

CONSTRUCTING ANARCHISMS: A WORKSHOP

Organized by Shawn P. Wilbur

WEEK THREE READINGS

CONSTRUCTING ANARCHISMS: A WORKSHOP

Organized by Shawn P. Wilbur

WEEK THREE READINGS

Constructing an Anarchism: An-Archy

The first order of business is to again thank everyone who has followed along—and particularly those who have taken the opportunity to comment. A special shout-out to the folks on the [Anews Podcast](#), who took some time again last week to talk about “Constructing Anarchisms.” The responses—sometimes even the trollish ones—have helped make clear the various little course-corrections that seem necessary. There is necessarily a lot of the work on this project happening just-in-time (or, like today, just-past-time) and the kind of active engagement required on my end is a lot easier to maintain when there are signs of life elsewhere.

Among the course-corrections you’ll notice moving forward is a slight change in my list of building-block concepts. Mutualism and federation are out, replaced by individualism and guarantism. As will be clear when we get there, these are fairly small shifts in focus, but they represent clarifications for me, prompted in part by feedback received on the early material.

✧

On, then, to *An-Archy*, hyphenated in this way to underline the fact that there are really two concepts—*anarchy* and the *archy* it intends to do without—that will have to be addressed.

Two Working Definitions

As we turn to my construction-in-progress, I hope to provide two slightly different resources for those of you who intend to attempt your own construction later. I obviously need to provide some fairly straightforward definitions for the concepts I’ll be using, together with some indication of how they fit together to form a useful *anarchism*. But it is also important to underline the extent to which these specific conceptualizations are choices made within specific contexts—and then to explore the background of those choices with enough care to make others’ choices easier. Sometimes it will also be necessary to make more than one choice, provide more than one definition, while clarifying why that is a necessity. And, of course, explaining the twelve concepts on which I will focus will require addressing a range of other, related concepts.

Addressing *An-Archy*, perhaps we can begin with a very simple, structural definition and a general observation:

☞ As should already be clear, I think we have to treat *anarchy* as a still-emerging concept, in part because we are still coming to terms with the precise nature of the *archy* it seeks to eliminate. Perhaps that’s the way we should be thinking about all concepts of any importance. In

The Theory of Property, Proudhon observed that “Humanity proceeds by approximations” (including, significantly, “the approximation of an-archy”) and I think we have to suspect that one of the ways that *archy* manifests itself is the form of approximations taken for something more finished and persistent. That’s a question we’ll undoubtedly have to return to at various points in our exploration. For now, let’s just emphasize that most of our “definitions” of concepts like anarchy will really be more like descriptions of some one of its aspects or applications.

☞ That said, we can point with a good deal of confidence at some of the more prominent aspects of the reigning *archy*: *hierarchy, authority, governmentalism, oppression, exploitation*, etc. In my model construction, I want to focus on questions of social relations and their structure, so let’s say that, in this context, *anarchy* entails *horizontality*, the complete absence of *hierarchy*. While I am prepared to recognize every sort of *difference* between individuals and groups of individuals, and to attempt to account for the practical consequences of those differences, it appears to me that every attempt to translate those differences into *inequality* (in the sense of social inequality, the persistent elevation of any individual or group above any others on the basis of their identities or social roles) is necessarily going to find itself at odds with the most basic sorts of anarchist critique.

This approach is narrow, in the sense that it is focused on particular structures of social relations, but also quite broad in other ways. The *archy* that it opposes is not simply capitalism, the state-form, patriarchy or any of the other specific specific hierarchy (all of which can be critiqued from a variety of perspectives), but instead the general pretense that every social body must have a “head,” that someone must always “lay down the law,” etc. It identifies a particular target, a particular *archic* way of looking at the world, but makes no particular claims about the reasons for the hegemony or ubiquity of the *archy* it opposes.

Compared to the conceptions of *anarchy* already introduced, it undoubtedly seems a bit tame. And it says something at once amusing and important about anarchist ideas that we might begin with an opposition to what is arguably the basic structure of the majority of our social institutions and still feel like maybe we’ve haven’t made a good start. But let’s see where this definition takes us and what it contributes to the specific project of a shareable, synthetic anarchism I have proposed, while we also explore larger contexts and other options.

A Historical Interlude

One way to contextualize specific conceptualizations is to compare them to those made in the past, which are not always the shining moments of clarity that we might imagine they were. When *anarchism* emerged as keyword, ideology and movement in the 1870s, for example, there was a considerable amount of baggage already associated with the term, as well as a considerable amount of not always accessible history accumulated in what was at that time still a largely undocumented anarchist past.

Our hyphenated an-archy threatens to drag us into a confrontation with the details of that emergence and perhaps we should just go with the flow. That form can perhaps be seen as a nod to Proudhon and the *anar-chie* of 1840, which as good an “authority” as Kropotkin assures us was not quite the *anarchy* of the collectivists or anarchist communists. In the essay “On Order,” he began by noting that “a party devoted to action, a party representing a new tendency, seldom has the opportunity of choosing a name for itself.” He discusses the *beggars, sans-culottes* and

nihilists, who were all presumably named by their opponents, and then presents this rather remarkable origin story for *anarchism*:

It was the same with the anarchists. When a party emerged within the International which denied authority to the Association and also rebelled against authority in all its forms, this party at first called itself *federalist*, then *anti-statist* or *anti-authoritarian*. At that period they actually avoided using the name *anarchist*. The word *an-archy* (that is how it was written then) seemed to identify the party too closely with the Proudhonists, whose ideas about economic reform were at that time opposed by the International. But it is precisely because of this — to cause confusion — that its enemies decided to make use of the name; after all, it made it possible to say that the very name of the anarchist proved that their only ambition was to create disorder and chaos without caring about the result.

Forget the anarchists who actually *seized* the opportunity to call themselves “anarchists.” What Kropotkin will distinguish as “modern anarchism”—itself a curious characterization, as *anarchism* was at that time really a new label—was named by its enemies—the Marxist?—in order to “cause confusion.”

And the “modern” anarchist communists learned to live with it...

It’s a weird story, which seems to play ideological games with the historical facts—and, in the long run, it wasn’t a story even Kropotkin could stick to. Proudhon would reenter the story of anarchism in later tellings. And perhaps it was always “the Proudhonists” who were the target of Kropotkin’s comments, although they were not particular fond of the language of *an-archy*. Most likely, Kropotkin was just repeating bits of ideological hearsay. After all, by the time he became involved with the International in 1872, the “Proudhonists,” who had been instrumental in the founding of the organization and they rather swiftly purged from it, were really a distant memory.

There are indications, too, that Kropotkin had yet to really engage with Proudhon’s work directly. In 1883, Marie Le Compte (responsible for the less famous, but nearly simultaneous *other* English translation of “God and the State,” reported to Benjamin R. Tucker’s *Liberty* these details from Kropotkin about his activities in prison:

At 10 I read Proudhon half an hour, then take five minutes’ exercise by whirling my chair over my head, then read Proudhon. At 2 the guard comes to say promenade in the court. I promenade half an hour, then write on my “Prisons of Siberia” for two hours (all I am ever able), then read Proudhon.

Chair-whirling Kropotkin is one of those images worth a side-trip, I think. More immediately worth our attention is the potential mix of confusion and uncertainty about that anarchist past that informed the formation of “modern anarchism.” Back in 1881, Kropotkin tells us that “the anarchist party quickly accepted the name it had been given” and then goes on to explain how the ideological conflicts were presumably dealt with by a return to the sources.

So the word [anarchist] returned to its basic, normal, common meaning, as expressed in 1816 by the English philosopher Bentham, in the following terms: “The philosopher who wished to reform a bad law”, he said, “does not preach an insurrection against it.... The character of the anarchist is quite different. He denies the existence of the law, he rejects

its validity, he incites men to refuse to recognize it as law and to rise up against its execution”. The sense of the word has become wider today; the anarchist denies not just existing laws, but all established power, all authority; however its essence has remained the same: it rebels — and this is what it starts from — against power and authority in any form.

If, however, you were not expecting Jeremy Bentham, inventor of the Panopticon, as the source for the “basic, common meaning” of *anarchy*—particularly as the rest of the explanation sounds an awful lot like Proudhon—well, you’re not alone. And, if we didn’t know about all of that furious later reading of Proudhon (and chair-whirling), it would be hard, I think, to avoid noticing the similarities between the emergence of that explicit *anarchism* and certain all-too-familiar kinds of *entryism*. When I first read “On Order” in the context of my work on the language of anarchy, I could help but think of this spicy, but probably apocryphal bit from Kenneth Rexroth’s *Communalism*:

There is a story that, when the Communist International was formed, a delegate objected to the name. Referring to all these groups he said: “But there are already communists.” Lenin answered: “Nobody ever heard of them, and when we get through with them nobody ever will.”

Placing Kropotkin in the villain’s role was even a kind of thought experiment I played out in a long-ago post on “the Benthamite anarchism and the origins of anarchist history.” Unsurprisingly, the idea of Bread Santa as the bad guy was too alien even for much outrage. Fair enough. We know the essay was not Kropotkin’s last or best attempt to engage with the anarchist past. We also know, I think, that it was not the last silly thing he said about the “Proudhonian” parts of that past. So what are the takeaways from this particular episode? Maybe these:

This anarchism thing never been easy.

We all have to start somewhere.

Sometimes even our best and brightest have been a bit off the mark, even in relation to the basics.

Again with the Etymology...

I don’t want to spend a lot of time and energy on etymological considerations. That’s the sort of thing that is all too prevalent in online discussions of anarchism. And we’ve already touched on some of the relevant details. But let’s review a few key bits and raise a couple of new questions.

We are pursuing *anarchy* as conceived through the broader of the proposed etymologies, as *an-arche*. The prefix *an-* is *privative*, which, according to the *OED*, means “consisting in or marked by the absence or loss of some quality or attribute that is normally present.” We recognize in *arche* a concept that, as Stephen Pearl Andrews put it, “curiously combines, in a subtle unity of meaning, the idea of *origin* or *beginning*, and hence of elementary principle, with that of *government* or *rule*.” Go in search of the other significant uses of *arche* and the combinations get curious indeed. So when you put the two together you should at least expect to do without an awful lot of things that you might otherwise expect to be present, with the

absences being particularly noticeable among things that might pretend to be *eternal, essential, certain* or *absolute*.

We aren't going to solve theoretical or ideological problems with even the best dictionary. But it's probably worth noting that there is nothing about the word *anarchy* that precludes broad interpretations, sweeping denunciations, whether we're talking about something like Proudhon's *anti-absolutism* or the insurrectionary desire to "to finally come to daggers with life." (And this might not be a bad time to recall that, for Proudhon, insurrection was a Plan B to which he clung for much of his life. See "[My Testament, or Society of Avengers](#).") Indeed, it is probably when interpreted most broadly, most sweepingly, that is is most shareable, even if it is not in that form that it will seem most appealing to some who might be invited to share.

The Anarchist Question

It's never been easy. This is the horn that I would like to stop blowing about now, but if folks have spent time with any significant fraction of the material presented so far, I imagine the point has been made.

If we go back to the beginnings of the anarchist tradition, we find that the clearest conceptions of *anarchy* were complex, with multiple meanings in play. (See "Proudhon's Barbaric Yawp," "Anarchy, Understood in All its Senses.") And sometimes the conceptions were not as clear as they might have been, if only because anarchist thought was a work in progress. ("Anarchy: Historical, Abstract and Resultant")

Moving forward through the anarchist past, we encounter a range of difficulties that have made the transmission of ideas from generation to generation, or even just between contemporary factions, anything but clear and simple. We can't escape the fact that ignorance and confusion have, at times, been woven into the fabric of anarchist tradition, nor should we neglect the fact that the urge to rectify that sort of error has been persistent enough to almost count as an anarchist current on its own. Almost from the beginning, students of anarchists ideas have proposed means of coming to terms with the anarchist past, often seesawing between despair and optimism. ("The Bankruptcy of Beliefs," "The Rising Anarchism," "The Anarchist Question.") We might seesaw a bit ourselves, seeing how perennial some of the questions we face have been throughout the anarchist past, but I think there is something reassuring in finding that the questions have already been asked, often by some of the most familiar names in anarchist history, even if those investigations have not always received the attention they perhaps deserve.

A Theory of Archy

One of the things I've learned about the study of the anarchist past is that many of the things we imagine it can't provide us are indeed there, ready and waiting, but we tend not to find them until we've done enough work on our own to know what we lack. Five years ago, when I wrote "Toward a General Theory of Archy," *archy* was really just another in the series of neologisms that filled my writing at the time. I knew that I had reached certain limits, however temporary, in my reading of the "classics," where the shifting vocabularies and conceptual toolkits add layers of complexity to ideas that are already challenging. So I was expanding my own conceptual toolkit, with mixed success, trying to establish some comparatively fixed points to which I could relate the shifting senses of more familiar keywords in the works of Proudhon, Bakunin, etc.

Archy is not really *arche* in any of its historical senses. At first, I simply wanted a kind of place-holder for all of the things that anarchists have opposed historically. I discovered parallels between Proudhon's critiques of capitalism and of governmentalism, then hoped to extend those critiques to institutions, like the patriarchal family, that Proudhon had not adequately analyzed or critiqued. Much of what I will be sharing in the coming weeks was ultimately a product of that project, although the insights came in fits and starts. ("Escheat and Anarchy," like "Anarchy, Understood in All its Senses," emerged from the correction of existing translations.)

For a few years, I spoke about *archy* in public forums and including it in my writings, *as if* the notion had secured its place in historical anarchist theory—and there weren't many bold enough to call my bluff. And eventually it was no longer a bluff, as I found that the term did indeed have a certain currency in certain 20th century anarchist circles. By the time I wrote "Archy vs. Anarchy," I didn't need to make or avoid any claims about the novelty of the term—but I suppose there may be plenty of other more or less unauthorized innovations there.

"Archy vs. Anarchy" is a simple introduction to the anarchism I'll be constructing over the coming weeks. I have paired the three short readings on archy with René Furth's long, but very interesting article on "The Anarchist Question," as preparation for my post on Tradition, rather than revisiting the material from the "[Extrications](#)" series, which some of you may have already read. I will summarize what I think is useful from those exploratory writings. Those trying to pace their reading schedule should notice that next week's readings will include Voline's essay "On Synthesis," which, again, some participants will have already read, and that "Escheat and Anarchy" will be more thoroughly discussed in Week 7, when we look at Proudhon's theory of exploitation.

Our Lost Continent & the Journey Back—1840 Proudhon's Barbaric Yawp

— Je vous entends : vous faites de la satire ; ceci est à l'adresse du gouvernement. — En aucune façon : vous venez d'entendre ma profession de foi sérieuse et mûrement réfléchie ; quoique très ami de l'ordre, je suis, dans toute la force du terme, anarchiste. Écoutez-moi. — P.-J. Proudhon, Qu'est-ce que la propriété?

[I understand: you are engaged in satire; this is addressed to the government. — Not at all: you have just heard my serious profession of faith, over which I have reflected long and carefully; although I am very friendly to order, I am, in the full force of the term, (an) anarchist. Listen to me.]



The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me—he complains of my gab and my loitering. I too am not a bit tamed—I too am untranslatable; I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world. — Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself”

Every story has to start somewhere. And when the story is that of *anarchist history*, it seems hard to find a more likely place to begin than Proudhon's 1840 declaration—*je suis anarchiste*—which we generally treat as the first instance of at least one kind of anarchist position-taking.

The form of this first anarchist declaration is almost certainly familiar to those of us who have made some attempt to claim the anarchist label. Most of us know the “you must be joking” reception and have made the “we mean it, man” response. And most of us have more than once then gone on to the “listen to me” stage of things and tried to explain to baffled or incredulous listeners just what we are talking about. For those of us who have been around a while, perhaps all of that has even become relatively routine. Still, I think most of us, no matter how long we've claimed the label, might be willing to admit that our willingness to make the claim has often been more certain than our grasp on precisely what that claim involves us in. It is not, after all, entirely up to us; and whatever we may make of the phrase has to contend with what is now a long history of similar declarations.

Now, imagine making that declaration, not just for *our* first time, but for *the first time*.

Imagine *je suis anarchiste* as an inaugural event, a position-taking in a world where “being (an) anarchist” was a previously unattempted feat and where there were no clear criteria for determining just what should follow and validate such a declaration. Imagine speaking the phrase, making the declaration in *a world without anarchists*—at least in the sense most relevant to modern anarchist identities and identifications.

That's a hard place to occupy now, in a world where “being an anarchist” is a relatively common, if not necessarily well-defined phenomenon. But at the moment when Proudhon made his declaration, it was arguably not even clear how one would diagram its structure, let alone fathom its consequences. After all, French grammar allows us to read the final word of that phrase as a noun or as an adjective. Does *anarchiste* designate a role, identity or affiliation, or does it indicate a tendency? *I am an anarchist*—although there are, perhaps, no others, at least in the precise sense I am using—or else *I am anarchistic*—unless, of course, we decide that “the full force of the term” includes all these various senses (and Proudhon would indeed later embrace “anarchy, taken in all its senses,” so this final interpretation may be an immediately relevant precedent.)



Multiple stories start with Proudhon's declaration. We will follow one of them for almost a hundred years. But another ends almost as soon as it begins, because this moment, this event is not ultimately sustainable.

Almost immediately, we move from a moment of pure and perhaps boundless potentiality to the exploration of all that moment might contain, in potential form, or imply. There is what we might call, borrowing from Whitman, Proudhon's *barbaric yawp*—for which, in that moment, “not a bit tamed” and “untranslatable” seem perfectly appropriate descriptors—and then the “listen to me,” followed by 180 years (and counting) of attempts at enough taming and translation to put the potential energy stored up in that moment to some practical use. And that has meant, among other things, repeated attempts at restaging the initial moment, repeated declarations, followed in their turn by explanations that, when they are successful, capture some aspect of the anarchy that Proudhon invoked, but inevitably leave more to be said.

A significant portion of the material on which this history will draw will have been part of a long series of *anarchist declarations*. And some of the failures of anarchist theory to accumulate and develop in some more systematic manner may be attributable to this dynamic, which tends to draw us back—if not to *first principles*, as anarchists have a complicated relationship to *arche*—to familiar forms of position-taking and equally complicated relationships with origins and systemization.

All of that will, I think, become increasingly clear as this exploration progresses. But, for now, what I would like to suggest—as a kind of preliminary conclusion and guide to orient future action—is this:

We have still not even come close to exhausting the radical possibilities of that inaugural moment. “Je suis anarchiste” remains, despite all of our efforts, nearly as untamed and untranslatable as it did in 1840.

And, perhaps, recognizing that fact will at least help us, as we retrace our steps from that point, to determine how best to orient ourselves and our anarchist activity with regard to the questions and possibilities raised by that initial declaration.



Onward, then! But perhaps we still want to take a moment, just on the verge of beginning in earnest, to think about the route ahead of us and make a few last minutes arrangements.

First, let's observe that exploring a lost continent is perhaps a task best undertaken with a party—and then acknowledge that ours is already partially assembled. Along with Max Nettlau and Proudhon, who will accompany us, in one capacity or another, throughout the journey, we should welcome Walt Whitman, whose inclusion here involves much more than just the opportunity for a fun post title. Whitman's work has long been a kind of touchstone for anarchists, myself included, and it will function at times in this study as a kind of poetic foil for more conventional theoretical work we'll be examining.

Whitman will get his own introduction in due course, but, for now, consider him at least on a path likely to cross our own at various points.

Second, in case this dynamic I have described of a sort of eternal return to basic anarchist questions seems implausible, let me cite at least one contemporary anarchist who seems to recognize a similar dynamic. Consider this passage from Alfredo M. Bonanno's “The Anarchist Tension:”

So anarchists keep asking themselves the same question: What is anarchism? What does it mean to be an anarchist? Why? Because it is not a definition that can be made once and for all, put in a safe and considered a heritage to be tapped little by little. Being an anarchist does not mean one has reached a certainty or said once and for all, 'There, from now on I hold the truth and as such, at least from the point of view of the idea, I am a privileged person'. Anyone who thinks like this is an anarchist in word alone. Instead the anarchist is someone who really puts themselves in doubt as such, as a person, and asks themselves: What is my life according to what I do and in relation to what I think? What connection do I manage to make each day in everything I do, a way of being an anarchist continually and not come to agreements, make little daily compromises, etc? Anarchism is not a concept that can be locked up in a word like a gravestone. It is not a political theory. It is a way of conceiving life, and life, young or old as we may be, whether we are old people or children, is not something final: it is a stake we must play day after day. When we wake up in the morning and put our feet on the ground we must have a good reason for getting up, if we don't it makes no difference whether we are anarchists or not. We might as well stay in bed and sleep. And to have a good reason we must know what we want to do because for anarchism, for the anarchist, there is no difference between what we do and what we think, but there is a continual reversal of theory into action and action into theory. That is what makes the anarchist unlike someone who has another concept of life and crystallises this concept in a political practice, in political theory.

Although Bonanno may seem like strange company for at least some of the figures likely to be featured in this examination, I don't think it is unfair to suggest that this passage—one of my favorite bits of modern anarchist writing—describes a dynamic at least not significantly different from the one that I have begun to explore.

Whether these two expressions come anywhere close to *representing* a key elements in "the anarchist tradition" is course, a question that only the proposed exploration can attempt to answer.

So, again, *onward!*

Toward a General Theory of Archy

A lot of my frustrations with the anarchist milieu have less to do with the sorts of internal problems we face, which seem to me to be logical manifestations of the larger social environment, and more to do with the fact that, even if we had the will to address the various things that hold us back, we might not have enough shared theory and vocabulary to get the job done. But, as I have said, my feelings of alienation have been parallel to, and undoubtedly also arise from, a very strong sense of having finally plumbed a lot of the depths of anarchist theory and history. The combination leaves me very few excuses for putting off writing the sort of general anarchist theory that I have been circling for the last few years, something I've been wrestling with as I added the role of anthologist to the various other roles I've played within the milieu. I could be generally agnostic about defining terms like *anarchy* and *anarchism*—in their various senses—as long as the primary vehicles for my work were blogs like this one, the Libertarian Labyrinth archives and Corvus Editions. It's been easy to treat everything as a working translation or a sketch for a chapter in a work to be completed when more data had been gathered. And it has also been extremely useful to do so, and not to tie myself prematurely to a particular guiding narrative. Opening anarchism onto itself and its possibilities, by documenting all the messiness of its history and the complexities of its earliest theories, has, I think, been an extremely useful project, and one in the context of which I think I can claim some real accomplishments.

It is, however, only part of the work necessary to rethink the milieu in terms that allow us to move on beyond existing obstacles. Adding complexity to the narrative of anarchist history and showing the permeability of sectarian boundaries is a good tonic for those who think of our problems in terms of rigidity, dogmatism, etc. For us—and I proudly count myself a member of that particular faction—more *anarchy* in our *anarchism* just seems natural. By itself, however, this approach doesn't necessarily have much to offer those who are concerned that anarchy might ultimately be a principle of pure dispersion, insufficient to guide us toward the specific changes we desire in our lives and relations. Fortunately, the sort of clarification of the idea of anarchy that would be necessary to chase the fears of this group is likely to be of use to the rest of us as well, and that other work of opening closed narratives and engaging complexity has probably unearthed everything we need to attempt some sort of positive account of anarchy as sufficient to the needs of anarchism—a narrative shareable by a variety of present tendencies, but also one suggesting a shared thread through various historical tendencies.

In my present state of dissatisfaction with the anarchist milieu, such a narrative, while shareable, can't help but also be a sort of provocation. For me, one of the lessons of the past couple of years is that some “sectarian” battles, very narrowly defined, are indeed worth fighting. To embrace “anarchism without adjectives” in any sense that is not absurd and ultimately indifferent is to adopt the hardest sort of line against any sect that would attempt to ground anarchism on any basis but the shifting ground of anarchy. That means taking a stand against the various would-be “anarcho”-authoritarianisms and the ideological quibbling of various competing approaches. So feel free to take what follows as quite consciously polemic. Just understand that I'm pretty sure it's a well-grounded polemic, the product of decades of thinking about these issues, and, of course, it is not *just* polemic.

Nearly everything I have written recently converges on this potential *shareable narrative*, with the “Propositions for Discussion” being the central bit of work. In the sections that I've outlined so far I've set up a couple of basic claims about anarchy:

1. The nature of the idea of *anarchy* leaves very little room for arguments about definitions—unless they are rather fruitless fights about etymology and whether anarchy is “the right word” for what anarchists have proposed. As anarchists have understood it, at least, anarchy really does “accept no adjectives.”
2. The majority of our disputes have really been over the range of human relations for which anarchy seems to be a suitable ideal. When we get bogged down in debates over whether a capitalist *employer* is a *ruler*, the question really seems to be whether the relationships we oppose in the political and economic realms are sufficiently of a type that principled opposition to one demands opposition to the other.

It is at this point that our lack of shared vocabulary and theory makes our lives very difficult. We have our laundry lists of things that we oppose—oppression, exploitation, hierarchy, authority, absolutism, privilege, government or governmentalism, statism, sexism, racism, patriarchy, etc., etc., etc.—but all of these terms are subject to the usual tug-of-war that determines the local meanings of ideologically charged words. In the end, even anarchists can’t agree on what they all mean. Marxists and Proudhonists will see different sources for the exploitation of labor, and different mechanisms in its operation. Anarchists will trot out Bakunin’s “defenses” of “the authority of the bookmaker” and the “invisible dictatorship” almost as often as our opponents. Some anarchists are perfectly comfortable with the notion of “anarchist law” and complain that “anarchy mean no rulers, not no rules”—and there are ways to turn the various words in those phrases in directions that are consistent with the main currents of anarchist thought, but it’s very hard to tell at any given moment if that’s what’s on the table. We need a way of defining the “archy” that unites the various things that we’re against, but, if anything, the trend at the moment seems to be away from that sort of approach and toward a taxonomy of oppressions that are considered either incommensurable or subject to a rigid sort of hierarchy of severity.

I’ve had a suspicion for a long time—a thought I’ve voiced here on a number of occasions—that there was something in Proudhon’s analysis of *unity-collectivities* and *collective force* that might serve to bring together at least some of these opposition into a kind of General Theory of Things Anarchists Oppose. But there are at least a couple of steps in making that case. First, there is the necessity of finding the connections, or at least clear grounds for the connections, in Proudhon’s own work—where, we can be sure, any standard for identifying archic relationships will have been applied somewhat unevenly. Then, it is necessary to demonstrate that the proposed standards are applicable under present conditions, in the context of 21st century anti-authoritarian discourse. If, for example, it was possible to find parallels between the critique of capitalism and the critique of governmentalism in *What is Property?*, it would still be necessary to show that the critique could be extended to patriarchy and that it would either connect those analyses to, say, the analysis of privilege or demonstrate why that connection wasn’t necessary.

The hardest part of reading Proudhon’s work is probably simply the sheer number of writings, and the very diverse nature of them, joined with the fact that, for Proudhon, there was obviously a great deal of connection between the various analyses. I’ve noted more than once how often a key piece of theory will be tucked away in some entirely unexpected place. The presence of key remarks on the nature of the “citizen-State” in *The Theory of Taxation* is just one example. The various twists and turns in Proudhon’s use of keywords—well-documented over the years on this blog—is another complicating factor. The strategy I’ve had to develop to deal

with these problems has involved a lot of keyword-searching across all the digitized volumes, a lot of mapping of equivalent terms, and the establishment of chronological accounts of the development of various concepts. Another decade or two of that and I think I'll know Proudhon's work pretty well, but the last decade of it has arguably given me a useful sense of the broad outlines of his project, with really in-depth knowledge of some aspects of it. And if some of the mysteries of his use of words like *anarchy* and *anarchist* still elude me, the nature of our elusive *archy* has become increasingly clearly to me.

As I've been suggesting over on Mutualism.info, some key answers seem to have been hiding in plain sight, clustered around the famous claim that "property is theft." It took some time to clear away a lot of dubious interpretations of that phrase, to focus on the issue of "collective force" and get clear about the account of exploitation provided in 1840. That work accomplished, it became possible to see that a fundamentally similar account of governmentality was present in various places, such as the "Little Political Catechism" in *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*. And when the manuscripts of *Economie* became available online, we gained Proudhon's own testimony that the two processes were, in fact, fundamentally the same in his estimation. It took wading through the "Catechism of Marriage" to see that Proudhon's strong feelings about the physical inequality of the sexes was still joined to a strong insistence on other sorts of equality—a state of affairs that is hard not to find maddening, but which seems nonetheless to have been the case—which opens at least the possibility of attempting to extend Proudhon's anarchic critique to the institution of patriarchy (as I started to do in "[The Capitalist, the Prince, the Père de famille, and the alternative.](#)")

It turns out that Proudhon may have even laid some of the foundations for an extension of his own critique. In the "Little Political Catechism," he wrote:

Of the Appropriation of the Collective Forces, and the Corruption of the Social Power

Q.—Is it possible that a phenomenon as considerable as that of the collective force, which changes the face of ontology, which almost touches physics, could have been concealed for so many centuries from the attention of the philosophers? How, in relation to something that interests them so closely, did the public reason, on the one hand, and personal interest, on the other, let themselves be misled for such a long time?

A.—Nothing comes except with the passage of time, in science as in nature. All starts with the infinitely small, with a seed, initially invisible, which develops little by little, toward the infinite. Thus, the persistence of error is proportional to the size of the truths. Thus, one is thus not surprised if the social power, inaccessible to the senses in spite of its reality, seemed to the first men an emanation of the divine Being, for this reason the worthy object of their religion. As little as they knew how to realize it through analysis, they had a keener sense of it, quite different in this respect from the philosophers who, arriving later, made of the State a restriction on the freedom of citizens, a mandate of their whim, a nothingness. Even today, the economists have barely identified the collective force. After two thousand years of political mysticism, we have had two thousand years of nihilism: one could not use another word for the theories which have held sway since Aristotle.

Q.—What was the consequence of this delay in knowledge of the collective Being for peoples and States?

A.—The appropriation of all collective forces and the corruption of social power; in less severe terms, an arbitrary economy and an artificial constitution of the public power.

Q.—Explain yourself on these two headings.

A.—By the constitution of the family, the father is naturally invested with the ownership and direction of the force issuing from the family group. This force soon increases from the work of slaves and mercenaries, the number of which it contributes to increase. The family becomes a tribe: the father, preserving his dignity, sees the power he has grow proportionately. It is the starting point, the type of all such appropriations. Everywhere where a group of men is formed, or a power of collectivity, there is formed a patrie, a seigniorie. Several families, several societies, together, form a city: the presence of a superior force is felt at once, the object of the ambition of all. Who will become its agent, its recipient, its organ? Usually, it will be that of the chiefs who hold sway over the most children, parents, allies, clients, slaves, employees, beasts of burden, capital, land—in a word, those who have at their disposal the greatest force of collectivity. It is a natural law that the greater force absorbs and assimilates the smaller forces, and that domestic power becomes a title of political power, and only the strong may compete for the crown.

There is a good deal here that is interesting, but certainly nothing is more interesting, from the point of view of moving beyond Proudhon's anti-feminism, than this treatment of the father and the constitution of the family as the example of how the "appropriation of all collective forces and the corruption of social power" gets its start.

I don't want to get too bogged down in the textual details here, but if you wanted to explore them yourself you couldn't go too far wrong by tracking down the various references to this "power of collectivity" (*puissance de collectivité*.) Regular readers of the blog should recognize the phrase from a line from *Justice* that I have quoted many times:

Voilà tout le système social : une équation, et par suite une puissance de collectivité.

That is the whole social system: an equation, and consequently a power of collectivity.

I have generally used this as a description of anarchy, to the extent that its fundamentally anti-systemic character can be expressed in terms of a system. (This sort of slightly paradoxical relation of anarchy to archic systems, which I have already mentioned in the case of Bakunin, seems to be something of an occupational hazard for anarchist theorists.) What I've suggested is that anything that can't fit into this very simple model probably falls somewhere within the realm of *archic* relations. But perhaps we can clarify things just a bit more, with another look at the two elements of this "system."

Let's start with the *equation*. Proudhon describes the scenario he is imagining:

Two families, two cities, two provinces, contract on the same footing: there is always that these two things, an equation and power of collectivity. It would involve a contradiction, a violation of Justice, if there were anything else.

So, here, the *equation* is a matter of being "on the same footing," of equal standing between the parties. *Equality* was an extremely important keyword for Proudhon. *Society*, for example,

was essentially a synonym, in the sense that equality was the primary precondition for relations worth calling “social.” But Proudhon was at the same time very skeptical of any sort of material equality. In *The Philosophy of Progress* he wrote:

...the correlative of liberty is equality, not a real and immediate equality, as communism intends, nor a personal equality, as the theory of Rousseau supposes, but a commutative and progressive equality, which gives a completely different direction to Justice.

And later in the same work:

Some philosophers who think themselves profound, and who are only impertinent, imagine that they have found a flat refusal of the principle of equality, which forms the basis of the anti-proprietary critique. They say that there are not two equal things in the whole universe.—Very well. Let us admit that there have not been two equal things in the world: at least one will not deny that all have been in equilibrium, since, without equilibrium, as without movement, there is no existence.

So equality become, through its “commutative and progressive” character, closely connected to *reciprocity*, defined by Proudhon as “the mutual penetration of antagonistic elements,” and roughly synonymous with *justice*, which he understood in terms of the balance of interests among equals. And all of them are essentially aspects of anarchy, understood in its most general sense.

Of course, as interesting as all that is, and as vital as it is to understanding Proudhon, it doesn’t necessarily take us much closer to the sort of tools we need to recognize *archy* whenever we encounter it. For that, we have to look at the other half of Proudhon’s “system,” the “power of collectivity” and the ways in which it is appropriated and corrupted.

There’s nothing terribly complicated about the “power of collectivity,” which is, of course, the “collective force” familiar from *What is Property?* and various other works. And there’s really nothing mysterious about the way that this force or power (*puissance*), which is a product of society (in the sense we’ve just noted), comes to be appropriated by individuals, who then transform it into some form of more-or-less *governmental* power (*Pouvoir*) and use it against the very society that created it. Real force changes hands as a result of relations that are in some sense *collective*, but lack the element of equality that would make them really social, and the rationale for this privatization is the denial of equality—in that form that is hardly distinguishable from society, reciprocity, justice, etc.—through some alternate systemization of the social body, through what Proudhon called “the external constitution of society.” Now, “external constitution” is a fiction, or at least a misunderstanding, depending on some rhetorical sleight-of-hand in order to introduce hierarchy in the place of society. Of course, one of the most common forms of this fiction is precisely the one that takes “society” as a thing, the unity-collectivity of the associated individuals, as opposed to a relation of equality and justice among them, and then elevates that *real* collectivity to a *fictive* superiority over its component members.

And now maybe things are getting a little complicated, or at least unfamiliar to those not steeped in Proudhon’s thought. If every individual is a group, and every organized group is a sort of individual, these unity-collectivities are real, and have their own interests. They even, Proudhon suggested, have a sort of “soul,” if we have to talk about what “realizes” them, but that “soul” is nothing but the collective force that it contains. But, here again, we have dipped into the

realm of figurative language, aimed at identifying *alternatives* to those in archic systems. In a less rhetorically loaded explanation, Proudhon identified the collective force in these social beings as their *liberty*, so that it is precisely liberty—material liberty, everything in these social systems above the sort of bare subsistence we might expect from isolated, unassisted labor—that is appropriated by the various classes of usurpers as a means to elevate themselves. But *elevation* is not one of the elements of the proposed system, and Proudhon was quite clear that the composite nature of social collectivities did not grant them any authority or precedence over the individuals of which they were composed. An association of some number (N) of workers—all assumed to be on an equal footing—produces at least N+1 individuals whose interests must be balanced if justice is to be served, but those individuals all remain on that equal footing.

So, if we stopped here and tried to sketch out the characteristics of *archy*, what would they be? If every form of association produces a collective force, then in an anarchistic society we should expect to see that force serve the interests of all the individuals, whether human individuals or social collectivities, in a just, balanced way—not according to any mechanical, quantitative form of equality, but according to a “commutative and progressive” process of creating and maintaining an equilibrium of interests. If we borrow terms from the most familiar of Proudhon’s analyses of collective force, we should expect to see individuals compensated both individually and collectively for their contributions, with no individual or class of individuals being able to appropriate more than a balanced share. Importantly, we should find some awareness of the collective force resulting from the association and collaboration of individuals and a steady experimentation to find the best means of balancing, *justifying* all the various interests. And, indeed, if we follow Proudhon’s principles, as opposed to his imperfect practice, the individualities included in that balance might ultimately range “from the infinitesimal to the universal” (as Fourier might have said.) In an archic “society,” then, we can expect to find equality denied and the products of collective action individually appropriated—in most cases, precisely as a means to maintain inequality. That privatization may take the form of economic exploitation, hierarchical government, or any number of systems of inequality based on the exploitation of identitarian categories. A full analysis would have to involve sketching out a wide range of such systems, but it seems likely that virtually all of the forms of exploitation, oppression and privilege that we oppose could, in fact, be mapped onto roughly the same framework.

And if that is the case, then perhaps the problem of discovering the proper scope for the application of anarchy is not a great deal more difficult than that of defining it.

Escheat and Anarchy

One of the difficulties in explaining the anarchist critique—and of distinguishing anarchist tendencies from those that propose only partial breaks with authority—has been the fact that the two fundamental critiques associated with anarchist thought—*anti-capitalism* and *anti-governmentalism*—have been difficult to unite, despite indications that they emerged together as part of a single critique in the work of Proudhon. We are arguably more in touch with those particular origins than we have been for most of anarchism’s history and in many ways our understanding of Proudhon’s thought steadily improves. In social media discussions, when it is a question of critiquing capitalist exploitation, vague references to “usury” or recourse to Marxian ideas are increasingly replaced by appeals to the theory of *collective force* and reference to the *droit d’aubaine* that seems to justify the appropriation of the fruits of association by the capitalist class. On the anti-governmental front, we have begun, at least, to explore the problem of “the external constitution of society,” which Proudhon attributed to the governmentalist state. But the connection between the two critiques has remained a bit elusive.

Part of the problem has been that we are still in the process of making Proudhon’s thought our own. In the meantime, we have been guided by those who went before us and particularly by the translators of the few works by Proudhon that have been available in English. The fact that these translations have been, for the most part, quite good has perhaps lulled us into some complacency. But we have learned over time that sometimes otherwise excellent translations have been badly wrong at crucial moments. The translations of *anarchie* in *The General Idea of the Revolution* are among the most cautionary examples we have discovered to date, but there have been others. And perhaps it is time to ask if Tucker’s translation of *droit d’aubaine* as “right of increase” has led us astray.

A focus on “increase,” and particularly on the “right” to accumulation at the heart of capitalist relations, has seemed obviously useful. At our present stage of understanding, it has been extremely important that we understand the mechanisms by which the wealth produced by associated labor is consistently alienated and turned against the producers. It has been equally important for us to focus to some extent on the alternatives to a system that consistently concentrates capital and to explore alternatives that instead emphasize the circulation of resources. But that has, in some ways, left us engaging with Proudhon’s critique of 1839 (from *The Celebration of Sunday*), where “property is theft” because it is the result of “putting aside.” We have, it seems to me, only really made half of the 1940 analysis our own. We have seen clearly enough that the individual “right” to “dispose at will of social property” is a source of injustice and material inequality, but we have not always been able to clearly articulate just how our critique is specifically anarchist—and opponents (anti-state capitalists and the like) have seldom hesitated in their attempts to paint our anti-capitalism as simply *tacked on* to our anti-governmentalism.

At the same time, our anti-governmentalism has arguably lacked a bit of theoretical clarity. We may disagree about the details regarding capitalist exploitation, but there doesn’t seem to be much disagreement among anarchists that it exists and that its primary mechanism involves the appropriation of the fruits of labor by capitalists. And there is probably no form of consistent anarchism with economic ideas that could not be described or derived by the use of the theory of collective force. The same almost certainly cannot be said about the critique of “external constitution.” When we turn to the anti-governmental side of the anarchist critique, however, the diversity of approaches is really striking. While *an-archy* would seem to indicate a complete

break with government, it is extremely common to see anarchists focus simply on abolition of the state, while promoting some form of “radical” or “true democracy.” Rather than taking our main cues from the strong, consistent anti-authoritarian critiques in the tradition, we are prone to emphasizing the possibility of exceptions—whether practical, as in the case of “democratic decision-making,” or largely rhetorical, when we invoke “the authority of the bootmaker” (all too often without much apparent recollection of the contexts in which the phrase was originally used.) Some anarchists make the case for “anarchist law,” while others assure us that “anarchism is against rulers, but not rules.” Some defend “natural rights” and many defend “natural” (or naturalized) *systems of desert* (“from each...; to each...,” etc.) We seldom manage to advance a consistent critique of the necessity of government, authority or even hierarchy—and as a result fall back on the project of seeking “justification” or “legitimacy” for particular forms of these institutions. And, all too often, we find self-proclaimed anarchists responding with bits right out of our opponents’ playbooks when we try to draw the focus back to *anarchy*.

When we want to emphasize the really radical quality of Proudhon’s anti-governmental critique, we refer to his *anti-absolutism*. Whatever his failures in applying the standard, his *anarchy* was informed by critique that reached beyond specific institutions to the philosophical theories and habits of thought on which they were erected. According to Stephen Pearl Andrews, anti-absolutism was already implied—however “curiously”—in the notion of anarchy or *an-arche*:

Arche is a Greek word (occurring in mon-*archy*, olig-*archy*, hier-*archy*, etc.), which curiously combines, in a subtle unity of meaning, the idea of *origin* or *beginning*, and hence of *elementary principle*, with that of *government* or *rule*. (“The Pantarchy Defined,” 1873)

And the provocative passages in *The General Idea of the Revolution* certainly suggest that Proudhon’s understanding of the notion of anarchy was more complex than we often assume. (See “[Anarchy, Understood in All its Senses](#).”) But, ultimately, while this broad understanding of anarchy gives us a philosophical critique capable of working in various contexts and at various scales, its connection to the sociological theory of collective force and the economic critique of exploitation seems to require something that is at least not yet explicit in our analysis.

The logical point of contact is that notion of “external constitution,” which Proudhon employed to describe the relationship between society and the governmentalist State. I’ve discussed Proudhon’s critique of Louis Blanc in “[Self-Government and the Citizen-State](#),” but the basic idea is that authoritarians see society as a social body that must have a “head,” with that head above and apart from the rest of the body, directing it and “realizing” it. Proudhon agreed that social collectivities existed, but disagreed that this authoritarian conception of their organization was necessary or correct. Without the authoritarian lens, social bodies could be seen as engaging in a decentralized self-regulation.

The question is whether this particular notion, which saw only very limited use by Proudhon, applies to more than just the governmentalist State. If, for example, it seemed to apply more broadly to politics (to constructions like “the people” and perhaps to certain abstract constructions of “society” itself), to economics (to the construction of “the economy,” but also of “the firm”), etc., then we might suspect that we were closing in on our “general theory of archy.” And it turns out that the evidence of that generality may have been “hiding in plain sight” right along, veiled by Tucker’s choice when it came to translating *aubaine*.

It turns out that the *droit d’aubaine* is arguably not best understood as the right of *increase*, but as the principle of *escheat*. Wikipedia informs us that:

Escheat is a common law doctrine that transfers the real property of a person who died without heirs to the Crown or state. It serves to ensure that property is not left in “limbo” without recognized ownership.

Some definitions naturalize the relationships involved by describing this transfer as “reversion” to the state.

Now, when we go back to Proudhon’s account of the *droit d’aubaine*, things perhaps look a bit different. We have a principle designed to assure that property is not “left in limbo,” which appears to mean either a specific proprietor, their specified heirs or the state (meaning, in practice, those who can claim to be the “head” of the social body.) What Proudhon seems to do is to insist that some version of this principle already contributes to the very constitution of property. Individual workers can only make individual claims, with the fruits of collective force doomed to “limbo” (which here means essentially anything resembling “social property”) and eventually passing to a capitalist class by virtue of their position as apparent “head” of some economic body (firm, economy, etc.) The main difference between the status of the citizen in a governmental state and that of the worker in a capitalist firm is that while the contribution of the worker to the constitution of the firm (or of the real associations that produce wealth for the firm) is perhaps even more obvious than that of the citizen in the constitution of the political state, the firm aspires to the recognition granted to the state by virtue of its relation to society, while essentially denying that any such society exists among laborers and capitalists. From the point of view of the real associations, the firm is a sort of external constitution, but from the point of view of the firm (and, of course, of its “representatives” and proprietors), it is the workers themselves who are individually considered inessential and essentially *external*.

What Proudhon’s analysis suggests, of course, is that “limbo” is the proper home of most of what is called property. And this is arguably as true of common property as it is of the exclusive, individual variety. This is perhaps one of the key reasons that mutualist economics have almost always emphasized *circulation*, even when they were fairly far removed from these theoretical roots. In the early days of the current mutualist renaissance, it was common for us to talk about property as a “problem” with no definitive solution. But I suppose it should come as no surprise to anyone that the thought of “limbo” does not hold particular terrors for those who have constructed their political projects—to one extent or another—around the concept of *anarchy*.

And perhaps it is in the opposition of escheat and anarchy that we will find the connections we have been looking for.

Escheat guards against the limbo that is perhaps *proper* to those resources ultimately claimed as property. It does so with the aid of an abstract collectivity, which is always assumed to have a prior claim to, well, just about anything that individuals cannot convincingly claim is solely the product of their own exertions. This abstract collectivity possesses a plausibility derived in part from the existence of real associations and in part from the dominant belief that every social body must have a head.

Without the imposition of a “head,” the social body is a kind of anarchy. Authority simple asserts that such things cannot be and proposes to provide the “missing” ruling elements, which are external either in the sense that they wholly appropriate the real associations through force or fraud, or in the sense that they involve the creation of new functions in no way intrinsic to the organization of the anarchic social organism. And, really, this is perhaps all that authority ever does. But every time that it does its work—replacing anarchic association with relations of command and control—it produces hierarchy and it produces the conditions for exploitation.

It seems to me that this principle of escheat at least provides us with a kind of basic model, in which we can see elements common to both capitalism and governmentalism. And that seems like a useful clarification. It remains to be seen how far towards a “general theory of archy” this step takes us, but it appears to be a step down the right path.

Archy vs. Anarchy

These short contrasting entries constitute an attempt to sketch out some basic principles of existing *archic* society and some *anarchic* alternatives. Those alternatives are drawn largely from what we have been calling the “neo-Proudhonian” project. As such, they are not necessarily the alternatives most often proposed by self-proclaimed anarchists. They are proposed, however, as a means of approaching some baseline for a consistently anarchistic synthesis of existing anarchisms. That approach will undoubtedly require considerable elaboration and clarification of the contrasting principles and tendencies presented here—but it is important to make a start.

<p>The Polity-form: <i>Archic</i> social organization seems to quite consistently depend on a particular conception of social collectivities as <i>bodies</i>—specifically rather anthropomorphic bodies with the organs of direction placed in some “head.” This model of social collectivity seems to inform our understandings of the patriarchal <i>family</i>, the governmental <i>state</i>, the capitalist <i>firm</i>, the democratic <i>People</i> and, sometimes, even the anarchistic <i>commune</i>, <i>community</i> or <i>federation</i>.</p>	<p>The Federative Principle: An alternative principle is <i>federation</i>, understood in its more radical, <i>anarchic</i> senses. That almost certainly has to include doing more than simply networking conventional polities. Freedom from the polity-form allows considerably more flexibility in the realm of decision-making (so often a stumbling-block in discussions of anarchistic organization), potentially transforming legislative networks and assemblies into largely consultative bodies, specializing in the gathering and dissemination of the far-flung knowledge necessary as context for sound, responsible local action.</p>
--	---

External Constitution: Proudhon described the governmental State as “the external constitution of society,” referring to the belief of some of his fellow socialists that society was not “realized” until it was given a “head,” in the form of a government, to direct it. There are probably a variety of ways in which the constitution of politics can be considered “external” to the actual associations to be “realized,” starting with the transformation of the individual into a *citizen* and the mass of individuals into the *People*—and then extending through all of the various ways in which identities are legally constituted within governmentalized collectivities.

Constitution by Association: The actual, fluid, evolving associations established between individuals and groups of individuals seldom resemble that *archic* centrally controlled social body. Instead, we find acephalous bodies, bodies with capacities distributed according to less anthropomorphic models and evolving networks that may stretch the metaphor of a social body to its breaking point. Among the alternatives to external constitution explored by Proudhon, we find the idea that the distinction between *society* and *government* could perhaps be erased. In its strongest statements, the proposal to replace political relations with economic relations amounts to a proposal to simply recognize the organization of daily life as all the “government” that anarchy can accommodate—a proposal that would obviously alter the way we think about daily life.

Legal and Governmental Order: Proudhon made some strong statements about the absolute opposition of anarchy and social orders rooted in authority. Without necessarily embracing the claim that there is, for example, no middle ground between anarchy and dictatorship, we perhaps have to recognize that once the possibility of binding legislation has been recognized, the limitation of the principle seems at least quite difficult. The existence of the *prohibition* seems to imply *permission* in other cases and the status of acts not already granted or denied some prior stamp of approval becomes hard to even account for.

- A Contr’un Glossary: [Legal Order](#)

Responsibility: In the absence of both prohibition and permission—the logical outcome of rejecting legal and governmental order—*responsibility* emerges as the key concept “governing” action. And anarchistic responsibility is specifically mutual responsibility in the face of uncertain consequences. Each act potentially exposes the actor to an unbounded set of possible responses, but the mutual character of this extreme exposure ought to create incentives that minimize the extremity of responses—in the interest of preventing cycles of reprisal spinning out of control, but also because the responses are no more authorized in advance than the actions themselves. Best practices for avoiding damaging conflict will almost certainly begin with some attention to the problem of carrying one’s own costs.

Hierarchy: The stratification of society, with its establishment “rights” to command and “duties” to obey, is perhaps not the whole of *archy*, but it is obviously a necessary element in the aspects we’ve examined so far. And perhaps it would not be too much to claim that anarchist social relations would be impossible without some the “elevation” of some party, sect, faction or representative symbol above the mass of not-unequal individuals and daily interactions. This notion of the “not-unequal” seems necessary, if only in passing, to avoid a simple slide to an in sufficiently examined notion of *equality*.

Difference, Mutual Interdependence, Reciprocity: The alternative is one in which the *differences* among individuals—differences of capacity, experience, interest, etc.—are treat *as differences* and as largely *incommensurable*. Where judgements about equality or inequality demand some shared scale or measure, the recognition of difference allows us to entertain the possibility that no such shared scale exists—at least where it is not imposed. And that is a possibility that anarchist thought almost certainly needs to take quite seriously, if it is to avoid naturalizing certain kinds of social hierarchy. (Fortunately, the anarchist tradition is rich in attempts to address the *unique*.) Viewed without an already hierarchical lens, even fairly simple social interactions seem to suggest that mutual interdependence is the norm—and where interdependence is indeed mutual, it seems hard to make a strong claim for one dependent as the element that “realizes” the potential in another, unless we do so in the very non-hierarchical sense that there is a kind of *mutual* “realization” in horizontal association. At that point, however, it seems more useful to consider the dynamics of association in other terms—and it is here that Proudhon’s theory of *collective force* seems to find its field of application. That analysis, in turn, ought to help us break down what is perhaps the most stubborn instance of the polity-form—the individual human subject—as we come to terms with *reciprocity*—not in terms of some simple “equal exchange,” but, in the form that Proudhon proposed, as “the mutual penetration of antagonistic elements.” (And here, as I have suggested so often in the part, Walt Whitman joins Proudhon and Stirner as a thinker with contributions to make to our emerging analysis.)

Authority: If *hierarchy* is a structural form dependent on some kind of imposed scale or yardstick, then *authority*, understood in two related senses, is the yardstick and the rationale for its imposition. The two concepts are intertwined in the common sense of archic societies and both almost certainly represent attempts on our part to make sense of the world that we find ourselves in, starting with the intuition—correct or not—that we are surrounded by something other than a random arrangement of whatever stuff the universe is built from. We imagine a *creation*, then a *creator* and then some sort of *plan*, before attempting to make our experiences—and our own plans—conform to those imaginations. The plan—if we could know its details—would perhaps provide the sort of authority that could serve as a standard and measure of our projects and our differences, as well as giving evidence of an ultimate source of authority. But knowledge of that ultimate, authoritative blueprint and its author seem to be the one thing that is not offered to us by any of the major schools of thought. Searching our philosophical and religious schools, we find the hypothesis that that is no plan and no author,—and that perhaps our intuition is based doubt and projection of our own capacities;—the possibility that there is indeed a plan, but one unknowable to us; and religious the option of faith, revelation, etc., which ultimately seems to want to have it both ways where the question of knowledge is concerned. There are other options as well, but it seems fairly clear that this sort of ultimate authority has never been established according to the usual standards of evidence. And an authority that cannot establish itself authoritatively seems to be nothing but an invitation to juggling and abuse.

And it doesn't seem to matter how far we attempt to drag the meanings of *authority* from some divine or natural origin. There remains some sense that a particular kind of vision or knowledge provides a rationale for imposition of some standard, creating a duty to conform in those who lack it. And—all quibbling about “the authority of the bootmaker” aside—that doesn't seem to be a notion that anarchists can consistently embrace. Bakunin himself suggested that even perfect knowledge would have to be resisted if it came to us in forms that demanded compliance.

Influence, Attention to Authority-Effects, Vigilance: With the notions of *mutual interdependence* and the Proudhonian version of *reciprocity*, we have already guaranteed that *influence* will be an important (if generally *mutual*) factor in our understanding of social relations and that expertise will find its uses. We've simply raised the question whether any standard can show itself sufficiently self-evident to move us from the terrain of largely incommensurable *differences* to that of *inequality*. This objection to authority does not a denial of differences in individual *power*, but it does attack the means by which those differences might be naturalized and made the basis of some new, *archic* social form.

It is important to recognize the extent to which what we have previously called [authority-effects](#) can still emerge, even where the principle of authority has been rejected, simply because even the most anarchic social organization does not occur in a vacuum. There are likely to be both external, material constraints on our free associations and there are certainly no guarantees that the expertise and experience needed at any given moment will be simply given. So we will always find ourselves combining a principled opposition to the imposition of plans and standards with a vigilant concern about the kinds of accidents and externalities that might constrain some among us more than others.

This is one of the circumstances where an awareness of the dynamics of collective force is likely to be among the most important tools in our kit.

Exploitation and the Right of Escheat: What is perhaps a bit abstract when framed in terms of anti-hierarchy and anti-authoritarian theory gains considerably in practical import when we recall that Proudhon’s reimagining of *anarchy* took place in the midst of a critique of *exploitation*—a critique that he explicitly extended from the economic to the political sphere and one that we can undoubtedly extend much farther. One of the things that the analysis of exploitation provides us is a considerably more dynamic look at the consequences of *archic* organization and its power to continuously concentrate capital of various sorts in a comparative few hands. It isn’t just a question of a one-time appropriation of surplus value or even just the sum of all the individual instances of that kind of exploitation. To harness collective force against its primary producers is to provide oneself with the capacity to *tighten the screws* at various points all through the economic cycle, to transform economic wealth into political clout, etc.

- [Escheat and Anarchy](#)

Property as a Problem: Early in the period of mutualism’s reemergence, it was common in at least some of our circles to talk about “the problem of property,” acknowledging that there was a lot about the issues raised by anarchist critiques that we had perhaps not yet plumbed entirely. I think that the shift in focus toward social-scientific analysis and particularly the attention given to the dynamics of collective force have dramatically increased the questions we might raise about how best to solve that problem.

It isn’t clear that the sort of *balance-of-despotism* proposed in *Theory of Property* is well adapted to modern contexts, where the amplifying powers of collective force and the technological base are so great. For the same reasons, it isn’t clear that the familiar demand that individuals be compensated with “the full fruits of their labor” gets us very far—unless it is toward some kind of communistic arrangement, which, in turn, does not necessarily address the dangers of exploitation.

The possibility of a specifically *mutualist* property—raised by Proudhon in his last manuscripts—and, in general, the possibilities of anarchy in what I’ve called its [resultant](#) form, remain largely unexplored. But it seems likely that it is in this general direction that our explorations should turn.

- [Property, Individuality and Collective Force](#)

Limited Economy: If we were to attempt a kind of *philosophical* summary of what has been proposed so far, pulling back from the specifics of Proudhon’s work or even the anarchist tradition in general, we might have recourse to something like the distinction made in Georges Bataille’s *The Accursed Share* between *general* and *limited economies*. *Archic* social relations are shaped by the questions that they consider answered in advance, the standards they take for granted and the structures—starting with the presence of vertical ranks—that give them their fundamental character.

General Economy: *Anarchic* social relations—taken in, as Proudhon put it, “the full force of the term”—are, on the contrary, characterized—at least in our present, largely *archic* context—by the lack of these fundamental standards and, in general, by a lack of foregone conclusions when it comes to specific arrangements. We know that *archic* arrangements seem to have failed in establishing their bona fides, but, beyond that, the positive implications seem to carry us into realms dominated by profusion and uncertainty. It is not, of course, a question of any of the real problems we face becoming any more difficult to solve. It may, in fact, be quite the opposite. But the loss of familiar certainties—even if they were of a dubious sort all along—does carry with it a range of new costs.

Anarchy—in the full force of the term—is only negative in the sense that it precludes one particular sort of social arrangement—and one related view of the world. But, of course, that worldview has been pervasive. It has shaped our major institutions and shaped us as social subjects as well.

the anarchist question

rené furth

dispersion

Anarchism is a permanent obstacle for the anarchist.

It scatters more than it gathers. It fritters away energies rather than concentrating them. It squanders its gains when what is necessary is to mobilize them for new acquisitions. Summary judgments and the remnants of old popularizations stand in for the methods of analysis and the precise knowledge that it lacks.

Instead of devoting the best part of our efforts to the struggle against capitalism and political power, we exhaust ourselves struggling to patch up and hold together our fragile means: groups, press, networks of communication. It is with great difficulty that we find the means to support ourselves on any kind of basis. The groups and organizations keep breaking up; those that take their place slip despite themselves in the ruts dug by the predecessors — unless they refuse everything, and toss and turn, for a while, this way and that.

The majority of the publications are as ephemeral as they are little known. Their theoretical basis — when there is something that resembles a theoretical basis — remains unstable and ragtag. In the best of cases, they earnestly reframe the old questions: celles those that had been forgotten for fear of the challenges. Or else they inject into the little anarchist world some elements of research and analysis done elsewhere, which is certainly useful and only too rare.

to depart or to begin again?

This complete lack of cohesion and continuity reduces the anarchist movement's powers of attraction to such a point that it can only retain a minority of the minority that traverses its sphere of influence. The numerical insufficiency contributes in turn to the limited life span of the initiatives, the poor quality of the contributions and the resorption of the exchanges.

That penury does not only concern the "specific" milieu, the groups and formations that proclaim themselves libertarian. Those who identify their practice with a libertarian perspective, without associating themselves with the milieu — precisely because they observe its deficiencies and because they are wary of the confusion that tarnishes anarchism — would have everything to gain from the existence of a living movement: information, theoretical reflection, variety of experiences, contacts, stimulants (even in polemics).

It remains to be seen whether we must stick with this admission of failure. Many have done so and have left for revolutionary tendencies that offer them greater means, a coherent theory and a more stimulating intellectual climate. Others hang on, unmoved by the confusion and fragmentation, because all that interests them is the radicality of specific, ad hoc actions or the rough outline of a lifestyle. Let's not speak of those who have ordained themselves the proprietors of an "inalienable anarchy," anarchists of divine right and guardians of orthodoxy, assiduous above all to track down the deviations not provided for in the catalog of their ideological bric-à-brac. Let's leave these dealers in second-hand goods to call the shots in their shops; the innocents who stumble in there linger less and less.

If we want to put an end to this critical situation, the question arises: is anarchism condemned by its nature to fragmentation, to outbursts with no future, to vague ideologies? If

not, can it find within itself the unifying principles that would give it strength of conviction and power to intervene?

What is serious is that these questions are so rarely posed, except by those who respond by leaving anarchism behind. They are at least implicitly at work in the attempts made by certain grounds to find their way out of the fog. The inertia of the milieu reins in these attempts and limits their duration; they nevertheless constitute a first positive element, without which it would hardly be worth the trouble of struggling with this sort of questioning.

the absence of forms

At first glance, what characterizes anarchism and its lack of continuity is the absence of forms. At all levels, we encounter the shapeless.

Its most obvious manifestation is the inevitable return — always in the same terms — of the problem of organization: the absence of forms in the relations between individuals, between groups. The proclamation of the informal is only a resignation to the unformed. We can indeed perceive that spontaneous relations are more to be valued than being stuck in a closed group, set against all others and worn out by internal conflicts. I also admit that nothing is more delusive than the formalism that consists of mapping out mighty organizational schemes and waiting for the masses to throw themselves into them, or the formalism that wears out people in the maintenance and upkeep of some bit of machinery that cannot find a use in real life. But the informal cannot be a solution, precisely insofar as the temporary and fluctuating character of this type of relations does not allow the preservation and extension of gains.

The problem of organization is, in fact, secondary. It is a question of consequence, and not of causes. No real accord is possible as long as we limit ourselves to pooling refusals, vague formulations and slogans. At the slightest debate regarding substance, the facade of unity cracks. It could hardly be otherwise: how, in the absence of some clearly defined bases, can we know what we've signed up for? Agreement on a particular point does not make up for indecision and contradictions on a variety of other questions, which remain in the shadows because no effort is made to achieve an overview. It is impossible for us to offer newcomers a comprehensive vision with which they can engage.

It is this way that the dispersion and loss reach their culmination. It has become customary — for a long time now — to carve anarchism up into little, clearly separated segments, each of which bear the marks of some popularizers. The link with the original works or the social movements that furnished the "label" is most often cut. The "individualists" know as little of Stirner as the "libertarian communists" know of Bakunin or Kropotkin. What does it matter? The founding fathers (and Stirner is one despite himself...) tended to have a general view of the problems, and a connection with the knowledges and ideas of their times. The often show themselves to be more modern than their followers.

Another purely internal and outdated criticism? It is true that a new generation of libertarians if better able to avoid arbitrary splits, by no longer separating the social revolution from the subversion of everyday life. But it pushes negligence, and even pure and simple refusal, even further as soon as it is a question of giving a coherent expression to its reasons for acting and its practice.

Even groups anxious to translate their experience into a more rigorous formulation, to widen the discussion and allow a reflection on their journey, have difficulty avoiding breaks. First, because they want to keep their distance from the anarchist milieu and, on the other hand,

because the consciousness of making an original and modern attempt tentative releases them with little thought from seeking in the past of the libertarian movement for the precedents or arguments that could support their research. So they remain engaged in a very compartmentalized activity, which prevents them from grasping as a whole the links, theoretical and practical, that connect their enterprise to the global project of the anarchist revolution.

fragments of anarchy

Another fragmentation further weakens our capacity for expression: ideas circulate very badly across borders. Few translations are made and the French, to take one example, *prendre un exemple*, are largely ignorant of the anarchist books published in German, England or Italy.

We can ask ourselves whether the dispersion results only from temporary conditions or if it is inseparable from the anarchist movement. A backwards look leaves no doubt; the multiplicity of tendencies and sub-tendencies is chronic. But this is also more a symptom than a cause. The fragmentation does not only come from loss, from the fact that, of the essential works, we only retain isolated elements, detached from the unity that gave them their true sense. The "inaugural" works are themselves fragmented. Even at its highest level, libertarian thought remains fragmentary.

In Proudhon, anarchy clearly underlies certain books (those of the period 1848-1852) more than others; it fades in some periods, or remains mixed with reactionary slag. His multiple activities, the crises of daily life divert Proudhon from ordering and clarifying his concepts, which often leads us to believe there are contradictions where there is only imprecision. Eitzbacher rightly reproaches him for his irregular and changing language. (But it is also true that a theory does not immediately create its own intellectual domain, and we have made no effort to reread Proudhon.)

What can we say about Bakunin? His work is made up mostly of unfinished books, of immoderate letters. Stirner himself, the most purely "theoretical" of the anarchists, is the man of a single book, composed of fragments: commentaries on works read, polemics, the still trembling transcription of interminable tavern discussions. Nothing is more characteristic than the title of Tucker's book: "Instead of a Book. By a man too busy to write one. A fragmentary exposition of philosophical anarchism."

More generally we can say that anarchism appears only in fragments in the life of an anarchist. It is not just a question of "crises of youth." The conditions of existence are such, and the mental pressures, and the influence of the mechanisms assembled through education, that anarchy struggles to free itself from authoritarian reflexes, intolerance and fear of liberty. It is the same for events: revolutions are anarchist in their beginnings...

The fragmentation is still more intimately connected to the nature of a current that attaches more importance to life than to thought, and has always emphasized passion, intuition and instinctive urges. "Science only deals with shadows," said Bakunin. "The living reality escapes it and only gives itself to life, which, being itself fugitive and fleeting, can and indeed always does grasp everything that lives, which is to say everything that passes or flees." The sentence could be from Stirner...

the words of the tribe

Everything leads us toward the rupture. Where would we find the unifying energy capable of susceptible gathering up the fragments, of resisting the dispersion? We lack the elementary basis for any possible cohesion: a common language. We have no language. That is why we are still always reduced to speaking of anarchism, instead of speaking as anarchists regarding today's world and the life that we lead here. How to speak as an anarchist, to speak anarchistically, is not self-evident. We employ the words of other, haphazardly, with all the misunderstanding that produces, or we use worn out, lifeless words, which drag along for generations, from pamphlet to discussion and from discussion to "incendiary" tract...

Result: we have no end of trouble making ourselves understood or even to make ourselves heard; these stammerings become truly inaudible. It is at this level that the necessity of a theorization makes itself felt every day. A theory is, first of all, a well constructed language, some clearly defined notions between which we can establish logical relations.

It is not a question of a formal procedure. Clarifying concepts implies — and calls for — a clarification of ideas and methods of analysis. This also demands on our part the confrontation of different expressions of anarchism in order to discover common forms and constants. Finally, and above all, this effort of clarification demands a labor of critical revisions and updating, since the aim is not to establish a catalog but to elaborate a language capable of grasping (for purposes of knowledge, communication and action) the present reality.

It is tempting, obviously, to simply use the categories and notions produced by systems better assimilated by those to whom we wish to address ourselves (and marxism, in particular.) And in that way it is impossible to avoid the use of a marxist (or psychoanalytic) vocabulary circled widely through the human sciences. This is, however, a new source of confusion. This vocabulary reflects theoretical constructions whose cohesion is strong and whose imprint can divert our ideas, distort their meaning and obliterate their originality. To use the words of others without further examination is to lock ourselves within their ideology. Hence the need to examine what can be integrated into our coordinates without parasitism... and to check if our intellectual tools withstand the confrontation.

Whatever the domain envisaged, going beyond atomization requires a radical overhaul of our way of seeing and of our habits. Beneath the discontinuous, we will have to look for the continuous; beneath disorder, the forms that give cohesion and meaning to the whole. More generally, we will have to come to grasp anarchism as a global reality that refuses partial and arbitrary definitions insofar as we can identify and describe its concrete manifestations in the history and in the life of men.

a return to the sources

Even if this proposition appears absurd to the partisans of tradition and spontaneity alike, it is a question of becoming fully aware of what anarchism is, consciousness of the anarchist phenomenon: as historical movement, as current of thought, as a permanent feature of social ferment and individual emancipation.

This recasting implies a return to the sources that will allow, so to speak, the rediscovery of anarchism in its nascent state, not only in the events and works of the past, but in the actions, behaviors and writings that, today, give it a new expression.

To clarify the connections, most often explicit, that exist between the fragments, their common reason for being. Through gradual restructuring, to identify the connections in larger and larger wholes. And this is still only a prerequisite, which is insufficient to effectively merge in practice, in spontaneous consciousness, the fragments of anarchy that are accessible to us. It is useful to know what there is in common between a savage strike, a communitarian experiment, a past insurrection, a page from Proudhon and a new analysis. But the dispersion will only cease when a current of life spontaneously connects these exploded realities in order to establish between them a field of force capable of producing new impulses and ideas.

In other words: we will have a real chance of overcoming dispersion when we have reestablished an active cultural life in the anarchist milieu.

culture, counter-culture

What many among us forget — or want to ignore — is that a common culture is a powerful unifying factor. When pushed, we recognize this force of cohesion when it is a question of denouncing the dominant culture: doesn't it function to join together in a single submission, in a common "ideal," the diversity of individuals and social classes? But the fact is that it ne s'installe qu'en écrasant, en disloquant des cultures particulières. The history of colonization and its cultural imperialism furnishes no end of examples. And one discovers, finally, that there exists in France an "internal colonization," that the centralizing State is built on the ruins of regional cultures, on the crushing of differences.

The bourgeoisie ideology only extends its influence by condemning to suffocation the ideas, works and modes of life that are opposed to its principles and rules. The deviant elements that are persistent enough to resist find themselves gradually assimilated and distorted. Denouncing this process is quite insufficient. The true response consists instead of reviving, reinforcing the cultural forms thus eliminated or neutralized.

One could also respond that only the complete disruption of the capitalist system will allow the implementation of a different culture. Okay... if we do not forget that no revolution is possible outside of certain "subjective conditions" (awareness, knowledge of means and end, "capacity" in the Proudhonian sense), which are precisely cultural factors.

the state against culture

The affirmation of the liberating role of culture has long remained a constant in the workers' movement. Revolutionary syndicalism, in particular, has endeavored to put this conviction into practice. It has not only stepped forward to give militants the training (political, economic, technical) necessary to lead effective struggles and to participate, after the revolution, in the collective management of the new society, but also to develop a "producers' ethic." The very idea of a proletarian culture was to gain ground for some time: that the working class forge its own forms of expression and oppose the artistic productions of the bourgeoisie with works devoted to the life, problems and values of the proletariat.

The libertarian conception of culture was closely linked to its critique of the State. We find it expounded in all its aspects in Rocker's work (still unpublished in France) on "Nationalism and Culture:" culture and state power are two fundamentally contradictory realities; the strengthening of power inevitably calls for a regression of cultural activity, since that activity requires complete freedom of expression and respect for diversity. The stimulant of collective spontaneity is

essential for the blossoming of works suited to the needs and aspirations of the greatest number. Direct state intervention, on the contrary, paralyzes creativity through its exclusions and instructions, or else it only supports production that meets the tastes and interests of a privileged minority.

We are far, today, from such positive conceptions of culture. The word is from now on invested with a negative charge, automatically serves to repel. But if we have every reason to be wary of cultural optimism, we must also react rapidly against the automatisms that replace reflection with conditioned reflexes. (There is a leftist conditioning...) The fetishized words, whether positively or negatively charged, are as pernicious as slogans. They bypass the discussion and deny the problems instead of tackling them head on.

We must avoid, at the outset, too restrictive a definition of culture. To stick to a very general and common sense, I would say that it consists of the set of representations, symbols and works that express the moral, intellectual and aesthetic values that guide the relationships of men with the world and the relationships between men in a collectivity. Culture codifies and transmits the beliefs of the collectivity, its conception of the world, its impression of life. It inscribes itself in behavior, at best in a lifestyle.

Defined in this way, culture cannot escape the critique of ideology as developed, in particular, by Marxism. In fact, any culture is determined not only by the state of technology and knowledge at a given time, but by all the conditions of life (forces and relations of production, social and political divisions, systems of domination, etc.) It will therefore mobilize in the first place the conceptions of the classes that own and control the means of expression and dissemination. It will celebrate the values invoked to justify and preserve the established hierarchy.

toward a one-dimensional culture

A first restriction imposes itself. No culture can be considered the simple "reflection" of the economic and social infrastructure. It develops in a sphere of activity that has its own logic — often stubborn — and contains too many elements borrowed from previous forms of existence, elements that remain tightly interwoven in the more recent representations. Witness how slowly the repercussions of new scientific and technical conditions are assimilated by the collective mentality.

Furthermore, great cultural works do not constitute a simple demarcation of the given reality, or an interpretation totally structured by the dominant ideology. The work of art is an attempt at reinterpretation, often critical. Far from being limited to a justification of the forms of existence imposed by contemporary society, it generally denounces the suffering caused by these forms of existence: loneliness, failure, nostalgia for a life where the values proclaimed would actually be achieved. Even "the demand for happiness takes on dangerous accents in a system that brings distress, deprivation and pain to the majority" (Marcuse).

Culture is thus shaped by two opposing tendencies. One aims to justify the existing order, to shape collective life according to its standards, to disseminate beliefs, myths and an image of life that integrate the individual into the whole and ensure the survival of the system. The other, on the contrary, encourages criticism of what is in the name of what could be: in the name of the unrealized values, repressed desires, denied fulfillment and new possibilities opened up by the revolution of knowledge and means of action.

It is this contradiction that is in the process of eliminating what we have called "mass culture" and is, in the words of Marcuse, a one-dimensional culture. The products that they bring to the markets, intending them for mass consumption (films, television programs, records, "popular" novels, magazines) suppress contradiction and its frictical ferment. The demand for happiness is reduced to the desire for well-being, the accomplishment called *standing*. There is no longer any question aspiring to the impossible: happiness is a matter of savings and payments.

The role of one-dimensional is to make the given reality appear *natural*, to show it capable of infinite progress. And if, most of the time, labor remains a matter of coercion and boredom, the margin of leisure offers compensation for that effort and that wear and tear: peace at home, vacation trips and machines that let us dream in our seats. To the passivity imposed by the conditions of labor is added the fascination with the flood of images that transform the news of the world into a soap opera. And each, according to their means, seeks to give to each in spectacular form the achievement of their existence.

What place remains for "working-class culture" in this magma that drowns particularities and the sense of reality, that veils the real conflicts? Material access to cultural in no way means effective appropriation. Works of critical culture may be sold as paperbacks, but they are only read by those who are prepared to read them. The same goes for television, where late artistic or intellectual broadcasts are seen only by "the elite."

In the end, it is no longer even necessary for the State to intervene to channel production (even if it does not hesitate to do so, on occasion, to eliminate a product that is insufficiently compliant.) The "cultural" industry itself ensures the promotion of entertaining and anesthetic goods that meet the needs of the dominant ideology.

the counter-currents

These observations, and more simply the gloomy prostration of sanitized imagery or "cultural" rites, can lead quite naturally to the rejection of anything that pertains to culture. But the sterilization cannot reach the desired degree. Against the homogenizing current of "mass culture" are opposed counter-currents, ceaselessly turned back, but which for some time at least resist the general mingling. Through books, films (often low budget), theatrical shows (often marginal), through cartoons and comics, they express what the euphoric ideology seeks to camouflage: that violence is not the privilege of a wicked few, but is inscribed in the whole of relations of domination and exploitation; that daily life, with its exhaustion and its illusory compensations, constantly reinforces isolation, aggression and fear of liberty.

These negative currents innervate what is now called a "counter-culture". For a long time, this has also remained reserved for a minority. It becomes a collective phenomenon and takes a more radical orientation: a global refusal of cultural production (except for records...), a craze for raw information, a systematic preference given to the spoken word over the written word (except when it takes the form of the *parole brute*).

Against the fetishism of the product, against the passivity of the consumer, the counter-culture affirms play, improvisation, and celebration. Against isolation, it calls for encounters at the mercy of chance and wandering, community life. Against the "moral order" (work, family, country), it extols vagabondage, sexual freedom, spontaneous cosmopolitanism, respect for life and nature, non-violence. We could go on, but this is not an inventory. What I would like to make clear is that the counter-culture acts like a culture. By rejecting the values of the dominant

culture, it affirms its own values, which are not only proclaimed, but embodied in the beginnings of a way of life.

The strength of the counter-culture is that it proceeds from a collective sensitivity and is realized in behavior. This is the sign of a living culture. Its weakness, on the other hand, lies in the scarcity of the works, in the absence of the coherent thought essential to overcoming the stammering and the vague humanitarian considerations. It thus easily becomes prey for confused mystics. Ecology itself becomes mystical, with quite a wave to the soul of returning to the earth always put back and tours of the world never undertaken.

We find the dispersion, haziness and incompetence of expression which also paralyze the anarchist movement. An additional point of convergence between anarchism and the counter-culture... It is still to be feared that their weaknesses are added more easily than their creative potential.

libertarian culture

The counter-culture is a potential culture. It can be, at least, — if it is not sooner or later recuperated by the dominant ideology — the breeding ground of a new culture.

One of the reasons for its fragility is the absence of a past. We can obviously consider that as an advantage and as an additional attraction. No constraining tradition, no stifling models, no knowledge to take in or respect. Invention can give itself free rein. Life rediscovers its spontaneity, invades forbidden playgrounds. But spontaneity is exhausted in repetition, thought ends when it is enclosed in a limited circle of ideas. Expression is frozen when it no longer finds form on which to base itself. So the counter-culture seeks a past, or pasts, by taking hold of fragments drawn from ancient cultures, preferably exotic (Buddhism, Hinduism) or from cultures crushed by white imperialism - (Africa, the Indians of the Americas) or else from marginal traditions (esotericism).

the anarchist pasts

Because it has a past, anarchism can more easily refocus and thereby find a power of resistance against dissolution in the great one-dimensional magma. Paradoxically, its past is virtual: it is still to be established...

More precisely, anarchism has two pasts. A "manifest" past, which is that of the established anarchist movement, with its patchiness and its narrow tradition, but also—a positive point, which will be discussed further—its non-conformist way of life. The defeats and disappointments, the constant internal struggles have left their legacies of mistrust and unavailability. Years of survival cut off from the world have prevented the irrigation of the milieu by modern ideas. The poverty of means and the waning of intellectual activity have dried up the resources of a tradition that was no longer mentioned except in hearsay to preserve the orthodoxy of reassessments and new inputs.

This sclerosing past has lost its grip after the recent development of a new libertarian milieu, which is very informal and still disparate. It owed little to the established "movement" and began to discover the past of anarchism as a social movement.

What we retained of it so far was too often legend embellished by nostalgia and self-justifications.

The renewed interest in anarchism and, more generally, the disruption of the stalinist and leninist hegemony draws new attention to the revolutionary movements and the socialist experiments that did not lead to the "proletarian" State. From the war in Spain (finally viewed other than through military deeds) we go back to the Makhnovist movement, then to that Jurassian Federation that was the true crucible of anarchism. The centenary of the Commune has also allowed some things to be put in order.

Publications and translations multiply. New studies are published and others are in progress. Historians connected to the anarchist current take part in this work of rediscovery, with the obvious aim of identifying the original and positive aspects of the experiments that they describe, without piously leaving in the shadows what they consider to be weaknesses or errors. It would, however, be unjust to pretend that all anarchists have lacked interest in their history until recent years... Indeed, they hardly had the chance to publish their research, and that information blockade, which locked manuscripts and documents in desk drawers, was enough to stifle burgeoning careers. Even published books, like Voline's *The Unknown Revolution*, do not escape the little circle of initiates.

read, comrade

This past is still virtual: both because it is in large part still to be brought to light and because it is not yet active. It will be active from the moment that it exerts its influence on our thinking and our behavior. This implies an intermediate stage: moving from fragmentary rediscovery to the reconstruction of the whole. At the point where we are, the stages of our history which reappear are still too exclusively those of heroic periods. Publishing, even when it is somewhat marginal, does not escape the laws of the market. By force of circumstances, we publish what is most likely to sell. In the history of the Makhnovstchina or the Durruti column there is an epic, "western" side that can appeal to a large number of readers. And, a bit more seriously, the unknown aspects of the Russian Revolution or the achievements of self-management in Spain appeal to a relatively large fraction of the leftist public or simply the left. As for the exploits of the Bonnot gang or of Marius Jacob, they can boast of the suspense and the quaint elements so dear to detective novels.

We must note the thing without lamenting it too much. It is good that these books can appear and that they come to break the wall of silence (and of falsification) deliberately maintained by the Stalinist "historians." Even the history of illegalism — not to mention the exceptional personality of a Jacob — sheds light on certain nihilist tendencies of anarchism, and therefore on anarchism itself.

What is in question is the still incomplete nature of the "disinterment," first with regard to the periods chosen, but also at the level of the method of approach. By limiting ourselves to a particular series of events, we often give up on making comparisons between it and other anarchist interventions. What is important for us is a global view of libertarian social movements, with their lines of force, their constants and their interferences. It is indeed a question of reconstruction and not partial descriptions.

I believe, moreover, that such a work can only be carried out in a truly fruitful manner by libertarian historians. I do not doubt the honesty of researchers who are not "committed." We can often even recognize in them more than honesty: a real passion for their subject. But I expect more from anarchist historians. Let them go beyond the reconstruction of the facts, to see what sort of anarchism is at work in the events they are studying, what it brings that is new or

particular compared to the anarchisms that preceded it, and what identity persists beneath the variations.

I do not wish to open a debate here on objectivity in history. But I hope that the history of the anarchist movement will be for us more than “historiography”, that it will really be a past questioned in the light of our present. A past that, at the limit — and this limit is inevitable — changes with our present, according to the lights and shadows that our concerns, our intuitions and our projects throw on it.

Let us go farther. The facts are nothing in themselves. They do not "speak" until they are illuminated by the meaning of a coherent whole. It is precisely through their sensibility and libertarian consciousness that a historian can establish new links between facts, give a common sense — or just a sense — to events that have thus far remained disparate and “silent”. Must we specify that such an understanding has nothing to do with a manipulation of history according to the needs of a *line* to be defended or revised?

the history of ideas

The reconstructing of our past will only be complete, will even only be possible on the condition of integrating the history of ideas into the history of events. I am not thinking only of the ideas formulated by the men and groups involved in the events that we study. That goes without saying. It is also necessary to address the theories developed in a certain of works presenting themselves as libertarian or claimed as their own by libertarians. It is, quite simply, a question of making a history of anarchist philosophy.

In this regard, we find ourselves almost totally destitute. Doubtless, there are useful works on Proudhon, Stirner and Bakunin. We owe them, almost always, to authors foreign to the libertarian movement ... and in general we do not take them into account. (What attention have we shown to Gurvitch's, Ansart's or Bancal's books on Proudhon, or to Arvon's book on Stirner?)

Even more than in the domain of social history, the reconstitution must here be a reconstruction, if not simply a construction. The relations to be identified are multiple. It will be necessary to study the influences of social movements on the works, and vice versa; to situate each work among the intellectual productions of its time. Truth be told, two types of history of anarchist philosophy are possible — and necessary. The first would describe the "systems," their intellectual and sociological circumstances. The second — a more subjective and, properly speaking, a more philosophical work — would start from current thought to reread (in the sense of reinterpreting) the founding texts. Such a rereading could lead, to give one simple example, to rejecting Stirner in the name of Bakunin, or Bakunin in the name of Stirner; it could also assimilate both in the name of a single existential revolt against the System. We have to rewrite anarchism.

The interest, for us, to unearth old tomes? First of all, they are not all to be unearthed, as some are carefully arranged in publishers' stocks (Rivière's Proudhon, for example.) These old books are first of all testimonies, attempts to draw from consciousness and give form to proposals for transforming the real. That reality, we can agree, is no longer ours. Or no longer quite ours... But what certainly remains, what deserves examination and discussion, is the spirit in which the critiques and the proposals were formulated.

If there exists (at least virtually) an anarchist theory, studying its genesis and its transformations is a way of grasping it.

To deny is amount to the same thing as rejecting the history of the revolutionary movement under the pretext that only the present interests us.

There is more. Behind each book stands an individual, who fought to change the world they lived in, to find other forms of life and of relations. To condemn those individuals to oblivion or to pious dismissal, is to agree with those who sought to reduce them to silence during their lifetimes; with those who, after their deaths, have distorted their thoughts or actions in order to eliminate their influence. Regarding Proudhon, Stirner and Bakunin himself, many — among us too — settle for the considerations of Marx and his followers. Giving a fair and credible image of anarchism also means showing that anarchists have said and done something else, and that what they have said still provides us with the means to understand our world and to act in it.

a lifestyle

Through the reactivation of its past, anarchism can recover its culture. The diversified activity that this renaissance entails will in itself constitute an invigorating factor of cultural life. The aim of the operation, of course, is not to be able to bring a bookish knowledge into line with our antecedents. It is above all a matter of knowing ourselves better, of reintegrating into our field of consciousness the values, dreams and ideas that have made anarchism a historical reality.

Libertarian culture, however, has other sources and other manifestations. An active past is a past mobilized by and for a present activity. A culture, to come back to the initial definition, only becomes reality if it permeates mentalities and behavior, if it is embodied in the lifestyle of a community. On this level, at least, libertarian culture has held up quite well. Anarchism was formed and developed in the struggle against all oppressions and all alienations. In the most diverse conditions, it has manifested consistent conduct: primacy granted to direct action, confidence in spontaneity (individual or collective), a refusal of means that contradict the aims and a desire to simultaneously change the world and life.

This consistency is not due solely to the permanence of a "revolutionary tradition." It is above all the effect of a fundamental will to liberty that produces homologous reactions in a variety of situations.

What applies to collective struggles also applies to personal existence: rejection of domination and submission, attempts at a way of life freed from taboos, independence of judgment and decision. It was logical that anarchism was the revolutionary tendency whose attention was most immediately directed to everyday life. The presence of an individualist current, skeptical of the possibilities of a future social upheaval and all the more concerned with short-term liberations, strongly contributed to orient the anarchist milieu in this direction.

The struggle against repressive sexual morality, birth control, the search for a non-authoritarian pedagogy thus inscribed anarchist values in the forms of practical life. These were not just propaganda themes; they were also more than hypotheses to be experimented with: a way of life developed, education was spontaneously carried out in daily contacts. The meeting between the libertarian culture and the new counter-culture takes place in the most natural way on this level. We find this overlap even in attempts at communitarian life (which had already encountered the same difficulties in the days of *milieux libres...*)

So the existence of a libertarian culture, with its own values, with its accumulated ideas and experiences, with its particular sensibility and way of life, does not seem to me to be contestable. I would even add that, like every culture, it has an integrative function. It imbues individuals with the convictions and aspirations of the anarchist collectivity, leads them to assimilate the

means of understanding, of communication and of specific intervention, and it inserts them into the community.

There is no reason to refuse this natural and necessary process, if the culture in question expresses and puts to work these essential resources of anarchism which are questioning, insubordination, a critical spirit and the will to personal achievement. What is really problematic is the form taken by libertarian culture: its gaps, its losses of substance, its weakening and its aging. It is precisely because it is not in a position to fulfill its function of integration that we are reduced to dispersion.

a dominated culture

One could ask if the integration process does not insidiously go beyond the purpose that I attribute to it. The insertion of a momentum of revolt in the forms of an anarchist culture could well constitute a first step, a mediation, in a process of recuperation for the benefit of (dominant) Culture.

The first point to consider — and I have already touched on this in passing — is the fact of dominated cultures. To extend its hegemony, the state system must abolish the distinctive characteristics, the non-institutionalized collective links that prevent it from having a direct hold on the “citizen”: historical communities (voluntarily or forcibly melted into the “nation”), regional languages, class consciousness. The mold of compulsory education, the control of the media, not to mention the sacrosanct military service, aim to create a normalized individual, cut off from their concrete attachments.

Libertarian culture is subject to the same flattening as the cultures of the provinces or colonized countries. The mechanism of repression operates from day to day, according to the logic of the system, without even the need for visible interventions. The gaps in official history, the silences of the news media and the closure of access to the means of dissemination do their job quite naturally. Let us add, for anarchism, that the whole apparatus of conditioning renders minds unreceptive to ideas that put freedom first. In the end, the weakening of the currents thus neutralized does the rest.

Yet another factor has contributed to the stifling of anarchist culture. As dogmatic Marxism has gained the status of dominant ideology in the revolutionary movement, it has imposed a falsified image of anarchism. It has thus come to reinforce very effectively the repression exercised by bourgeois culture.

It is now a question of reversing the proposition. If the dominant ideology must crush particular cultures in order to reduce the individual to the stage of an atomized element, cut off from any autonomous community and any divergent tradition, the reactivation of a refractory culture can be a very effective leaven of resistance. Without doubt, it will be influenced by established ways of thinking and imposed living conditions. But it will suffer them all the less to the extent that it is supported by a clearer consciousness of its difference.

social life

The return of an anarchist cultural dynamism should stimulate the counter-currents, which would feed it in return. We come back to the earlier question: is this not a participation in global cultural life, and therefore indirectly participation in the renewal of the dominant culture?

We cannot simply reduce the cultural life of a society to its dominant culture. One of the essential ideas of libertarian sociology is the opposition between the State and social life (society), the State being considered a parasitic excrescence capturing the energies of society and focusing them according to the interests of a minority.

The battle against the State cannot be limited to an action of opposition and contestation; it also demands a permanent effort to reinforce, on all planes, social spontaneity and the collective capacity for initiative and autonomous organization. (I have developed this idea at greater length in *Formes et tendances de l'anarchisme*.) The same is true for cultural activity, which springs from a collective need, a spontaneous tendency in social life. Again, we must not forget that the multiplication of state interference and the extension of ideological apparatuses intertwine the statist and the social much more closely than at the time when the first anarchist analyzes (of liberal origin) were developed.)

So it is not a question of rejecting cultural life as a whole, but of preventing as much as possible its diversion, its alienation by ideological apparatuses. The best way is still to reinforce as much as possible the counter-currents, the anti-authoritarian tendencies, by giving them means of expression and grounds of confrontation, by radicalizing them with an anarchistic consistency. If regional cultures are already perceived as a danger, a source of division and non-conformity, the existence of a revolutionary culture, born of the struggle against capitalism and the State, constitutes a permanent risk of insubordination and deviation.

Foundation

The arguments for a libertarian culture are limited in scope. Their interest consists above all in defining a possible field of action, in bringing together on a more explicit basis those who feel the need for continued intellectual activity. Only a vibrant and diverse cultural life will be able to create a real force of conviction by drawing a growing number of individuals to places where “something will happen”: discussions, study days, editorial boards, etc.

points of reference

It is futile to seek to revive an intellectual activity if all its manifestations have dried up. We can coordinate, intensify, but not begin from nothing. Despite the dispersion, despite the occultation of the anarchist tradition, we can graft new contributions onto the fragments of anarchy that have remained alive.

The work of questioning and updating undertaken by the review [Noir et Rouge](#) is still recent, and can be continued. [Anarchisme et Non-Violence](#) reaches a circle of readers little marked by the old anarchist milieus and its concerns can take hold directly on the "counter-culture"; its working methods and approach to relations can be extended to other groups or publications. In [Recherches libertaires](#) (I also cite my own ties...) we tried, with modest means and intermittent perseverance, to at least maintain an awareness of the shortcomings and a conviction regarding a possible renewal. [ICO](#) (“Informations, correspondances ouvrières”), whose references are to the socialism of the councils rather than to anarchism, remains an active meeting point where discussions and exchanges of information continue. Let us not forget *La Tour de feu*, some issues of which (“Salut à la tempête”, “Artaud”, etc.) represented the counter-culture well at a time when it was hardly mentioned. The reflection on anarchism has also continued in personal works. That of [Charles-Auguste] Bontemps, for example, who in the elaboration of his "social

individualism" has always been concerned with the rigor of the foundations and the persistence of an anarchist intellectual life. Or that of Guérin, announcing — and stimulating — this current of ideas that is now rediscovering anarchism starting from Marxism.

Another notable sector of our cultural activity is the historical studies undertaken by certain of our comrades on the stages of the anarchist movement, on pedagogical experiments, etc.

Research on anarchism once against becomes an anarchist research. The CIRA (Centré international de recherches sur l'anarchisme) can become an essential link in the network of exchanges since it allows not only the circulation of documents but also information on the works in progress and contacts between those engaged in them.

With regard to the established anarchist movement (I am speaking of its situation in France), we can consider as positive the renunciation of the illusion of a single organization whose basis of agreement is the vagueness of common principles and the flight from substantive discussions.

The formation of groups based on "ideological" and tactical unity presents at least the one advantage the we are entitled to expect from them: a clear definition of their bases and the elucidation of the tradition on which they claim to be founded. The need for clarification seems to be recognized, since there was talk some time ago about organization-to-organization dialogue. It remains to be seen under what conditions it will be done, and whether the absence of a sufficiently developed language will not cloud the confrontation.

In the end, within the limits that I have already noted, we can count on the contagion of the "counter-culture". The clarification that is taking place in the movement of ideas that emerged from May 68 may become another component of our cultural life, insofar as spontaneist agitation and its systematic anti-intellectualism are beginning to give way to the demand for theoretical reflection and more in-depth information on the currents that have come together in leftism.

This panorama will appear very optimistic after the admission of bankruptcy in my first chapter. It is, in part, a matter of perspective. Yes, there were living cells that endured in the atrophied tissue of anarchism. The irrigation is now better, and new cells have come to graft themselves on what remains. But we still haven't found the forms (theoretical structures, communication networks) that would allow us to unify and assimilate the disparate material of the anarchist revival.

the anarchist tradition

This is why I insisted so much on the need to first identify the forms produced by anarchism in its genesis and its evolution. To take up against a word I used despite an apparent contradiction, it is about reconnecting with the anarchist tradition. If a tradition is sclerotic, it is because the community that claims it is sclerotic.

A living community, in permanent evolution, has an active tradition (in the same sense in which I spoke of an active past.) If we content ourselves with bringing to light fragments of our past, we will end up at best creating a mosaic of information, a fragmented knowledge. A tradition, on the contrary, retains and nourishes everything that lets itself melt into its organic unity.

However, we have not escaped the paradox. Tradition implies transmission, continuity, available funds. While we have yet to invent our tradition... A tradition is always in the process of transformation. Some of its elements are falling into disuse, others are unearthed and reactivated. Links are made which were not given at the start. Connections are established between different stories. Stirner is introduced into the anarchist current by his posterity.

Kropotkin places Fourier at the source of libertarian socialism, and as a function of Fourier's current "return" we can expect an imminent injection of his ideas into modern anarchism. These processes of appropriation can also carry much further in time: Etienne de la Boétie, Epicurus, Lao-Tzu... A living tradition is a conquering tradition.

The reestablishment of certain connections prompts us to reconsider some renunciations. The libertarian communist groups are tempted to assert that they owe Proudhon nothing. No doubt they are far from the People's Bank. But libertarian sociology is the essential work of Proudhon and we all remain dependent on his hypotheses and analyzes. Rather than concentrating on some of his utopian constructions, we should re-examine — and reuse — his methods of analysis, his dialectics. Let us not forget either that the theory and practice of self-management have solid roots in Proudhon. Not to mention his influence on Bakunin, on the anti-authoritarian current of the First International (even if the "collectivists" had to fight "proudhonian" reformists there.) Likewise, non-violent anarchists deny Tolstoy and more readily attach themselves to Gandhi,... who himself owes much to Tolstoy,... who himself was marked by Proudhon.

This is not a genealogy undertaken for fun. The interest of the thing is to discover what is implicit in our positions and what are the lines of cohesion. The search for unity comes through the search for foundations. But this is still only one aspect of the real foundational work, which for us takes place in the present. The anarchist past is not lacking in disparity or inconsistency. Our reading of the past will therefore also depend on the consistency that we have introduced into our current ideas, these two structuring efforts constantly sending us from one to the other.

And as soon as we tackle the shaping of our ideas for the present, we find ourselves confronted with the stream of modern intellectual life.

communication networks

We would again be the losers if the “rereading” was done to the detriment of a “reading” of the present: a theoretical interpretation of the new forms of alienation and of the fight against alienation, a confrontation with the theoretical research that is developing around us. The libertarian movement will be animated by an effective cultural life when all these processes are intimately linked, when we can approach the intellectual life of the moment with the knowledge originally acquired by our tradition and re-examine our past with both acquired knowledge and current experiences.

We will arrive at this degree of "mobilization" in stages (if we arrive there at all...), through a collective work that will require great diversification. So there is a new risk of dispersal. We could only remedy this by increasing the overlaps, by forming teams based on common interests, on synergies or interactions. Here again, we will be hampered by our small number and our geographical dispersion.

The first condition, and the most stimulating, will be to multiply the number of encounters, using all the means of communication at our disposal (including the means of transportation...). Periodicals will be needed so that everyone can be kept abreast of other research, and so that all of this output can be used and discussed. At a more spontaneous level, we can envision networks of correspondence (relayed if necessary by newsletters) that would announce projects, provide information on the research and maintain the more informal discussion.

Above all, it will be necessary to create meeting places and times, where contacts would be established beyond the limits of organizations or particular sectors of intervention. I do not see these meetings primarily as "seminars" or "colloquia" (which I do not exclude, far from it), but

as crossroads where the exchange of ideas would take place as current events (significant events or actions taken) dictate.

The interest of these "cultural centers" would be to be independent of "organizations", whose exclusivity and rivalries are not very conducive to unprejudiced encounters.

So much the better if each group hosts its own intellectual activity. But to set up cultural networks, it is much better to start from personal relationships and affinities, communities of interest or relations that certain groups maintain between themselves according to the needs of short-term actions. Nothing would, of course, prevent the members of an organization from participating in these contacts.

One could object that it is, once again, to remain informal. The forms — when there is a need for forms — would be determined by the tasks pursued: debates to be prepared, journals to be published, editing, etc. And, in any case, it is a question of allowing precisely those forms (theoretical structures, language, cultural ramifications) to emerge that could provide a *raison d'être* and some transparency to the formalization of relations.

Here I would like to leave the field of hypotheses and proposals, in order to jump into that of utopia (or even the science fiction dear to many of us.) These networks could give themselves a center, or centers (let us remain federalists), points of interference and passage, places for permanent meetings. Friendly bookstores are already playing this role. More is needed: access not only to recent books but also to older or rarer documents with reduced print runs. And above all the possibility of working on site, alone or with others, of living for a while at the "center", of meeting people there. Scattered teams would meet there, meet other teams, take and give the "news". Let us add — why skimp? — means of publishing, and one more step will lead us to a community built around an activity of publishing and printing (some American communities live on the publication of a newspaper.)

Finally, community or not, we would have there a nerve center for the libertarian movement, at once memory and factor of invention, laboratory and good hostel, in short, to return to science fiction, a "powerhouse." A Foundation.

overture

The "program" that I have just outlined is the result of great optimism. I will invoke in favor of optimism the current extension of an anti-authoritarian movement in all aspects of life and I will recall the historical precedents. The anarchist movement has already experienced periods of intellectual turmoil, which indicates that it is not congenitally insane.

That said, the proposed program is tainted with a primary weakness: it is the work of a single individual. This is common in anarchist milieu, but that is no reason to put up with it. From my point of view, like that of *Anarchisme et Non-violence*, these notes are therefore intended first of all for the discussion of the reasons and the modalities of a cultural activity. From there, we will see if a "common program" is possible, not in the form of a manifesto in x points, but as a coordination of actions already initiated or at least planned.

To prevent this debate (and the expectation of debate is another proof of optimism) from starting with misunderstandings, I would like to put some of my positions in perspective. The negative and dissolving tendencies of anarchy prevail by force of circumstances over its positive and creative tendencies. To really bring into play the dialectic between one and the other, it seems necessary to me to reinforce the latter, and I have oriented my remarks in this direction. This does not mean that I wish to eliminate the negative.

The search for unity. — I do not believe that a re-reading of anarchism (as a social movement, as an intellectual tradition) can lead to a single theory. An anarchist "system" is unthinkable, but we can at least consider a systematization, always open to questioning and new contributions. It would already be a big step forward if we found face to face — with all the contradictions and interferences that entails — with well-structured and well-informed theories.

A thought centered on the idea of freedom ("it is the emptiness of the hub that makes the wheel turn" said Lao-Tzu) is inevitably led to plurality, because it cannot base its orthodoxy on any authoritarian body, even of a "scientific" nature, that would distinguish between the straight line and heresies. But we can interrogate each theory regarding its consistency and the value of its information.

Theorization and culture. — We have such a delay to make up for that shaping one or more theories will necessarily be a long-term project. It is the theorization that is to be immediate. It has as a condition a plural intellectual activity that must be able to inscribe itself in a diversified cultural life. I have particularly mentioned the "founders" here, but cultural life implies the circulation of much more varied texts: works relating to testimony or rage, imagination or the lampoon. Déjacque, Darien and Cœurderoy will have their say. Biographies, memoirs, books filled with souvenirs maintain the traces of the "lived tradition." The very multiplicity of small, ephemeral publications is not a cause of weakness and loss if there exists a current of clarification and unification that can serve as a relay and a stimulus.

Finally, there has been a lot of talk in these notes about work, effort, elaboration, etc. It is true that there is a lot to do, but we will do it all the better if we do not forget the pleasure of encounters and discoveries, the taste for exploration and experiment, curiosity and receptiveness. A cultural life is largely made up of those things.

"External" ideas. — The "reinvention" of an original tradition in no way means a return to a vacuum. We recognize a spontaneous anarchy on the plane of action: regardless of any anarchist label or any filiation, certain interventions in social movements or in daily life manifest the logic of a libertarian struggle. It is time to recognize that the same is true of thought and cultural activity. We have no more monopoly on libertarian expression than on libertarian action, even if it is up to us to develop to the end the anarchist logic of certain attitudes or certain ideas.

Particularly incandescent "fragments of anarchy" have been emitted by the surrealists, and quite recently by the situationists. After the war, existentialism released a current of ideas that had clear libertarian components. The anarchists have gone right past surrealism as if nothing had happened. (A regular collaboration of the surrealist group with the *Libertaire* group began in the early fifties ... but the newspaper was already in the hands of "revisionists.") Existentialism has been no better understood — and even the sponsorship that Stirner could give it has been of no consequence.

Situationist ideas have had a more direct impact, as they have had on the whole of the authoritarian movement (even if the mark often remains superficial); but as regards the official spheres of the anarchist "movement", they above all triggered a panicked reaction and helped to ripen one of the periodic schisms of the F. A. (1967).

I am sticking here to clearly marked cross-currents, in order to go quickly. Each group, each individual, according to their own coordinates, can be led to look for their references outside of the tradition. No limit, except that of internal cohesion, can be opposed to the absorption, by an anarchist theory, of substances and radiations useful for its growth and vitality.

Order and progress. — It is above all from the anti-authoritarian movement of recent years that anarchism will draw its energies for the time being. Such a process of assimilation calls in

return for questioning. But anarchism carries within itself the impetus for its own questioning. Its negative and dissolving tendencies are unlikely to lose their vigor with cultural revival. Contestation, the will to rupture, the temptation of particularism and fragmentation, the rejection of everything given and the passionate impulses are inseparable from anarchism. No tradition, however flexible and evolving, can avoid questioning, least of all in an anarchist environment. The drying up of cultural life, and not its demand for form and continuity, leads to the sclerosis of tradition. The effort of construction and unification does not suppress negativity; on the contrary, it directs the destructive tendencies towards their true aim: the "old world", its ideology and its apparatuses of domination.

The anarchist question — since we must speak about it once again in closing — awaits a practical answer. Prove movement by walking. Reappropriation and assimilation only take on their meaning and effectiveness in a new production: the development of a language through precise analyses and experiments in communication, the extension, in our writings, of writings passed down or recognized.

I list here two particular steps, because they can be undertaken immediately, with all of the incomplete, approximate and provisional character that our situation will lend to them (as evidenced by this text...) The more-or-less groping and erratic search for a new kind of life also continues its course, with a first effort (part of the "underground" press) to achieve expression.

This attempt at communication, which is itself in search of antecedents, should naturally converge with that which derives from the written word.

We can hardly say more. I have tried to indicate some necessary steps, some starting points and some potentialities. The concrete forms of our cultural life will take shape along the way, each stage being able to open up, for the stage to come, possibilities that were unforeseen until then.

[WEEK THREE NOTES]