodness. I resisted everything I disagreed with and

[2] This is generally true in all aspects. At least in my own personal experience, small towns generally maintain a lot of our communal traditions. This is especially the case when poverty strongly incentivises barter and mutual aid.

many teachers—ranging from racist Mormons to underprepared ex-students with more concern for their growing university debts—grew to hate me. In retrospect, I probably would have preferred something similar to Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer's model, where the classroom is structured horizontally and inquiry, communication, and free agency is encouraged. It became clear that the institution was a waste of time and I had to take responsibility for my own education. At sixteen, I finally dropped out.

Writing constantly was the easiest and most effective way to self-educate. I would research topics—mainly theology, politics, ethics, and history—and type out essays accordingly. Some days I would get stoned and write dozens of pages just for fun. Within one year I learned more than in my entire public school experience. It was only a matter of time before I considered writing professionally. Not long before I turned seventeen, I printed my first article with issue #140 of Adbusters, the neo-Situationist magazine famously credited for sparking the Occupy Wall Street movement. I became a regular follower of their work (at least as much as I could), which pushed me even further in an anti-establishment direction.

Around this same time, a series of events led me to a book that inspires me to this day—a copy of *Anarchism and Other Essays* by Emma Goldman in worn DIY binding, given to me by my older sister when she visited from Oregon. I instantly became fascinated by her work. Aside from her passionate language, what struck me most of all was her relevance. Initially I thought she belonged to the radical movements of the '60s, '70s, and early '80s. It showed me how anarchist thought is just as pertinent to our condition today as it was a century ago.

Appealing to my growing frustration with militarism, both conservatism and liberalism, and the national idea in general, this stood out to me in her 1908 speech on patriotism featured among the *Other Essays*: "We Americans claim to be a peace-loving people. We hate bloodshed; we are opposed to violence. Yet we go into spasms of joy over the possibility of projecting dynamite bombs from flying machines upon helpless citizens. We are ready to hang, electrocute, or lynch anyone, who, from economic necessity, will risk his own life in the attempt upon that of some industrial magnate. Yet our hearts swell with pride at the thought that America is becoming the most powerful nation on earth, and that it will eventually plant her iron foot on the necks of all other nations… Such is the logic of patriotism."[3]

I saw her as an expert when it came to analyzing problems in our society. Her views on political alienation and the nature of property and bureaucracy strongly resonated with me. At this time, though, I thought anarchy went in a counterproductive direction. My half-baked conviction was partly influenced by her definition of anarchism as the philosophical advocacy against government, society, and man-made law. This is true, but I still misinterpreted it. What came to mind was opposition to all forms of association, whereas she clearly meant opposition to administrative monopoly, self-annihilation of the individual, and arbitrary means of maintaining order. I was still very much using statist language and logic. The definition I followed for government was basically any system of doing things, not a central body of institutional power. As if it wasn't a crucial part of the point, I fell into saying, "but humans are inherently social, so we will always form government."

It's very possible that my early dismissal of anarchism and anarchy, despite my positive encounters with it from a young age, was rooted in an unconscious influence from the belligerently conservative environment of Idaho combined with a narrow and immature understanding of the

[3] *Patriotism: A Menace to Liberty, Anarchism and Other Essays, 1910*

subject. I vividly recall an interaction I once had with a Council local on a camping trip near Mill Crick. We were getting along well until I innocently brought up the topic of anarchists, thinking back to the Dustbin. I fell back in silent confusion when he suddenly became hostile and dismissive. Why was it that he associated anarchy with pointless violence and apocalypse? Over time I considered anarchists well-meaning and intelligent but unrealistic. It took me a long time to realize that I knew almost nothing about them.

I hadn't overcome the misconception that anarchy was a disorganized free-for-all, the absence of infrastructure and protocol. The highly functional non-hierarchical societies in Catalonia and today's Rojava and rural Chiapas, let alone how they ran, were unknown to me. I would need to know what it might look like in practice before I could consider it and Goldman never attempted to champion anarchism from that angle. She even explained why she did this, saying she didn't believe anarchism could "consistently impose an iron-clad program or method on the future," and that different ideas were unique to different situations. Though this is true, and anarchy is more about free association than a set order of things, it still wasn't enough for me to consider anarchy without some description of how it was organized. Now I realize that she isn't a good introduction for some people, even if she's perfect for others.

A few months after my eighteenth birthday, I had to choose between staying in the mountains as a burden to my family or becoming homeless with my sibling in Portland. I had no doubt about my decision. I'd read *The Communist Manifesto* by then and was curious about Marxism, so I was excited to learn that Portland was a hub for activism and radical thought. This was my first episode of Portland homelessness and it was the least violent, because I fortunately had a lot of stable allies right off the bat. Without them, I would have experienced unimaginable horror before I was mature enough to withstand it. Spending my nights in a shelter, I surrounded myself with eccentrics and street kid philosophers, and bumped shoulders with all manner of insanity.

Most of my evenings were spent reading downtown, hopping transit as an advocate of the "Never Pay" movement, stealing rations and alcohol to give to the homeless, and wandering from drop-in to drop-in across the city. Even while I was homeless, I would sometimes volunteer for local FNB chapters for something to do. The experience was similar to college, except with chronic exposure to poverty, substance abuse, and violence. One of my closest friends was a "neo-Luxemburgist" I met through my older sister at shelter. She was always concerned with showing me new perspectives and theory. One day she gave me two books she found at a shelter in Washington: a USSR-issued complete anthology of Lenin and *On Anarchism* by Noam Chomsky.

Beginning with Lenin because of his historical influence, it didn't take long before his words triggered a reappraisal of what I initially saw in Marxism. I already knew that Marxists consider state and often party dictatorship legitimate forms of "social ownership" because they view the state as a tool any class can use to manifest power over society. According to Marxist theory, a socialist revolution can only exist in the form of a state apparatus, which is supposed to "wither away" into the communal ownership of resources. This inevitably symbolic "people's dictatorship" is referred to as a *dictatorship of the proletariat*. Early Marxism is vague with its definition of the state, so it has been interpreted as both grassroots and bureaucratic in nature.

Before my issues with Marxism (and leftism in general) developed—mainly its dogma, elitist views against "lumpenproletariat" and rural people, and its pseudoscientific belief in material dialectics and a historical endpoint—I considered it synonymous with democracy, class struggle, and unionism. Leninist ideologies, meanwhile, advocate party dictatorship meant to act on *behalf* of the communities in question. They believe that direct democracy and decentralization is

more prone to corruption than nationhood, parties, and central hierarchy—placing more faith in bureaucrats and less in the intelligence of everyday people.

I could not understand how a group so against domination could resonate with Lenin's ideas. In *What is to be Done?,* he asserted that workers are incapable of self-liberation and needed to be led by a *bourgeois intelligentsia*, "educated representatives of the propertied classes." In *Against Revisionism*, he condemned unorthodoxy and free criticism, treating his own ideas as sacred doctrine meant to replace all others. It's true that Leninism and its variations—characterized by powerful central government, nationalization, and a Marxist vanguard party meant to oversee the state—have never inherently been against certain vague interpretations of democracy. Cuba's legislation allows communities to directly vote on local laws, for instance, despite the Cuban government behaving like a police state overall.

None of these gestures matter when important decisions must be approved by a totalitarian party created for the fundamental purpose of limiting public participation. I'm referring to vanguard-style parties. Even the vanguard organizational principle of *democratic centralism*—which is practically identical to liberal republicanism—only exists to keep the minority in political power. Time and time again, it has created organized violence that threatens the masses, consistently undermining human needs, volition, and potential.

Political parties and central administration always end up creating their own class, their own bourgeoisie, which tramples on the rights of ordinary people. Even in labor, capitalist bosses are merely replaced by bureaucrats, and workers' unions often face the same level of hostility as under capitalist republics. When you question Marxist—and most other collectivists, including capitalists—about these problems, you see how it is for them to differentiate between society, individuals, and the state.

It confuses them that what's good for the state wouldn't automatically be good for the people. Despite everything they believe about capitalism, they refuse to see how hierarchy, centralism, and strict ideology could produce negative results. It didn't take long before I began to experience a sentiment that Mikhail Bakunin put like this: "When the people are being beaten with a stick, they are not much happier if it is called 'the People's Stick'."

Though it wasn't immediate, much of my views as an anarchist is a direct reaction to Marxist-Leninist dogma. *On Anarchism* was next on my list. I already knew Chomsky as a social critic and linguist but didn't know he was a self-defined anarchist. His introduction by Nathan Schneider was nearly convincing enough on its own. It began by discussing Occupy and its flirtation with anarchist principles, their use of consensus, and how they came to adopt the word "horizontalism" in place of terms like anarchy and socialism which had been rendered unusable by propaganda. I was impressed by how Occupy and similar movements acknowledged the distinction between hierarchy and leadership. This distinction had already been made clear to me in my experience with grassroots activism.

There was mention of the spokes councils behind the 1999 anti-globalist riots in Seattle: anarchist affinity groups from Oregon and Washington who came together to devise a comprehensive plan against the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other transnational institutions. Referred to as the "Battle in Seattle", it helped popularize the anti-globalist and anti-corporate ideas that dominate modern activity, as well as the black bloc tactic still practiced by today's generation of actionists. Schneider linked the mass "anarcho-amnesia" over the WTO-riots, Occupy, and other major events to the particularly vehement crusade against anti-state thought. Reading deeper, Chomsky outlined a different picture of anarchism for me. He described it as the belief that hier-

archical systems and institutions are not self-legitimized, and that if hierarchy cannot justify its existence (and it usually can't) then we should dismantle and replace it with bottom-up alternatives. This made me realize that there was more to anarchy than I thought.

Today my minimal definition of anarchism is the philosophical call for a personal lifestyle and/or social order on the basis of autonomy, quality, decentralization, and participation. For the individual, this manifests as a connection with one's inner-authority, often accompanied with the conscious desire for cooperation and allies. For the group, it typically involves a network of directly democratic municipalities, co-operatives, and autonomous spaces. Although individualists might emphasize the self in this, or at least the individual-in-context, it's uncommon for anarchists to see anarchy as anything but organized non-hierarchy. Non-hierarchy is the uniting idea of anarchy.

While most anarchists share these common principles, motives and praxis are unique to each person. It is generally said that anarchism splits into individualist and social positions. Individualist anarchists tend to place greater emphasis on autonomy while social anarchists emphasize cooperation. The division between them is mostly false, though, and ideas can be borrowed from all corners of thought. Community-planning can co-exist with markets, etc; liberation from social forces and liberation from antisocial forces are only two sides of the same struggle for self-representation. If authority comes from the bottom to a large enough degree, a marketplace of ideas combined with trial and error can guide us towards where we need to be. And as a general principle for adaptation and personal health, we should consider all ideologies, philosophies, systems, etc., nothing more than tools for individuals to use as they please. Acting otherwise is both dangerous and unhelpful.

With the feeling I was taking a step in the right direction, I sought out more perspectives on the subject. There are many worth mentioning, but I was most moved by Petr Kropotkin, the egoist school, and the communalists Abdullah Öcalan and Murray Bookchin along with other green currents (namely post-civilization and solarpunk). Besides Goldman, Kropotkin's sociobiological book on mutual aid was the first classical anarchist theory I read. It provided an articulate argument that our natural state, especially when liberated from the shackles of hierarchy, is a social one, and that solidarity can be a great source of fulfillment, security, and freedom. He articulated the benefits of empathy and mutual aid, not just in humans but the entire natural world, and why incorporating it in social organization is complementary to the human spirit. This was one of my favorite passages from the book, which discusses humanity's social tactics of self-preservation:

"It is not love to my neighbor—whom I often do not know at all—which induces me to seize a pail of water and rush towards his house when I see it on fire; it is a far wider, even though more vague feeling or instinct of human solidarity or sociobility which moves me. It is not love, and not even sympathy (understood in its proper sense) which induces a herd of ruminants or of horses to form a ring in order to resist an attack of wolves. . . . It is not love and not even sympathy upon which society is based in mankind. It is the conscience—be it only at the stage of an instinct—of human solidarity. It is the unconscious recognition of the force that is borrowed by each man from the practice of mutual aid; of the close dependence of every one's happiness upon the happiness of all; and of the sense of justice, or equity which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his own. Upon this broad and necessary foundation the still higher moral feelings are developed."

The philosophical school of egoism—concerned with the role of the self and desire as a justifiable/innate motive for one's actions—provided the reminder that, mutual aid considered, we are still individuals at our core. As individuals, if we aren't acting for our own cause then we're likely

acting for the cause of phantasms and the powerful. In this context, egoist-anarchists advocate a "union of egoists", a horizontal, mutually-beneficial, and voluntary form of association that may be produced and reproduced around any given affinity. The distinguishing point of this union is that its members cooperate together as self-owned individuals, thinking independently from society, moral creeds, institutions, capital, parties, roles, and strict ideology.

This does not negate the role of love and altruism. As Wolfi Landstreicher notes in *Against the Logic of Submission,* "it is only in the realm of economy—of goods for sale—that greed and generosity contradict each other." I'd argue that strong community and participative decision-making is necessary for the personal fulfillment of every individual. It allows me to access my own environment, form exciting relationships, and give according to my own volition. Kropotkin's theory on mutual aid and egoism are not contradicting. In fact, they reinforce each other in terms of survival of the fittest. As inherent individuals, self-preservation is our strongest instinct, and throughout our evolution this instinct has been most successful with solidarity. Likewise, we are not acting in our interests by mindlessly destroying our environment or cheating our allies. It is arguably more self-serving to routinely invest into others, to recognize our shared affinities and respect certain boundaries. The egoist can allow amoral compassion to illuminate their existence—compassion for the sake of the egoist, not because "it's the moral thing to do."

People already make decisions with the hope that it will be right for them, yet so many pursue their interests in the most roundabout ways possible, reducing themselves to nothing as they fall into external identities and grand narratives. "Good" and "evil", this ism or that ism, whether applied to oneself or another group, are only arbitrary constructs perpetuated by statist culture and institutions. In political contexts, they have been used to keep people submissive, distracted, and easy to mobilize against their masters' enemies. This is not to say that certain labels cannot have good ideas associated with them. The issue is that we use them to replace our identity, turning to ingrained doctrine and narrow labels instead of ourselves.

Conscious egoists thus reject moral and ideological thinking in favor of critical self-theory, analyzing society from an individual perspective and asserting control over their minds and bodies. We are considerably less susceptible to manipulation when we recognize our uniqueness and act according to what is right for us, not a political party, not a belief system, not a nation-state. We should avoid identifying with concepts intended—at the best of times—to help us navigate the objective world. If they must be used at all, it's healthier to view them as tools. The best way to utilize an egoist approach is to eliminate the other definition of ego: the lies we build around ourselves in psychic defense against the world.

It took me months to reconnect with a natural egoist practice. Soon after, I would use it as a tool for bridging the individual and community—deconstructing and legitimizing cooperation with the outer-world while avoiding dogma or becoming property of the "collective" (which is just a network of individuals). Obviously our social side is undeniable.[4] However egoistic, searching for ways to represent myself and participate in a group remained a concern. The conclusion: the bridge between our individuality and interconnectedness, as well as the bridge between civility and undoing domesticization, resides in direct participation and the municipality. Whether my environment was communistic, market-oriented, etc., was for the most part irrelevant so long as I was still able to represent myself in my environment by means of assembly and consent.

[4] Contrary to popular belief, not even Max Stirner, the "father" of egoistic nihilism and a profuse enemy of collective dogma, believed complete separation from society was possible.

In the meantime, there is nothing denying me my ownness, nothing except me. State, capital, and dogma are only obstacles. Before we achieve anarchy—conditions where we can meaningfully speak our minds and set our own goals, when the fate of our lives and planet is not left to cold institutions—we must first become anarchs, proprietors of our minds and bodies who don't look for excuses to not free ourselves. By definition, anarchy is non-hierarchical association. Anarchism is an idea, a longing for anarchy and *the anarch*. The anarch is to anarchy what the monarch is to monarchy. It is ownness, it is recognizing yourself before hierarchy, a lived anarchy.

Certain aspects of libertarian municipalism, aka, social ecology or communalism, networks of directly democratic municipalities, became a potential means of accessing my environment without unneeded conflict. Until it becomes practice, it is a vision of cooperation, while my ownness intrinsically and presently belongs to me. When I acknowledge it, I empower myself and unlock control over ideas. In this way, ownness is revolutionary; the arrival of anarchy is dependent on the activity of anarchs, just as we cannot be completely ourselves without anarchy. "If my freedom depends on the freedom of all, does not the freedom of all depend on my acting to free myself?"[5] Communalism, like any anarchist project, can only be a product of self-ownership.

Öcalan and Bookchin introduced me to social ecology and a few active projects in anarchistic democracy. Although I later saw him as fallible and preoccupied with an anti-individualist grudge, Bookchin's general drift aligned well with my idea of a horizontal society. Bookchin was the first voice I found who connected the importance of anarchism with green politics. In his book *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (one of his better ones), he wrote: "It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the anarchist concepts of a balanced community, a face-to-face democracy, a humanistic technology and a decentralized society—these rich libertarian concepts—are not only desirable, they are also necessary. They belong not only to the great visions of man's future, they now constitute the preconditions for human survival." The Kurdish project and Öcalan's communalist-inspired brochure *Democratic Confederalism* broke down how a directly democratic culture would operate and convinced me that it was possible even in intensely chaotic environments like the Syrian Civil War.

Over time I synthesized the philosophies of social ecology and democratic confederalism with the best of post-civilization, which opposes the domination of urbanity over the natural world and the techno-industrial system outside of modest, responsible places[6]. My terrible experiences in the city and in our age of ecological concern likely contributed to this as an emphasis, especially in the way it promotes self and communal transformation. Returning to a more human and democratic environment and establishing harmony with nature is possibly the most important lesson of our age.

Like all humans, I'm constantly learning and changing. Anarchism is something that started as a great curiosity and way of organizing my skepticism of dogma, power, and industry. It is perhaps almost useless as an identity or symbol, but it is a very real concept concerned with our relationship between the land, ourselves, and each other. The more I learned, the easier it was to

[5] *Jean Weir, in the foreword for The Insurrectional Project by Alfredo Bonanno, 1998*

[6] Post-civilization is not to be confused with primitivism. I've found no better break-down of this difference than this paragraph from the essay *Post-Civ!* by *Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness:* "We're not primitivists: primitivists reject technology. We reject the inappropriate use of technology. Primitivists reject agriculture: we're not afraid of horticulture, but we reject monoculture (and other stupid methods of feeding ourselves, like setting 6 billion people loose in the woods to hunt and gather). Primitivists reject science. We just refuse to worship it."

conceptualize anarchist philosophy and logic. The more confident I became that it could work, the more I came to defend it openly.

> "I find freedom to be the most important issue facing any human being today, because without freedom, then life is pointless. The more dependent you become on centralized power, the more easily you are led around."
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> — Russell Means, Lakota activist

It's important to note anarchy's relationship to consensus-oriented democracy. The etymology of democracy comes from Latin and its literal definition is "rule by the people". This makes anarchy—which translates from ancient Greek to "without a master"—the purest democratic idea. Anarchism holds a vision of participatory decision-making where communities and individuals can directly influence legislation, giving people a voice outside of elections. Swedish political scientist Jörgen Westerståhl identified four manifestations of political participation: electoral participation, referendum, district councils and local assemblies, and participation based on knowledge and interest in politics. None of these have to be exclusive, and the most functional democracies would need elements of all of them.

Expertise and delegation can still exist in a completely direct democracy. *Abolition of the politician* is a common sentiment heard in some way or another in anarchist communities. This doesn't mean the abolition of delegation or facilitation; it's the abolition of special monopolistic authority, replacing certain roles with grassroots systems. "Politicians" in an anarchist society are delegates who act in accordance with decisions made and approved from the bottom using general assembly, imperative mandates, and referendums.

"By the people, for the people" means that representative democracy is treasonous. Representative democracy is inherently "by the representatives, for the ruling class." Government—when it is not used synonymously with the state—is the uncountable noun form of the word "govern" and refers to all society's agreements between itself about the laws of an occupied territory, how those laws are enforced, and the economic structures that might be present. This never requires hierarchical rank within that society and the "Government of Rank" is the intrinsic antithesis of "a people's democracy."

For anarchists, these democratic ideas have been incorporated in labor and economics. Anarchism is often associated with libertarian socialism, sometimes described as the individualist wing of socialism. Some anarchists would prefer to distance themselves from the confines of ideology, but most schools nevertheless have strong anti-capitalist sentiments. Even anarcho-capitalists oppose capitalist monopoly in their own contradicting and utopian way. Although anarchist organization, rigidity, and methods vary considerably, they all advocate some conception of non-monopolistic ownership. Economically speaking, there are both collectivist and market anti-capitalist tendencies in anarchism.

The difference between capitalism and markets is that markets are characterized by decentralized and competitive industry, while capitalism is characterized by private, central control over production and land for profit. The larger the monopoly, the more obvious this distinction becomes. Anarchists are unlike both capitalists and state socialists because they understand that people do not own the means of production unless they have direct control over it. By nature, state bureaucracy excludes workers, sometimes more than capitalism, from participating in deci-

sions or receiving the full amount from their labor. For this reason, many anarchist schools have put thought into non-hierarchical economies.

Opposition to private property—which is not the same as personal property—doesn't necessarily mean opposition to markets. Proudhonian anarchism, for instance, is famously described by its subscribers as "free-market anti-capitalism." It advocates reciprocity, direct democracy, use and occupation property norms, and collective planning through a community bank that lends at minimal interest rates. Proudhon objected to the power relations of capitalism, viewing private accumulation as feudalistic and prone to monopoly. He argued that the capitalist order could be toppled if individuals created mutual contracts between each other to create a cooperative, democratic society designed to prevent the concentration of market leverage and incentivize mutual exchange.[7]

In terms of labor, social anarchists are different because they reject the market economy altogether. Instead, they suggest we should socially own the means of production through large democratic networks, which federate into communities, into municipalities, districts and eventually the entire world. But there are differences in how they think we should handle distribution. Anarcho-collectivists, like Mikhail Bakunin, believe we should still use a type of currency, sometimes in the form of labor notes, corresponding to the amount of work each worker puts into the organization. Anarcho-communists, like Petr Kropotkin, think we should distribute according to need and a gift economy.

Some post-left anarchists—defined by the critique of trends within leftism, i.e., global revolution, glorification of work—have advocated for ego-communism (anarcho-communism from an egoist approach) or "mutualism without markets." The only real difference is that it takes a more self-organized, anti-ideological, and insurrectionary approach, preferring direct action, self-theory, and affinity groups over vanguard-style programs and planning. Not that this sums up post-leftism as a whole, which has never been a single idea or system.

We see here that many anarchists put too much focus on non-hierarchical organization to be anti-government in the sense of order and protocol. The notorious Circle-A, popularized by punk and activist culture, symbolizes "Anarchy is Order", based on the quote by Proudhon, "as man seeks justice in equality, so society seeks order in anarchy." In other words, anarchism pursues balance and liberty by replacing hierarchy with cooperation, going on to suggest that it is more likely without the negative order enforced by the state. Still, the philosophy remains falsely associated with disorder, which has been its biggest obstacle since before Pierre Joseph Proudhon embraced the term in the early nineteenth century.

In his manifesto, Errico Malatesta described the issue exactly as it is today:

> *"[T]he word anarchy was universally used in the sense of disorder and confusion; and it is to this day used in that sense by the uninformed as well as by political opponents with an interest in distorting the truth."*

[7] In his controversial book "What is Property?" (Qu'est-ce que la propriété?) Proudhon described his philosophy as "a synthesis of communism and property", going on to say: "Property, acting by exclusion and encroachment, while population was increasing, has been the life-principle and definitive cause of all revolutions. Religious wars, and wars of conquest, when they have stopped short of the extermination of races, have been only accidental disturbances, soon repaired by the mathematical progression of the life of nations. The downfall and death of societies are due to the power of accumulation possessed by property."

Noam Chomsky practically paraphrases this in an interview included a couple dozen pages into *On Anarchism*: "Yeah, it's a bum rap, basically," he said, "—it's like referring to Soviet-style bureaucracy as 'socialism,' or any other term of discourse that's been given a second meaning for the purpose of ideological warfare. I mean, 'chaos' is a meaning of the word, but it's not a meaning that has any relevance to social thought. Anarchy as a social philosophy has never meant 'chaos'—in fact, anarchists have typically believed in a highly organized society, just one that's organized democratically from below."

The factor of non-hierarchical organization is crucial for balance and equity. People don't need to understand socialist theory to understand their own interests. When I was doing fence contracting at ninetween, a fiercely anti-socialist co-worker of mine once proposed a side-job and distributing the pay equally on top of an additional amount based on contribution. He thought up socialism on instinct. Imagine if the average person had a direct say in grassroots democracy. You don't even need a great deal of inner-working knowledge to participate. That's what the delegates and experts are for. You just need to know what you want. Decisions can be formed on a local level between citizens and elected facilitators, and then passed through direct public mandates and referendum to maximize the presence of consent. This can be organized on a massive decentralized scale, as a federation of municipal councils, regional parliaments, and general congresses, allowing individuals and communities to exercise a direct influence over their shared environment and day-to-day life.

"The overriding problem is to change the structure of society so that people gain power. The best arena to do that is the municipality—the city, town, and village—where we have an opportunity to create a face-to-face democracy."[8] From the anarchist perspective, it is imperative for the human condition that each individual can directly represent themselves, and being forced to take part in a prison-like society that imposes social, material, and psychological realities is a natural contradiction. Paired with consensus decision-making, this is where the anarchist principle of decentralization comes into play as a tool for individual empowerment. If the goal is to give ourselves a voice *to the same degree we're affected,* then decisions must occur *on the smallest possible scale.* Our communities should be our own spaces. In these spaces we find both familiarity and a chance to amplify our own voice.

When it comes down to it, the main argument against this type of society is that humans are incapable of cooperation, that law (as in polity) equates order and that this order is positive. Most anarchists would argue that human organization would be impossible if not for our profound social nature, even in the form of a less conscious enlightened self-interest, and that society would collapse if not for an everyday communism underpinning the social foundation exploited by powers of our age. Sociological studies have found, in fact, that in nearly all cases of crisis (e.g., a natural disaster) mutual aid and solidarity increases, with local networks and individuals responding more efficiently than the government.

The negation of anarchy is also rooted in elitism and projected insecurity, the assertion that your neighbors are too stupid to have a say, so it's better to impose your own views indirectly by periodiciaclly consenting to a dictating class. Through this collective disenfranchisement, the individual is supposed to become "empowered" or at least have a slim chance at representation if they take steps to prove themselves a model citizen—obedient, passive, committed to a flawed due process. Such in the logic of statism, especially in the form of "representative democracy," a

[8] *Murray Bookchin, Harbinger Vol. #2, The Institute of Social Ecology, 2001.*

contradiction in terms. This argument disintegrates when we consider our constant social conflict, the murder of our ecosystem, the mismanagement of technology and materials, all in the end demonstrating that politicians and bosses are incapable of sharing our interests. If hierarchy is so beneficial, why is every corner it touches so fucked? They are the ones making the damaging decisions while dragging the rest of the world into their insanity. Instead of getting to the root of the problem, statists of all varieties continue to advocate public exclusion from the decisions that affect them.

It could be argued that a lot of our problems ultimately stem from central hierarchy—the state—which gives a monopoly to violent ideas that serve special interest. I genuinely think that directly democratic conditions would allow us to govern based on core instinct and ego, and certain anti-social views that only benefit an elite class could not be sustained.

We are an emotional species, but we are capable of rationalizing our social side, which does not come from nowhere. Our selfish reason will guide us back to the village if we act for ourselves with logical guidelines. "Greed in its fullest sense is the only possible basis of communist society. The present forms of greed lose out, in the end, because they turn out to be not greedy enough," as the Situationists put it.

Everyone is a communist without external authority—media, politicians, religious leaders—convincing us we're not. Most people care about their community and practice mutual aid, especially when they are not experiencing social alienation. Even if this weren't the case, societies could be organized so decisions are confined to their own areas—another major case for the principle of decentralization.

Likewise, we should also remember that anarchy is not something that can be imposed by giant institutions. Anarchists don't create programs, they create networks. If localities are done working with the government, approaching anything close to anarchist culture, it's also likely that other things have changed. That said, I acknowledge that some places will take different paths than others, and that I won't agree with everything, but refusing to fight for communal liberation just because propaganda has made us distrust one another will be the death of any prospect for better living.

Top-down administration, the state, does not entail better decisions. It cannot represent any individual outside of the elites who run them. All states are founded on monopoly and power, and like all monopolies, they undermine the will of the individual as they stray towards centralism and globalism in the gluttonous pursuit for wealth. Once a monopoly has concentrated enough power at the top, once it uses its power to betray any possible image of its goodness, it is doomed to fall apart. This has been clear in every case from the Mongols to the USSR. Too much violence, too much alienation, and too much corruption are the rightful nail in the coffin for every state. Even then, hierarchy will survive unless our coming insurrection is also aimed at statist culture. Power doesn't give up power, and it acquires more at every opportunity no matter the cost. It will continue to appear until one way or another the illusion is dismantled.

Statism is not an intrinsic part of our nature. Most modern anthropologists agree that for practically all of human history, until just about the end of the Neolithic Age, human association was communal and largely consensus-driven. Just like ant colonies that wind up walking in circles until they die, the human race is in an insanity loop. The only way to break this loop is by recognizing it, taking individual and eventually collective efforts to break free.

After the arrival of the state, even the modern nation-state, there have been countless large- and small-scale stateless societies that have flourished only to be destroyed by foreign govern-

ments. Non-hierarchical networks have existed on American soil for thousands of years, especially before Manifest Destiny, the large-scale robbery and subjugation that propelled us into our corporate age. One good example is the Iroquois Confederation, described by colonial emissary Cadwallader Colden as having "such absolute notions of liberty that they allow of no kind of superiority of one over another, and banish all servitude from their territories." The Iroquois were among the most complex governments in the world at the time, living by a communal and participatory basis that is still in practice today. Another example is the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. For the Muscogee, if agreement on major issues could not be found, tribal members were encouraged to set up their own settlements with help from those they were leaving. We can see how unfathomable this is today, when nearly every aspect of community and individual life is micromanaged by removed powers.

Old European guilds, communes, *túath*s, voluntaryist practices, etc., belonged to a western anarchic tradition that ended with the violent spread of hierarchy by civil and religious powers. Over a long period of assimilation and conquest, these trends swallowed Europe and eventually the globe. They developed into increasingly centralized states built on superstition and power, forcefully guiding the behavior of man-kind away from community, democracy, and nature. It's an old story: the arrival of the state expanded and perpetuated a violent culture in spite of our better tendencies. Our dystopian reality today is only the newest manifestation of relatively recent trends.

Anarchist organization is no stranger to the present. We see it in action today with the Zapatistas and the Kurds. But the most famous modern example is Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War. The anarchist movement in Spain was the product of generational oppression carried out by the monarchy, capitalist robber-barons, and the Catholic Church, which pulled peasants and urban working-class communities towards radical thought for an alternative. The ideas of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Marx, Proudhon, Stirner, Élisée Reclus and others became very popular over a few decades, especially in Barcelona. By the 1920s, revolutionary trade unions across Spain carried out massive general strikes and sabotage campaigns at growing numbers, and in 1931 the monarchy was overthrown.

The population quickly established a constitutional republic and began making progressive reforms. This created a sense of alienation among reactionary currents—i.e., fascists, monarchists, liberal capitalists. By July 1936, Francisco Franco, a fascist general under the old monarchy, united these groups to execute a coup, facilitating his power with the aid of Nazi and Italian forces. Push-back was higher than anticipated. Those loyal to the Republic—or at least against the fascists—scrambled to form a resistance. The Republic became the least influential faction as Marxist and anarchist organizations established territories across northern Spain. Practically overnight the entire region of Catalonia and Aragon founded a network of free municipalities on anarchist ideas.

The anarchists in Spain wanted to distance themselves from the bureaucratic interpretations of socialism and communism. In his book *After the Revolution*, published shortly after the uprising, economist Diego Abad de Santillan wrote: "We are guided by the vision of a society of free producers and distributors in which no power exists to remove from them the possession of the productive apparatus. In the Russian example, the State has taken away from workers' associations and peasants the free decision over everything relating to the instruments of labor, production and distribution. The producers there have changed their masters. They do not even own the means of production nor the goods they produce, and the wage earner, who is subjected

to as many inequalities or more than in the capitalistic society, is living under an economic order of dependency, servitude and slavery."

Much of the economy in Spain was collectivized and many resources were distributed on a communal basis. Workers and communities seized 75% of the economy in the anarchist stronghold of Barcelona, most of which during one grand sweep at the very beginning of the war. Since the collectivization was directly democratic in nature, workers on the ground floor were able to personally influence decisions with their unique perspectives. Conditions also improved and changes were made to make labor a more welcoming and voluntary task. According to Emma Goldman, who visited Catalonia between 1936 and 1937, productivity rose by 30–50% across the entire region despite wartime interference. In a publication for the *Workers' Solidarity Movement*, Irish anarchist Eddie Conlon said this on the Spanish economy:

"Collectivisation was voluntary and thus different from the forced 'collectivisation' in Russia. Usually a meeting was called and all present would agree to pool together whatever land, tools and animals they had. The land was divided into rational units and groups of workers were assigned to work them. Each group had its delegate who represented their views at meetings. A management committee was also elected and was responsible for the overall running of the collective. Each collective held regular general meetings of all its participants.

"If you didn't want to join the collective you were given some land but only as much as you could work yourself. You were not allowed to employ workers. Not only production was affected, distribution was on the basis of what people needed. In many areas money was abolished. People come to the collective store (often churches which had been turned into warehouses) and got what was available. If there were shortages rationing would be introduced to ensure that everyone got their fair share. But it was usually the case that increased production under the new system eliminated shortages.

"In agricultural terms the revolution occurred at a good time. Harvests that were gathered in and being sold off to make big profits for a few landowners were instead distributed to those in need. Doctors, bakers, barbers, etc. were given what they needed in return for their services. Where money was not abolished a 'family wage' was introduced so that payment was on the basis of need and not the number of hours worked.

"Production greatly increased. Technicians and agronomists helped the peasants to make better use of the land. Modern scientific methods were introduced and in some areas yields increased by as much as 50%. There was enough to feed the collectivists and the militias in their areas. Often there was enough for exchange with other collectives in the cities for machinery. In addition food was handed over to the supply committees who looked after distribution in the urban areas."[9]

The Spanish libertarians faced some challenges that shouldn't be overlooked. While the resistance did receive some aid from the Communist International (controlled by the Soviet Union), munitions were systematically cut off from the anarchists. Militiamen received minimal training, shabby rifles, and poor ammunition; because weapons and munitions were scarce, they were unable to exit survival mode and engage in united offensive action. These conditions may have well foretold the outcome of the war. Contrary to statist claims, however, anarchist militias did well considering these odds. Their confederal and democratic nature made them flexible and capable of carrying out tasks independent of one another. Propagandists often suggest this grassroots model was more disastrous than it was; just as often, they act like centralized modes of coordina-

[9] *The Spanish Civil War, Workers Solidarity Movement, 1986.*

tion were even possible at this time. As Orwell noted in his memoir, "a modern mechanized army does not spring up out of the ground." Even the decrees imposed out of pressure from the Communist International could not change this, as the ranks retained a decentralized soft command throughout the war.

There were some problems that came with the revolution. They were deeply ideological, suffering from the habit of fetishizing mental constructs. As anarchism replaced the moral authority of the church, many people sacralized it similarly, creating another conformist culture based on anarchic doctrine. Despite its strong democratic and egalitarian practices and opposition to hierarchy, this culture nonetheless had dogmatic elements where individuals acted for grand narratives they internalized and put before themselves. My criticism follows illegalist and egoist-anarchist Renzo Novatore's point: "Since the time that human beings first believed that life was a duty, a calling, a mission, it has meant shame for their power of being, and in following phantoms, they have denied themselves and distanced themselves from the real. When Christ said to human beings: 'be yourselves, perfection is in you!' he launched a superb phrase that is the supreme synthesis of life."[10]

My issue is not with anarchism nor even with social anarchism, but with people losing touch with their inner-authority. The heteronomy in Spain—which harmed the individual psyche above all else—occurred partly in response to the revolution, a perceived time of enlightenment and fraternity after generations of oppression. There was even evidence that it was more of a trend among the organizers and propagandists than the insurgents. Still, it's worth noting its relationship with the intellectual and ecclesiastical trends rotting our minds for thousands of years—in this case, the idea that doctrine is anything more than the fallible words of another of ourselves, and the tendency to act for grand causes, a mere righting of systematic wrongs without emphasis on our role in things. They found it difficult to "reject the black flag" so to speak. This may be a side-effect of every social movement for a long time; the development of healthier habits begins now.

We need to battle the notion that ideology or morality have any place in organization—including anarchism. While agreed upon methods for organizing are one thing, liberation is not imposing a new social order on a basis of "right" and "wrong", "good" and "evil", what we are obligated to do with our freedom. It's better that organization remain fluid, eclectic—a constantly-evolving and natural product of individuals. Building a free society on higher systems and doctrinal thinking is missing the point. Hardly anyone criticizes the Enlightenment stance on secularism and its opposition to theocracy, yet still the aim of practically every political movement emphasizes imposing new moral institutions, a new ideological order. Even most anarchists fall into this dogma, forgetting that institutionalized ideas and doctrine become a justification for limited democracy and, ultimately, a major variable in the establishment of strict political orders like the church—mentally and materially—in medieval Europe, only this time surrounding a *religion of ideas.* Religious secularism isn't enough—we're long overdue for *total secularism.*

Apart from these issues, which were still naturally occurring and minimal compared to more statist ideology, we can still admire the Spanish anarchists' commitment and systems of doing things. The anarchist organizations in Spain demonstrated that freedom and equality are interdependent, mutually-reinforcing goals, and that real revolution is abolishing alienating institutions rather than "seizing control" of them. Everything about their decentralized, consensus-driven

[10] *Anarchist Individualism in the Social Revolution, Il Libertario, 1919.*

methods proved promising, even considering the moments of confusion at the beginning of the revolution.

History might have looked considerably different if Comintern hadn't threatened to withhold subsidies if Leninist factions didn't repress and eventually destroy the anarchist communities. Civil war erupted amidst civil war, making the resistance even more vulnerable to fascist forces. The anarchists fell on February 10th, 1939, to many marking the end of the golden age of classical anarchism. Franco's army took total control of Spain by April 1st, a little under two months later.

> "Be realistic, demand the impossible."
>
> — slogan from the 1968 anarchist uprising in France

These are turbulent times for our planet. Perhaps more than any other time in history, we are seeing the consequences of our debased and power-hungry civilization. Often without realizing it, we find ourselves facing an order that produces only mediocrity, loneliness, mindless waste, and unnecessary violence. Across the world—despite the domination of institutions, parties, and culture—experimental ideas are spreading as our corporatocratic states continue to push their luck. Yet still there are still multitudes of people who can't imagine what even a minor deviation from the present reality would look like. Many have moved on from capitalist and neoliberal politics, at least in word, but there are many mistakes we can make from here, such as placing production in the hands of bureaucratic power or putting too much faith in politicians, narratives, and platforms. People have the social values but the tendency towards authoritarian worship escapes few groups in politics. It's about time we gave more anarchic ideas serious consideration.

For many anarchist circles, it's been a long time since just getting together hasn't felt like a victory. But as a habit developed out of stagnation, it is dying with action. Today radicals are finding more and more direction, and minor differences don't matter as much when you hit the streets. Affinity groups and solidarity networks are popping up in many areas, as well as worker, tenant, and houseless unions. Nearly every major city has an anarchist infoshop and collective. Even among non-anarchists—or unconscious anarchists—worker liberation, anti-policing, and prison abolition are becoming common topics in discourse. People are also warming up to the tactics of sabotage, occupation, rioting, and general strike. As urgent as the future seems, it's easy to lose yourself in hope when you're right in the thick of things, which is my best advice for the fed-up, idealistic, and terrified.

Of course, we first need to consider how we would manage to realistically overturn things under a highly developed surveillance state like ours. Centralized, top-down tactics would make us an easy target in five seconds. Right now, the best thing would be to start from the bottom, spreading the word and building local affinity networks—expropriative gangs, infoshops, mutual aid groups, trained militias, etc.—to challenge the legitimacy of capitalism and the state. The goal of these organizations should be putting communities and individuals in the saddle. "Freedom cannot be 'delivered' to the individual as the 'end-product' of a 'revolution'; the assembly and community cannot be legislated or decreed into existence," said Murray Bookchin. This doesn't mean fighting for a transitory state or a representative who isn't ourselves. This means fighting for our homes and the ability to directly take part in decisions. Anything else is just another transfer of control over our lives and communities.

Authority cannot create freedom. This is a basic law of society that almost everyone has lost. For both practical and tactical purposes, organized action should be led by a series of networks

linked by affinity, what the Italian insurgent Alfredo Bonanno called the "base nuclei" of anarchist revolutionary struggle. Horizontal groups, militias, and community projects help authority remain at the bottom. They also promote horizontal activity that is much harder to infiltrate and destroy than parties, bureaucratic unions, and states. A consensus-driven network of affinity groups involved with easily repeatable attacks may be our best method of organization.

Decentralized action of all types is the one thing bureaucratic governments like ours aren't skilled at destroying—they can rape the planet and torture the people, but at the end of the day they only understand themselves. America's defeat in Vietnam and Afghanistan was largely due to the difficulty infiltrating, tracking, and identifying confederal militias. Russian conscripts today find similar obstacles in the Russo-Ukrainian War. Decentralization has also shown potential in actionist movements such as the Yellow Vests, who organize into local chapters, but alone they will never be able to make big changes in a world this authoritarian. Not without grit. Not without embracing life as courageous, self-willed rebels. Not without dropping out of indentured living to build networks. Not without meaningful agitation, education, adaptation, nor without the support of every committed insurgent, diligent medic, cunning saboteur, and passionate orator that I am proud to see in some circles.

There would also need to be a surplus of involvement, because support is not cheering at the sidelines for a cause you've done nothing for. Take this as an invitation. The experiences found in the heart of direct action are inspiring, just as much as the reasons for it are enraging; if anything, it makes it easy to see the difference between leadership and hierarchy.

Change depends on action. I'm sick of people ordering off Amazon and working to pay rent just to be like, "When will the revolution happen?" Every moment is the revolution! Your workplaces, your neighborhoods, your prisons, your schools are the battlegrounds. Every second there are opportunities to organize, expropriate, and sabotage. A post-state future will not arrive until we start taking every opportunity to strike back!

The time to adopt an insurrectionary practice is now. When I say insurrection I mean "an organized rebellion aimed at overthrowing a constituted government through the use of subversion, sabotage, and direct resistance— calling in question the legitimacy and efficacy of government." Insurrection means much more than revolution. Revolution refers to an overturning of conditions and institutions while insurrection, notwithstanding its goal of dismantling the established order, emphasizes the logic of individual revolt, a rising of headstrong rebels fed up with the life presented to them. As Stirner put it, "The revolution aimed at new arrangements; insurrection leads us no longer to let ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and sets no glittering hopes on 'institutions'." Change requires the development of our individuality just as much as our environment.

Resistance can take many forms. All anarchists—except for those convinced that the state will naturally wither away—have advocated some idea of insurrection. Establishing mutual aid networks and free stores may be considered insurrectionary, so long as it's self-organized and openly subversive.

My goal is to create autonomous spaces where I can pursue stimulating experiences and represent myself in a way that matters. I think we should take any realistic path towards this but we can't depend on it being delivered to us. Power doesn't give up power—maybe you can change some aspects of a monopoly, but you can't make a monopoly give itself up by asking, waiting, or readily compromising.

This is where insurrection becomes essential. The significance of insurrection is not measured in quantitative ways such as body count or military might, but the social upheaval, action, and cultural and personal transformation it generates. The importance of any given rebellion should be assessed by how it manages to break the "business as usual" passivity that's all too common in today's world. The tactics used by the Zapatista movement provide a great example of this. Their comparatively small armed clash with the Mexican government in San Cristobal in 1994 is considered an example of successful insurrection, not because of a staggering military victory, but because it was able to catalyze a culture of insurgency that is still alive today. The autonomous communities in the Chiapas highlands are in part a product of this insurrectionary culture. They have since used this base to begin a new campaign against the Mexican state and colonialism and have expanded into parts of Oaxaca.

We need to know when to be passive and when to be assertive, when to break a window and when to fix one. Realistically, we need to at least build the foundation of the replacement before we can really get down to overthrowing the status quo. Every need and necessary function of the community must be fulfilled by self-organized revolutionary associations, without permission from capital or government. It would probably be pointless and even dangerous to put too much faith into any one strategy, but whatever happens it would be wise to highlight grassroots practices as much as we can. Doing our part to build a network of mutual aid groups, spokes councils, militant bands, and black market cooperatives would be a good start. I know there are plenty of people ready to undertake something like this, so all we need to do is go out and meet each other.

Change comes through action, not waiting. A radical insurrectionary movement might be quick and spontaneous or it may be a gradual process spanning over decades if we manage to survive that long. This does not change how we should respond at present or the extreme importance of restructuring how our world works. The present situation calls for a campaign of subversion, direct action, and community support, challenging the state and democratizing communities from below, taking every opportunity to build up our communities and transform them into autonomous spaces. This requires a great deal of courage and self-willed discipline. It also requires expertise and total divestment in the current order. The first revolution is a personal one.

If a movement has any potential to threaten the status quo, authorities will ruthlessly try to derail or hijack it to prevent it from growing. The anti-police movement here in the U.S., for example, is consistently met with violence whether protesters are peaceful or not. This is something we should expect but can also use to our advantage. People have gone to events with the intent of non-violent civil disobedience, but came prepared with a plan and defense, in some cases developing effective new strategies. Once the police attack, which they sometimes are looking for any excuse to do, black bloc and other affinity-style groups make sure to protect the vulnerable. Radical medics respond to the injured and independent press documents things to expose the true nature of the state. These types of activities not only pressure the present order but create a space where actionists can network and gain experience.

The point of these minor rebellions is to promote a culture of action and catalyze large-scale movements against the corporate state. Alone they are pointless. The true battlefields are in our minds and everyday life. In the real world, most of the revolution is building, not destroying. Solidarity networks may prove useful. Some might ask, "wouldn't all of this be mercilessly attacked?" Most things worth doing are going to be difficult. This is the unfortunate reality. However, every

person changes the world at least a little bit, and therefore every subversive act means something. These tactics have been proven effective wherever they have been applied and could do better. Believe me, the logic of aiming high and acting will get us more than we ever thought possible. "The weak indulge in resolutions, but the strong act. Life is but a day's work—do it well."[11] A future of self-determination, stimulating existence, and the autonomous village is possible if we're up for the struggle.

[11] *The Morantia Motto, The Urantia Book, 1955*

Thomas Pulliam
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