

Rambles in the Fields of Anarchist Individualism

Shawn P. Wilbur



I am not, when all is said and done, an individualist—not, at least, in any exclusive or defining manner. Anyone who has followed my work can no doubt guess that I have derived a great deal of pleasure from the literature of individualism, and particularly from the anarchist individualism of figures like E. Armand. I count Stirner among my influences (and that guy with all the funny names among my friends), but neither am I an egoist. I'm generally of the opinion of Proudhon—"All these isms aren't worth a pair of boots!"—but I'll answer happily enough to anarchist, mutualist, synthesist.

Still, if I can't embrace individualism as an identity or an ideology, I've never seen the means to do without it as one discipline or practice among those necessary to life as an anarchist. And I feel fairly confident that, despite all of the attempts to jettison it along the way, the anarchist tradition has never found those means either. So it seems natural at this stage in the work on Our Lost Continent and the Journey Back to take the time to come to terms with anarchist individualism and begin to sketch out its place in the synthetic plain anarchism I am presently seeking to elaborate.

Were circumstances different, this particular part of the project might have waited for another time, but as the pandemic has shifted my focus to works on hand, and as the 20th-century individualists have captured my attention for the moment, I'm happy to embrace when circumstances have placed in front of me. And, with both the character of the material to be addressed and those rather unusual circumstances in mind, my intention is to tackle this phase of things somewhat differently than I have some of the others.

Taking my cues from the columns of papers like l'en dehors, I'll be organizing my thoughts about anarchist individualism in somewhat smaller and perhaps more easily digestible chunks than usual: sketches, notes, vignettes, perhaps a prose poem and perhaps some odds and ends scavenged from old posts and other writings.

And, indeed, to start things off, what better than an old entry introducing the figure of the Contr'un...

Who Is the Contr'un?

[May 19, 2014]

Basically, the *Contr'un* is the star of the show here, the Whitmanesque subject who contains multitudes and is not contained between hat and boots, who spills out over all the property lines we might draw, at the same time drawing the world in without attempting to claim exclusive domain. It is the subject understood in its general economy. It is an individual characterized by an *antinomic* relationship with its own individuality, a counter-self, the one against the (absolutist) One. It is frustrating, messy (at least in the context of our attempts to draw clean boundaries, *improper* (in senses that draw out all the various connotations of the *proper*), and perhaps rather more *feminine* (in familiar, probably important, but also rightly contested terms)

than we are accustomed to assume—and where the conventionally *masculine* elements don't seem in harmony with a *phallic* sort of identity. It is the form of the actors in a world where *solidarity means attack* (if I may be forgiven for that appropriation) at a more or less metaphysical level, where Universal Antagonism is the first fundamental law of the universe, but where the second is a kind of reciprocity that justifies that antagonism without seeking to destroy it.

In theoretical terms, a focus on the Contr'un as anarchistic subject has all sorts of consequences for how we think about *property* (non-exclusively, to begin) and how we think about *identities* (where perhaps the non-*exhaustive* character is the starting point.) As insights in those areas scale up, it has the potential to work a fairly complete overhaul on a lot of the familiar apparatus of anarchism. I've already made suggestions about a different sort of class analysis, as well as a different analysis of intersectionality. Most of that work, however, remains to be done, as just the question of *property* alone has been enough to occupy much of my time here for several years now. The time is coming to get right down to it, but there is some useful review and clarification to be done first.

In more personal, practical terms, the Contr'un is really the position from which this blog is written. My own opposition to absolutism and fundamentalism, even when it is the absolutism and fundamentalism of would-be anarchists, is at the heart of the project here. Historical work, archiving, and close reading of texts may seem like fundamentally conservative labors to some (often those who haven't done much of the work), but faced with the sort of false memory syndrome that afflicts so much of the movement, it's sort of amazing what can manage to be radical. I think about Joseph Déjacque's colorful opening to *The Humanisphere*:

I take possession of my solitary corner and, there, with teeth and claws, like a rat in the shadows, I scratch and gnaw at the worm-eaten walls of the old society. By day, as well, I use my hours of unemployment, I arm myself with a pen like a borer, I dip it in bile for grease, and, little by little, I open a way, each day larger, to the flood of the new...

and think, "right there with ya, brother." That absolutist *One* comes in a wide variety of guises, and in the last year I've been exploring some of the ways that anarchism itself might join the list of possibilities. In case it hasn't been clear, that doesn't seem to me to be any sort of idle speculation. From my perspective, it seems more like addressing a real, present problem in the movement. And that is what has suggested the necessity of focusing some attention of what I've been calling *contr'archy*, the aspect of anarchism that concerns itself with avoiding absolutism, and returning to the metaphor of the two guns of mutualism, to all the ways in which the most consistent anti-authoritarian theory and practice may still threaten to blow up in our faces. On this more personal register, the Contr'un is me, and, I suspect, most anyone who wants to join on me in my explorations here for any length of time.

Rambles in the Fields of Anarchist Individualism

No. 1. — Vast, containing multitudes...

Whatever we think of *individualism*, *anarchist individualism* or a range of related topics, anarchist theory can hardly dispense with some close consideration of the *individual*. The question is whether that is a permanent condition or whether we have yet to extricate ourselves from a philosophical problem that we will eventually solve. And we are fortunate, I think, to have inherited some analyses of the concept of the individual that lead us rather quickly to what is most complex and interesting about it.

Proudhon's *free absolute*, a *unity-collectivity*, seems to involve the right mix of the free and the fixed, the individual and the group, held in antonomic tension. Stirner's *unique* is perhaps most striking for not being an instance of any type—or perhaps for being an *only one* that does not seem to preclude others. And what can we say about the *self* that Walt Whitman sang, casually mixing the *single* and the *en masse*?

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

My own understanding of the *anarchic individual* is, at this point, something of a synthesis of this material—except that the various insights do not come together, or at least have not yet come together, in any simple unity. Instead, my thoughts remain more than a bit *anarchic*. It remains to be seen whether or not that is a problem.

There is obviously a shared dynamic in these various approaches, according to which the single and individual tends to become multiple in a variety of ways. And perhaps the same can be said for figures like E. Armand's *anarchist individualist*, who is as often a *camarade* as a *solitaire*. These are questions that I'll attempt to address here, in this series, without any particular sense of urgency, in the form of a series of *rambles* through the literature of anarchist individualism.

All this talk of *rambling* is, in part, an allusion to the pace of the investigations involved, to the *balades champêtres*, open-air excursions or country rambles, hosted periodically by *l'en dehors* and, finally, to a striking passage from E. Armand's writings that I recently had occasion to translate:

Life as experience tears up programs, treads decorum under foot, breaks the windows, descends from the ivory tower. It abandons the City of Established Facts, out through the Gate of Settled Matters and roams, vagabond, in the open countryside of the Unforeseen.
— E. Armand, "Life as Experience"

But it is also a reference to the part of nearly every day that I spend wandering through various local parks, in all kinds of weather, sorting through whatever problems of anarchist theory happen to be at the top of the mental heap. My own open-air excursions are an important part of the process of thinking and writing, which it is often hard to credit in the work produced. In this series, however, they may sometimes assume something close to center stage.



In choosing the title for this first installment of the *Rambles...*, I had intended to set myself on a path straight to the heart of the *anarchy* that dominates my understanding of the individual as *contr'un*. Respecting the process has made the path a little less straight, but let's at least check in with "the star of the show."

The Contr'un

Contr'un. Counter-one. A single *unit* or *unity* that keeps pointing us towards quantities *more or less than simply singular*.

With Stirner, we mark the scope of a self in terms of the reach of « its » might, but we do not assume that this might, this force, is in any way *simple*. Instead, with Fourier and Proudhon, we identify it as complex, composite—always already a *collective force*—and we recognize the connections of energy with conflict.

"All that reason knows and affirms is that each being, like every idea, is a group." — P.-J. Proudhon, *The Philosophy of Progress*

And so we also recognize the working of Proudhon's first "fundamental law of the universe," not just in the relation between an individual and other individuals, or between the individual and their milieu, but also within the individual itself. Internal *contradiction* and conflict is the motor of the individual and the source of that "quantity of freedom" we associate with its collective force.

(This is a too-quick summary, but much of the argument behind it can be found in the posts linked in the sidebar.)

That also means that *reciprocity*, at least in the peculiar way that Proudhon defined it, is a dynamic already at work within the individual.

Such is also the first law that I proclaim, in agreement with religion and philosophy: it is Contradiction. Universal Antagonism.

But, just as life supposes contradiction, contradiction in its turn calls for justice: from this the second law of creation and humanity, the mutual penetration of antagonistic elements, Reciprocity.

Proudhon's *unity-collectivity* is obviously not just an individual, but the notion does allow us to account for what we might call *individualities*, *units* or *unities* at a wide range of scales—provided we are prepared to have most of our other familiar keywords shift in meaning to take advantage of the new interpretive possibilities.

That, of course, is the difficulty.

That redefinition and redeployment of terms—the subversion of concepts—is one of the strengths of Proudhon's work, but also one of the chief difficulties it poses for readers. And as a tool for elaborating something like individualism... well, it is quite obviously not exactly designed for the job.

Still, we will almost certainly find ourselves elaborating something very much like individualism, even if that elaboration must be supplemented by other sorts of analysis. It is quite

simply very difficult to talk clearly about both sides of the unity-collectivity *antinomy* at the same time. So we may, for example, find ourselves grappling with the "individual" side of things, but in language that is largely "social" in its usual association—and *vice versa*.

But perhaps that is not the worst of outcomes.

I would, I think, be happy enough to call the human individual the first in a series of *societies*, if, in the process, I was able to avoid positing it as the first in a series of *polities*.

Armand on the anarchist "label"

The French title of this short piece is « Étiquette ? » Neither "Label?" nor "Tag?" seem like particularly attractive English translations, although both are obviously apt enough. (And "Tags" is the title of a related essay by William J. Gorsuch, of which I am very fond.)

It's the kind of minor translating problem that is likely to send you off great distances in unlikely directions, all in the hope of some elegant solution. And while I don't seem to have found one yet, I did remind myself, in the course of my more or less fruitless searching, that the word "independent," which is italicized in the final paragraph, may be rendered in French as "sans etiquette"—which may be neither here nor there, but I did set me to wonder just what is the relation here between the anarchist "label," which is not *just* a label and has been adopted solely for the pleasure it brings, and the lack of labels associated with independence.

Perhaps there will be some occasion to return to that question, but, for now, I think the article itself—*sans* any clear tag at its head—is interesting enough to share here:

An anarchist individualist, I choose, I have chosen the "label" *anarchist* because it please me, but also after *reasoning* about it. But this anarchist label is not just a label. It is an affirmation and a definition by itself, of which no one could be ignorant if they have studied the slightest bit of sociology or have spent time with flesh-and-blood anarchists.

Anarchist is a label that is also a declaration: a declaration that — in order to live in isolation or association, to produce or consume, to learn or to teach, to exist and to evolve in all domains — there is no need of governmental authority, there is no need for the State. The rulers have understood this so well that they have enacted special laws restricting the anarchists, the so-called *lois scélérates*. And this is true of all governments, up to and including the government of the proletarian elites.

The dictionaries indicate for the word "anarchy" and its derivatives "disorder, confusion." But it is easy to see that this *reflects the governmental method of teaching*, which wants to promote the idea that without the State there is only disorder.

An artist, a literary person who does not prostitute themselves is only imaginable anarchically, outside of governmental or statist tutelage, protection or orders — and that is why an *independent* artist or writer who uses the words *anarchy* or *anarchist* in the official sense is incomprehensible to me.

E. Armand.

Source: *Le Libertaire* 4e série, 31 no. 10 (6 Juin 1925): 2.



...in the fields...

Even out here on the far edge of the suburbs, an open hillside is a bit of a treasure. I'm fortunate enough to have one, on public land, within a short walk of the house—complete with views of the mountain and largely unmown fields that shift in color and texture with the shifts of light and seasons. There are quite a number of these marginal and interstitial plots nearby, generally poorly marked and not too heavily used, but this is arguably the gem of the bunch. It's just a grassy hillside, really, with an uneven path mown around its edge. The contours of the land make the hill itself difficult to photograph and the hummocky ground is any number of twisted ankles waiting to happen. But that just means that walks are leisurely on the path and even more so off it—and that when you stop and lift your eyes from the uncertain surfaces underfoot, the lines of the hillside always seem to lead off and up towards some encounter with the sky.

I take picture after picture, day after day, recording the various convergences of grass and slope and sky and sun and clouds. I stop for long periods of time, to take photographs or to scribble in a tiny notebook. The dog-walkers are sometimes obviously curious, but generally too polite to ask questions.

Today, thinking and scribbling about this project, I walked around the recently remown trail and then around again...



The Mystery of Hermann Sterne

Of the various ways in which individuals and multitudes might cross paths, one that I had not thought about as I started this set of reflections was the question of *pseudonyms*. But it was that question that absorbed a great deal of my time and attention over the last few days.

The name Hermann Sterne first caught my eye while working my way through the run of *l'en dehors*. There were, of course, no shortage of pseudonyms in the paper, but a story called “Unico Schmidt,” signed Hermann Sterne, struck me in passing as perhaps exceeding some kind of limit on possible references to Max Stirner. I noted a couple of other articles by Sterne, but didn't pay

much attention until, much later, I started to try to track down the original sources of the stories and articles in E. Armand's collection *En marge du vice et de la vertu*. One story, "La Bête de Proie," showed up when I did a search through my archive—not once, in fact, but twice. In neither case, however, was the author listed as Armand. In the pages of *l'Anarchie*, it was signed "Hermann Sterne," but in *l'en dehors* the same story was signed "Me Grosjean." I was pretty quickly able to determine that "Le cauchemar," another story originally published under the Hermann Sterne name, was the same story published as by Armand in *Profils de Précurseurs et Figures de Rêve*.

It seemed clear that I was dealing with a pseudonym, but I couldn't find any confirmation of the fact. What I could find, however, were a number of curiously incomplete author biographies and a lot of indications that Hermann Sterne had always published in roughly the same periodicals as Armand. At length, I convinced myself that there was no other logical explanation—and then I found this note by Armand himself in the supplement to *l'en dehors* no. 4:

I acknowledge the articles written by me under the pseudonyms Hermann Sterne, Amos and le Guépin, published while my name appeared on the masthead of *l'anarchie*.

So E. Armand (pseudonym for Ernest Juin) noted the regular use of pseudonyms by the editors of "l'anarchie" in his conflict with André Lorulot (pseudonym for Georges Roulot) and identified three of his own. And now, searching for the pseudonymous articles, other names look suspicious. At some point, I think it will make sense to map the appearances of other obvious pseudonyms in *l'anarchie* against the timeline of editors—and then do some careful content analysis of any likely Armands.



It is still unclear to me to what extent Armand made any attempt to conceal his authorship of the pseudonymous articles. He was prone to experimentation in his writing. But his concerns certainly remained constant, as this piece by "Hermann Sterne" should demonstrate:

"My Cause"

I am only willing to work for one cause and one cause only: my own. I do not wish to sacrifice myself for Principles, to expend my energies in the service of an Ideal. I only wish to concern myself with the triumph of one cause—my cause—my anarchist cause.

I do not wish to make any effort that is not intended to make me less dependent on everything that dependence implies. That does not aim to free me from everything represented or perpetuated by authority. Institutions and men alike.

For my cause—the cause that I espouse, that to which I give my days, my energy and my whole self—my cause is that of individual autonomy.

And I want my cause to triumph straight away. And I place myself in a state of constant revolt against everything that tends to diminish, weaken or restrain the surge or development of my personality.

But in order for My cause to be completely affirmed, in order for it to triumph, it would be necessary that there be no instance in which I could be dominated or dominator, exploited or exploiter.

Any voluntary act on my part that would tend to maintain domination and exploitation works in opposition to the triumph of My Cause. So I cannot, knowingly, be an agent of authority, an intermediary of exploitation, or the conscious auxiliary of the least of those agents or the most insignificant of those intermediaries.

As isolated as I may appear, I nevertheless have many friends: all the anti-authoritarians who desire the success of Their Cause; all those who defy authority; all the partisans of the autonomy of the individual; all those who deny or reject social or moral constraints; all those who do not desire the intervention of the State or Society in their personal lives.

All those who struggle for the reduction to nothing of the empire and influence of the powers of oppression and exploitation. All those are « my own » and belong to my species.

Let us battle for our cause, in isolation or associated, when associated, freely and temporarily, for a specific cause and not for the triumph of "the Cause" as an abstraction or for the cause of others. Let us struggle so that Our Cause emerges victorious, so that the cause that carries the day is that of anti-authoritarianism, of individual independence, so that the phantom prejudices and shadow-conventions that the men who surround us have created to excuse their ignorance or conceal their fears may be reduced to dust.

Hermann STERNE.

Translating E. Armand

« *En guillemets* »: Most writers pose a few very individual problems for translators. For example, the most unlikely words can become "technical terms." In the writings of E. Armand, *camarade*, *milieu* and *determinisme* all seem to do just a bit more work than we might expect them to. But Armand also makes a peculiar use of quotation marks, sometimes where we would expect "scare quotes," but also particularly around possessive pronouns: "Citoyen de « mon » monde," "« Notre » individualisme," etc. It is perhaps not surprising that some little extra fuss might be made around questions of possession—around "the unique and its property"—but it isn't always clear whether the intent is to underline the proprietary relation, to problematize it, or to do a bit of both.

As a working strategy in translations, I have simply chosen, where it is a question of these possessive pronouns, to maintain the original publication or some very close approximation, to leave the translated word en guillemets: "Citizen of « My » World," "« Our » Individualism," etc. And we will see, over time, whether or not the practice gives up more of its secrets. With more familiar sorts of scare-quoting, I have chosen to use the guillemets to signal instances where the word in question has a particular significance for Armand. So, for example, a central figure in Armand's world is the « en-dehors ».

The Camarades of *l'en dehors*

Although my study of periodicals like *l'en dehors* was initially focused primarily on E. Armand and a few other writers, such as Ixigrec, I knew from experience that other contributors would emerge as interesting figures in their own right. The poet Eugène Bizeau was among the first to separate themselves from the pack, particularly with a couple of book reviews in poetic form, like this one for Armand's *Anarchist Individualist Initiation*:

My dear Armand, your book is a book of ideas, which is why those who wish to reign by the sword or by the power of their fists do not value it. I, preserving the ideal of my younger years, I like its dawn-air, which breaks as if to illuminate the helpless vessels that the surf carries off ... And, fleeing the ebb of human stupidity, endlessly multiplied, how many sailors lost on the granite rocks, how many tormented minds and hearts full of sorrow, will one day to "put in at the port," if by you aid their "compass" once again finds the north!

But I am always on the lookout for short, pithy statements of anarchist principle, which I have a tendency to translate as I find them. And I quickly realized that a certain "Marius Jean" or "Jean Marius" had produced quite a number of those for *l'en dehors*. Here are two of them:

Them and Us

The ordinary individual, partisan and supporter of the present society, is hostile toward us: we are too different from them.

They fear us: their conformist spirit allows them to adapt to all situations and to submit to all forms of slavery. They want, above all, to live in peace. For them, we are trouble-makers, destroyers of quiet—and the more capable we are of revolt, the more they fear and hate us.

They do not understand us: men of the herd, their mentality — which accepts the ideas of exploitation and iniquity, which destroys in them all courage and renders impossible the least gesture of independence — is so deeply rooted that any burst of energy, any act of conscious rebellion is foreign to them.

They would like us to be like them, with the same listless spirit, the same resignation, dragging along the same lamentable existence, perpetuating as they do the suffering and sorrow of living.

But we will never accept such a fate. We have no wish to be the accomplices of those who, through lack of consciousness or consistency, maintain slavery in all its forms. Let us be outsiders, true « en-dehors », not only in dreams and in words, but in our acts each day, no matter the opinion of the admirers and supporters of society, no matter what they wish of us! — Marius JEAN.

A Dream of the Future

I tasted, in this gloomy spring, the delights of one of the rare days when the sun had deigned to smile. Under its fiery rays the countryside felt revived. Trees and blades of grass were growing green again and in the proud clusters of lilacs, the humble flowers spread their exquisite scents. From the earth itself there escaped the odor of renewal. Everything breathed the joy of living, the delight of being enveloped in the caress of light and vibrant air. And what delicious chirping of birds! What amorous pursuits! What charming games! How far off winter seemed! Everything was only promises: green meadows, undulating wheat, fragrant flowers, the beginnings of nests.

I was entirely captivate by nature, which lavishes each spring its inexhaustible treasure of life.

And yet, I said to myself, in the heart of this admirable nature, where nothing artificial exists, where it seems that harmony and kindness should bud and blossom, we are still neither happier nor better than elsewhere. We lead the same painful, dull lives, devoid of wisdom. We are not more humane, not more human.

And I dreamed of an existence very different from our own, where, inspired by nature, we could develop harmoniously; where, more reasonable and less artificial, we could live more freely and more beautifully; where we would finally be “human.” — Jean Marius.

I can't always entirely endorse the sentiments expressed in these short pieces, with which the anarchist individualist papers tended to be rich, but I almost always find them useful to think with—or against.



And perhaps that's enough for a first installment—time to pocket the notebook and take another turn around the grassy hill. Yesterday, I sketched out the first bits of some reflections on "self-government," which should form part of No. 2. We shall see where things take me today...

No. 1. — Vast, containing multitudes... (continued)

I expect that my method in these exploration and experiments will be much like my daily circuits of the grassy hillside, as I cover the same general ground in all kinds of light and weather. But those atmospheric effects are not to be discounted, particularly when what we are circling are some fairly protean understandings of individuality. So there will be some advantage to sorting through the impressions a bit, as I present them.

For example, as I started to move on from the first installment of these *Rambles*, I fairly quickly found myself faced with two—and then three—possible paths forward. I have known that I wanted to work through some of the limitations of what really was individualistic in some of Proudhon's thought—in part by drawing on some of the more interesting anarchist individualists—and the third set of *Rambles* will almost certainly focus on that problem. But as I was searching for relevant material—and tying up some loose ends related to E. Armand's pseudonyms—I found myself taking my first really close look at *...hors du troupeau...*, the second of Armand's periodicals, following *l'Ère nouvelle*. What I found there was a particularly concentrated treatment of *solitude*, emerging from a consideration of Stirner's *einzigste* as "the only one," along with some discussion of how Armand's life in the country—his bicycle rides in the fields—came to shape his philosophy. And I decide that material struck me as of such immediate interest, that I opted to postpone completion of the in-progress installment on Proudhon and individualism and set to work translating the best of it.

But "*...hors du troupeau...*" also provided a very nice bit of E. Armand in a Whitmanesque mood—all "vast, containing multitudes"—so it seems worthwhile to add this translation to the material from *No. 1*:

I Do Not Always Have Just One Opinion

I do not always have just one opinion on a given subject. Or a person. Or an idea. I do not always and inevitably consider things and beings from the same angle and with the same eyes. I do not feel bound by my opinion of yesterday and that of today could not oblige me tomorrow. I do not want to remain a slave to my past opinions. I don't want to be a walking corpse and advance, exhaling the smell of death, imprisoned in the shroud of my former opinions. I want to live free. I want to be able to vary my experiences, modify my points of view, revise my formulas, returned to theories that I have abandoned. I do not wish to desperately drag along the millstone of my previous convictions until my demise. I want to be the heretic of my own faith. I do not wish to be tied by the letter or the spirit of what I have written in the past. I want to be free to put forward, regarding the same gesture, depending on the side from which I look at it, contradictory appraisals.

Not that I am a weathervane turning at the slightest breeze. But here's the thing: I am not seeking to recruit followers. And I do not have the heart to be a driver of the wavering. I do not believe that I am charged with a mission. And the role of counselor does not please me at all. I do not present myself as an example to the multitudes. I value my comrades and friends that much more because they can do without me, and live their lives for and by themselves. I have no intention of setting myself up to real off "rules of conduct." I do not claim to be a pontiff. Celebrity leaves me indifferent. What I write, I write for my personal satisfaction. Because I also believe that the account of my moment of intellectual being can be useful to those who read me. Because, finally, at the moment when I make it public, the theory that I propose tallies well with my state of being. I do not pretend to offer or furnish anything other than that. I do not accept continuing to support ideas that could not beat in unison with my state of being. I do not consent to live presently the life that I lived when I found myself under the influence de theories that have become irrelevant to me.

I do not, however, renounce my opinions or my judgments of days gone by. They are intellectual children to which I have given birth and who have gone around the world. They live their own life. They can still be useful to those who adopt them. No doubt they are. And I do not feel any displeasure at seeing them progress along a road opposed to the one that I am on. I have never promised to be an end. Or a boundary. Or a signpost. I simply find my pleasure in saying — as I think it — what I think at the very moment. I cannot, in all honesty, go farther.

E. Armand.

In practice, of course, these "installments" will always overlap, as we look at a fairly compact set of questions from a variety of perspectives, returning to old concerns regularly. But there is something to be said for the instances like this one when we can make the connections more explicit.

Rambles in the Fields of Anarchist Individualism

No. 2. — Quand je me sépare...

I'm really enjoying this particular project, which is both a radical break from the kind of work I have been doing to get *Our Lost Continent and the Journey Back* underway and an opportunity to work on the final sections of that project, in which the literature of anarchist individualism will play a significant role. So, like most of my vacations, it's a *busman's holiday*, but I often find those very pleasant. And explicitly connecting the writing to my daily practice of walking, observation and reflection has enriched all of those elements. It was not exactly a surprise to find that E. Armand connected changes in his understanding of things to similar practices, given recurring elements in his writings, but the process of learning the details has certainly been rich in pleasurable moments.

In *No. 1*, I suggested that Armand played at least two roles in his own work, appearing as *camarade* and *solitaire*. I'm inclined to associate those roles with two aspects of Stirner's *einzigste*—or at least of its general reception in anarchist circles. Without making too strong a claim for the fidelity of either interpretation, I think we might say that there are distinctions to be made between what we might call the *unique* and the *only one*, the *singular* and the *solitary*. The singular *unique*—who appears, I think, most clearly in "Stirner's Critics"—is not an instance of any type. Its acts of solidarity, union and camaraderie are fundamentally creative acts, but we are still working with a framework where the problem to be solved seems to be largely one of *incommensurability among uniques*, of thinking about *union* without making the unique itself a *type*. That's already an extremely radical perspective, but that fact hasn't prevented egoists from assuming one that is perhaps even more radical. John Beverley Robinson's essay "Egoism" presents at least a suggestive introduction to what I am calling the *only one*:

For each one of us stands alone in the midst of a universe. He is surrounded by sights and sounds which he interprets as exterior to himself, although all he knows of them are the impressions on his retina and ear drums and other organs of sense. The universe for him is measured by these sensations; they are, for him, the universe. Some of them he interprets as denoting other individuals, whom he conceives as more or less like himself. But none of these is himself. He stands apart. His consciousness, and the desires and gratifications that enter into it, is a thing unique; no other can enter into it.

It is a hard perspective to maintain, and he has hardly posited an individual *alone* before he seems to retreat a bit, talking about one who is merely *apart*. And he continues:

However near and dear to you may be your wife, children, friends, they are not you; they are outside of you. You are forever alone. Your thoughts and emotions are yours alone. There is no other who experiences your thoughts or your feelings.

Stirner himself seems to waver in a similar manner, as in this passage from *The Unique and Its Property*:

When the world gets in my way—and it gets in my way everywhere—then I consume it to quiet the hunger of my egoism. You are nothing for me but—my food, just as I am also

fed upon and consumed by you. We have only one relationship to each other, that of *usefulness*, usability, advantage. We owe *each other* nothing, because what I seem to owe to you, I owe at most to myself. If I show you a cheerful expression in order to likewise cheer you up, then your cheerfulness matters to me, and my expression serves *my* wish; I do not show it to thousands of others, whom I have no intention of cheering up.

If we had to answer the question of whether or not there is more than one *einzige* in these passages, we might quite reasonably, I think, admit that the indications are mixed. This is not necessarily any kind of problem, in context. But I have to admit that my own response to these tantalizing glimpses of an individual who is both, in some strong sense, *singular* and *solitary* always tug at me.

It's not hard to understand why many people, whatever their relations to *individualism* and *anarchism*, might find the more-or-less solipsistic extremes suggested unappealing, but I must admit that, in certain ways, I find the *only one* an easier figure to embrace than some of the other figures derived from conscious egoism. At the extreme, where there is really only *my own* and that which is simply not of interest to me, where a *creative no-thing* has eluded *possession* by all that seeks to possess it, perhaps even this notion of *a world that gets in my way* is a bit haunted. If an antagonist is required, then it seems somehow more sensible to step back into the world of the merely singular, rather than *fight with our food*. It's not hard to say why we tend to strut a little and strike martial poses as we declare our independent from all that would seek to *possess* us, but antagonism ultimately seems like one more trap, if our declaration has anything to it. If life is a work of continuing creation, then there seems to be little reason why *our world* should be defined by anything but our *self-enjoyment*, within the limits of our capacities to enjoy—with the not-enjoyed hardly worthy of antagonism and the not-yet-enjoyed existing as spice.

I think we see here at least one of the ways in which the *selfishness* with which conscious egoism is naturally charged by the world it resists shows itself to be what James L. Walker called *selfiness*—and how what might seem to be a retreat from the world and everything in it results in a remarkable sort of *intimacy*.

And this is one of the places where we might look to a figure like Walt Whitman for a master class in how to *enjoy oneself* and enjoy the world in and as oneself.

I dote on myself, there is that lot of me and all so luscious,
Each moment and whatever happens thrills me with joy...

And then, if we can imagine one singular, solitary individual engaging with the world as a sort of creative self-enjoyment, perhaps we can make the leap to imagining a kind of reciprocation on the same terms.

In this piece from *Les Réfractaires*, for example, Armand gives us a provocative glimpse of *love among the solitaires*:

Because I Consider You To Be Mine.

Because I consider you to be mine, I take an interest in you. Because I know that I can count on you in the difficult times, on your caresses when my senses speak, on your knowledge when my own fails, on your material support when I find myself at the end of my resources, or on your sympathy when I embark on some adventure that is to your

taste. Because you are *my property*. Because you belong to me and I can build on that possession. Because you also consider me as *your own* and as *your property*. I wish for you all the happiness you could desire. And among those, the pleasure of individual liberation, which is the greatest good that we can imagine. I want you to be free of the chains of the past and the commitment of the future. I want you to be free of rigid rules of conduct and of the fear of living. I hope that you will be liberated from seeking the approval of others. I long for you to be beautiful, strong and voluptuous, my camarade. I long, my comrade, to be vigorous, audacious and sensual. I like to see a disdainful curl to our lip when in the presence of those who speak of the political struggles and commercial competitions of this world. And I want to employ all my strength to see that you are or become all of that. Not for you, but for *me*. Because I find *my* pleasure in it. The more you rise toward the summits of individual autonomy, the more you show yourself thirsty for life, the more indifferent you are to the banalities that stir up the masses, the more I feel that you are *my* camarade. And I do not ask that you treat me any differently.

E. Armand

What we're pursuing here is first a vision of life from which *lack* has been banished, generalized so that what takes the place of more familiar sorts of society would be a matter of fullness added to fullness. It is, I think, a remarkably seductive vision, provided we can free ourselves from enough of our present "common sense" to embrace it.

But perhaps we have to acknowledge that it is a work for another day...



I was talking—I supposed I was talking—I had set out to talk about "*...hors du troupeau...*" and E. Armand's rather focused investigation of *solitude*, of *distancing oneself*. And in those texts from 1911 and 1912, lack has certainly not yet been banished and solitude remains mingled with various kinds of *loneliness*.

Benjamin de Casseres' poem, which appeared in the final issue of the run, seems to capture the prevailing spirit of the investigation:

Solitude

Friends, come sit down around me, so that I can come to know the enormous distance that separates us.

Oh woman, whom I embrace in the throes of passion, what a horrible abyss exists between your heart and mine.

I rise when other men rise, seat myself again when they take their places, and between them and me... infinity intervenes.

Behind the impenetrable atmosphere of personality, I reign like a king, a Caesar in the midst of a Sahara.

Benjamin de Casseres.

Gather 'round close, many of these writings seem to say, *so that we can examine the bottomless gulf that separates us*. And then the next step is to embrace separation and to make a

conscious separation of the self into a kind of individualist discipline. So, for example, we have this piece from E. Armand:

When I Separate Myself...

It is when I separate myself that I feel myself, that I am conscious of my existence as an individual being. And separation does not only consist of taking refuge on the summit of some unknown mountain or on the shores of some far-off ocean. I can separate myself by thought, even when I am in the midst of a dense crowd or among the fellow laborers that the so-called social contract has imposed on me. No matter where I am.

When I separate myself, it seems to me that nothing exists any longer. I no longer hear the buzz of conversations, nor the tumult of the road, nor the noise of the open road. I walk through an isolated universe of which I am the sole inhabitant. Nothing foreign comes to trouble the surges of my imagination. I am truly the Unique. And I live my life. All that exists exists only for me. The earth and all that is found there. The heavens and all that they contain. And the past. And the present day. And the future. And suffering. And joy. Everything ends in me, converges toward me, is identical with me. I am no longer subject to the humiliation of concessions, since I can do without everyone. And I feel no urgent need to associate, since I am unaware of any necessity.

I live. I am the Egoist. The Man Alone. I am conscious that I am myself. Myself and no one else. Outside of myself, there are only shadows and confusions. I depend only on myself. I situate myself on the margins of good and evil, on a plain where I cannot be judged or criticized by anyone, for I, Alone, exist.

Pure fancy? Not at all. Some mishap might occur and interrupt my temporary solitude. It is, however, only seemingly that the Milieu would have recaptured me.

And it pointless to point to the tedious and insipid tasks with which I am occupied. I only work at the temporarily, to earn my bread and butter, and as a last resort. My heart is not in them. I am always the loner. I feel nothing in common with the busybodies, the *petits bourgeois*, the traffickers, the misers, the drunks, the exploiters or the beggars. I feel that I am neither the friend nor the associate of the inferior who crawls or the superior who humiliates. I don't understand their aspirations at all and their ambitions leave me unmoved. They are creatures of society and I, I am a only a Bystander, noting but a passerby. That maintains no Solidarity with the Social Lie that it encounters in its path. Who escapes the contingencies that bind the sticky Mass. It is because I renounce solidarity with the Mass that I feel I am strong. So strong that I escape it morally, intellectually and psychologically. Strong to the point that I separate myself from it without it costing me anything. And that is when I feel myself.

E. Armand.

One finds oneself—or at least feels oneself—in the process of separating oneself—from "the herd," "from the anarchist, individualist herd... if you wish," as he said in the same period. But if the first step is to become more truly *one*, rather than matter in the social mass, disconnection is not itself a virtue. It is more a question of escaping a particular framework governing our connectedness than it is of escaping connectedness as such. More than just separation is obviously required for expansion of the self required for it to make the "shadows and confusions" that surround it into *its own*. And part of what is needed appears to be a literal

change of pace, a simple matter of slowing down, while rambling—or cycling—in what we might be forgiven for seeing as "the open countryside of the Unforeseen."

I have presented the translations from "*...hors du troupeau...*" in roughly reverse chronological order, presenting last what I had originally intended to share first. But, in the present context, perhaps it doesn't matter so much. In any event, here is the second section from the column "A l'aventure" ("at random," "aimlessly") in the first issue of "*...hors du troupeau...*" (September 25, 1911):

along the way

In these days of sweltering heat (*), I do not feel the slightest desire to soar too high, intellectually speaking. I will take this occasion to recount some of my impressions of recent times.

I travel frequently, confining myself as seldom as possible in the cars of those trains where, in summer, you not only roast, but are also subject to all sorts of more or less "undesirable" promiscuity. Most often, I go by bicycle, at a moderate pace that allows me to feast my eyes on the landscape, always new, that unfolds as I advance. Sometimes, passing through woods and forests, I feel myself completely filled by the aromas of certain essences, whose fragrance is a revelation to me, or stopped by the sound of some songbird, which I seem to hear for the first time. I have learned to love nature and if I sometimes miss the city, the big city, I have learned that life is appreciated more fully by considering apart from the long rows of six-story houses, so monotonous in their uniformity.

I attribute part of the change that has taken place in my understanding of things over the last twenty or so months to my bicycle rides. The rest is due to the fact that I live in the country. There was a moment in my life when I learned that the swift never go swiftly enough. I would have liked to roll a hundred leagues an hour. I was blind to the flowers and indifferent to the perfumes of the countryside. I considered them as things very distant and not very real, like Muses. It was above in paintings that landscapes interested me, and still not all of them. It was the qualities of the picture that determined my appreciation of nature.

For some months now, I have tasted reality. And I have found it superior to fiction. I have seen the same river that far overflowed its banks during the winter months, a mass of water that resembled a lake, change, in the warm days, into a paltry little trickle of water that a child could step across. I have seen the fields, desolate and bare in January, full of stems with heavy spikes of grain in July. I have been subject to flooding and withstood drought. I have encountered, at three in the morning, men and women who went to the fields bearing sickle or spade. And at nine o'clock at night, I have met carts laden with fodder and straw, led slowly by a drowsy driver—or rather by his horse. And all that, that is life.

And I have also contemplated the ocean, "whose limits we do not see" and which makes us think of the infinite, the sea whose constant undertow is like an image of the slow, but eternal activity, like a representation of that movement that we are assured constitutes all life.

And it is because I have made my way more slowly that I have been able to appreciate more. Because I could come to a stop when the desire took me. Because I had

liberated myself from the obsession with being at a given station at a given hour. Because I remained in charge of whether hastened or slowed down. And that freedom — a relative as it still may be — has been well worth the drawbacks — real as they are — of long journeys by bicycle.

I do not mean to say that I am entirely cured of the irresistible need to go fast, common to all who have lived long in the big cities or who remain there. It is a fever with which one is infected at birth, I fear. I try to react against that tendency to constant overexcitement that is characteristic of our era—an era drawn towards an intensity of life to which human beings have become slaves. Everyone is in such a hurry to produce, to enjoy, to create and to move that it has resulted in constant overproduction and overwork. Wishing to go fast, we have destroyed originality; wishing to eat up the kilometers, we have lost the spirit of observation. We perhaps acquire more, but we know less deeply and are superficially familiar with many things. We have accumulated countless formulas and all of this quickly, very quickly. And like food that we eat without chewing, all that we have learned has not profited us much.

(*) This was written some time ago.

Walking around the grassy hill today, it struck me how much the color had finally faded from the ears of the bunchgrass. The purple tint—so striking at first and then gradually less prominent—has passed in a matter of days from gold to straw. Patches of yellow field clover have been spreading beneath the grass, peeking through when the wind blows. The mown path as a deep green for now, but, judging by the sudden graying of the mountain in the distance, it probably won't be long now before our drought conditions really start to show. Tomorrow is supposed to be cloudy, but perhaps I'll take along my copy of *Novatore* and find a place to sit or lean, while I reacquaint myself with his treatment of the creative nothing. Or perhaps some problem will emerge in the writing of *No. 3* which demands whatever attention I can spare from the shifting of the sky and the swifts darting around.

Translating E. Armand

Ellipses: The title of the periodical was indeed "*...hors du troupeau...*"—complete with the ellipses on either end. Armand frequently used ellipses in work and particularly in titles. For the translator, there is not generally anything to do but to maintain the punctuation—but this is one of those cases where it seems useful to put ourselves on notice that here is a tendency worthy of further consideration.



A discarded version of this sequence included remarks on another recently translated piece by E. Armand, "Solidaire?" The question of solidarity among individualists is undoubtedly one to which I'll have to return.



And that brings the second set of rambles to a close.

Rambles in the Fields of Anarchist Individualism

No. 3. — Thoughts on “Self-Government,” the “State-citizen,” etc.

It’s been heartening to get some positive feedback on *No. 1*, since one of the things I am trying to determine is to what extent *Our Lost Continent and the Journey Back* might take a more *rambling* form. Ultimately, any sort of relaxed engagement with general anarchist history is probably a sort of liberty that you have to take, if you can manage it, but perhaps I am starting to believe that the project could be manageable. One of the temptations has been to treat the majority of *The Journey Back* as a kind of explorer’s journal / travel narrative, framed in the various volumes by more strictly theoretical discussions about the possibility of a synthetic, anarchy-centered *plain anarchism*. I may be just about ready to succumb to that temptation.

Echoes... of Zarathustra?

And they — the intellectual vagabonds — shattered the windows and rushed eagerly through the desecrating freedom of the fields, where festive nature wove songs of life; there where the golden crops danced in the wind, kissed by the sun. — Renzo Novatore, “Intellectual Vagabonds” (1917)

I did indeed take my copy of the *Novatore* anthology out for a walk and worked my way through the first few essays leaning up against a wooden rail down in a wooded flood control basin, on my way out to the grassy hillside. I find Novatore harder to love than some of the individualists, but I do get a lot of enjoyment out of the way his voice often provides a useful foil to voices I find it easier to love. “Intellectual Vagabonds” is an essay I have spent some time with, in part because of the place that intellectual *vagabondage* plays in the work of individualist friends and *camarades*, but I had not consciously connected the passage quote above with the bit from Armand’s “Life as Experience” that already plays a prominent role in this work. Apparently the two passages share an allusion to Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*, where, in the chapter on “The New Idol,” we find the admonition “Better break the windows and jump into the open air!” But both also move from the shattering of the windows to a flight into the countryside.

And what countrysides! What flights!

In Armand’s work it is *Life* that “vagabonde, à l’aventure, dans la campagne ouverte à l’Imprévu.” *Vagabonder* means to roam—and *vagabonder à l’aventure* means to roam at random. My translation—“to roam, vagabond”—was a nod to those friends and *camarades* already mentioned. My only hesitation about it now is that the phrase “à l’aventure”—which I now know was the title of one of Armand’s columns in *...hors du troupeau...*—ends up lost in the shuffle. For the description of the fields themselves—la campagne ouverte à l’Imprévu—I’ll stand by “the open countryside of the Unforeseen.”

Novatore’s vagabonds “dello Spirito”—who are Nietzsche’s “brethren”—flee the “apes and lunatics” who worship the New Idol of the state, escaping through the shattered windows into the “la libertà profanatrice dei campi.” Novatore calls them *sovvertitori*—subverters or revolutionaries—and they declare themselves *banditi*. And we are left to contemplate an *open-*

air liberty that profanes, defiles, dishonors, violates—all possible readings of *profanare*—if only in a world where the *sacred* is among the things most to be resisted.

There are, of course, plenty of passages in Thus Spake Zarathustra that might have been invoked in the discussion of the solitaire. “The Flies in the Market-Place,” which follows “The New Idol,” begins:

Flee, my friend, into thy solitude! I see thee deafened with the noise of the great men, and stung all over with the stings of the little ones.

Admirably do forest and rock know how to be silent with thee. Resemble again the tree which thou lovest, the broad-branched one—silently and attentively it o’erhangeth the sea.

Where solitude endeth, there beginneth the market-place; and where the market-place beginneth, there beginneth also the noise of the great actors, and the buzzing of the poison-flies.

I suppose that some day soon it will have to be the Zarathustra that I take out for a walk, as I have barely begun to account for its echoes.

Translating E. Armand

It strikes me, rereading *No. 2* and discussing its contents, that I was probably remiss in not translating the title “Parce que je te considère comme mien” as “Because I Consider You To Be My Own.” Not every possessive pronoun in Armand’s work in an invocation of Stirner, but not every instance that does reflect egoist concerns is marked *en guillemets*—and it is probably bad practice to miss simple chances to mark those other instances when it can be done so easily.

And it is definitely a work in progress, but I spent some time this evening considering the English translations of quite a range of French phrases that all signal some kind of relation to the outside: *en dehors*, *au-delà*, *hors de*, *en marge de*, etc. It will eventually be necessary to choose standard translations for a number of these—and to account for the fine differences among them. Armand had repeated recourse, for example, to the phrase “en marge du vice et de la vertu,” which is similar to the Nietzschean formula “beyond good and evil” (*au-delà du bien et du mal*), but not quite the same.



Anyway, on to the promised encounter with Proudhon...

Individualism and the Polity-form

I would, I think, be happy enough to call the human individual the first in a series of *societies*, if, in the process, I was able to avoid positing it as the first in a series of *polities*. — *Rambles...*, No. 1

In announcing a discussion of “self-government and the State-citizen,” I’m obviously signaling a return to some old concerns, including those addressed in my chapter for the *Staatsverständnisse* series, “Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: Self-Government and the Citizen-State.”

That essay has, I think, weathered the years fairly well. Further research has not particularly challenged the account I gave, but it has uncovered some additional elements that need to be incorporated to fully understand Proudhon's State-theory.

The provocative figure at the center of that essay was what I called the *citizen-State*, appealing to the language of a passage from Proudhon's work on taxation:

It was in *The Theory of Taxation*, also published in 1861, that the citizen-State finally emerged. While primarily concerned with methods of public finance, the book contained a very brief section on the Relation of the State and Liberty, according to modern rights." Despite its brevity, however, it is perhaps the most concise summary of Proudhon's later theory of the State. The modern theory of rights, he claimed, "has done one new thing: it has put in the presence of one another, on the same line, two powers until now had been in a relation of subordination. These two powers are the State and the Individual, in other words the Government and Liberty." He reaffirmed that the State had a "positive reality," manifesting itself as a "power of collectivity," issuing from the organized collective, rather than imposed on it from outside, and thus possessing rights—of the sort introduced in *War and Peace*—but no authority. He asserted that in a regime of liberty it too must be ruled, like the citizens, only by reason and by justice—because, as he put it, "it is itself, if I may put it this way, a sort of citizen." This image of the citizen-State, neither master nor servant, and located "on the same line" as the other citizens, may be the simplest characterization possible of Proudhon's complex and elusive ideal for the State. Finally, Proudhon declared the State "the protector of the liberty and property of the citizens, not only of those who have been born, but of those who are to be born. Its tutelage embraces the present and the future, and extends to future generations: thus the State has rights proportional to its obligations; without which, what use would its foresight serve?"

At the time, there was perhaps some question whether this one reference to the State as "une espèce de citoyen," in work hardly noticed by most Proudhon scholarship, was a strong enough peg to hang the study on. But not too long after completing the chapter, I read the unpublished opening section of *Theory of Property*, which would have explained the connections of that work with the six previous chapters on "Political Geography and Nationality." And there I found a *State-citizen* to go with the *citizen-State*.

One of our maxims is that the citizen must be made in the image of the state, that the man given by nature must be repeated on the model of Society, the true and living Word. It is only in this way that the individual will acquire that of which nature has only given him a shadow, liberty and autonomy, become the personification of right, and be able to separate themselves from the magistracy and the government.

But it is not only by intelligence and justice, not only by theoretical and practical reason that the citizen must follow the example the State. If it were thus, the civic quality would be reduced to a pure ideality. The humanitarian republic would exist only in the imagination, in the dream of the conscience; the State alone, having its feet on the soil, king of the temporal, would possess things and could say: I am. The nation, deprived of a body, without authority over matter, would be in the air, lost of the wave of its spirituality. There is not, there cannot be here, as in the Apocalypse, two Jerusalems, one on the earth, the other in the heavens: the two are only one, and it is a question of

establishing their identity. So it is necessary that the citizen, declared free and inviolable, in full possession of himself by education, having autocracy over his labors, his opinions, his desires, his conceptions, his will, as well as over his person, called to resist, if necessary, the despotic tendencies of the State, and to react against the driving and incursions of his fellows, must furthermore be established, like the State, in sovereignty over things; that his self, relying on the external world, creates there a position, a domain, without which his liberty, like a force that had exploded in the void, would remain without efficacy and would fall back into nothingness.

Now, to confer to the citizen power and jurisdiction over things, to assign him a possession, a territory, to make him in this way the head of a state within the state, that is what I call closing the political circle, and finishing just where we began. It is not, in fact, by the soil that the political life begins for the individual, as we have previously seen the political State set out from its embryonic valley. It is by the possession of the soil, on the contrary, by the eminent domain that is granted to him over a portion of territory that the citizen is completed, and dignity begins. Thus the citizen becomes the fellow, what am I saying?—the equal, the rival of the State. He is himself the entire State, reduced to its simplest expression, to its most minimal extent. Thus is accomplished in the social world the union of matter and mind, a phenomenon inexplicable in the world of nature, where the creative operation is performed, without our being able to discover its beginning; where the syntheses are given to us ready-made, without our being able to resolve them.

This is arguably a really vital clarification of Proudhon's mature work, one that helps to clarify some of the elements that are hard to understand in works like *The Federative Principle*—which, as I've noted before, seems to have originally been intended as a continuation of *Theory of Property*, just as that work was a continuation of the chapters on political geography—and also helps to underline the ways in which Proudhon, without rejecting the notion of *anarchy*, was nonetheless almost certainly a different kind of *anarchist* than most who have chosen that label.

There is a lot going on here, particularly if we try to incorporate what we know about the other aspects of Proudhon's analysis, but I think it is safe to say that in this context, where our concern is with varieties of individualism, the choice I have proposed—between looking at the human individual as the first in a series of *societies* or, alternately, as the first in a series of *polities*—confronts us with at least one important issue. (For my analysis of the polity-form as a key consideration in formulating an anarchy-centered anarchism, see the “Note on Mutualism and the Market-Form” and the posts on a “general theory of archy” linked there.)

Prior to the discovery of the passage on the State-citizen, it was possible to think of Proudhon's project at this point as a matter of bringing the various social collectivities in which human individuals participate down to the same level, in terms of rights, as the human individuals themselves, without in any way rejecting their real existence or subjecting them in turn to purely individual concerns. It was easier to speak of “anarchic self-government,” without believing that the tensions in that phrase were much more than the rhetorical tensions so common in Proudhon's work. So, for example, I could propose this general explanation:

The work on *Justice* also presented an important evolution in Proudhon's discussion of *reason*, the sole source of legislation in his anarchist vision. *Collective reason* emerged alongside collective force as a manifestation of collective being, and in the study on

“Ideas” Proudhon described the special role that it had to play in safeguarding individual reason against the corrupting influence of the absolute. To simplify what is both a wide-ranging and occasionally puzzling discussion, we might simply observe, in this context, that as the force exerted by individuals in industry finds expression both in industrial organizations and in more strictly individual forms, the individual reason which is supposed to inform our *self-government* is expressed, if we may put it this way, by individuals as individuals, by collectives as individuals, and by individuals as parts of collectives. The anarchic *self-government* of a given society will have to be grounded in the balancing of those manifestations of reason, and the overlaps between individual and collective give us some clues to the mechanisms likely to be involved. (“Self-Government and the Citizen-State”)

There is no point in denying that an account of this sort assumes—or pretends—that Proudhon had no more real curve balls to throw, when, in fact, it is well-known that *Theory of Property* complicates things in a variety of ways. But as we confront this newest complications, it’s probably worth noting that they are very much like those associated with *Theory of Property* and those I addressed in “Authority, Liberty and the Federative Principle.” On the one hand, in each of these cases, Proudhon at least appears to be embracing the very things that he began by criticizing, including strong property rights and political authority. On the other, he does not appear to have abandoned any of the early critiques—and does not appear to have established any footing, other than those he has pretty well demolished, on which to reconstruct those elements.

So we are left to consider to what extent we have become lost in Proudhon’s shifting language—and to what extent he had not really yet found and positioned himself in it all. I have, on various occasions, suggested that Proudhon’s work was ultimately “more consistent than complete,” proposing the project of a *neo-Proudhonian anarchism* as an attempt to complete some of what was left unfinished, and I remain convinced that the most compelling interpretations of Proudhon’s work lead toward an anarchy-centered anarchism. For every apparent turn back toward some kind of absolutist or governmentalist foundation, there are too many passages like this:

Property is not measured by merit, as it is neither wages, nor reward, nor decoration, nor honorific title; it is not measured by the power of the individual, since labor, production, credit and exchange do not require it at all. It is a free gift, accorded to man, with a view to protecting him against the attacks of poverty and the incursions of his fellows. It is the breastplate of his personality and equality, independent of differences in talent, genius, strength, industry, etc.

And here we are back in the realm of “the gift economy of property” and similar constructions.

Perhaps all we are really dealing with is that tendency, so obvious and so troublesome in figures like Proudhon and Bakunin, of trying to let the language of the system to be rejected continue to do the work of describing an alternative. Perhaps there isn’t really much to be done beyond finally, once and for all, dispensing with the language of “self-government” and similar notions.



It's remarkable how these posts balloon, once they get started, when I have given myself the green light to wrestle with the details. Ultimately, these rambles around the last open hillside in a particular suburb are always just a connection or two from becoming that journey back across the lost continent of anarchist history that have occupied me elsewhere. And, of course, some topics pose that risk more constantly than others.



But perhaps the task at hand can be accomplished by stopping here, a bit midstream, and focusing on a couple of critical issues.

So far, we've documented the emergence of a potential problem in Proudhon's later work. First, there is what appears to be a turn back toward governmental ideas, with the notion of the State-citizen. But this is not by itself an insurmountable difficulty, as we really expect Proudhon's project at this stage to be some kind of *resultant anarchy*, balancing elements that are perhaps not really anarchic in character themselves. The real difficulty is that he does not seem to be consistent in making this turn toward the governmental, so that it simply isn't clear how it would work. Whether or not *that* is a real problem, within the context of Proudhon's own work, or just a function of incomplete exploration probably depends on what we make of his last works on universal suffrage and other manuscripts connected to the study on *The Political Capacity of the Working Classes*. And we aren't going to do that work in the course of an afternoon ramble.

What we can do quite easily here, however, is to take a closer look at a couple of common models for human existence that depend on some form of self-control, including the notion of *self-government*, which Proudhon appealed to throughout his career. And then we can engage in at least a quick survey of the Proudhonian and *neo*-Proudhonian alternatives to the figure of human individual as *self-governor*.

Self-Ownership and Self-Government

Concepts like *self-ownership* and *self-government* obviously represent a certain kind of progress in a history where individual liberty was not something that could be taken for granted, but they only take us so far in the transit from *archy* toward *anarchy*.

Self-ownership confronted the institution of chattel slavery with a significant challenge, simply by positing a prior owner for every human being. What it didn't do is to present us with any example of human beings not subject to some kind of proprietorship. In an important sense, all that was accomplished was a generalization and naturalization of the institution of slavery.

This creation of what is essentially a notion of self-slavery was undoubtedly the product of a kind of uneven development in the tools for conceptualizing real and potentially anarchic liberty, while the often peculiar arguments advanced in favor of self-ownership in the present seem to be shaped by similar dynamics. The *propertarian* defense of self-ownership twists itself around to accommodate scenarios like individuals *homesteading* themselves—sometimes at the expense of the most elegant parts of Locke's theory—because self-proclaimed libertarians somehow find it hard to talk about property and liberty without recourse to rights-talk. But, as I've suggested on various occasions, there is a sense of property that is separate from and prior to the rights-talk, which might be very useful to anarchists. Consider, for example, this passage from "How does property become capitalist?" :

What is "property"? What is it, that is, when taken in its most general sense, before we attempt to establish its attendant "rights" and such?

"Property" appears to be little more than one of the characteristics of *the self* or *personhood*, which comes into play when it is examined from the perspective of conflicts over material resources. On this reading, *property* is a concept similar to *identity*, which is a characteristic of the self or person when examined in the context of social interactions, where some distinction between actors is required. In both cases, we're dealing with useful approximations. We know, on reflection, that any stark distinction between the *self* and the *other* is likely to involve some degree of philosophical violence, some substitution (in Bataille's terms) of a *limited economy* for a *general economy*, with some necessary *accursed share*. The argument in favor of *anarchist property* would do well to address a series of potential *alienations* and *approximations* in the formation of even the most basic *property*, in order to determine if this is the sort of norm that is truly useful to us, particular given its practical history. But, remember, nobody seems to really be attacking *property* at this level. And perhaps we can point out a little more clearly just where some of those practical problems have had their source.

If we accept that there is a broad sort of property, which simply designates what is "one's own," what is "proper to the self," without any assertion of specific rights and norms, we immediately encounter a complication, since "the self" is not a static thing. To too clearly delimit its boundaries is essentially to condemn it to death. The dynamic nature of the self is the problem that makes more concrete conceptions of property necessary, and it is that dynamic nature that introduces the first complications to the notion of "self-ownership" or "property in one's person." While critics object to the way that those ideas seem to split the self, perhaps we have to acknowledge the extent to which the self is always splitting from itself, always redrawing the boundaries of the *proper* in ways that our property theories will have to account for. But different ways of accounting for this problem will have different consequences. I want to sketch out two possibilities, one roughly *mutualist* and the other arguably *capitalist*, which diverge based on their understanding of what is involved in "property in one's person." (*Contr'un*, August 2, 2013)

This sort of property, which obviously has some points of contact with Stirner's account of "one's own," addresses—or raises—a different set of problems than the question of who owns a given individual person. And we'll keep coming back to all the various ways that our attempts to identify and isolate separate individuals tend to run aground on the dynamic and fundamentally non-exclusive character of human being. I've already proposed part of a reading of Stirner that addresses it and referenced Proudhon's account of *reciprocity* as a kind of immixture. And Whitman provides us with the figure of an individual "not contain'd between ... hat and boots."

So perhaps we can be done with *self-ownership* without, in the process, being done with *property* of some form that does not imply *self-slavery*. But what, if anything, can we salvage from the notion of *self-government*?

This is another clear instance where the notion that we *control* our selves, *rule* our selves, *boss* our selves around, etc. is some kind of advance on having that stuff done to us by someone else, but what are the consequences of making the basic unit of our social systems an individual already in a relationship with its self based on an abstract sort of hierarchy and a presumed necessity for constraint. It is essentially *self-slavery* in a slightly different context.

And we have no shortage of alternatives. Stirner provides us with the concept of *self-enjoyment*. Proudhon, despite all of his benighted ideas about sex and gender, transformed the heteronormative couple into an "organ of justice," in the context of which human individuals become social in intimate, interdependent relations with others fundamentally different from them. The basic building-block of a just society is thus the entrance of the individual into a formal relation of *reciprocity*—in the fullness (and much of the full weirdness) of that phrase "mutual penetration of antagonistic elements." Proudhon also provided the inspiration for what I have called "the gift economy of property," which I expect to spend quite a bit of time discussing in this series. But, for now, I want to focus on another of those isolated but apparently vital turns of phrase in Proudhon's work, in the hope not just of proposing a clear alternative to the *State-citizen* and all its close relations, but also of bringing our rambles back around to some issues already raised by E. Armand.

The Free Absolute

Man is a free absolute. I use the word *free* here in same manner as the physician distinguishing the free from the latent caloric. It is thus that I have already said free spirit and latent spirit, in order to distinguish the intelligence that knows itself and that moves in man, from that of which we recognize the imprint, but which seems asleep in nature.

In short, the free absolute is that which says "I;" the non-free absolute is that which cannot say "I."

I've recently quoted this passage from Justice in the Revolution and in the Church at greater length in "Anarchy: Lawless and Unprincipled," but here I want to focus specifically on the difference between the *free* and the *latent* forms of the *absolute*. The origin of this distinction in an old scientific theory, which explained heat in terms of "a self-repellent fluid called *caloric* that flows from hotter bodies to colder bodies," is an attractive rabbit-hole, which might actually shed some light on Proudhon's theory of *collective force*, but all I really want to observe here is that he situates himself in the ranks of those for whom the key human characteristic is self-consciousness and the power to reflect.

The whole question of property arises from this capacity to identify the self—to say “I.” But property really is, perhaps inescapably, a question and a *problem*, because that self-consciousness seems to confront us with both a real experience of isolation and an experience, real by many of the same criteria, of intimate connection with world around us. We find all of the figures whose work we have been examining attempting to solve that problem in one way or another—and often in multiple ways, not all of which are perhaps entirely compatible. What we are not seeing, I think, even in Proudhon’s other attempts to address the question, is much of anything that suggests that the best use of this presumably unique sort of human freedom is to employ it in a project of *self-constraint*.

Without fully embracing any of the particular projects of *self-creation* proposed by various individuals, egoists and anarchists, I don’t have any trouble affirming that creation seems like a much more promising project for a *free absolute*.



And that is probably just about enough rambling for this go-round...

Translating E. Armand (continued)

It strikes me, in this context, that perhaps one of the more puzzling translation problems posed by Armand’s idiosyncratic word usage is at least partially solved by bringing his ideas closer to those of Proudhon, as we have just done. Armand frequently talks about individuals’ *determinisme*, seemingly designating the elements within a given individual through which determinism, as a more general principle, manifests itself—or else the specific manifestation of that general determinism, treated as a kind of principle of individuality. This is almost certainly one of those terms that will eventually just earn itself a longish footnote and a place in the glossary, but I wouldn’t be surprised in that footnote ended up containing a discussion of Proudhon’s *absolutisme*—and, who knows, perhaps that will be the time to really delve into the *caloric theory*.



Some circuits are a bit more arduous than others. That’s no surprise. And some do not, perhaps, pay off in the same moments of real clarity. I have the sense, having brought the discussion of Proudhon this far, of having taken a detour the ultimate utility of which is perhaps far but clear. But we are still very early in these explorations and there is something to be said for getting cards on the table, introducing concepts that we can now refer back to if and when necessary.

What I have to remind myself is that the exposition of Proudhon’s works still goes on at least one more stage, even without delving too deeply into any neo-Proudhonian innovations. Among the other unpublished manuscripts attached to *Theory of Property* there is a note where Proudhon corrected himself, saying of the form of property he proposed in that work: “It is not, and it cannot be modern property.” The rest of that note is merely suggestive and somewhat confusing, but it does point in several specific directions where clarifications might be found. I am not, at

this point, convinced that Proudhon ever really circled back to the more anarchistic formulations of early works, but I am fully prepared to be surprised once again by new research.

For now, I think I'll close this number with no promises about what comes next, since I really don't know—and we can all be surprised by new research in No. 4.

Rambles in the Fields of Anarchist Individualism

No. 4. — Give and Take: The Last Polity

Summer is finally upon us and the fields, which have been going through their slow, but steady evolutions, are showing more dramatic changes. Walking the circuit in the evening, the drying stalks of the long grasses shine a bit in the dying light. Elsewhere, the field clover and shorter grasses are taking over. The skies have been clearing, but there are still days when one of the chief entertainments is watching the various layers of clouds cross overhead. The swifts still fly, close down over the tops of the tall grass, and the crows are a fixture in the trees above the creek — but lately there's been a marked increase in the songbirds along the fences to the west and, perhaps as a result, some sightings of the kestrel that usually haunts the next property over.



All of this, of course, is prominent only through certain lenses. The summer looks to be long and hot in a variety of senses, and the neighbors seem edgier than usual. And there is no point in obscuring the fact that a slight shift of the camera replaces the quaint barn in the near distance with the roofs of the low-income housing that some big brain decided to stick out here in the Land of No Sidewalks. And none of us seem to know quite how to honor the outdoor mask mandate on trails where you can *almost* maintain six feet of distance. The summer-weight neck-gaiter I've been playing with is obviously not *quite* the solution.

There are senses, of course, in which pulling the curtain back a bit to reveal the staging of the project provides us one more useful way of thinking about the issues we have been examining. A text like E. Armand's "When I Separate Myself..." involves a similar sort of careful focus, always at the mercy of a variety of ordinary distractions. The *self-separation* that it describes is a *practice*—a part of a practice or a very partial practice—connected to a particular view of the *self* that may only do some of the work that we would perhaps expect such a concept to perform.

And Armand was hardly unaware of the fact that separation, even solitude, was largely a matter of focus and perspective.



The Man of the Solitudes

My dwelling place is not a peak or forest,
Nevertheless, I am the man of the solitudes.

From morning to night, I roam the city;
I have built my house in the very heart of town,
Nevertheless, I am the man of the solitudes.

The refrains of songs, the clink of glasses,
The clapping of hands, the patter of fools,
The sounds of the places where the crowd likes to meet:
I am spared none of them, nor do I flee any,
Nevertheless, I am the man of the solitudes.

I feel I am a stranger to projects ill-conceived,
To bizarre desires, to unwonted intentions
On my fingers, one by one, I count my friends,
And rare among them is the one who would invite me
Home, such as I am, the man of solitudes.

Thus, even though I wander among the multitudes —
Not lost at sea, not deep in the heart of the desert
— I feel I am, nevertheless, the man of solitudes.

My dwelling place is not a peak or forest,
Nevertheless, I am the man of the solitudes.

E. Armand.

Loches-Tours, July 17, 1927.

(*L'En dehors* 6 no. 113-114 (fin Juillet 1927): 5.)

So we need to be similarly conscious. In pursuing an anarchistic idea of the self, whether or not that idea is meaningfully individualist, we might be tempted that we can simply posit a few elements—the self, the non-self or general milieu, the possibility of other selves, etc.—which, together, would provide us with a general framework for evaluating various alternatives. Instead—and perhaps this should come as absolutely no surprise—all of these elements seem to undergo much more complex transformations in the works we have been examining, so that any more general scheme will undoubtedly be the product of some kind of synthesis.

Armand's discipline of self-separation seems to involve a self defined as that which can be taken, drawn apart from a world that is always in its way, extricated from conditions that limit its expression as a self. There are obvious limits on the scope of a self that is essentially subtracted from "the world"—and there are reasons to wonder how that self relates the more-or-less Stirnerian vision of the extreme solitaire that we explored in *No. 2*. Indeed, while I was working on that earlier material, I was struck by what seemed to me perhaps a holdover from Armand's

Christian days, a very “in the world, but not of it” vibe. But it was only after completing *No. 3* that I tracked down this “meditation” from the first issue of *L'Ère nouvelle*.



A Meditation each Month

In the World, but Not of the World

...I have given them the word and the world has hated it, because they are not of the world, as I am not of the world. I do not ask you to take them from the world, but to preserve them from evil. They are not of the world, as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by your truth: your word is the truth. As you have sent me into the world, I have also sent them into the world... (John 17: 14-19).

Note that it is to the disciples, thus to all the disciples, that these words are addressed. In the world, certainly, — in order to act there, because they have been sent, — but not of the world. Nothing in common with this world of selfishness and oppression. Not of the world, but in the world, in order to be your imitators there, Christ, for if we were of the world, attaching any affection whatsoever to the passions that animate it, we would be as far from being your disciples as if we were not in the world, in order to lead it to you and to establish your Kingdom there.

E. Armand

(*L'Ère nouvelle* 1 no. 1 (Mai 1901): 4.)



👉 *Research notes:* The last week has been rich in new insights regarding the early years of Armand’s career, prior to the launching of *L'Ère nouvelle*. An autobiographical passage quoted from *l'Unique* led to six pseudonymous contributions to *Le Libéraire* in 1898 — three prose pieces signed “Junius” and three poems signed “Frank J.” (or something very similar), all likely written by Armand. And then a note in *E. Armand: Sa vie, sa pensée, son œuvre* led to 9 issues of the Christian pacifist paper *l'Universel* to which Armand contributed under the E. Armand name. The earliest of the first group, “The Indifferent,” is available elsewhere in the Labyrinth archive —and is perhaps a bit too timely for comfort in the context to the responses and non-responses to events like the federal occupation of parts of downtown Portland. 👉



There will undoubtedly be a good deal more to be said about the early phases of Armand’s career and, at this stage, I don’t want to overstate the importance of elements that may simply be residual effects of Armand’s earliest phases. I expect, based on what I know so far, that we will find a great deal of general continuity in his work, with preoccupations familiar from later work already at least in the process of being established early on, but also with some Christian echoes persisting. But we need to take the opportunities presented all along the way to examine the various articulations of *selves* and *worlds* if we are to come to any sort of general conclusions.

So let's begin with one particular conception of a self, which seems to be "in, but not of the world," but which manages, through self-separation, to connect with another world or another face of "the world." We've already tracked some of the complexities of this negotiation of the self with those worlds or aspects of worlds. We have noted, if only in passing, the role of coming-together, of associating as *camarades*, in the process of self-separation. And it's worth noting how persistently Armand appealed to encounters and practices *entre nous*—"between you and me," "among ourselves"—from the pages of *L'Ère nouvelle* and *l'Anarchie* to those of *l'Unique*. Beyond all of that, we have a clear sense of Armand's aspirations, of the vagabond life he imagines out in "the open countryside of the Unforeseen." It just isn't entirely clear how we get to that end by the means we've examined so far. And there seems to be a danger that « one's own world » might end up being fairly small.

But rather than pick on E. Armand any more, let's turn to a phase of my own work where the dangers I've been gesturing toward do not seem to have been avoided. Way back in September, 2008, in the context of another set of meditations on property and individuality, I proposed what I called a "gift-economy of property" as a way to ground a specifically anarchistic conception of property.

My intuition, based in part on some language various places in Proudhon's work and in part on the connections I've been making to other continental thought, is that a "gift economy," in the sense of a system in which something, which can be rightfully given, is given, with no specific expectations of return, could only arise in fairly limited circumstances, and perhaps can only have one application within Proudhon's thought—but that one application may be a bit of a doozy. We know that there is, for Proudhon, some opening for society to emerge as a "pact of liberty" leading towards approximations of equality and finally of justice. We know that freedom rises from the interplay of necessity and liberty, and that property too has its internal contradictions. Proudhon's *moi* has very little that it can rightfully give, if even its own "property" is theft. But it, perhaps, give property to the other, through recognition, which steals nothing, robs no one, and is perfectly gratuitous, even if—and this is the character of the gift economy—it cannot be sure of reciprocation. To the extent, however, that commerce is based in equal recognition, if not *necessarily* any other sort of equality, then this particular gift economy might be strangely (given all we have said, and some of the names we have invoked) foundational.

Over the years, I have allowed that notion to work primarily as a placeholder for some more fully elaborated theory, returning to it now and again to clarify some element. In "A Tale of Three Provisos" (2012), I observed that:

The very notion of *appropriation* involves a notion of a self which is not contained, as Whitman put it, "between hat and boots." We "mix" with all sorts of things around us, and with other people—as Stirner reminds us in the long section on "My Relations." Interpersonal mixing seems as natural a part of what is proper to human being as other sorts. So if we want property rights to regulate an exclusive distinction between "mine" and "thine," then we have to retreat back between our hats and boots—at least when we're talking about *proprietors*. And that means that the proprietor, the subject of self-ownership, will not have "self-ownership" in the entirety of the self. There is, in effect, a

third proviso which we apply when we move from all the ways in which we mix with the world to those from which we are willing to recognize the creation of a property right. In that sense, there are no “non-proviso” lockeans, only those who reject the limitations on appropriation, waste or concentration, while maintaining a different proviso which also limits the circumstances under which labor-mixing can result in property rights.

At the heart of my discussions of property in those earlier years was a sense that, although Locke’s rather elegant approach to property might have very little application in modern societies, there might still be some ethic according to which steer our individual appropriations in the direction of more just property relations. There didn’t seem to be any very logical construction of *self-ownership* that filled the bill—for reasons related to my previous discussions of self-ownership as *self-slavery* and of the limitations of a bellicose relation to the world, along with others related to my developing understanding of Proudhon’s work. At bottom, that problem of the the self’s tendencies to match up only very approximately to any given body, and to mingle in complicated ways with the world and other selves, posed problems even when we sought to simply claim *our own* even by the humblest determinations.

Ultimately—in the realm of aspirations—I wasn’t all that interested in humility. I had my own windows that seemed to need shattering and my own fields that beckoned, even if the references were more likely to be in Whitman than in Nietzsche. But I think we are almost inevitably drawn back to the practical problem of getting from here to, y’know, *the open countryside of the Unforeseen*. So even “the Walt Whitman Theory of Political Economy”—as I have half-seriously described parts of my work—faces some form of the familiar “problem of the transition.”

In 2017, contributing to a C4SS exchange on occupancy-and-use property, my initial “Neo-Proudhonian Remarks” included the most practical restatement of the “gift-economy of property” material to date. I encourage readers to give the whole essay a careful reading, as it might easily drop into the current stream of observations without making too great of a splash, but I particular want to focus on the following paragraph:

If we are to find a social order that more closely resembles emergent harmony than armed peace or open war, what are we to do? If we cannot take, then perhaps we can give. We know the value and the virtues of individual property, as did Proudhon. If we are unable to secure it for ourselves as a matter of individual appropriation, then perhaps we can grant it to one another as a matter of gift or cession, not of a property that we individually own, but of claims that we might otherwise make on one another? Imagine the basis of this new property not as *appropriation* but as mutual *extrication*. Some of the steps would resemble familiar propertarian notions. First, perhaps, mutual release would yield a variety of “self-ownership.” Then, the familiar “personal property” in items of more intimate attachment or use. Beyond that, real property on the basis of occupancy-and-use. Then, perhaps, a sphere of alienable goods and a recognition of exchange — based, like the other steps on a mutual willingness not to interfere with one another’s activities. Etc. Etc. Limiting conditions and local desires would determine the bounds of the emerging system.

I think that the proposed program for “mutual release” still resonates strongly with my ultimate goals, but it struck me yesterday—more than a little ruefully, to be honest—that the

recourse to *mutual extrication* was at least as much a retreat from my gift-economy idea as it was a practical elaboration. I remain convinced that “if we cannot take, then perhaps we can give,” but I can’t help but feel that every attempt to give one another space, as long as it depends on a model of *exclusive, individual property*, is likely to leave each of us living in a very small world. And counting on a subsequent mutual release feels a bit like counting on the “withering away of the state,” precisely because the first move feels complicit with the “last polity” approach to individuality, even if the rationale is more appealing and generous to all concerned that the *self-subjugation* discussed in the last go-round.

It’s more than a little sad to set out to be a *vagabond*, but just end up a *hermit*.



And let’s leave things there, at the risk of feeling a little sad. There is another half to this examination of “give and take” in the construction of the individual, but if that stage of things will take us much closer to various aspirations, it will arguably do so by moving some distance from anywhere that we might start, individually, right now. And we can expect a return to this *hermitage* at some point, if only to consider once again the prospects for some more promising transition.



In the meantime, having reached one of those points where it seems a little early in the day to stop our travels, but clearly too late to take on all that the next leg of the journey demands, let me just present a couple of translations. The first is an article from *l’en dehors* by Aurora, which addresses some of the conflicts between self and world in slightly different terms. The second is an essay on Nietzsche and anarchy by André Colomer. I offer them, without further commentary, as *more grist for the mill*.



The Indifferent

I was talking the other day with fellow workers, good people who sweat blood and water six and a half days a week to earn the few francs that will allow them and their families to live. We were talking about everything that presently excites what we are accustomed to call public opinion. We spoke of the suicides with which the daily papers have recently entertained their readers. The we came to social inequalities, miseries, the sufferings of humanity...

One fact struck me. In general, faced with the evil that eats away at our old society, with the awful selfishness that sows death and despair, my interlocutors seemed to be very indifferent as to the remedy. And yet they too were proletarians; they too complained about long, long days at work! They too complained about being at the mercy of the first foreman to come and having to comply with his requirements But that was it! The ideas of the anarchists, of human solidarity, left them cold and indifferent.

Indifferent!

That is what kills us, stops us, shackles us. Indifference, that other form of egoism, is the stumbling block. It is the obstacle that blocks the path to all social or moral progress, to every attempt at liberation, to every revolution!

Indifference, it is that morbid state that some writers of this century have called *j'menfoutisme*. [1] As long as I enjoy relative well-being, what are the others to me? If I have my three or four or ten francs assured each day, what to me are the unfortunate old men the poor women responsible for families to whom the Public Assistance allots forty sous per month? Provided that I do not die of hunger, what should I care about those who succumb in that bitter struggle for life!

Indifference is the accomplice of *coups d'état*, reactions and all sorts of actions behind closed doors. It is with its aid that the people are slaughtered, that those who demand justice are put to the sword, that strikers are shot.

Indifference and crime go hand in hand. There is as much wrongdoing, when all is said and done, in seeing an innocent butchered without defending them as in slaughtering them yourself.

Oh! Let us not remain indifferent! At this moment, when the stinking tide of clericalism rises, threatening to choke beneath its heavy, impure waves the few voices that are still heard in favor of the truth, at this moment, I say, let us raise our head ... Let us raise them high in the crowd that surrounds us. Let us not keep our convictions to ourselves. On the contrary, let us spread them, broadcast them! Let us not be tongue-tied silent protesters, but protesters trembling with indignation and anger. Yes, we are the eternal protesters against injustice, whatever it is and wherever it comes from! Yes, we are those, the eternal protesters against corruption, against infamy, against inequality, against servitude! But let us not be content to protest silently! Let our comrades in work or study hear our protest!

And this is how they will be won over. And this is how the starving, the prostituted, the cannon-fodder will realize that they, the majority, are hoodwinked by a tiny minority. They will understand it and the most obtuse intellects will be illuminated.....

Soon then will come the dawn of a new world where truth and liberty will reign, because selfishness and its principal causes will have been banished. This, while our old inquisitorial and medieval society will pass through its last convulsions.

Hasten, comrades, the coming of that shining dawn! For it is up to you to do it. Win to our cause all those dazzled by the tawdry veneer of this civilization; open their eyes and they will see as you do. And there number will constantly increase until, an irresistible torrent, nothing can stop them any longer.

That is why we join those who say: Death to indifference! Down with half-heartedness! Let us act! Let us act!! Let us act!!!

Junius.

[1] *Je m'en fous* means "I couldn't care less" or "I don't give a shit."

Junius, "Indifférents," *Le Libéraire* 4 no. 116 (6 Février 1898): 1.

[Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur]

Rambles in the Fields of Anarchist Individualism

No. 5. — Give and Take: The First Society

I would, I think, be happy enough to call the human individual the first in a series of *societies*, if, in the process, I was able to avoid positing it as the first in a series of *polities*. — *Rambles...*, No. 1

Walks with Zarathustra

For days now, it has seemed more and more likely that it is field clover that will inherit the earth. On some parts of the hill the tall bunchgrass has drooped as it dried, allowing a layer of short, thick, green grass and a variety of flowering plants—mostly invasive, but still pretty—to peek through. But there have also been large, steadily expanding areas where the taller grasses seem to have melted away, as the vegetation often does with the first frosts, giving way to mats of yellow hop clover. The only contenders for showy dominance have been the tall, mustard-bloomed clusters of asters, which first appeared out in the center of the fields, sometimes growing tall enough to show against the horizon—at least from the lower portions of the hill. Clumps of asters three, four and even five feet tall.

More than once in the past week I've taken a newly acquired copy of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* out to keep me company on the walk. I had ordered one of the newer editions, but ended up with a copy of Hollingdale's translation, which I at least haven't read recently. The last time I studied Nietzsche at all seriously, I was teaching *Beyond Good and Evil* to a pack of young, mostly bright, but almost uniformly resistant analytic philosophers. And every day my lesson was "I am not the mouth for these ears." Working through "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" on a series of walks, with little at stake beyond refreshing my memory, so I can catch Nietzschean allusions, has been remarkably pleasant in comparison, even if it lacks the pleasures of flirting with one's downfall.

Nietzsche's voice remains one of those that bores and annoys me as often as it enlightens me or makes me smile, but at this point the boredom and annoyance are familiar enough that the moments of real pleasure are not substantially dulled by them. Our reunion has been, as so many reunions tend to be, a bit of a trial to be endured. But I have been struck, now and again, by passages that I imagine might have had complex resonances for anarchist individualists invested in the thought of Stirner. Consider, for example, this line from the third section of the "Prologue:"

In truth, man is a polluted river. One must be a sea to receive a polluted river without becoming defiled.

I will admit that I find it hard, in the context of the present investigations, not to capitalize *Man*—and then run with the distinction between *Man* and (unique) *One*. Reading Nietzsche with a head full of Stirner, I wonder what use a unique, solitary *One* could have for *Man*. And I wonder what someone like E. Armand would have made of a *self-separation* imagined in terms of *contempt for the self*. But clear answers to those questions about the specific dynamics of

Nietzschean *self-overcoming* almost certainly call for a close encounter with the *will to power*—and that is, at the very least, a work for another day.

But, hey, I like a river-sea metaphor at least as much as the next guy. And in today's work—the work of giving a bit more precision to the notion of the *gift economy of property*—there may be some opportunities to turn that metaphor to other uses.



Three (Other) Kinds of Self-Separation

Aside from reading *Zarathustra*, I've been working to distinguish the various kinds of *self-separation* that seem to be in play in the various forms of property theory I've been examining. Again, *property* here is just the side of selfhood or individuality that we see when we consider the self in its relations to the world and to other selves. And it is generally, given the uses to which we conventionally put property, the self when *separated* from those other elements—an *exclusive individual property*.

I've already gestured at two different kinds of property, based in two different kinds of self-separation. As a shorthand, let's (cautiously) refer to them as *individualist* and *mutualist*.

While both aim to establish some shareable norm or convention related to exclusive individual property, the first approach begins by taking the individuality of the individual as the fundamental "social" reality—and then either affirms or denies the necessity of restraining one's self for the needs of others and of "society" (or ~~society~~, as the notion tends to appear here in some contested sense, *sous rature*) as a whole. This is the form that seems to give rise most directly to notions like *self-ownership*, *self-government*, etc. It is also the basis for a certain kind of (vulgar) egoism, which treats everything outside the self as "in the way," perhaps even fictive, and always flirts with the dogma of "might makes right."

The second approach begins with an affirmation of the always already social nature of the individual self—and then proposes a strategic *denial* of it, the adoption of the *polity*—or *property-form*, as a first step toward establishing explicit, voluntary association. In the simplest form of *mutual extrication*—or in Proudhon's "New Theory"—selves that might otherwise make contested claims regarding their *full person* (to say nothing of *full product*) draw back from one another, ceding what we might otherwise think of as parts of themselves, in order to facilitate this other order of explicit sociality.

In both cases, it is a question of establishing a kind of shared ethic or discipline. The anarchist individualists gather themselves together to better understand their separateness. The mutualists draw apart in order to more consciously address how they might come together in justice and relative peace. And it would be hard, I think, to overestimate the importance of that kind of thing for anarchists. After all, if we are ever to achieve a social world without legal or governmental order, we are arguably going to be that much more dependent on a few anarchic or anarchistic insights about our selves and the world. But neither of these approaches seem adequate to the kind of life I imagine living in conditions of *anarchy*. One of the things that appeals to me about the Proudhonian emphasis on *collective force* is that seems well adapted to analyzing all the complex interactions within the self, between selves and between the self and its environment, without, in the process, losing sight of the self as a locus of agency, creative energy and a certain kind of responsibility. What continues to disappoint me about the Proudhonian “New Theory” is that it seems to involve a retreat from the full implications of that emphasis.

The question then becomes whether there is an obvious alternative, an understanding of the relationship between selves and the world that provides a general *guide* for guiding our behavior, but without introducing any sort of *rule* or any pretense of its enforceability. And, given the material we have already covered, we might ask, I suppose, whether there is a third sort of self-separation from which we might begin—perhaps the sort that leads us to think of the self as “vast, containing multitudes.”



We’re headed for Walt Whitman territory. More specifically, we’re headed for another encounter with what I’ve half-jokingly called “The Walt Whitman Theory of Political Economy” and a long-overdue elaboration of *the gift economy of property*. It’s time to go beyond a “giving” that is ultimately just a *giving-way*—a *retreat*—and try to establish a notion of anarchistic property that does not depend on self-limitation, but itself on self-expansion, full self-enjoyment, the gifting of the products of self-creation and a giving-space to the similar productions of others.

All of that—and it is admittedly a lot—begins with a somewhat more literal embrace of that “vast, containing multitudes” understanding of the self. It begins when we decide that it is not enough to think of our productions as diverse or inconsistent and that there is some advantage to think of our self-creation as a kind of co-creation, the self as already a *society*—a potentially *anarchic* society—and the first instances of social negotiation and *mutual utilization* as internal to what we may still be inclined to think of as the *individual*.

I suspect many readers will not be prepared to go that distance at a leap. But perhaps it will seem a little less extreme a project if we take it in stages.

The Elegance of (Proviso) Lockean Property

Anarchism has traditionally treated property as a problem, starting from Proudhon’s analysis of it as “theft” and “impossible.” And there is very little about the property theories we encounter in economic debates to encourage any revision of that attitude. One interesting exception is arguably Locke’s “labor-mixing” account, which is often invoked, but seldom adhered to by capitalists, who tend to find the various “provisos” that are its real strength at odds with their ambitions. I have, in the past, spent quite a bit of time talking about the strengths of Locke’s

approach, which, with the provisos intact, seems to me more or less unanswerable—but perhaps also, under modern conditions, impracticable.

In “Property, Individuality and Collective Force,” for example, I described the strengths of the approach:

I think that Locke’s basic model, which begins with the “fact” of property in one’s person (in the sense that it encourages us to base any system of property rights in what is, in the most strictly descriptive sense, “proper” to the individual), notes the ever-changing boundaries of the “person” (presenting human activity as “labor-mixing”) and then tries to imagine the conditions under which that most basic sort of appropriation ought to be a matter of moral or legal indifference to others (with the *provisos*, and the standard of the “good draught” of consumption that leaves a “whole river” of resources, rendering this sort of appropriation unobjectionable because it is essentially non-rivalrous) is sound. This is not a blanket endorsement of Locke, who, it seems to me, has to leave the most elegant parts of his argument behind in order to make sense of actual property conventions and make “homesteading” productive of alienable property appropriate to market relations. It is the weak, but almost certainly useful, observation that exclusive individual appropriation is no big deal if it is literally the case that nobody is worse off because of it, which is decidedly *not* the approach we see from modern proprietarians.

In the context of this discussion, perhaps it makes sense to take a step back and simply say that what Locke presents are some guidelines for living that, if followed generally, might simply result in social conditions under which the question of property would simply not arise. Thinking of appropriation in terms of human-scaled “good draughts,” which always leave “a whole river”—or at least “enough, and as good”—for others, is perhaps not impossible, given some attention to the natural renewability of basic resources—provided that the appropriation remains really individual.

The fact that very little nominally “individual” appropriation in our societies is really human-scale, thanks to the pervasive effects of association and technology, raises some very serious questions about how useful Locke could be to us, but, for the moment, let’s just focus on the possibility of similar sorts of guidelines, which, if followed individually, might largely “solve” the problem of property by preventing it from arising.



We’re after an alternative to thinking of the world and other selves as fundamentally “in our way.” It is this problem of encountering and consuming the world (and others) that property theory attempts to solve, whether it is a matter of elaborating complex systems of property law or making a Stirnerian end-run around the problem. The Lockean example gives us an elegant model, based fundamentally in self-restraint with regard to consumption, that is at least suggestive. And the connections to the proposal for *mutual extrication* shouldn’t be too hard to see.

The fundamental problem with the Lockean model seems to be that it assumes a kind of pre-modern individual, very different in its capacities from the individuals that we are. And perhaps the next question is simply to ask if perhaps the very notion of an individual has lost a good deal of its utility in the modern world.



You oceans that have been calm within me! how I feel you, fathomless, stirring, preparing unprecedented waves and storms. — Walt Whitman, “Starting from Paumanok”

Collective Force and the Impossibility of (Exclusive) Property

In “Property, Individuality and Collective Force,” my summary of Locke was part of an assessment of the limits of what was then the recently proposed notion of mutual extrication. (The full essay is linked in the sidebar and, while I will quote significant portions of it here, it might still reward a full reading.) The immediate context was land-use questions raised by the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, a context in which ecological science and a certain kind of naive American individualism were revealed, for anyone who still had doubts, as existing within widely separate worlds.

In addressing anarchist circles, where perhaps the Bundy brand of concern about “government overreach” played a little better than it should have, it seemed useful to suggest just how far from the real world all the cowboy posturing really seemed to be:

It seems obvious that, at the level of individual appropriation, unamplified by high levels of technology, the possibility of an appropriation that would not (in some general, *a priori* sense) be *theft* is largely dependent on the renewability of resources. That observation is important, because it suggests that the question of just appropriation is not just a legal or moral question. It is in some sense, and perhaps in a really fundamental sense, also an ecological question. If our rights have some pretense to *universal* or *natural* status, then they are going fluctuate as nature fluctuates. There are probably things in our societies that everyone could appropriate without threatening the continued supply, and perhaps even non-renewable resources of this sort (assuming we define “resource” broadly), but some of the traditional components of “the commons” (clean air and water, for example) may no longer be among them. We’ve amplified our individual impacts through technological advances and large-scale social organization. If there was ever a reason to doubt the reality of *collective force* as a factor in our societies, it’s hard to miss seeing it almost everywhere now. As a result, we may have lost our connection to that simple, elegant homesteading model, not because anything has change about the legal principles or ethical imperatives connected to exclusive, individual property rights, but simply because we are not ourselves exclusive and individual in the same ways as our ancestors. We were probably never, as Whitman put it, “contained between hat and boots,” but the mixing and sprawling of persons is arguably both real and ongoing.

That is admittedly a rather *oblique* response to that particular crisis, but nothing about it should come as a surprise to readers of these *Rambles* or the work on *Our Lost Continent and the Journey Back*. For better or worse, my sense is that many of the crises, large or small, that we encounter suggest, on any kind of close inspection, that our whole critical and interpretive toolkit needs something of an overhaul. In 2016, having recently reopened the discussion of the *gift economy of property* with the remarks on *mutual extrication*, it seemed like a moment to ask

whether perhaps the whole project was, despite its radical departures from most anarchist thought on property, still not radical enough.

Let's linger for a moment and consider the implications of this twist on the notion that *property is impossible*. For Proudhon, the "impossibility" of property arose primarily from the *droit d'aubaine* ("right of increase") attached to capitalist property rights. That did not necessarily preclude some kind of return to strong, exclusive, individual property rights, provided those rights could be constrained either by principles like those found in Locke's provisos or in a strong egalitarian ethic, such as we find in the "personal property" speculations of even communistic anarchists. After all, between the early works advocating "possession" and the "New Theory" of the 1860s, Proudhon explored both possibilities to at least some degree. But if it is indeed the case that our "individual" interventions and appropriations are no longer in balance with the regenerative capacities of our natural environment, then there are arguably some very interesting, and certainly troubling consequences. First, it raises the possibility that exclusive, individual property rights—even in a radically reimagined form like my "gift economy of property"—may be impossible. But it also raises the possibility that it is not just property *rights* that are threatened by our current social and technological organization. It may be that property, even in the descriptive sense, is no longer sufficiently *individual* to support the kind of discussion regarding property that we are accustomed to. That notion may be a bit difficult to come to terms with, but let's at least attempt to give it a try, particularly as a situation in which we could meaningfully say that *individuality is impossible* would create problems for our presumably non-propertarian options nearly as great as those confronting any new theory of property rights.

At the time, I did not insist too strongly on the "impossibility" of individuality. Even raising the question was really a kind of complex provocation, inspired by Proudhon's "mathematical" demonstration that capitalist property simply *didn't add up*. That demonstration, of which he was very proud, didn't prevent him from going on to propose his "New Theory" and attempting to redeem "theft" through various kinds of careful *ponderation*. And I was ready, with the help of *one* of my two most-used Walt Whitman phrases, to stave off the problem by suggesting that the problem with most conceptions of individuality was that we tended, despite the contrary indications of various radical pioneers, to treat individuals as exclusive of one another.

Whitman was not the only radical voice we have noted for whom the "contained between hat and boots" model of individuality was not adequate. Pierre Leroux, William Batchelder Greene, Proudhon, Stirner and Bakunin, among others, argued in various ways for the recognition of other people as an essential part of what is proper to the growth and continued being of human individuals. And our various explorations of the work of *collective force* have suggested that what is proper to individuals *as individuals* does not exhaust their *property* (in the general, descriptive sense), since it is still necessary to account for what is proper to individuals *as parts of various social collectivities*.

We certainly shouldn't be surprised that what is proper to human beings involves *involvement*, *entangling* and *combination*. After all, the reigning metaphor for

appropriation is *mixing*. But if we are surprised that all that mixing involves more than just consumption by relatively isolated and autonomous human beings, then we should probably explore our surprise carefully.

All of this led to a reaffirmation and elaboration of the program of gradual *mutual release* quoted in *No. 4*. And I think that there remains some useful food for thought in that material. But, even at that time, I should probably have recognized that I was applying only *one* of the two phrases from Whitman that generally served me as reminders of the problems with so many conceptions of the individual. And, of course, coming to terms with the implications of a self truly “vast, containing multitudes” would almost inevitably present new ways to think about individuality and its “impossibility.”

So let’s get right to work on this new problem, by examining a passage from “Self-Government and the Citizen-State,” already cited in *No. 3*:

The work on *Justice* also presented an important evolution in Proudhon’s discussion of *reason*, the sole source of legislation in his anarchist vision. *Collective reason* emerged alongside collective force as a manifestation of collective being, and in the study on “Ideas” Proudhon described the special role that it had to play in safeguarding individual reason against the corrupting influence of the absolute. To simplify what is both a wide-ranging and occasionally puzzling discussion, we might simply observe, in this context, that as the force exerted by individuals in industry finds expression both in industrial organizations and in more strictly individual forms, the individual reason which is supposed to inform our *self-government* is expressed, if we may put it this way, by individuals as individuals, by collectives as individuals, and by individuals as parts of collectives. The anarchic *self-government* of a given society will have to be grounded in the balancing of those manifestations of reason, and the overlaps between individual and collective give us some clues to the mechanisms likely to be involved.

And let’s also pick up the thread, dropped at the end of that installment, regarding Proudhon’s conception of the human individual as a *free absolute*.

There are a number of elements in Proudhon’s theory that need to be brought together if we are to understand his characterization of the human individual as a *free absolute*.

First, we have to remind ourselves that, as we noted in *No. 1*, Proudhon considered *individuality* and *collectivity* as two aspects of a single dynamic. “All that reason knows and affirms is that each being, like every idea, is a group.” In this, he was showing a specific influence from Charles Fourier, but we find similar ideas widely dispersed, as in this passage from *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, by the “other” father of dialectical materialism, Joseph Dietzgen:

In the universe, every group is an individual and every individual is a group. The uniformity of nature is not greater than its variety. Both of them are infinite.

So, as we noted at the beginning, our attempts to discover the *individual* seem destined to have their twists and turns:

Contr’un. Counter-one. A single *unit* or *unity* that keeps pointing us towards quantities *more or less than simply singular*.

With Stirner, we mark the scope of a self in terms of the reach of « its » might, but we do not assume that this might, this force, is in any way *simple*. Instead, with Fourier and Proudhon, we identify it as complex, composite—always already a *collective force*—and we recognize the connections of energy with conflict.

The key here is that we are dealing with *living individuals*—and life entails complexity, mutability, etc. Proudhon suggested that we could identify individuals in terms of their internal “laws”—patterns of development that characterize their evolution in the long term. So, for example, we find him in *The Philosophy of Progress* affirming that he is “the man whose thought always advances, whose program will never be finished,” but also suggesting that his specific affirmations and denials could be predicted over the course of a thousand years, if we were to grasp the fundamental tendencies of his thought.

Of course, this quality of life and development, with its exclusion of the simply singular, is shared by all of the individual-collective actors in Proudhon’s world, whether it is a question of human beings, social groups or even natural assemblages that we might not ordinarily think of as living. And the question of *individuality*, like that of *collectivity*, is primarily useful as an analytic distinction. The unfolding, developing world unfolds and develops without regard for these questions, indifferent to so many of the relations that we try to read into the natural world. We can probably, say, for example, that the question of “natural hierarchies” is almost entirely a projection of our concerns onto a world with which, as we have seen, our relations are quite complicated.

We might say that there is a sort of *anarchy* manifested in this conception of the world, but it is an anarchy of *indistinction*, which lacks the key element in all of the anarchies that anarchists have pursued. The missing bit, of course, is the human, *free absolute*, which is distinguished from all of the other “lawfully” developing individual-collectives by its capacity for reflection and self-conscious behavior. The *anarchy of the anarchists*, whatever else it might be in individual hands, is a web of relations in which the element of human self-consciousness is added, but without, in the process, elevating any of the elements in relations of hierarchy or authority over the others. And perhaps we can acknowledge that we are simply talking about a choice between interpretive frameworks, as neither hierarchy nor horizontality seem to be given in the nature of things. Both seem to be artifacts of self-consciousness.

The utility of thinking of all these relations as existing intermingled, side by side, with all of that “*involvement, entangling and combination*,” is precisely the thing we are seeking to demonstrate, so, for now, let’s simply acknowledge it as indeed an option.

Following these indications in Proudhon’s work, we find ourselves in a world stuff full of individualities that are also collectivities, where the development of those individual-collective elements not only manifest a particular kind of *life*, but even—and particularly in the assemblages we would most easily recognize as social—a particular kind of *reason*. But, among all of these beings, self-consciousness emerges only in the rarest of circumstances. *Reason* (which we should undoubtedly not define too narrowly, given the novel contexts) is presented as the force that opposes absolutism—“the sole source of legislation in his anarchist vision”—emanating from a variety of beings on a range of scales, but perhaps really only a useful tool in the hands of the human *free absolute*.

Let’s say, modifying the statement quoted earlier, that the various sorts of reason that might inform our *self-creation* emerge from a variety of sources, are in some sense expressed by beings at a variety of scales, but that it is only through the human *free absolute* that they can be taken up

and put to use in a conscious manner. That then might raise the question of whether “humanity” is, in fact, “the brains of the world”—a familiar enough notion, with enough similarities to the *archic* theories of social hierarchy to give anarchists pause. There just doesn’t seem to be any reason to go there, particularly as there are other, much less familiar questions that we might ask ourselves.

If, for example, we think of what is *conscious* in our selves as the *free* part of a variety of otherwise *latent* intelligences, then we are in a strange, new world. We are already prepared to find « our own » well beyond the bounds of the individual human body, even if we will perhaps necessarily grant that particular body a certain privileged status in our analysis, thanks to its special role in the immediate maintenance of life. But what we seem to find is that the conscious self is at least capable of playing an integral role in the expression and direction of multiple bodies, some of which possess considerably greater might than the one we must often think of as « our own », in its unamplified state.

We are potentially very distant from the approaches to individual property proposed so far, which involve *self-constraint* or a *retreat* of the self to a state in which selves might be considered exclusive of one another. But we are also some distance from an account of selves as singular, but overlapping. Instead, we have the conscious elements of a self acting as a shared element or organ in a variety of beings—and this is perhaps one of the best reasons to treat these beings, despite their differences in might and scale, as fundamentally existing on a single plane, without hierarchical relations.

The third variety of *self-separation*, then, might take the form of accounting for the various beings that intersect in the conscious expressions of the *free absolute*, as part of an ongoing, “internal” process of *self-creation* and *recreation*.



And perhaps it’s time to pause for breath. We’ve taken one more big step down the path—and perhaps, under the circumstances, you can forgive me the invocation of “unprecedented waves and storms” that preceded it. I think we have at least some indications of how the notion of an individual self of the “vast, containing multitudes” variety might pose more significant challenges than just, for example, being “of more than one mind” on particular issues.

But I think, having proposed the participation of the individual in a potential multitude of bodies, we may find that the familiar tools of individualism are not a great deal of help to us—and that the more radical analyses we have examined along the way only get us so far. To make our next advance, we really need the aid of Walt Whitman, who sang a self for which the problems of multiplicity and changing scale were arguably routine.



I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
— Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself”

Varieties of Might

Rambling alone in the fields, my individual might is negligible. Without some preparation, fairly minor fluctuations in the weather pose some real threats. And for me, a modern *civilisée*, preparation almost inevitably means tapping into social reserves of *collective force*, organized through massive systems of association.

Under these circumstances, the world that can be meaningfully, *exclusively* « my world » is necessarily quite small and bounded on all sides by another world endowed with much greater might—at least if « my might » is construed as a power to bend the world to my narrowly individual purposes. But we already have plenty of reasons to think that contest and conquest are far from the only ways that we exhibit might.

Armand's *solitaire*, for example, may be “in, but not of” a certain social world, but separation from that world and reconnection to the natural world seem to go hand in hand. And if the characteristically human power of reflection is hindered by that first world, which “gets in the way,” it is not just that a connection with the natural world facilitates the exercise of that particular capacity, but that it does so by facilitating a separation of the self from itself. We might, in fact, be inclined to think about self-conscious reflection as depending on internal self-separation, with the separating wedge being some element of the world.

The question that Whitman raises is just how much of the world we can make « our own ». How much extension can the individual self withstand?



I picked up a copy of the most recent Norton Critical Edition of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. It's a massive collection and just about every page testifies to his continued attempts to embrace what the world presented to him. And I've been trying to pay special attention, as I've rambled a bit through those pages, to what Whitman helps us imagine or allows us to believe about the self and the world. It seems to me that, first, he crafts a complex vision of a world that is *not in the way* and then, in a gesture which seems equal parts giving and taking, he presents that world to his readers as if it is their own.

That second element may be the more challenging of the two. Certainly, there is a kind of relentlessly acquisitive side to Whitman that might seem like the height of arrogance and selfishness in many other writers. When Whitman *takes on* the world, he does not take it from us or claim it for us, but instead claims to possess it with us in a kind of joint *assumption*. And that claim involves a remarkable assertion of intimacy, even if it takes the form of a kind of giving: “For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.” If, in the end, we are willing to forgive the familiarity, it is almost certainly in large part because of the real joy with which Whitman infuses this whole exercise in self-creation.

I dote on myself, there is that lot of me and all so luscious,
Each moment and whatever happens thrills me with joy...



We're talking about *strategies for self-creation*, and specifically about various ways of conceptualizing the relationship between the self and the world, but also about the different kinds

of *might* that we would expect to see displayed by various sorts of selves. And perhaps that language is a bit alien to some who might have followed the rambling this far, while the uses I am making of it might seem peculiar to others. If I have chosen to emphasize it more than, say, talk about potentially shareable “ethics” or “disciplines,” it is in part because I want to continue to underline the differences between what I am proposing and the various sort of *self-government* and *self-ownership* already discussed. In any event, I’m not sure that more familiar formulations—the “homesteading principle,” NAP, etc.—aren’t pretty well described by a phrase like “strategies for self-creation.” While we tend to treat them as the most basic sorts of legal or governmental principles, they often function, as I have already suggested, as guides for individuals wishing to avoid entanglement in legal and governmental order.

All of these approaches are *individualist* in the specific sense that they recognize the human individual as the primary locus of conscious agency. Individualisms differ in the manner and the degree to which they recognize that the human individual is always also social—and those differences can be extreme—but they are united by a focus on solving, or avoiding, social problems through more strictly individual action. Obviously, as we recognize more and more complex interconnections between individuals, the effectiveness of individualist strategies—of, for example, principled *self-creation* as a replacement for social negotiation—depends increasingly on the quality of the analysis of the dynamics we have been examining.

But what goes into a high-quality analysis of that relationship? If we are to draw on sources already in play, I would suggest something like Proudhon’s sociology of collective force. And if it is a Proudhonian strategy of self-creation that we are elaborating, then it will almost certainly involve a ponderation of our various interests, a kind of internal *conflict management* that certainly will not preclude the intensification of conflicts in the interest of increasing the collective force at our disposal.

The First Society

Through various twists and turns, I have been working steadily toward this notion of the human individual as “the first in a series of *societies*,” drawing inspiration from a variety of sources.

In Whitman, we have a self “not contained between hat and boots,” but also “vast, containing multitudes,” overlapping with the world (and other selves) and dividing within itself in just about every way imaginable. What we don’t have is any sense that all of this in any way diminishes the self or its status as “Myself.”

In Proudhon, we have beings-as-groups, whose internal vitality is as much a function of division and balanced conflict as it is any sort of uniformity or homogeneity. But we also have a strong thread of *developing* individuality, so that the present self and the self a thousand years hence are presumably bound together by threads that would be visible if we can attain the proper vantage points.

In our reading of a more-or-less Stirnerian *solitaire*, we have suggested a similar dynamic. As « our world » comes to include more and more of the world, our *self-creation* and *self-enjoyment* seems less and less attributable to some persistent, self-same “ego”—and, indeed, the encouragements to think in those terms steadily diminish.

And so on.... with E. Armand, it seems to me, somewhere just ahead of us in this exploration, drawing, as he did, from so many of the same sources.



I don't think that there is anything particularly radical in the claim that we are indeed often "of more than one mind" on important matters or that we often find that our interests are not uniform. This is undoubtedly one of the fundamental facts that the strategies of self-creation we have rejected attempt to address, either by sifting through potential selves and competing interests to establish which are "real" ("authentic," etc.) or by isolating the individual from its various contexts and environments, as a kind of social atom.

There is, however, probably something at least against-the-grain about starting to address *sociality* as a quality internal to the individual self (however familiar similar moves may be to the *deleuzians* in the room, etc.) In any event, novelty is, by itself, of fairly limited interest. What does interest me is the possibility of opening lines of communication between various discourses that are often treated in anarchist circles as not just distinct, but opposed. I don't imagine that the gulf between committed partisans of communist and individualist anarchisms has been much diminished in the dozen years since I first proposed a "gift economy of property," but it does seem to me that there is an audience with at least some interest in the project of anarchist synthesis I have been pursuing, for whom an elaboration of that intuition may at least afford some pleasure.

So let's return to that notion, by reviewing its first appearance.

The Gift Economy of Property

My 2008 essay began with an affirmation of shared anarchist goals in the economic realm:

I think most anarchists and libertarians share a faith that it is possible for needs to be met, goods to be distributed and some level of general prosperity achieved, in a way that is voluntary and at least approximately just. But we couldn't differ more, it seems, when we start to ask how to get the work done. Probably most of us aim, in the long run, for a society where there is sufficient prosperity that we could be much less concerned about such things, where generosity would be a logical response to plenty.

The context was a familiar one:

I've been presenting some of Proudhon's ideas about individuality and free will, as well as reviewing his work on property. I have begun to suggest some of the ways in which the early critique of property as a despotic, absolutist principle, became the basis for Proudhon's later reluctant propertarianism, which he based on his analysis of the human self, the *moi*, which he found was itself naturally absolutist, and despotic when given a chance.... Having had done with the divine Absolute, he could only depend on human ethical actors themselves to accomplish the march towards justice, the justification of their institutions, the perfection of their concepts, etc. But it was obvious to him that they would never do it alone.

And while the language of self-as-society is still to come, much of the present analysis was already at least in progress:

If the self is not innately depraved, neither is it simple, centered, clean and “proper.” Any body or being, Proudhon says, possesses a quantity of collective force, derived from the organization of its component parts. Though these component parts may be subject to rigid determination, the resultant force exceeds the power of the parts and, to the extent that the collective force is great and the organization that it rises from is complex, it escapes any particular constituent destiny. The collective force is the “quantity of liberty” possessed by the being. Freedom is thus a product of necessity, and expresses itself, at the next level, as a new sort of necessity. And perhaps at most levels of Proudhon’s analysis (and we can move up and down the scale of “beings” from the simplest levels of organization up to complex societal groupings and perhaps to organization on even larger scales) the quantity of liberty introduced wouldn’t look much like the “individual freedom” that we value. But the human “free absolute,” distinguished by the ability to say “moi” and to reflect on her position in this scheme, has her absolutism tempered by encounters with her fellows, also “free absolutes,” also pursuing a line drawn by the play of liberty and necessity. Out of their encounters, out of mutual recognition, the “pact of liberty” arises (or fails to arise, where lack or recognition or misrecognition take place), and a “collective reason,” possessed (in social organs and institutions, in “common sense,” etc) by a higher-order being, which is to say a higher-order (but latent, rather than free, because it lacks that ability to say “moi”) absolute.

In the system that emerges around these notions, individual human beings hold a very special place, as the chief architects and artisans of justice. Again, like Fourier, Proudhon makes a point of not stigmatizing the impulses of individuals, and, far more than Fourier, he actually makes a virtue of individual egoism and absolutism, as long as we are not so self-absorbed that we can’t recognize our fellow egoists and absolutists as such. Even the “higher wisdom” that is possessed by the higher-order collective beings, like “society” and “the state” (which, in his later works, takes on a very different meaning than anarchists generally give it), is really in large part in the hands of human individuals.

Necessity gives rise to liberty, which tends to a kind of necessity. “Individualism,” even “complete insolidarity,” tends (as we have seen elsewhere in Proudhon’s work) to centralization, to the dangerous “socialism” that Leroux warned against in 1834, but also, if equilibrium can be maintained, to an expanded space of social freedom (“the liberty of the social being”) for the individual. It’s all a little dizzying; and in the middle of it, star of the show, sits the individual self, the moi, which, while off the hook for original sin, still has to deal with something we might think of as “original impropriety.”

There then follows a certain amount of rambling about anarchist attitudes towards “property” and “gifts,” including some very rudimentary critiques of capitalistic “self-ownership” and communistic zero-price economies. The essay then ends with the statement of an *intuition*:

My intuition, based in part on some language various places in Proudhon’s work and in part on the connections I’ve been making to other continental thought, is that a “gift economy,” in the sense of a system in which something, which can be rightfully given, is given, with no specific expectations of return, could only arise in fairly limited circumstances, and perhaps can only have one application within Proudhon’s thought—but that one application may be a bit of a doozy. We know that there is, for Proudhon, some opening for society to emerge as a “pact of liberty” leading towards approximations

of equality and finally of justice. We know that freedom rises from the interplay of necessity and liberty, and that property too has its internal contradictions. Proudhon's *moi* has very little that it can rightfully give, if even his own "property" is theft. But it can, perhaps, give property to the other, through recognition, which steals nothing, robs no one, and is perfectly gratuitous, even if—and this is the character of the gift economy—it cannot be sure of reciprocation. To the extent, however, that commerce is based in equal recognition, if not necessarily any other sort of equality, then this particular gift economy might be strangely (given all we have said, and some of the names we have invoked) foundational.

"The Gift Economy of Property" is perhaps still the best-known of my writings, thanks to its inclusion in *Markets Not Capitalism*—where I expect it may seem like a bit of an anomaly. It remains one of my favorites, if only because even the most basic articulation of the titular notion has had lasting and what seem to me positive effects in "neo-Proudhonian" circles. However, my original understanding was that the essay would appear with its sequel, "What Could Justify Property," which at least begins to flesh out the idea proposed, and I suspect that, in circles where the other work is not known, it has been difficult for the original to appear as anything but a curiosity. It seems appropriate to reunite the two short writings here.

Rereading these works, the dozen intervening years seem long and many of the preoccupations of the earlier period just a bit alien. I've learned—with a little help from the Chomskyarchists—to do without the notion of justification. And talk about Humanity certainly makes more sense in a context where the regular references included William Batchelder Greene and Pierre Leroux than it does in something like the present context. But I don't think it is so difficult to translate a passage like this into the language of this particular investigation:

What could justify property for Proudhon? One answer is simple: Progress, which Proudhon describes as "the justification of Humanity by itself." Which makes the next answer easy: Humanity, that is, us, learning, through experimental trial and error, to balance our interests in institutions embodying (hopefully) steadily higher and richer "approximations" of Justice.

My main reservation would be that I now take much greater care to avoid appearing to invoke abstract *identities* ("Man," etc.) or default *polities* ("society," etc.), which dealing with appeals to real, large-scale *collectivities*. But Leroux's rather idiosyncratic reflections on humanity certainly contain some elements worth noting in the present context. Consider, for example:

The life of man then, and of every man, by the will of his Creator, is dependent upon an incessant communication with his fellow beings, and with the universe. That which we call his life, does not belong to him entirely, and does not reside in him alone; it is at once within him and out of him; it resides partially, and jointly, so to speak, in his fellows and the surrounding world. From a certain point of view therefore it may be said, that his fellow beings and the world also belong to him. For, as his life resides in them, that portion of it which he controls, and which he calls *Me*, has, virtually, a right to that other portion, which he cannot so sovereignly dispose of, and which he calls *Not Me*.

“What Could Justify Property” is linked in the sidebar and will probably reward a complete reading by those specifically interested in Proudhon’s later ideas on property. But this is a hill that I’ve been circling for a dozen years now and, having already explained what I take to be the shortcoming of my early attempts to turn the basic intuition into something more (and with this post already flirting with the 8000-word mark), perhaps it’s time to wrap things up—even if that just means sharing a new intuition.

Some Thoughts on the Journey Thus Far

For the last few days, as this installment of the *Rambles*... has moved gradually toward its conclusion, I have been living with the madness of the project, which always threatens to ramble too much or not enough. I try, as best I can, not to think too about what it looks like from the outside, writing as much as possible for myself and for the sake of the material that I have picked up along the way. That doesn’t prevent me from feeling, now and then, that I have perhaps bitten off more than I can easily chew.

That usually calls for more and longer walks—more of the world inserted between the thoughts that would otherwise distract me with their push-and-shove. And, with a little luck, I eventually find myself—perhaps on some other, more conventionally suburban hill, looking down over the athletic fields at one of the local schools—drawing calm from a sunset and an evening breeze.



Ramble, n. — A walk or wander without definite route or other aim than recreation or pleasure.

To set oneself a-rambling is to set some guards against things getting too serious, but also to leave your options open. And there is certainly nothing about the practice of rambling that rules out the possibility of getting rather far from home, or even a bit lost, and having to press a bit to set things right and make it home.

The thing I haven’t known about this particular variety of rambling was just how closely I would have to watch my tendency to just keep going—and what it would look like when I was pushing the pace a little to make it home in daylight. And I wasn’t going to know until I had worked my way through one of these longer cycles and done a bit of synthesis of the work.

That's much less of a mystery now—and I expect that every five or six installments of the series will, from now on, constitute some kind of more or less unified arc.

This opening arc has accomplished a couple of necessary tasks, even if their necessity only became clear in the course of the journey—or real in its specific context. I have at least begun to stake out a position from which to continue, another point to which I will no doubt regularly return, if only to see how the passing seasons have changed it. And I have assembled a first group of traveling companions, who might benefit from being more formally introduced.

Let's be clear. While I have tried to be relatively faithful in my treatment of the various thinkers I have enlisted in this first round of explorations, I have also been necessarily and quite consciously partial in presenting them.

Max Stirner remains perhaps most opaque to me. My clearest insights into the heart of his project have almost certainly come indirectly, through a heady mix of leisure, fine, strong ale and egoist *camarades*. And my appropriation of his thought in this arc—« my Stirner »—has been a quite conscious attempt to present a particular interpretation of the *einzigste* as a foil for Whitman's much-sung self. That “only one” is at once a figure of extreme acquisitiveness and one that, *in victory*, loses much of its aggressive character. It presents an extreme sort of self-separation, but one that, as I have suggested, perhaps leads to a rather remarkable intimacy, even if it is framed in different terms.

The Proudhon I have focused on in this arc has been the partially or temporarily lapsed anarchist of the not-quite-final years. But in using Proudhon as a cautionary figure, I have tried to be faithful to a particular stage of his developing thought and to draw useful and ultimately Proudhonian conclusions from what I might, in other contexts, be tempted to treat as a period of unfortunate deviation from more strictly anarchist concerns. This Proudhon serves as an example of a self-separation according to what are ultimately governmental guidelines—but he also provides us with the sociological tools that we can expect to employ moving forward, when it is a question of exploring the complex internal dynamics of the self.

Armand—primarily a young Armand in this arc, in the early stages of his own journey—has served as a kind of precursor or advance scout, struggling to untangle himself from some potentially authoritarian ways of relating to the world and manifesting a sort of scattershot assortment of egoistic and individualistic tendencies. He raises the question of self-separation—and then answers it in a number of different ways. We may spend a bit more time with this comparatively young Armand in the next arc.

This particular cast of characters has then allowed me to present a Walt Whitman considerably more useful to the causes of individualism, anarchism and even egoism than he was in life. He is here in this arc first as the representative of a self that tends both to spill itself into the world around it and to multiply internally. But he is also the expansive *solitaire* who recognizes and lifts up his fellows, as well as an *ocean* (in something like Zarathustra's sense) with precious little fear of any pollution. A proud manifestation of internal self-separation, he gives us a glimpse of non-reductive, non-destructive, self-integration and complex self-enjoyment.



Around and around and around. There is a lot that still might and probably ought to be said about all of the issues that have been raised so far, but perhaps we have finally come far enough

—established sufficient common language and common ground—to venture a slightly premature revision of the *strategy of self-creation* I have called the “gift economy of property.”

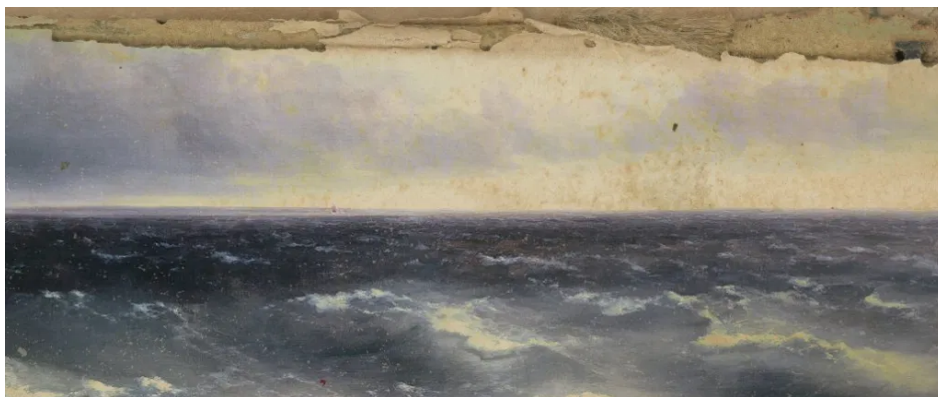
Elements of a New Intuition

If we were to assemble the first draft of a program from the observations of the first five *Rambles*..., the result might look something like this:

- The human capacity par excellence is reflection.
- Reflection allows and perhaps necessitates the transformation of the world into something we might call, with the appropriate references, « our world ».
- If it is up to us, as a part of our ongoing self-creation, to craft a world of our own, we should probably build one that doesn't cramp us.
- That means first discovering and claiming that which is already « our own » — *for better or worse*, we might add, as we can expect to build with some combination of the things we truly desire and those we simply cannot escape.
- Then, having learned just how much of the world is already « our own » — how much is, in an important sense, already a part of us — we need to learn to live with these selves of ours — we need to learn how to stop *fighting with our food*.
- It seems only natural, in fact, that we would prefer to enrich, uplift and enlarge « our own ».
- But that will obviously mean learning to open spaces within the sphere of the self, reshaping our activities to make the most of changing “internal” dynamics, managing “internal” conflict, etc.
- And the more of this work that we do proactively, *egoistically*, as a matter of individual self-creation, the fewer opportunities will arise for legal and governmental order to once again rear its ugly head.

Other arrangements would, of course, be possible, given the rambling nature of the work, but it seems to me that this provides us with the outlines of a next intuition regarding property, the nature of the individual and its relation to the world. And if we were to condense it down even more, perhaps we might simply appropriate a bit of that Nietzsche quote from the beginnings of this go-round:

One must be a sea...



~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

The moon shines through the window above my computer screen, nearly full and strikingly bright, even through the half-closed blinds. It's been a long day, stretched a bit now into the next, so that this extra-long installment can be posted and I can put myself to bed. Tomorrow promises to be warm and clear, a fine day to start again on a new arc. But right now I am honestly too tired to even begin to imagine where it might lead.

Rambles in the Fields of Anarchist Individualism

No. 6. — Songs of Solitary Selves

Just when it looked like summer had settled in for good, August delivered a bit of rain. And just when I thought I had pretty well wrapped up this set of Rambles, I found my casual browsing through the anarchist individualist literature yielding a remarkable number of writings focused on the notion of solitude. So it seems appropriate to supplement No. 5, which was without new translations, with this collection, drawn from a considerably larger body of poems and short reflections, of working translations featuring a variety of perspectives on what we have been calling self-separation.



Solitude

Far from the petty duties and faithful respect
That force too-weak knees to bend,
If you want to be strong, build your fortress
On the proud peaks where the eagle has its home.

On the azure summit where each new dawn
Sees the rose bloom and the wild rose flower,
Poet, for your self alone, on your immortal lyre,
Sing your ideal, in the shadow of the path.

Flee the crowd's procession and the riot's storm,
Since your soul is proud and scorns the feast,
The joys and clamors of the noisy cities.

Solitude is sweet and exile is a dream
To the sage, whose aim, without respite and without truce,
Is to give life to their soul, where their deities are.

René Morley.

Pendant la Mêlée 1 no. 2 (5 Décembre 1915): 2.



The Lonely Alley.

Leave the street to those whose souls are troubled.
As for you, breathe in, like a clandestine treasure,
The lily of solitude on your lofty balcony,
And play with the blonde locks of Fortune.

Heaps of the hungry crowded at the common table,
Leave to others their hasty portion of the feast;
And let your verses, secrets as well as your destiny,
Ascend like a jet of water toward the moon.

In the heart of the sanctuary hear the divine art
Prophesy your soul, and towards the divine Work
Lift your heart like a ciborium of fine gold.

Think, dominate the Age, and breath in Space.
Do not hope; Hope is a rapacious bird.
See, if you can, the eternal in the hour that passes.

A. Samain.

Par-delà la Mêlée 1 no. 4 (15 Janvier 1916): 2.



Alone, superbly alone; here is my pride.
Thank you, I have no need of your compassion.
I love the high summits where the icy winds sting.
Narrowed horizons do not intoxicate my soul;
I hate the confused noises of the public square,
I like to acclimate myself where you could not live.

Francis Vergas.

Par-delà la Mêlée 1 no. 5 (26 Janvier 1916): 2.



“Live your life:”... To live one’s life is just the opposite of spreading it out on a platter. How can you claim to live your life when you are unable to keep *your* secret to yourself?... To live your life is not to live for those close to you, not even for the closest, but to live for yourself.

E. Armand.

Par-delà la Mêlée 1 no. 22 (mi Janvier 1917): 1.



To the Superman

You alone, and that is enough. The herd that we are,
Since, for better or worse, we remain human,
Interests your superhuman pride nor more
Than the blood spilled on the roadside flowers.

You live on the summits, like an austere hermit,
Nobly detached from the things of the earth,
And it is not to you that some grotesque joker,
Might say, if you came here: “What’s it to you?”

You drink in the pleasure from a naked kiss
Averting your eyes, haughtily, from naked women,
And your deep disgust for what we love
Deprives our air of access to your lungs.

To eat is good for we who possess a belly
With the appetites of a wild cat in its den!
Your own kindness, for the birds in the sky,
Leaves drops of honey in the hearts of the flowers!

Mortal indifferent to the evil that tortures us,
May your felicity reign in nature;
But if at your feet the world kneels,
Wait until I am dead to mock us!

Eugène Bizeau.

Par-delà la Mêlée 1 no. 7 (8 Mars 1916): 2.



SOLITUDE

In the depths of the attic where I live alone
I dream of racing and wandering the earth,
Or, naked, stretching out in the shadows of tall trees.
I dream of a new, different, future life,
Where, finally free, as children of nature,
Humans will frolic, without morals and without laws.

It is free women, having broken their shackles,
Their infamous yoke, that I dream and not slaves
Subject to the male, to his brutal pleasure.
I dream of milieus where harmony reigns
Where under a loving sky, of infinite sweetness,
Beings without remotes satisfy their desires.

In the depths of my attic, where I live alone,
I dream of embracing a naked body on earth
Covered with grass in the shadows of tall trees.
To lull our movement, I hear a soft murmur,
Song of liberated beings, children of nature.
Nothing but a dream... and yet, the dream of one outside the laws.

Maurice Jamain.

L'en dehors 12 no. 250-251 (mi-Mars 1933): 69.



Reflections

Solitude and Imagination.

The thinker is much less alone in solitude than in the crowd.

In solitude, we can give free flow to our imagination, which takes responsibility for surrounding us with individuals with the most diverse mentalities, with whom we talk and debate, persecute and protect.

Are we in a bad mood? We have the satisfaction of discharging it on one or more of these beings created by our imagination. Are we in a good mood? We pass it on to these characters with whom we divert ourselves. Are you besotted with sweetness? Immediately, an ideally beautiful woman comes, softly, to wrap you in her frail and fragrant arms.

Do we wish to make music? As soon as we seat ourselves at the piano, or take up our violin, we become a virtuoso without equal, although in real life we do not know how to play these instruments.

Imagination! But it is the manifestation of life itself. What is our real life beside that of our imagination! What misery would the life of man be without it!

But what am I saying — without it? But is it conceivable that an individual could make the least little reflection without addressing themselves to imaginary beings?

Robert Mariette



Solitude

We want to stand aside from the enslaved crowd,
To live off our land like the primitives.
We want to be good and naive, without regrets;
We want to live alone, in order to know life!

We want the sea and the horizon before us,
The hills, the woods, the magnificent rocks,
Everything, finally, that pleases our peaceful hearts.
Happy, we live far from the wretched prison...

To have our share of false liberties,
We must stifle dreams and joys;
Before too much happiness, hatred exerts itself:
Men, you would mercilessly mow down our pride!

We are not born to nourish remorse,
And your counsels are pure, divine Solitude.
We give our time to Love, to Study,
We await Age and Death without fear!

S.

L'en dehors 17 no 318-319 (Mai-Juin 1938): 49.



Out in the fields, the sun has returned and the brief reign of the field clover seems to have come to an end. Thick, coarse grass, of the sort that remains green despite the ongoing drought, is having its day, and in some places the hillside looks like a particularly unkempt lawn.

The hawks seem to have abandoned the neighboring property, at least for now, and the crows have their pick of treelines in which to congregate.

With the days getting shorter again, I am more and more likely to make my rounds at dusk and, while the contours of the land are not always conducive to the viewing of sunsets, sometimes atmospheric conditions conspire to put on a very pretty show, which can be viewed from the cool spaces at the bottom of the hill — an appropriately solitary kind of space in which to finally really end this arc.

