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Peterson Roberto da Silva

Balance, Diversity, and Mutual Aid for a Change:
Non-dominating latitude for nonconformity as anarchist freedom

Florianópolis

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Orientador: Prof. Tiago Bahia Losso, Dr.

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Prof. Ricardo Virgilino da Silva, Dr.
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

Prof. Daniel J. Kapust, Dr.
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Prof. Ruth Ellen Kinna, Dr.
Loughborough University

Certificamos que esta é a versão original e final do trabalho de conclusão que foi julgado adequado para obtenção do título de Doutor em em Sociologia e Ciência Política, área de concentração em Ciência Política.

Coordenação do Programa de Pós-Graduação

Prof. Tiago Bahia Losso, Dr.
Orientador

Florianópolis, 2024.

In memory of all comrades who have passed as this was being written,
including

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¹ Goldman (2018[1931], p. v).

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ABSTRACT

In academic discussions about freedom, anarchism is often neglected as a frame of reference, partly because a single meaning of the concept within the anarchist tradition of political thought is not readily available in academic literature. The aim of this thesis is to conceptualise anarchist freedom. A theoretical and qualitative bibliographical study was carried out, based on Mark Bevir's concept of tradition and the procedure of conceptual "reverse engineering" of the philosophical, sociological and institutional debates that make up the anarchist tradition. In contrast to views on freedom among liberals, republicans and Marxists, which can be classified within an Eurocentric paradigm that defines liberty as a form of unrestriction, anarchists discuss freedom as something associated with balance (involving their own views on equality and non-domination), diversity (institutional and subjective), and mutual aid (as the basis of common life and as transformative rebellion). Anarchists also understand that emancipation is built through prefigurative direct action, such that it is not possible to consider that one agent can truly "free" another. It follows that anarchists associate the word freedom with the ability to transform relational patterns (in a profound, consequential way). This transformation I call nonconformity, especially in contrast to changes that do not significantly alter patterns and institutions, a historical charge by anarchists against "reformist" impulses. Freedom would therefore be the ease with which relational patterns can be transformed in a non-dominating way, even if they are not changed at any given moment, and its "non-dominating" character refers to the fact that the transformations themselves should not produce a new situation in which this ease is diminished. I name this concept technically as "non-dominating latitude for non-conformity". Freedom thus understood is a quantitative, complex, and plastic property of relationships, experienced by individual and collective agents as an expansion of consciousness that strengthens agency in (but not *control* over) society and the environment, and also as institutions that embed in rules and cultural patterns principles that strengthen this agency and especially that develop individuals who can, by valuing it, promote it. This is a unique and distinct concept, not to be confused with others such as equality or diversity, significantly influencing the interpretation of reality and motivating emancipatory political action in multiple dimensions, including anti-racist and (or) anti-colonial action.

Keywords: Freedom. Liberty. Anarchism. Non-domination. Nonconformity.

RESUMO

Em discussões acadêmicas sobre a liberdade, o anarquismo costuma ser negligenciado como quadro referencial, em parte porque um sentido único do conceito dentro da tradição anarquista de pensamento político não está facilmente disponível na literatura acadêmica. O objetivo deste trabalho é conceituar a liberdade entre anarquistas. Foi realizada uma pesquisa bibliográfica, de cunho teórico e qualitativo, apoiada no conceito de tradição de Mark Bevir e no procedimento de “engenharia reversa” conceitual com base nos debates filosóficos, sociológicos e institucionais que compõem a tradição anarquista. Em contraste com as visões sobre liberdade entre liberais, republicanos, e marxistas, classificáveis dentro de um mesmo paradigma eurocêntrico que define liberdade enquanto forma de não-restrição, anarquistas discutem a liberdade a partir dos elementos de equilíbrio (envolvendo discussões próprias sobre igualdade e não-dominação), diversidade (institucional e subjetiva), e apoio mútuo (enquanto base da vida comum e rebeldia transformadora). Anarquistas entendem ainda que a emancipação é construída por meio da ação direta prefigurativa, de modo que não é possível considerar que um agente possa verdadeiramente “libertar” outro. Conclui-se assim que anarquistas associam à palavra liberdade a capacidade para transformar (de maneira profunda, consequente) padrões relacionais. Esta transformação chamo não-conformidade, especialmente em contraste com mudanças que não alteram significativamente padrões e instituições, uma acusação histórica de anarquistas contra impulsos ditos “reformistas”. A liberdade seria portanto a facilidade com a qual padrões relacionais podem ser transformados de forma não-dominadora, ainda que não o sejam em qualquer dado momento, e a qualificação “não-dominadora” se refere ao fato de que as próprias transformações não devam produzir uma nova situação em que esta facilidade seja diminuída. Nomeio este conceito tecnicamente como “amplitude para a não-conformidade não-dominadora”. A liberdade assim compreendida é uma propriedade quantitativa, complexa, e plástica de relações, sendo vivida por agentes individuais e coletivos enquanto expansão da consciência que fortalece a agência na (porém não o *controle* sobre a) sociedade e o meio natural, bem como enquanto institucionalidade que embute em regras e padrões culturais princípios que fortaleçam esta agência e, em especial, o desenvolvimento de indivíduos que possam, ao valorizá-la, promovê-la. Este é um conceito único e distinto, não se confundindo com outros como igualdade ou diversidade, influenciando de maneira significativa a interpretação da realidade e motivando uma ação política emancipatória em múltiplas dimensões, incluindo a antirracista e (ou) anticolonial.

Palavras-chave: Liberdade. Anarquismo. Não-dominação. Não-conformidade.

RESUMEN

En los debates académicos sobre la libertad, el anarquismo es a menudo ignorado como marco de referencia, en parte porque no es fácil encontrar en la literatura académica un significado único del concepto dentro de la tradición anarquista de pensamiento político. El objetivo de esta tesis es conceptualizar la libertad entre los anarquistas. Se realizó un estudio bibliográfico teórico y cualitativo, basado en el concepto de tradición de Mark Bevir y en el procedimiento de “ingeniería inversa” conceptual de los debates filosóficos, sociológicos y institucionales que conforman la tradición anarquista. En contraste con perspectivas sobre la libertad entre liberales, republicanos y marxistas, que pueden ser clasificadas dentro del mismo paradigma eurocéntrico que define la libertad como una forma de no restricción, los anarquistas discuten la libertad a partir de los elementos de equilibrio (tiendo sus propios debates sobre igualdad y no dominación), diversidad (institucional y subjetiva) y apoyo mutuo (como base de la vida en común y de rebelión transformadora). Los anarquistas también entienden que la emancipación se construye a través de la acción directa prefigurativa, por lo que no es posible considerar que un agente pueda realmente “liberar” a otro. De ahí que los anarquistas asocien la palabra libertad con la capacidad de transformar (de forma profunda y consecuente) los patrones relacionales. A esta transformación la llamo no conformidad, especialmente en contraste con los cambios que no alteran significativamente los patrones y las instituciones, una acusación histórica de los anarquistas contra los llamados impulsos “reformistas”. La libertad sería, por tanto, la facilidad con la que los patrones relacionales pueden ser transformados de forma no dominante, aunque no lo sean en un momento dado, y el calificativo “no dominante” se refiere a que las propias transformaciones no deben producir una nueva situación en la que esta facilidad se vea mermada. A este concepto lo denominé técnicamente “amplitud para la no conformidad no-dominante”. La libertad así entendida es una propiedad cuantitativa, compleja, y plástica de las relaciones, experimentada por los agentes individuales y colectivos como una expansión de conciencia que fortalece la agencia en (pero no el *control* sobre) la sociedad y el entorno, así como la institucionalidad que plasma en normas y pautas culturales principios que fortalecen esta agencia y, en particular, el desarrollo de individuos que puedan, valorándola, promoverla. Se trata de un concepto único y distinto, que no se confunde con otros como igualdad o diversidad, que influye significativamente en la interpretación de la realidad y motiva la acción política emancipadora en múltiples dimensiones, incluida la acción antirracista y (o) anticolonial.

Palabras clave: Libertad. Anarquismo. No-dominación. No conformidad.

RESUMO

En akademiaj diskutoj pri libereco, oni ofte neglektas anarkiismon kiel referenca trabaro, ĉefe ĉar unuopa kaj unika signifo de la koncepto en la anarkiisma tradicio de politika pensado ne estas facile havebla en akademia literaturo. La celo de ĉi tiu tezo estas konceptigi anarkiisman liberecon. Teoria kaj kvalita bibliografia studo estis farita, bazita sur la koncepto de tradicio de Mark Bevir kaj la procedo de koncepta “reversa inĝenierado” de la filozofiaj, sociologiaj kaj instituciaj debatoj kiuj formas la anarkiisman tradicion. Kontraste al vidpunktoj pri libereco inter liberaluloj, respublikanoj kaj marksistoj, kiuj povas klasifiĝi en eŭrocentra paradigmo kiu difinas liberecon kiel formon de nelimigo, anarkiistoj diskutas liberecon kiel io rilata al ekvilibro (implikanta iliajn proprajn vidpunktojn pri egaliteco kaj neregeco), diverseco (institucia kaj subjektiva), kaj reciproka helpo (kiel bazon de komuna vivo kaj kiel transforma ribelo). Anarkiistoj ankaŭ komprenas ke emancipiĝo estas konstruata tra antaŭfiguranta senpera ago, tiel ke ne eblas konsideri ke unu agento vere povas “liberigi” alian. Sekvas ke anarkiistoj asocia la vorton libereco kun la kapablo transformi socialajn ŝablonojn (profunde, signife). Ĉi tiun transformon mi nomas nekonformeco, precipe kontraste al ŝanĝoj kiuj ne signife ŝanĝas ŝablonojn kaj instituciojn, historia akuzo de anarkiistoj kontraŭ “reformismaj” impulsoj. Libereco estus do la facileco per kiu socialaj ŝablonoj povas transformiĝi neregece, eĉ se ili ne ŝanĝiĝas en iu momento, kaj ĝia “neregeca” karaktero rilatas al la fakto ke la transformoj mem ne devus produkti novan situacion en kiu ĉi tiu facileco malpliĝas. Mi teknike nomas ĉi tiun koncepton “neregeca amplekso por nekonformeco”. Libereco tiel komprenita estas kvanta, kompleksa, kaj plastika eco de rilatoj, spertita de individuaj kaj kolektivaj agentoj kiel grandigo de konscio kiu plifortigas agon en (sed ne *kontrolon* super) socio kaj medio, kaj ankaŭ kiel institucioj kiuj enkorpiĝas en reguloj kaj kulturaj modeloj principojn kiuj plifortigas ĉi tiun agon, kaj speciale kiuj disvolvas individuojn kiuj, per valorigo, povas antaŭenigi ĝin. Tio estas unika kaj aparta koncepto, ne konfuzota kun aliaj, kiel ekzemple egaliteco aŭ diverseco. Ĝi signife influas la interpreton de realo kaj instigas emancipan politikan agon en multoblaj dimensioj, inkluzive de kontraŭrasista kaj (aŭ) kontraŭkolonia ago.

Ŝlosilvortoj: Libereco. Anarkiismo. Neregeco. Nekonformeco.

RESUMO EXPANDIDO

Introdução

Em discussões acadêmicas sobre a liberdade, o anarquismo costuma ser negligenciado como possível quadro referencial. Este é o caso em parte porque um sentido único do conceito dentro da tradição anarquista de pensamento político não está facilmente disponível na literatura acadêmica. Seja porque abordagens sobre o tema presumem que tal sentido não exista, ou porque partem da premissa de que o anarquismo não é tanto uma posição política quanto uma “mistura” de outras posições, há uma lacuna no conhecimento científico sobre o conceito de liberdade para anarquistas. Diz-se, por exemplo, que anarquistas desejam “o máximo de liberdade”, considerando no entanto que a definição desta liberdade já esteja dada, tendo sido fornecida por outras tradições de pensamento político, como o liberalismo ou o marxismo.

Objetivos

O objetivo deste trabalho é analisar os debates filosóficos, sociológicos e institucionais que compõem a tradição anarquista com vistas a determinar se há de fato um conceito anarquista de liberdade (isto é, distinto de outros), e em havendo, qual é este conceito. Sendo assim, objetivos específicos incluem determinar se é possível conceituar a liberdade para anarquistas (seja como um único conceito ou um número plural de conceitos distintos de outros), fazer de fato tal conceituação, distinguindo este conceito de outros adjacentes, e refletir sobre suas características.

Metodologia

Foi realizada uma pesquisa bibliográfica, de cunho teórico e qualitativo, apoiada em dois procedimentos metodológicos voltados para a delimitação do objeto e a interpretação dos dados. O primeiro se trata da mobilização do conceito de tradição na obra historiográfica de Mark Bevir, adaptando-o para o campo da teoria política. Tradições são compreendidas como o processo de (re)constituição de um grupo de ideias transmitido geracionalmente. Isto permite compreender o anarquismo amplamente (porém ainda elencando exclusões relevantes), a partir tanto de seus conflitos internos quanto do encontro com outras tradições e outros movimentos políticos, como o feminismo, o abolicionismo, o anticolonialismo, etc. O segundo procedimento consiste em uma “engenharia reversa” conceitual aplicada aos textos anarquistas consultados, tendo em vista que aspectos do próprio pensamento anarquista e dos movimentos aos quais a tradição se associa fazem com que conceituações diretas da liberdade sejam com frequência preteridas por debates que partem do senso comum para complexificá-lo. Para entender o conceito de liberdade por trás dessas próprias complexificações, é preciso assim analisar as premissas e os prospectos que anarquistas associam a experiências de liberdade para avaliar de que maneira eles definem este termo — ou, melhor dizendo, de que maneira definiriam este termo a partir de uma linguagem mais técnica, que encapsulasse conceitualmente aquilo que distingue sua tradição das demais, em especial de tradições progressistas modernas.

Resultados

Tendo a pesquisa se concentrado em fontes da tradição anarquista, apenas esboços de conceitos mais consolidados na literatura acadêmica (visões sobre liberdade entre liberais, republicanos, e marxistas) são apresentados para fins tanto de compreensão da história pregressa da palavra “liberdade” (de etimologia europeia) como de posterior comparação com as visões anarquistas sobre o tópico. A tese apresenta, com base nestas visões gerais, o conceito de “paradigma de não-restrição”, que abrange as definições de liberdade para as três tradições supracitadas, explicando

algumas confluências importantes entre elas — a saber, que todas impõem uma visão de bem faccional como um bem geral, na forma de não-restrições que precisam ser salvaguardadas por instituições hierárquicas. Cita-se também que abordagens não-ocidentais sobre a liberdade apontam para alternativas ao paradigma eurocêntrico de não-restrição, abordagens estas a serem conectadas, ao longo da tese, às perspectivas libertárias. A tese então analisa como noções éticas (antiteologismo, não-imposição de perspectivas) e estratégicas (inserção horizontal nos meios populares) ácratas explicam a baixa incidência, na literatura anarquista, de definições técnicas e diretas sobre liberdade (a despeito das frequentes discussões sobre o tema em diversos gêneros de literatura argumentativa). Ao longo dos capítulos 4 e 5 demonstra-se a importância dos princípios de equilíbrio, diversidade, e ajuda mútua na tradição anarquista, a forma como eles são associados a experiências de liberdade, e seus significados enquanto motivadores de atitudes políticas específicas, isto é, produtores de identidades e padrões relacionais anárquicos. Anarquistas rejeitam o princípio de soberania (definido aqui como direito de exercer violência com impunidade) subjacente a diversos sistemas políticos que, ainda que diferentes entre si, baseiam-se na construção e manutenção de hierarquias, especialmente em ideais de propriedade em sentido amplo. Embora anarquistas não se oponham unanimemente ao emprego de força, e questionem a forma como a violência é definida num contexto de desigualdade de poder, eles se opõem de fato a este próprio desequilíbrio de forças representado pela soberania. Para anarquistas, a soberania, usualmente legitimada por fornecer um meio adequado para a resolução de conflitos, gera (mais) violência (com frequência sem defini-la como tal), atrofia capacidades para resolução de conflitos, e vicia a resolução pacífica de contendas. A alternativa anarquista é a legitimação da igualdade de forças, com vistas a dissuadir o uso de força e incentivar a mediação comunitária. Para além do equilíbrio de forças, anarquistas discutem também a existência de outros critérios para a aferição de igualdade em relações sociais. Anarquistas criticam formas de igualdade ou não-arbitrariedade pautadas em relações comuns de obediência burocrática a um poder soberano concentrado, pois a própria relação de comando e obediência é compreendida como um indicador de uma dominação pensada a partir não só do conceito de escravidão mas da experiência da pessoa escravizada. Anarquistas pensam ainda de que formas de desigualdades de recursos materiais, de conhecimento, e de recursos subjetivos associados à capacidade de liderança têm como consequência a legitimação de relações de obediência e, em última instância, a (re)construção de desigualdades de força. A igualdade de forças precisa ser dinâmica para ser mantida a partir da satisfação dos próprios agentes iguais em questão, e assim a diversidade e a ajuda mútua são princípios fundamentais que complementam a igualdade no que tange a experiências de liberdade. Em vez de buscar alguma forma de independência, anarquistas almejam instituições que representem uma dependência mútua (isto é, a ajuda mútua como fundamento da organização de vidas comuns) igualitária e diversa. Ao mesmo tempo, anarquistas promovem uma retórica sobre a subjetividade humana segundo a qual seres humanos são dinamicamente múltiplos, um auto-entendimento cuja persecução favorece a defesa voluntária e consciente de igualdade e diversidade sociais por meio de apoio mútuo rebelde. A interdependência enquanto organização da vida material oferece incentivos estruturais (externos) para a defesa de cenários sociopolíticos anárquicos, enquanto a diversidade subjetiva oferece incentivos motivacionais (internos) para esta defesa. Para anarquistas, relações (cada vez mais) calcadas em igualdade, diversidade e apoio mútuo devem, para que isto seja um ato emancipatório, ser construídas por meio de ação direta prefigurativa. Assim, ao contrário da lógica intrínseca a conceitos de liberdade baseados em não-restrição, não é possível para anarquistas considerar que um agente pode verdadeiramente “libertar” outro.

Discussão

Por meio da análise das premissas e prospectos internamente debatidos por anarquistas ao longo de gerações, depreende-se que a tradição como um todo afirma a possibilidade de ordens sociais igualitárias e diversas que, embora auto-organizadas por meio de cooperação, transformam-se para melhor servir aos interesses de todos os agentes envolvidos a partir de provocações causadas por conflitos e transformações. Neste sentido, aquilo que anarquistas chamam de liberdade, almejando promover por meio de equilíbrios de forças, de apoio à diversidade organizacional e subjetiva, e da instituição da cooperação como necessidade operacional, é justamente a capacidade de transformar (de maneira profunda, consequente) os padrões relacionais. Esta transformação chamo não-conformidade — especialmente em contraste com mudanças que não alteram significativamente padrões e instituições, uma acusação histórica de anarquistas contra o impulso dito “reformista” de outras tradições. A liberdade seria portanto a facilidade com a qual padrões relacionais podem ser transformados de forma não-dominadora, ainda que não o sejam em qualquer dado momento, e a qualificação “não-dominadora” se refere ao fato de que as próprias transformações não devam produzir uma nova situação em que esta facilidade seja diminuída. Este conceito tecnicamente nomeio de “amplitude para a não-conformidade não-dominadora”. A liberdade compreendida enquanto amplitude para a não-conformidade não-dominadora é uma propriedade não de indivíduos mas de relações (isto é, relativa a quão igualitárias, diversas e cooperativas são); quantitativa (pode haver mais ou menos liberdade em uma relação); complexa (a liberdade que se experimenta em uma relação é afetada pela liberdade de muitas outras); e plástica (não se refere somente à flexibilidade da relação mas também a sua capacidade de resistir a transformações que resultem em dominação). Esta liberdade é experienciada por agentes individuais e coletivos enquanto expansão de consciência que fortalece a agência sobre a sociedade e o meio natural (porém não o *controle* sobre eles), bem como enquanto institucionalidade que embute em regras e padrões culturais princípios que fortaleçam esta agência e, em especial, o próprio desenvolvimento de indivíduos que possam, ao valorizá-la, promovê-la. Embora esta liberdade seja compreendida como uma ferramenta importante para a realização de valores diversos, ela representa algo a que anarquistas aspiram em si.

Considerações finais

Concluo que é possível se referir a um conceito único e distinto de liberdade dentro da tradição anarquista de pensamento político, a saber, a amplitude para a não-conformidade não-dominadora. Este conceito se refere a um fenômeno específico, não se confundindo com outros — inclusive com igualdade, diversidade, e apoio mútuo, sendo mais que a mera soma destas partes. Ao adotar esta perspectiva, certos problemas sociais são redescritos enquanto um déficit de liberdade, e anarquistas argumentam ainda que esta alteração de ponto de vista é necessária tendo em vista a própria valorização retórica contemporânea da liberdade enquanto forma de não-restrição, pois formas emergentes de dominação certamente buscarão se fundamentar em conceitos já amplamente aceitos de liberdade. A luta pela promoção deste tipo de liberdade, contudo, não representa qualquer código cultural ou modelo institucional específico, dependendo radicalmente do contexto para se materializar em propostas concretas. Estas poderão ser lidas, pelo prisma de conceitos de liberdade mais consolidados academicamente, enquanto lutas liberais, republicanas, ou marxistas, mas representam a busca pela realização de outros valores, isto é, pela anarquização de relações sociais, e não pela consolidação de modelos liberais, republicanos ou marxistas de sociabilidade.

Palavras-chave: Liberdade. Anarquismo. Não-dominação. Não-conformidade.

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1 INTRODUCTION

When we were leaving, we apologized to our hosts that there wasn't more that we could bring them. [...] Under embargo, almost everything was in short supply. [...] "Don't worry about that too much, [...] I have my freedom. In a day or two you have to go back to a place where you don't have that. I only wish there was some way I could give what I have to you."

David Graeber ¹

Our appeal must be heard by all those for whom freedom is not an empty word. ^a

Mohamed Saïl ²



IN ACADEMIC DISCUSSIONS ABOUT FREEDOM, political traditions such as republicanism and liberalism often overshadow anarchism as a frame of reference. This is partly because a unique meaning of the concept within the anarchist tradition is not readily available in the scientific literature.

In his classic examination of liberty among anarchists, Alan Ritter (1980) ‘used Kant, Mill and utilitarianism to discuss’ freedom in anarchism, failing however to consider how anarchists discussed any of these philosophies (KINNA, 2016, p. 30). This relates to a broader issue: treating anarchism as a mixture of other ideologies (most often, liberalism and Marxism), implying ‘a parasitical relationship with [...] identifiable and bounded ideological positions’³ (KINNA, 2016, p. 29). As a result, a lot of political theory reads as if anarchists’ considerations on the topic were idiosyncratic ways of using somebody else’s tools; as if there were no distinctively anarchist notion of freedom — not of how much of it we should strive for, but what *it fundamentally is*.

I aim to correct this impression by filling that scholarly void. By analysing some of the philosophical, sociological, and institutional debates in the incredibly rich anarchist tradition of political thought, I shall argue about what kind of thing anarchists think the concept of freedom is a conception of, to whom or what they think it applies, and whether it has intrinsic or instrumental value for them (JUN, 2018, p. 44). I begin by explaining how I approach the idea of traditions and what this means for the scope of this study.

¹ Graeber, 2016, p. xxii. There are two sets of notes in this document: commentary and further reading are in numbered footnotes, while original versions of non-English quotes (and eventual translation notes) are in alphabetical endnotes (beginning on page 359).

² Saïl, 2021[1936].

³ See also Evren (2012, p. 305).

1.1 STUDYING TRADITIONS

We come here [...] mostly to learn what questions not to ask.

Faxe, in *The Left Hand of Darkness*⁴

Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire.

Gustav Mahler⁵

This work is not an attempt to define the “true” meaning of freedom. It is rather built on the assumption that liberty is an essentially contested concept (GALLIE, 1956).

This is, however, a relatively recent standard in academic discussions on the topic. Take Hannah Arendt’s position: ancients were right, moderns are wrong. She was not the first to identify that the meaning of liberty changed over time; Benjamin Constant (2005[1819]), for one, wrote that different forms of social organisation related to divergent perspectives on freedom. But it was arguably Isaiah Berlin’s (2002[1958]) essay “Two Concepts of Liberty” that made the notion of equally valid contemporaneous definitions mainstream in academic discourse⁶.

This did not spell the end of prescriptive claims. Berlin clearly favoured one of the concepts he outlined, and when Charles Taylor (1985), for instance, put forward an alternative framework, he attacked Berlin’s preferred view in the process. The novelty in these debates was in the need to make more salient the criteria used to separate different concepts, driving debaters to present and explore assumptions rather than hide their own and dismiss others’ — as well as to ground their views on sources richer than a-historical, geometrical vacuums.

Hence how traditions came to play a role in this discussion. For example, collaboration between political theory and history propelled neo-Roman republicans to challenge Berlin’s dualism. They were inspired by a tradition they traced to the Roman republic to recover a third concept of liberty, supposedly eclipsed by liberalism (LOVETT, 2015). As Dean Hammer (2014, p. 184, 246 apud KAPUST, 2017, p. 711) writes, ‘concepts are not built from air, not born in a moment, and not organized by reason, but are formed through a succession of events that one

⁴ Le Guin, 1969, p. 94.

⁵ Attributed; see discussion in <https://tinyurl.com/mr28nfyw>.

⁶ Berlin distinguished between a negative and a positive sense of the term, a distinction that ‘goes back at least to Kant’, writes Ian Carter (2019). Among those who have used such terminology, although with different content, are T. H. Green (BLAU, 2004, p. 549) and, funnily enough, Bakunin, whom Berlin particularly loathed (MCLAUGHLIN, 2002, p. 9–10). Berlin’s binary division has been criticised for both hiding a wider diversity of concepts (BLAU, 2004, p. 548) and being of limited use insofar as the two notions are ultimately a single one (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 162) (not necessarily mutually exclusive critiques). I find this last observation particularly insightful, as I have sought to operationalise it in section 2.2 below. See also Coser (2019).

comes to recognize as related'. Debating republics, liberal governments, and Marxism-inspired states as a way to discuss different concepts of freedom implies a link between definitions and social arrangements, one I shall take advantage of to conceptualise anarchist liberty⁷.

A tradition, as Mark Bevir (2000, p. 35–41) defines it, is 'a set of understandings someone acquires during a process of socialisation'. These ideas must be conceptually connected, forming 'an intelligible whole so that we can see why they went along together'. However, traditions do not have 'an occult or Platonic existence' that 'people discover', being rather 'contingent entities' they 'produce by their own activities'. A tradition is therefore a 'social inheritance' that each individual 'can modify and transform [...] even as he or she passes it on to yet others'.

This perspective is different from 'essentialist' ones, which see traditions as clusters of fixed ideas (BEVIR, 2000, p. 38). The classic "canon-building" approaches to anarchism, popular at the end of the 19th century due to authors such as Paul Eltzbacher, and on the 1960s again, mainly via the work of George Woodcock, are examples of essentialism⁸ (ADAMS, M. S., 2013, p. 39). These Eurocentric selections explore an ethereal idea, elaborated by a series of special men (CHRISTIE, 2021[1975]; ADAMS, J., 2014, p. 5; EVREN; KINNA, 2015; CORRÊA; SILVA, 2015, p. 26–29; KINNA, 2019b, p. 42–49). As we shall explore soon, some elements of the anarchist movement make its tradition a particularly nonsensical target for this sort of method⁹. At any rate, trying 'to define a tradition in terms of a fixed core' is difficult because individuals 'play an active role in the learning process', so 'we cannot identify limits to the changes' they can 'introduce to their inheritance' (BEVIR, 2000, p. 38).

Every time we attempt to apply a tradition, we have to reflect on it, we have to try to understand it afresh in the light of the relevant circumstances, and by reflecting on it, we necessarily open it up to possible innovation. In this way, human agency can produce change even when people think they are adhering to a tradition they regard as sacrosanct (BEVIR, 2000, p. 35)

Defining a fixed core for anarchism, however, is what Lucien van der Walt and Michael Schmidt (2009) attempt to do in their influential work *Black Flame*. These authors argue for a continual, coherent, global movement, against narratives separating libertarians¹⁰ of the

⁷ See the beginning of chapter 2 and section 3.2.

⁸ In Brazil, there is Caio Túlio Costa's (2004) work, noteworthy as it was part of the popular "First Steps" [Primeiros Passos] pocketbook collection. Apart from a small panel on an eighth grade history textbook, this was my first contact with anarchist literature.

⁹ It would be reasonable to argue that, by using anyone as a source of information on anarchism, one includes said person in some sort of anarchist canon one inevitably builds. If this is the case, at the very least I am committed, for reasons that should become clear by the end of this chapter, to arrange a much larger and diverse canon than most conventional "canon-builders". See section 3.1.

¹⁰ This term and "anarchocapitalism" have been used by right-wing apologists of unfettered market relations, even though the first *originated* with anarchism (in the sense of "libertarian socialism") and the second is

19th century from today's — the latter variably described as small “a” anarchists (GRAEBER, 2009; RAMNATH, 2012), postanarchists (NEWMAN, S., 2010), neoanarchists (IBÁÑEZ, 2014), among others (GORDON, U., 2006; BOWEN; PURKIS, 2018b; LITTLE, 2023, p. 20–33). Inasmuch as they help make sense of the tradition's wide geographic scale, as well as throw light on temporal connections¹¹ as Bevir's (2000, p. 40) concept demands, their scholarship is helpful and well supported. However, based on a ‘core set of beliefs’, they deliberately seclude a number of authors and ideas from the tradition by maintaining that “‘class struggle’ anarchism’, ‘syndicalism’, ‘revolutionary or communist anarchism’ (for them, synonyms), are ‘the *only* anarchism’ (WALT; SCHMIDT, 2009a, p. 19, emphasis in the original).

While it is the case that ‘the more narrowly historians define a tradition, the greater will be its explanatory power’ (BEVIR, 2000, p. 49), Ruth Kinna (2010, p. 329–331) writes that Walt and Schmidt's aims ‘could have been met equally well without arguing that syndicalism exhausts anarchism's ground’. Their approach to theory is ‘selective’, underwhelming in its handling of ‘questions about the institutionalization of rules, the internalization of norms, and self-censorship’, and it marginalises a ‘rich history of cultural experimentation, disobedience, and protest’ in anarchism. It presents an awkward “broad” tradition that extends membership to ‘figures who considered themselves Marxists [...] whilst excluding established notables’. In the end, as Kinna (2012b, p. 21) summarises elsewhere, to ‘elevate class struggle as a distinctive and singular aspect of anarchism [...] wrongly gloss[es] over the fluidity of cultural movements and anarchist activism and the interpenetration of a common set of ideas’.

As a set of shared practices and understandings, a tradition exists in relation to a group of people — or, actually, in reference to certain contexts in which they can be argued to express it. When changes are introduced, what happens cannot be determined in advance. Innovators might be chastised, ignored, hailed, to different effects. Since traditions do not have an independent existence, they are, at any given moment, what they have become by means of what people have made of them¹². As Bevir (2000, p. 44–45) points out, ‘conflicts over how to

simply a contradiction in terms (GRAHAM, 2005, p. 60). Anarchists have always opposed capitalism, and as Deric Shannon (2012, p. 280) puts it, ‘it is an insult to the memory of the thousands of anarchists who have died or been imprisoned fighting [...] to suggest otherwise’. Hence I shall apply the libertarian label exclusively to anarchists, referring to this other ideology as *ultraliberal*, agreeing with Matthew Hoye's (2021, p. 274) assessment that it is ‘an extreme form of liberalism’. See also Reclus (2013[1894], p. 123), Shannon (2012, p. 280), Oca (2019, p. 9–10), Finn (2021, p. 14, 166–169), and Little (2023, p. 244–250).

¹¹ As many others do; see e.g. Honeywell (2012, p. 114), Kinna (2012b, p. 15–16, 2016, p. 3), Evren and Kinna (2015, Sec. 2.9), Cornell (2016, *passim*), Brian Morris (2018, p. 222–223), and Kate Sharpley Library Collective (2021, p. 8).

¹² Compare Walt and Schmidt's approach to Ian Martin's (2010), who writes that ‘anarchists have become activists by default over the years’. In his terms, “activists” are negatively contrasted to “organisers”, but the

interpret traditions are a more or less permanent feature of social life’, but this does not imply there is ‘an authentic tradition over which to struggle’. Using Marxism as an example, he is direct: ‘there is no single, authentic Marxist tradition, just numerous Marxist traditions, each of which helps to explain a different person’s beliefs’.

Studying Marxism, therefore, could only mean analysing the history of connected, collective “trials” perennially taking place within the community of those who have expressed it before, litigations that can in turn change its constitution (in both senses)¹³. The anarchist tradition is, then, like all others, a contested field rather than a simple identity (COHN, 2006, p. 153; DUARTE, R. D. M., 2021, p. 2–3); an assortment of arguments about what it is and ought to be, picked up by each new generation, engendering yet other nexuses of cooperation and contention. In political theory, then, in contrast to historical research (Bevir’s main concern), there *is* a way to talk about a tradition in the singular – but only as *this constant process of (re)constitution itself*¹⁴.

But this is *the community’s* process. I may concoct a most fantastical account of liberalism; it will not “catch on” unless liberals themselves agree with it¹⁵ (making *me* a part of the tradition from that point on). The possibility of distinction, then, is obviously not foreclosed. ‘Whenever people locate themselves in a tradition’, writes Bevir (2000, p. 45–47), ‘they make a historical argument with which others might disagree’. Traditions are not subjective. To speak of one, it ‘must have existed’; individuals must be shown to have held ‘the beliefs and habits of which it is composed’ and have described it in similar terms. And to speak of one within the field of political theory, it must be defined in reference to people recognising that each other’s judgments have a bearing on (re)setting its limits, which imply an *outside*.

Hence I follow the scholarly consensus in excluding ideologies such as “anarchocapitalism”¹⁶, “national anarchism”, and “philosophical anarchism” from the anarchist tradition

relevant point is that he does not say they ceased to be anarchists because of that; although in his opinion ‘this needs to change’, this is what anarchism has become. See also Ibáñez (2014, p. 28).

¹³ Or, conversely, those who begin to be considered fit to judge and change a tradition’s constitution become a part of it. On a similar methodology applied to liberalism, see Bell (2014).

¹⁴ Tangentially, see Alfred (2005, p. 139–140).

¹⁵ Or, by force, I eliminate all current liberals and historical records of what they thought. Or, by means of coin and clout, I clog the airwaves with fiction, drowning their voices, kidnapping their identity. If this is completely successful (although that would be hard to ascertain), only an external perspective would be able to see the change for what it was. Plus, even if later generations acquired such perspective, there would be no (theoretical) reason to regard the changed meaning of the tradition (for as long as it held sway) as “distorted”, at least if the concern is to understand somebody’s mindset in the period it was supposedly distorted. Tangentially, see Parkin (2011, p. 573–574). I assume clashes between and within traditions occur as discourse only because not doing so would far exceed the scope of this work. But this is not at all an irrelevant concern for anarchists; see e.g. Parra (2003). See note 10 above.

¹⁶ See note 10 above.

(GOLDMAN, 2018[1931], p. 266; NURSEY-BRAY, 1996, p. 108; WALT; SCHMIDT, 2009a, p. 15, 19; WILSON, M., 2011, p. 17; CORNELL, 2016, p. 7–11; GRAHAM, 2018, p. 34–36, 44; SHANNON, 2018, p. 144; KINNA, 2019b, p. 8; FINN, 2021, p. 168–169). Those have rarely engaged with the ‘lived traditions’ of anarchism (JUN, 2016 apud KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019, p. 228), linked to the anarchist *movement*, being invariably in dire contradiction with its trajectory.

Individualist and communist anarchists, for a counterexample, have always collaborated in projects of all shapes and sizes, this interaction being sprinkled with lively debate throughout the history of anarchist publications (KROPOTKIN, 2000[1910]; KINNA, 2016, p. 57, 143–147; FERGUSON, K. E., 2018, p. 14–15; SILVA, R. R. d., 2018, p. 34–38; DUARTE, R. D. M., 2021, p. 116–118; FINN, 2021, p. 63–64; LITTLE, 2023, p. 149–150, 157–158). There certainly was scathing criticism (WILSON, C., 1886, p. 3; KINNA, 2016, p. 58), but the positions are much more intertwined than it seems at first, and they can be seen as divided more by a matter of emphasis than of kind (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][f]; GOODWAY, 2011[2003], p. 4; KINNA, 2011, p. 43, 2012a, p. 45, 2016, p. 2–3; CLARK, J. P., 2013b, chap. 7; FEITEN, 2013, p. 123–124; KINNA, 2019b, p. 123, 127; LITTLE, 2021). As Max Baginski (1907, emphasis in the original apud KINNA, 2016, p. 57) wrote, ‘I am Communist *because* I am an Individualist’. The more one reads individual opinions, the more one finds those which blend elements of these positions¹⁷; “anarchism without adjectives” and similar labels were not uncommon in the movement (MÁRMOL, 2013[1890]; MELLA, 2018[1903]; BONOMO, 2007, p. 408; BENEVIDES, 2018, p. 230–232; LITTLE, 2023, p. 207).

The historical record clearly shows the mutual recognition that characterises members of a tradition (as the aforementioned process of sharing ideas while disagreeing on what they mean *exactly*). ‘Arguments about what anarchism is[, ...] or might be, can be treated as ordinary, constructive, political disagreements, linked to particular sets of values or ideas, rather than theoretically bounded orthodoxies’ (KINNA, 2012b, p. 22). Walt and Schmidt carve out a section of anarchism from which to extract a definitional benchmark, and while their selection is not particularly outlandish, it halts the process by which the tradition could transform itself. A tradition is a ‘living’ one when it is *capable* of change, even if it does not do that, a point Walt (2013, p. 198) misses as he seems to think it means having contemporary adherents¹⁸.

¹⁷ Almost as if there were numerous anarchist traditions, each of which helping to explain a different person’s beliefs... See also Uri Gordon (2006, p. 48–49) and Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, p. 159).

¹⁸ Ironically enough, as this actually relates to what I shall say about anarchist liberty. See chapter 6, as well as Heckert (2018, p. 114).

It is true that Walt and Schmidt’s anarchism is not monolithic. However, I am not arguing for the same method, only more inclusive. Boolean categorisation should be replaced with a multifaceted analysis for assessing one’s place, or role, in the tradition. Surely for any one individual that place might be “as far removed as possible”, as argued above¹⁹. Some are closer, yet still hard to reach; others that might have seemed alien at one point now work like stars, helping the entire field discern its own location and inspiring spacecraft. ‘Analysing the relationship between Marxism and anarchism’, writes Kinna (2012d, p. 320), or ‘discussing the ways in which anti-statism has been and might be understood’, is ‘more productive than dismissing any idea or individual’ within “other” camps, such as the Marxist one.

Acknowledging affinities [...] does not rule out boundary-marking but it changes the status attributed to the boundaries and process of their negotiation[...]. Being less concerned to fix the boundaries and more concerned with investigating the processes of their formation, research on this model captures the fluidity of anarchist doctrines without dissolving its parameters. (KINNA, 2012d, p. 320–321)

The communist, social tendency is the undeniably predominant one among libertarians (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][k]; FABBRI, Luigi, 2004[1927]; COHN, 2006, p. 15; KINNA, 2012a, p. 44; JUN, 2018, p. 52; LITTLE, 2023, p. 12); it includes more networked, internally well-regarded figures. But understanding why some gravitate towards anarchism as individualists (even if they have limited influence on the movement as a whole) tells us something.

As Süreyya Evren (2012, p. 304, 308) writes, ‘the problem with dominant histories is not only that they exclude figures or movements from view’, but that they ‘rely on a historical framework that ill-fits anarchism’. The anarchist movement ‘was created and organized intentionally [...] as a fully internationalist, non-linear, global, horizontal, de-centred, geographically and culturally non-hierarchic movement’. A more nuanced picture of its tradition — with aloof adversaries and traitors, yes, but still an improvised symphony instead of a guarded hall of marble statues — is not only productive for this thesis; it is simply more accurate (CUBERO, 2015[1991][b], p. 44).

¹⁹ On the other hand, see John-Erik Hansson (2021, 13:07–13:26).

1.2 THE ANARCHIST TRADITION

*We're tired of suffering forever
Let's find out what to do together
If governments and bosses oppress us
Accumulating power and wealth
Direct action is the weapon we have
To get justice and live in good health^b*

Folk song "Anthem for Direct Action"²⁰

*[Anarchism can be summarised] in the figure of the volcano:
[...] anarchist discourse always meant to be the highest crater,
expelling the deepest hunger and fury; a volcanic eruption
that would reach the clouds and melt away the snow,
recasting things and people in a new balance.^c*

Francisco Foot Hardman²¹

By focusing on anarchism as a tradition, I am dispensing with debates over what kind of object it is. An ideology, a critique, a mode of action; it is or could be all of those and many more (APTER, 1971; GORDON, U., 2006, p. 43; HECKERT, 2010, p. 186; KINNA, 2016, p. 201–202; GRUPO DE ESTUDIOS JOSÉ DOMINGO GÓMEZ ROJAS, 2017; GRAHAM, 2018, p. 36). I shall adopt a view only to fit my purposes, not because it is the sole correct one. I wish to show how a set of ideas learned, debated, lived, transformed, and transmitted, across space and time, relates to a distinct notion of freedom, then conceptualise that notion. It is impossible (and undesirable) to completely separate the tradition from the movement, the ethics, or the culture; still, it is on anarchism as a tradition of thought that I choose to concentrate²².

I understand the anarchist tradition in reference to a movement²³ that, since the middle of the 19th century, opposes 'all forms of domination and hierarchy', and is especially concerned 'with the coherence of means and ends'²⁴ (COHN, 2006, p. 14). These ideas reached the present day in recognisable form, having had formatively²⁵ influenced people over generations (BOWEN; PURKIS, 2018a, p. 213).

²⁰ Authorship is unknown; lyrics taken from a rendition by Thomaz Reis (2012).

²¹ Hardman, 1983, p. 131–132.

²² A very similar approach was employed by Shane Little (2023, chap. 3); despite both of us having worked with Ruth Kinna, each of us developed this framework independently of each other.

²³ Doing so means prioritising 'the application [and] discussion of ideas' rather than a definition taken from 'selected texts' (KINNA, 2012b, p. 18); see also Kinna (2016, p. 34) and Finn (2021, p. 7).

²⁴ See also Kropotkin (2014[1883][b], p. 199).

²⁵ Bevir *could* be referring only to socialisation into adulthood, but I am using the term in a broader sense — agreeing with e.g. Silva and Laureano (2021, p. 13). Within anarchism, parents and early education played a role, but many (perhaps most) anarchist adults were "formed" by their socialisation into political movements, labour organisations, and other radical scenes. See, for example, Assis (2021).

While a tradition is not made of similar ‘instances’ but ones that are alike ‘because they exercised a formative influence on one another in a definite temporal chain’ (BEVIR, 2000, p. 41), many libertarians associated anarchism with Lao-Tzu, Aristippus, the Cynics, among others (RECLUS, 2013[1894], p. 120; KROPOTKIN, 2000[1910], p. 4–5; ROCKER, 2009[1949], p. 8; BOOKCHIN, 2011[1992], p. 4; MBAH; IGARIWEY, 1997, p. 12–13; RODRIGUES, 1999b, p. 14–17; PERES, I., 2006; GRAHAM, 2015; LUENGO, 2016, p. 63). Anarchist ideas would have existed in all historic times, everywhere (DE CLEYRE, 2017[1901], p. 2; KROPOTKIN, 2019[1903], p. 31–32; NEWMAN, S., 2010, p. 17).

Walt and Schmidt (2009a, p. 39) called these stories legitimising myths, created to ‘undermine charges that anarchism was alien, bizarre, or contrary to human nature’²⁶. One would do well, however, not to dismiss these “legitimising” stories outright. The first self-identified anarchists did not see themselves as inventors of original doctrines (GRAEBER, 2004, p. 3) precisely because “seeds” or analogous manifestations of what they were up against had already been identified as vicious, and resisted, by other people, in other contexts, with familiar tools. If ‘before 1840, no libertarian theory was called “anarchism” nor was there any popular movement termed “anarchist” by its members’, as Iain McKay (2014, p. 5) explains, ‘this does not mean that anarchistic theories and movements did not exist’: only that they ‘became retrospectively called anarchist once the anarchist movement discovered them’²⁷.

Anarchists generally want to avoid repeating the canon-builders’ mistake: attributing ‘the power of anarchist invention to [...] individuals of particular genius’, often ‘white men’, as if they ‘articulated a great idea, parcelled it up and exported it across the world’. Once this view is rejected, it should be easier to see that there is ‘no before and after “science”’ in anarchism, no ‘single moment of enlightenment’ after which it “truly” began (KINNA, 2019b, p. 10–12).

Anarchism thus developed, not from the abstract reflections of some scientist or philosopher, but out of the direct struggle waged by the working people against capital, out of their needs and requirements[...]. Anarchism’s outstanding thinkers [...] did not invent the idea of anarchism, but, having discovered it among the masses, merely helped develop and propagate it through the power of their thought and knowledge.²⁸ (DIELO TRUDA, 2010[1926])

²⁶ It is common for proponents of new things to feel the need to demonstrate they are well founded on tradition in order to gather support (BOURDIEU, 2001 apud PEDROSA, 2021, p. 12). See also Parra (2003, p. 90), Samuel Clark (2007, p. 7) and Federici (2015, p. 350–351 apud LAZAR, 2018, p. 168).

²⁷ Kinna (2012d, p. 321), for example, works with a distinction between ‘anarchism, pre-European state anarchist traditions[,] and non-anarchist anarchic polities’.

²⁸ See also Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 1), Rodrigues (1999c, p. 189), and Galián (2020, p. 10).

For Graeber (2009, p. 215–216), following Kropotkin’s (2000[1910]) lead, ‘all that really changed in the nineteenth century is that some people began to give this process a name’. But this is not negligible (RECLUS, 2013[1894], p. 120–121). What established anarchism ‘as a distinct political thought [...] is not separable from [...] very specific political, economic, cultural and social conditions, and [from] very definite social struggles’ (IBÁÑEZ, 2014, p. 9)²⁹. Anarchists criticised ‘traditional and psychological systems of obedience and command’ (BOOKCHIN, 1982, p. 4), including the non-capitalist kind (CORRÊA, 2012b, p. 106); they envisioned fair communities; they strove to go from the first to the latter (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 215–216). But in many ways so did others. Being no crusade against “conservatism” alone, neither a trek to Shangri-La, anarchism materialised from a critical engagement with “sibling” progressive ideologies (mainly liberalism, republicanism, and Marxism), geographically exceeding the Western European stage (KINNA, 2019b, p. 12–13).

The first such critical engagement produced socialism more generally: secularism and anti-monarchism were all well and good, but wage labour amounted to a new form of slavery³⁰. Liberalism failed to fulfil the promises of early modern revolutions and was thus deemed insufficient (BERKMAN, 1929, p. 118; KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019, p. 225–231).

This drew socialists and radical republicans closer, but events like the Paris Commune (1871) and the Haymarket affair (1886) marked the twilight of this collaboration and a sharpening of the anarchist opposition to the state (RECLUS, 2002[1898], p. 81–83; GOLDMAN, 2018[1931], p. 40–41; KINNA, 2019b, p. 22–26; KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019, p. 224–225; RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, p. 114). Common “republican terminology” could be used, for instance, to expose and criticise patriarchal relations³¹, but the suffragist goal was not embraced (GOLDMAN, 2009[1910], chap. 9; BONOMO, 2007, p. 144; MENDES, S. C., 2010, p. 34; LITTLE, 2023, p. 223). Élisée Reclus, Louise Michel, Fábio Luz; Liu Shaobin becoming Shifu after a march that ended the Manchu dynasty’s centuries of rule – conversion from republicanism to anarchism within the radical community was a global phenomenon from the 19th century well into the 20th (LUZ, 1993[1933], p. 208; FLOOD, 2010; LAURENTIIS, 2021, p. 8; SKODA; TROYANO, 2020, 7:48–21:03).

²⁹ See also Kropotkin (1886 apud KINNA, 2022), Kinna (2016, p. 1, 201–202) and Finn (2021, p. 7–8).

³⁰ See section 4.3.1.

³¹ The married woman is ‘a bonded slave’, wrote de Cleyre (2004[1890], p. 223). ‘The proletarian is a slave’, wrote Michel (1981, p. 141), but ‘the wife of a proletarian is even more a slave’. To Lucy Parsons (2004[1905]), women were ‘the slaves of slaves’; to Maria Lacerda de Moura (1928, p. 3 apud MIRANDA, 2006, p. 32), they were, within capitalism, ‘twice a slave’ [duas vezes escrava]; to William Morris and the Mujeres Libres (2022[1938], p. 3) group, they were ‘triply enslaved’ (KINNA, 2012a, p. 39).

Finally, the fallout of the International Working Men’s Association (IWMA, or the First International) in 1872 created a rift that would, over the course of decades, separate libertarian socialism from its Marxist varieties (LEUENROTH, 2007c, p. 82–83; KINNA, 2019b, p. 13–21). Despite Proudhon having already called himself an anarchist once, Kropotkin (2000[1910], p. 8) notes that the federations which broke with the IWMA’s General Council were ‘federalists’ and ‘anti-authoritarians’ before claiming the label of anarchists that adversaries pinned on them³².

José Moya (2015, p. 331) writes that the dissemination and resilience of the anarchist movement relied not only on steamers and railroads but on ‘cheap paper and the linotype’, which enabled ‘folks of modest means to publish[...] thousands of books and millions of pamphlets and newspaper pages’, while ‘photoengraving allowed the massive reproduction of revolutionary iconography’, all in a context of mass literacy³³. A ‘global infrastructure for distribution’ and for fast production of translations ‘ensured that [anarchists] were able to reach significant international audiences’ (KINNA, 2019b, p. 51).

However, as Evren (2012, p. 308–309) observes, anarchism ‘was not an export of a missionary project designed to bring enlightenment somewhere else’, nor ‘the practice of an original idea in an alien environment’; as Walt and Hirsch (2010, p. li–liv) put it, it was not ‘a West European doctrine that diffused outwards, perfectly formed, to a passive “periphery”’³⁴. In the United States, it was composed ‘of first and second generation immigrants’, but most ‘did not become anarchists until after they arrived’³⁵ (ZIMMER, 2011, 2:48–4:40); ‘European cigarette workers living in Egypt’, for another example, were radicalised by Egyptian syndicalists ‘and returned to Europe to spread anarchist ideas there’ (WALT; SCHMIDT, 2009b, p. 2). Anarchistic ideas were ‘constantly reshaped in various locations according to local problems, local priorities and local conditions, always in touch with the international, global linkages’. These multiple ‘connections, relations, exchanges and intersections’ entangled stories, experiences, and projects of resistance, possibly like never before³⁶.

³² See also Kropotkin (2009, p. 1–2) and Oca (2019, p. 38).

³³ For Mbah and Igariewey (1997, p. iii), the scarcity of anarchist literature ‘explains why anarchist ideas are not spreading as fast as they should in Africa’. See also Grigolin (2021, p. 170), Bantman (2022), and Estrelita *et al.* (2022).

³⁴ See also Avelino (2007, p. 13).

³⁵ See also Bonomo (2007, p. 41).

³⁶ See also Rodrigues (1999b,c), Knoll (2018[2007], p. 4–5), Benedict Anderson (2010, p. xv), Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, p. 229–237), England (2015, p. 244), Hwang (2016, p. 6–7, 11), Kinna (2019b, p. 53), Ole Birk Laursen (2020, 0:56–1:53), Romani and Ladeira (2021, 33:54–35:34), Samis and Ladeira (2021, 35:29–42:33), and Kauan Willian dos Santos (2021). On a side note, consider Jessica Thorne’s (2021[1979], p. 248) point that what she would describe in her research as ‘transnational networks of anarchists’, the anarchist militant Stuart Christie, certainly echoing many others in the tradition, ‘would simply call “friendships”’.

Transnational networks of activism were thus pivotal in constituting the anarchist movement, which Walt and Hirsch (2010, p. li–liv) claim emerged simultaneously ‘in Europe, Latin America and North Africa from the late 1860s and 1870s’³⁷. Although migration evidently contributed to this process, it was not simply that people were moving, but that they were moving ‘as wage labor under this new emerging capitalist system’, in which increasingly powerful nation-states demanded ‘exclusive loyalty’ as part of the new rules of the pleonexic games played by elites³⁸ (ZIMMER, 2011, 2:48–4:40). For Danny Evans (2021), then, anarchism was most distinctly a refusal of the (state-)national integration of the working classes³⁹.

All of this relates to an often overlooked element in “*canon-building*” accounts of anarchism: how anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, and anti-racism were some of its ingredients from its inception, even if there was certainly room for growth in these regards⁴⁰ (WILLEMS, 2016, p. 66; ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 81–83; DUARTE, R. D. M., 2021, p. 178–197). After all, rejecting the integration of the working classes meant bypassing not only ‘working-class representation in parliaments and [...] tolerated trade unions’, but also ‘racism and the spread of “whiteness”’ (EVANS, 2021). From Cuba and Peru to Egypt, South Africa, and Korea, libertarian labour entities sought to organise across racial lines and national borders (WALT; HIRSCH, 2010, p. lv–lx). Even more, the domination anarchism was being forged to oppose was built on the back of colonialism, and so ‘at the heart of the anarchist project’ was the raising of a ‘global consciousness’ that could rival the globalisation of empire and commerce (SIEGRIST, 2021, 1:00:49), a position not unlike the one found in the alter-globalisation protests that welcomed the new Western millennium (KINNA, 2016, p. 108; EVREN, 2012, p. 309).

‘Anarchists were able to [project] an alternative modernity that could be brought about by a combination of direct action and education’⁴¹ (EVANS, 2021), and continue to do so today, with specific organisations ‘in all Americas, in practically all of Europe, in most Asian countries, in a big part of Oceania and in a significant portion of Africa’^d (CORRÊA; SILVA, 2015, p. 51). Anarchism is a modern, global project in response to modern, global grievances: ‘the edge of modernity rather than premodern’, what the term ‘advanced ideas’ had by 1900 basically become synonymous with⁴² (MOYA, 2015, p. 331).

³⁷ See also Benedict Anderson (2005, p. 1–3), de Laforcade and Shaffer (2015, p. 1), Oca (2019, p. 22–23, 36–38, 40–41), Galián (2020), and Finn (2021, p. 4, 30) – and, for criticism, Finn (2021, p. 148–150).

³⁸ See also Ardaya and Cusicanqui (1988, p. 22).

³⁹ See also Béja (2022).

⁴⁰ See section 2.5.

⁴¹ See also Konishi (2013) and Finn (2021, p. 136–137).

⁴² See also Avrich (1974, p. 3 apud SANTOS, C. A. dos, 2020, p. 19) and *Tierra y Libertad* (2007).

In short: intercontinentally networked people acted prefiguratively to develop themselves and others out of what they saw as patterns of domination. Disappointed by alternatives, they increasingly used the term *anarchism* to describe their praxis.

These people were my sources — or, more precisely, the documents they produced, often for multiple purposes, from internal debate and theoretical registry to propaganda in many different contexts⁴³. Among these people are classic and contemporary figures, such as Louise Michel, Paul Goodman, and Peter Gelderloos; Emma Goldman, Errico Malatesta, and Eric Laursen; Mikhail Bakunin, Piotr Kropotkin, and Lev Tolstoy; Lucy Parsons, Frank Mintz, and Iain McKay; Élisée Reclus, Murray Bookchin, and Wayne Price; Voltairine de Cleyre, Gustav Landauer, and Nora Ziegler; Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Colin Ward, and D. Hunter.

Registration and archiving, however, especially the further back one goes into the past, skews heavily white and male (ADAMS, J., 2014, p. 5; MENDES, S. C., 2021a, p. 99–100). Moreover, the link between the tradition and the movement demands reflection on how authorship conceals the diverse forces shaping not only the making and printing of ideas, but their resilience and continued influence via reprinting, smuggling, editing, translation, commentary, hiding from persecution, among other activities (ADAMS, M. S., 2013, p. 58; TYNESIDE ANARCHIST ARCHIVE, 2021, p. 9–10; BANTMAN, 2022). I have therefore actively sought out texts by more typically sidelined voices, so that this thesis's representation of the tradition may respect both its definitional connection to the movement and the breadth of its concerns. Among these figures are Mandayam Acharya and Sam Mbah; He Zhen and Peggy Kornegger; Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin and Zoé Samudzi; Aragorn! and Tawinikay; Isabel Cerruti and Jaime Cubero; Ricardo Flores Magón and Manuel González Prada. I must also recognise the work of collectives, publishing, militant, or otherwise; among the referenced ones are *A Plebe*, the Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria, Crimethinc, Dielo Truda, the Indigenous Anarchist Federation (IAF), *Mujeres Libres*, the Brazilian Anarchist Coordination (CAB), *Oveja Negra*, the Kate Sharpley Library Collective, the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (fAu), and the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation of Southern Africa. I should also note that, while some academics are cited here for their relevant scholarship, some are also anarchist militants, and their works might be cited for different reasons in that sense. In fact, since academic research can also impact the anarchist movement, it is to a certain extent pointless to try to disentangle these two positions. This category includes but is not limited to Ruth Kinna, Kathy Ferguson, Fernanda

⁴³ I was limited to texts available in English, Portuguese, and Spanish. Availability itself was also an issue; often there were texts I would very much like to read but could simply not get hold of.

Grigolin, Nathan Jun, Alfredo Errandonea, Guilherme Falleiros, Felipe Corrêa, John P. Clark, Alex Prichard, Jesse Cohn, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Wallace de Moraes, Robert Graham, Zoe Baker, Anthony Fiscella, Uri Gordon, Lucien van der Walt, and David Graeber.

1.3 CHANGE AND FOCUS

Anarchism is the “inheritance” of the dispossessed, the legacy of slaves and fugitives, toilers and recalcitrant domestics, secret orders and fraternal organizations. It is the history that arrives with us — as those who exist outside the nation, as the stateless, as the dead, as property, as objects and tools, as sentient flesh.

Saidiya Hartman ⁴⁴

Anarchism is not an exclusively theoretical teaching, from artificial programmes designed to define the way ahead; it is a teaching based on life, through all of its manifestations[...].^e

Nestor Ivanovych Makhno ⁴⁵

To read Walt and Schmidt’s contribution as an exercise in gatekeeping is not only uncharitable, but incredibly presumptuous regarding the respect that anarchism commands in scholarly institutions. I venture that their quest for consistency is better understood as a reaction to a long history of academic⁴⁶ treatments of anarchism, which

applied a set of criteria for the judgement of political traditions that put a high value on conceptual consistency, analytical coherence and unity over time. This is an evaluative schema that most ideological traditions, which also consist of varying strands and changing emphases over time and in relation to differing contexts, would struggle to satisfy.⁴⁷ (HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 118)

It would be *too* convenient, however, to sweep conflict under the rug; to prune anarchism ‘until it fits the demand’⁴⁸ (FEITEN, 2013, p. 120–121). By selecting some individuals as truly representative of the tradition, I would navigate more easily through their discussions of freedom; alas, I must contend with an anarchism that is ‘complex and diverse at any given time, [...] especially so when examined across a span of decades’ (CORNELL, 2016, p. 6).

⁴⁴ Hartman, 2021, p. XII.

⁴⁵ Grupo de Estudios José Domingo Gómez Rojas, 2017, p. 52.

⁴⁶ Or general; see Kinna (2012d, p. 320) and Corrêa and Silva (2015, p. 148).

⁴⁷ On liberal biases in analytic philosophy, see also Franks (2012, p. 56–57).

⁴⁸ Elmo Feiten (2013, p. 121) calls this “platformist methodology”. Fabbri’s (2004[1927]) commentary on the draft to the *Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists* (commonly referred to simply as “the platform”) can be clearly seen as echoed in this discussion: ‘We [organised anarchists...] must distance ourselves from [...] imagining that we [...] represent the whole of Anarchism’.

But this is actually not so difficult. By paying attention to the continued, contextualised reconstitution of the anarchist tradition — its adaptations, transformations, conflicts — it is possible to discern the main attractors mobilising people around its ideas⁴⁹.

Benjamin Franks (2012, p. 62) observes that anarchist principles ‘are often expressed in different ways, depending on context’⁵⁰. For example, when dealing with a ‘mass consumerist model of capitalism and social administration’ during the Cold War, some in the United States and the United Kingdom shifted focus to ‘self-creation, diversity and community engagement’; to say that they have not influenced the anarchist tradition, at least on a local level, would be to deny reality (HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 114, 121). Their ideas are not above criticism from other anarchists, but disagreement could hardly be so fundamental as to justify seeing them as outsiders altogether.

It happens at least as often that different interpretations of the same principles clash in the same context, offering opportunities ‘to deepen our understanding of anarchism’ (TURCATO, 2017, p. 29). Conflicts whose competing sides continue to hold their own across time, making convincing claims to adequately actualise the tradition’s tenets in the eyes of each generation, provide a vantage point from which to analyse what is really at stake for its adherents. Beyond the “individualist-social” division seen in section 1.1 above, there are other internal divergences to be productively explored in the following chapters. There are historical debates around forms of organisation, the utility of gradual reform, the role of violence, and economic programmes (VENTURA, 2000, p. 187-227; ERVIN, 2009[1993], p. 48; DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 23; CORRÊA; SILVA, 2015, p. 45). Although some, like Wayne Price (2009b), consider the existence of two somewhat opposing “trends” among contemporary anarchists, others, like Kinna (2019b, p. 135–149), describe various partially overlapping approaches as more unique camps⁵¹. When the first “Brazilian Libertarian Journey” took place⁵², likely the first large anarchist political gathering after the military dictatorship (1964–1985) ended in the country, its coordinator, Helios Puig, talked about how different kinds of anarchists were able to find common ground: they ‘came together through the issue of liberty’^f (FEDERAÇÃO OPERÁRIA DE SANTA CATARINA, 2014).

However, some conflicts have been left behind. Discussions of sexuality, for instance, were often ignored, underplayed, sometimes actively thwarted (GOLDMAN, 2018[1931], p. 153, 155,

⁴⁹ Comparing a program’s outputs to different inputs is essential to actual “reverse engineering”, a methodological metaphor I discuss in section 3.2.

⁵⁰ See also Kropotkin (2000[1910], p. 7), Bonomo (2007, p. 183), Moya (2015, p. 332), and Evans (2021), as well as (more tangentially) Graeber (2009, p. 261, 2018, p. 237).

⁵¹ See also Damiani (2007).

⁵² In the very city I was born and where this work is being published!

171, 183; GEMIE, 1996; KISSACK, 2008; CORDERO, 2015, p. 318–319; DUARTE, R. D. M., 2021, p. 241–250; LITTLE, 2023, p. 140). ‘Censorship came from some of my own comrades’, wrote Goldman (2018[1931], p. 371), ‘because I was treating such “unnatural” themes as homosexuality’. However, Marxists were still parroting Friedrich Engels’ judgment of sexual diversity as “petty bourgeois social sickness” (WORKERS VIEWPOINT ORGANIZATION, 1976; KIRSCHENBAUM, 2017) in a time when this would already prompt resistance among anarchists⁵³; today, this is the stuff that implodes organisations (albeit luckily, to be fair, many Marxist ones as well). The important point is that anarchists read and celebrate Goldman now considerably more than they do her censors. Had she been successfully shut down or sidelined, anarchism would have become something quite different. That she was not, even if some of her views (on this very subject) were later challenged as well, is instructive about the character of the tradition as it has developed.

Seeing the tradition this fluidly also allows for better consideration of the ways others — indigenous communities, feminists, environmentalists, black militants, disability activists, to name a few — helped and help shape the tradition⁵⁴ (ERVIN, 2009[1993], p. 52). These examples are “others”, of course, only in the limited sense that they constitute distinct traditions of their own. Indigenous or queer people can obviously also be anarchist (LEIBNER, 2013[1994], p. 15–16; ACKELSBURG, 2012); the point is that not being so does not automatically deny them a part in the tradition’s “symphony”. Anarchism, as seen above, has always learned from — *has come from* — struggles for justice from below (FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, p. 72). With every “new” one, there is a chance for the tradition to grow in understanding (KINNA, 2019b, p. 175); to ‘move’, as Ibáñez (2014, p. 16) puts it.

Anarchism, with its flawed legacy, is dynamic enough to actually become a stronger position through the scrutiny; this is primarily due to the matter that as a tension of tensions against domination, anarchism has the unique character of resisting urges towards intransigence. It has been developed and redeveloped as a dynamic position that strengthens with its contortions. Anarchists have constantly looked inward and convulsed with (and even celebrated) their contradictions. (BENALLY, 2021b, p. 65)

While these movements and adaptations may not count as transformations in the sense of necessarily *negating* what came before, they provide interesting points of comparison: what changed? How was an innovation justified as a legitimate deployment of anarchist principles, and what does this say about what these are?

⁵³ See also Alston (2007[2003], p. 5–6).

⁵⁴ See also Finn (2021, p. 160–161) and Rusche (2022, p. 24).

Focusing on all this complexity means other traditions' features and histories cannot be given the same attention. As indicated in the previous section, however, liberalism, republicanism, and Marxism are of particular importance, as anarchism was constituted in opposition to them and continues, with each new historical development, to distinguish itself from their contemporary positions (as much as these uphold the state in contrast to their notion of anarchy) (PRICHARD, 2012, p. 98, 2019, p. 72; KINNA, 2019c, p. 133–134). Discussing any of these tradition's concepts of liberty with the same depth as anarchism's, in this thesis, would require more time than I have available. Yet, they are unavoidable points of reference. Therefore, I shall use simplified accounts for fruitful comparison, based on major sources and commentators that hopefully provide enough nuance: not studies on these traditions overall, not uppercase C "Concepts of liberty" in each one (as is the goal for anarchism), but general contours of what concerns them the most about freedom⁵⁵.

Among liberals, liberty consists of the scope of activity available by virtue of lack of human interference. For republicans, freedom lies in relative invulnerability to arbitrary interference. According to Marxists, liberty is self-determination according to historical necessity.

Typically liberal views can be summarised by Berlin's (2002[1958], p. 169–170) negative freedom: 'I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity'; 'the wider the area of non-interference the wider my freedom'. Philip Pettit's (1997, p. vii–viii) 'social' view of liberty is more recognizably republican, conceiving of it as the 'status of being relatively proof against arbitrary interference by others, and of being able to enjoy a sense of security and standing among them' (he calls it a state of "non-domination").

In Karl Marx's thought, one finds "particular freedoms" that existed insofar as specific fields of activity developed according to their own rules (i.e. as long as they were self-determined): 'freedom of trade is precisely freedom of trade and no other freedom because within it the nature of the trade develops unhindered according to the inner rules of its life'. All freedoms, however, were '*species of one and the same genus, of freedom without any specific name*' (MARX, 2000[1842], chap. 6), which can therefore only be understood as self-determination. To understand the liberty of human beings in general, one had to begin by the rules of development of nature. Its material history culminated in work, the self-conscious transformation of nature that transformed humans back, producing a new sphere of developmental rules which a proper

⁵⁵ On simplifying traditions, especially when analysing the connection between their philosophical positions and practical problems posed by (what are perceived to be) new political realities — as is sometimes anarchists' contention regarding these traditions, and liberalism's and Marxism's regarding republicanism, or neo-republicanism's regarding liberalism, etc. — see Parkin (2011).

materialist method could devise: freedom ‘consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature’ based on ‘knowledge of natural necessity’, being thus ‘a product of historical development’ (ENGELS, 1996[1877], chap. XI).

As just discussed, *any* tradition is internally varied. Liberals agree that there must be a state, and that its actions must be limited, but have endless disagreements over what these limits should be. Republicanism is also a broad term; one might speak of an Italian-Atlantic current opposed to a Franco-German one, of neo-Roman republicanism in contrast with a neo-Athenian current, even of a “plebeian” neo-Roman theory that is different from more elitist alternatives⁵⁶ (SILVA; LAUREANO, 2021). Finally, for each interpretation of Marx’s work there is a school of Marxism, usually associated with a Great Thinker (GRAEBER, 2004, p. 4–5; ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 74–75); one possible categorisation would be to divide apologists of actually existing socialist states (e.g. Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism) from dissidents to varied degrees (e.g. Trotskyism, Luxemburgism, Council Communism).

The views above underplay these internal disagreements to an extent. Still, they represent important facets of each tradition, allowing us to see both how they differ from one another *and* how they are related. Liberalism addresses self-determination, albeit usually that of the individual. By accepting the need for a level of interference to protect freedom itself, some (if not most) liberals echo the republican argument. Some republicans too focus on self-determination, if anything because democratic procedures can be used to tell arbitrary interference from the non-arbitrary kind. On the other hand, they would also agree that individual rights are of paramount importance, for it might be precisely this greater scope of activity that one is after as one seeks the status of free person. If the working class determined itself, the result would be a greater scope of possible actions for each individual (MARX, 2000[1845], part I). And if “arbitrary” interference is translated into “contrary to necessity”, Marxism could possibly be read as “workers’ republicanism” (MARX; ENGELS, 1942, p. 486 apud SOWELL, 1963, p. 119).

The following chapter is dedicated to understanding the origins of these views, which make up what I label the “unrestriction paradigm”. In it, I also explore why they “click” relatively easily with one another, despite their differences. In the third, fourth, and fifth chapters, I delve into the anarchist tradition, tearing its notion of liberty apart from unrestriction-based concepts. I turn these insights into a specific concept of freedom in the sixth chapter, and conclude by tackling some of the consequences of this idea.

⁵⁶ See also Pettit (1998, p. 82, 2013, p. 169–170, 199), Omori (2019, p. 925), and Hoye (2021, p. 275–276).

2 THE UNRESTRICTION PARADIGM

*Throughout literature on “freedom” one sees the
golden rule of writing definitions broken again and again:
“Do not use a word in its own definition”.*

Anthony Fiscella ¹

*So if freedom today looks like a cigarette
Or the most powerful car in the marketplace
I’m sorry, but you were taken for a fool without a trace
And you didn’t even notice; you paid and took home your grace:
full happiness like a toothless face ^a*

BNegão & Os Seletores de Frequência ²



BEFORE ANARCHIST FREEDOM CAN BE DEFINED, one must understand what “liberty” has historically meant, considering this word has been around much longer than the anarchist tradition. Anarchists’ treatments of the concept must be placed in the context of a history that is not exactly common knowledge, despite the term’s seniority. Popular explanations (“freedom is being free to do what you want” and the like) seem to deflect inquiries into the core of the concept itself by quietly assuming it as an unproblematic, quasi-natural object. Digging deeper, one finds it is anything but. For starters, “freedom” and “liberty” are both European words, but they have remarkable etymological differences:

“Freedom,” [...] is inherited from the Germanic *freiheit* while [...] liberty developed from the Latin *libertas*[...]. In the Roman context, liberty was “a legacy bequeathed by the founders of Rome to the Roman people[” ... and] was born through its opposite: enslavement. [It] was nothing humans were inherently born with but instead referred to privileges granted by Roman power. [...] The etymology [of freedom] is rooted in the Indo-European *priya / friya / riya* which meant “dear” or “beloved” and has also given us the word “friend”: “Free meant someone who was joined to a tribe of free people by ties of kinship and rights of belonging.” Here equality was integral to the very definition of “freedom.” [...] “free” men organized themselves in a form of decentralized federation. (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 150–151)

Both words were thus tied to specific circumstances; ‘to obligations, responsibilities, inequality, or equality’ (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 151). The words stood for the effects of certain political institutions and cultural norms instead of merely referring to subjectively desirable situations. They were therefore deeply intertwined with said institutions and norms.

¹ Fiscella, 2015, p. 151n323.

² Bernardo Santos, 2004.

Following Arendt's (1961, p. 148–166) reading, for example, liberty for ancient Greeks was action, but not *any* action – only that which was carried out within the borders of a certain institutional context. 'Tribal societies' were not free, since a required but not sufficient condition for it was liberation from 'the necessities of life and concern for its preservation'. 'According to ancient understanding', that could only be achieved 'through power over other men'. Liberty was also meant for males. Only men who were 'already rulers' over 'slaves and family', therefore, could be 'rulers among rulers, moving among their peers, whose help they enlisted as leaders in order to begin something new'.

A lot happened to Europe's culture and politics since the times of *libertas* and *freiheit* to flatten these different meanings into something more homogeneous, as discussed in the following section. According to Fiscella (2015, p. 151), English is the only European language to have retained both terms in common speech. 'North European languages have "freedom" but not "liberty," while the romance languages have "liberty" but not "freedom"'. Ian Carter (2019) writes that 'although some attempts have been made to distinguish between liberty and freedom [...], generally speaking these have not caught on'. Also, especially in the context of anarchism's cross-continental origins and reach³, the current mutual translatability of freedom-like and liberty-like words in other languages is impossible to neglect. Therefore, I shall use them interchangeably in this thesis, unless noted otherwise.

³ See section 1.2.

2.1 THE ROOTS OF FREE WILL

*The abstract and illusory free will [is] preached
by all moralizing and authoritarian discourses.*

Daniel Colson ⁴

A senatorial official of the late [Roman] Republic or early Empire[...] sponsors games, renders prudent judgment on questions of property law, and then goes home to have his most intimate needs attended to by slaves [...] with whom he can and does do whatever he likes, rape, torture, kill, with total impunity. He is a monster. Yet his perspective on the world, his judgments, lie at the basis of all our liberal ideas about freedom, and I suspect a lot more besides.

David Graeber ⁵

Arendt (1961, p. 158) argues that in late European antiquity liberty changed from a purely collective matter into something ‘occurring in the intercourse between me and myself’. This reflected political developments. ‘Inwardness as a place of absolute freedom’ was discovered ‘by those who had no place of their own in the world’ (ARENDR, 1961, p. 147). The doctrines that spread at the time represented a ‘political retreat’: most Greek philosophers ‘had been avid participants in the political life of the city’, but ‘under the Roman Empire, this was impossible’ (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 170).

Best representing this kind of “popular philosophy” in Arendt’s account was the Stoic Epictetus, who wondered how to be ‘a slave in the world and still feel free’ (GA’FAR, 2015, p. 45). He concluded that ‘a man is free if he limits himself to what is in his power, if he does not reach into a realm where he can be hindered’ (ARENDR, 1961, p. 147). By *wanting* only what one *can*, one *does* what one *wants* — in summary, Berlin’s (2002[1958], p. 181) ‘retreat to the inner citadel’. Freedom was to be found in one’s own self, a place where ‘no power is so absolute as that which man yields over himself[...] more securely shielded from outside interference, than any worldly home could ever be’ (ARENDR, 1961, p. 148).

Still, this notion was ‘derivative’; it only appeared when actual, political freedom was ‘denied’ (ARENDR, 1961, p. 146). While the will truly acquired significance as a psychological mechanism, Epictetus did not mean for *it* to be “free”. This was not even necessary, for the will was already ‘omnipotent’ for his purposes: ‘nothing could hinder the Will other than itself and its capability to bracket reality’ (which is why ‘limiting oneself to live in inwardness [...]

⁴ Colson, 2019, p. 95–96.

⁵ Graeber *et al.*, 2020, chap. 14.

demands continuous training’) (GA’FAR, 2015, p. 46–47). The ‘I-will’ adjusts one’s actions as reason recognises a lack of freedom (the domain of the ‘I-can’), and in this it is unimpeded; passion could interfere with *reason*, but will, as command, related to strength, not liberty (ARENDDT, 1961, p. 152–159).

It was the experience of an *imperative demanding voluntary submission* that led to the discovery of the Will, [...] a faculty in man by virtue of which, regardless of necessity and compulsion, he can say “Yes” or “No,” agree or disagree with what is factually given, including his own self and his existences, and [...] this faculty may determine what he is going to do. (ARENDDT, 1978, p. 68 apud GA’FAR, 2015, p. 44, emphasis added)

A fundamental shift took place with the ‘decisive factor’ of Christianity (ARENDDT, 1961, p. 157), which ‘began with the announcement that time and history were about to end’ (FREDRIKSEN, 1991, p. 151). This, as Khadeega Ga’far (2015, p. 40–41) writes, broke with the ‘ancient cyclical concept of time [...] congruous with the circular movement of life and nature’; if the universe was created and will come to a definite end, time unfolds as a line, not a circle. The relationship between “man” and “world” was also inverted. “The world is no longer everlasting and immortal’, and man ‘is no longer a mortal being whose life is transient’: instead, ‘the world comes to an end’ but each individual has ‘an everlasting life’.

When the future ceases to be seen ‘as an actualization or consequence of the past’, an “organ” for the future’ is ‘considered essential’ (YOUNG-BRUEHL, 2006, p. 157 apud GA’FAR, 2015, p. 42). It is not enough any more to understand the patterns of the world and adapt to their flow; one’s entire future (the “quality”, so to speak, of one’s eternal life) depends on the contingent act of choosing Christianity⁶.

Epictetus’s framework was recontextualised by early Christians under the yoke of Roman persecution⁷. One *does* indeed find freedom by willing only what is possible, but Christianity now claims perpetual heavenly peace is within reach. “Training” one’s will is all it takes (one only has oneself to blame for not achieving salvation).

There were, however, two problems with this formula. First, Christian freedom demanded not only belief, but practice. For Augustine, ‘saying no to reality’, meaning Epictetus’s solution, ‘was not enough for tranquility’ (GA’FAR, 2015, p. 47). Kristin Largen (2013, p. 234–235 apud FISCELLA, 2015, p. 152) points out that, for Christians, ‘true freedom results in true “servitude”’; in the ‘acceptance of responsibility, inconvenience, and encumbrance for the sake of the

⁶ See also Minogue (1995, chap. 4) and Trumbower (2001).

⁷ On the influence of Stoicism over Christianity, see Everett Ferguson (1993, p. 346–347). See also Kinna (2016, p. 99–100).

neighbor who needs me’ instead of ‘perks or privileges’. But divine law, Paul noticed, ‘is hard to fulfill’. For several reasons (possibly including political ones), ‘there is an “I cannot” regarding the commands of law even if the agent has the “I will.”’ (GA’FAR, 2015, p. 44–45).

The second issue, also elaborated on by Paul, is more subjective:

The voluntary submission required by the law from its followers implies that there is a possibility of refusal to voluntary submission to the law, i.e. the will might will (submit voluntarily to the law) or might *will* (refuse to submit to the law). [...] while the Socratic two-in-one is in friendship and is indispensable for a solitary dialogue or thinking, the two-in-one of Paul is problematic, because the split between the mental willing and the real ability would incite a conflict between the I-will and the I-can, or the I-will and the I-will. Paul does not see any possible solution to the conflict within the range of human capacity, “so that even if the law is obeyed and fulfilled, there remains this inner resistance.” Only divine grace can resolve the conflict and give peace to the Will. (GA’FAR, 2015, p. 45)

This is a crucial shortcoming of the Christian framework of freedom⁸. The will was ‘discovered as an organ of self-liberation and immediately found wanting’, Arendt (1961, p. 162) remarked; ‘it is as though [...] the moment men willed freedom, they lost their capacity to be free’. If Epictetus’s ‘free slave’ is weak-willed, failure is potentially temporary: inward freedom might still be achieved in time, with training. The failure of the will to take itself as its object – to will itself into willing – is irremediable. For Augustine, ‘the Will always speaks in imperatives’, but to ‘command and to demand obedience’ is in its nature as much as resistance is (GA’FAR, 2015, p. 48). The brokenness of the will mirrors the assumed inherent wickedness of humankind banished from paradise⁹.

In summary, Roman domination led to conformity, diminishing the creative agency of dominated peoples. This encouraged introspection, a subjective adjustment to feel such creativity there where the dominator could not reach. But liberty was sought within only because it could not be found without. Christianity positively rebranded this very *absence* in Roman terms. To become God’s ‘living surrogate, so completely at one with him that [one] has no separate identity’, meant liberating the will, that very subjective manifestation of an “imperative demanding voluntary submission”. In other words, it meant facilitating the obedience required to become a citizen in God’s eternal city (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 152).

The content of the word *freiheit* being replaced with a version of *libertas* is evidence of the Church’s deep impact. It meant that people were convinced to speak indistinctly of

⁸ This parallels Friedrich Nietzsche’s views on Socrates and Paul according to Acampora (2013, p. 83, 113).

⁹ See also the discussion on anti-theologism in section 3.1.

communal equality and individual submission (or at least that dissenters were successfully suppressed over time). In Arendt's account, "choice" had never been a factor in the concept of freedom, for it 'has no capacity to create a new possibility', being merely an 'arbiter between several possibilities' already given (GA'FAR, 2015, p. 38). With Christianity, it drowns out this (necessarily collective) creative agency. To be free, one must free one's will (be obedient, observant of dogma) in order to choose God.

2.2 THE SEEDLING OF SOVEREIGNTY

*In all discussions on freedom our ideas are obscured
by the surviving influence of past centuries
of serfdom and religious oppression.*

Piotr Kropotkin ¹⁰

*Freedom refers to the state of being free
from external constraints or limitations.*

OpenAI's ChatGPT ¹¹

Lynn White (1942, p. 145) argues that the Catholic Church is, if not the *mater*, the *matrix* of Western thought¹². In this section, we shall see how freedom was transformed after the European middle ages, as well as the ways in which it was not.

Quentin Skinner traces to Thomas Hobbes the origin of freedom as doing what one wills without external hindrance (SILVA, R., 2008, p. 174). He convincingly argues that the republican challenge to the English monarchy is the backdrop to Hobbes's theory, but the inherited grammar of 'free will' is clearly a prerequisite¹³ (SKINNER, 2008). Hobbes decontextualised the Christian will, which no longer had to be "let loose" *so that* specific choices could be made: its "looseness" was set on a path of becoming the only element needed to measure freedom.

'Liberty in the proper sense' as 'corporall Liberty' related to seeing one's environment and all other agents as threats: the 'Warre Of Every One Against Every One', which 'consisteth not

¹⁰ Kropotkin, 2014[1900], p. 638.

¹¹ ChatGPT, queried on July 2nd 2023 on its 3.5, "May 24 2023" version, answered the question 'What is freedom, generally?'

¹² See also Robinson (1980, p. 16–17), Bookchin (1982, p. 172), and Graeber (2001, p. 160–161, 257, 2018, p. 229–230). I use the shorthand "Western" but recognise its serious shortcomings; see Appiah (2016) and Garcia (2018, p. 313n21).

¹³ In fact, a debate between Hobbes and bishop John Bramhall on 'the freedom of the will' was a turning point for the former. At one point, Bramhall accused his debater of reducing liberty to 'nothing more than acting at will'; Hobbes 'cheerfully' agreed (SKINNER, 2008, p. 129–138). In Aristotle's dialogues, a similar proposition appears 'in the mouths of those who do not know what freedom is' (ARENDDT, 1961, p. 147).

in actual fighting; but in the known disposition thereto’, engendering awfulness¹⁴ (HOBBS, 2009[1651], lines 4016–4045, 6999). The Hobbesian solution was devoting ‘obedience to the state for the sake of security’ (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 153), which arguably led to ‘contrasting conclusions about the liberty of subjects’ (SKINNER, 2012, p. 9). On the one hand, there are liberties ‘we deny our selves’ by the covenant, but on the other, ‘in the act of our Submission, consisteth’ also ‘our Liberty’ (HOBBS, 2009[1651], lines 7125–7128). Laws did not make anyone act *against their will*; they simply caused people to acquire ‘a will to obey’ due to ‘fears about the consequences of disobedience’ — not to mention that ‘every Subject is Author of every act the Sovereign doth’ (HOBBS, 2009[1651], lines 7023–7024). However, Hobbes did also acknowledge that laws are ‘similar to real chains’ (SKINNER, 2012, p. 8–9).

While the view of natural life as belligerent was kept in the liberal tradition, Hobbes’s bare-bones concept of freedom was expanded to include “internal” constraints on the will, such as fear of punishment. This solved the definitional tension but justified notably different institutions. Liberty depends on ‘the silence of the Law’ (HOBBS, 2009[1651], line 7233), but if that is so, state interference *should* be kept at a watched minimum — if not for freedom itself, for prosperity through the safety of property¹⁵ (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 153) or for personal development¹⁶ (BALBACHEVSKY, 2000, p. 197–198). This culminated in the freedom of the private sphere; the freedom *from* politics *to* dwell in private affairs. With liberalism,

the highest purpose of politics [... became] the guaranty of security; security, in turn, made freedom possible, and the word “freedom” designated a quintessence of activities which occurred outside of the political realm[...] the boundary government should not overstep unless life itself and its immediate interests and necessities are at stake.¹⁷ (ARENDRT, 1961, p. 149–151)

But this was not the only development in the European landscape. As Fiscella (2015, p. 153–154) explains, Immanuel Kant ‘located the source of “freedom” in rationality and mental autonomy’, binding liberty to ‘duty and an obligation to do what is right’. John Tresch (2012, p. 66) writes that, for Kant, ‘one was free to act immorally, but only truly free when one chose

¹⁴ This is not exactly unprecedented; see chapter 5, page 176.

¹⁵ Hobbes’s (2009[1651], lines 8175–8198) state could arrange property as it pleased.

¹⁶ However, this could also be used to justify heavy governmental interference, as John Stuart Mill (1955, p. 14–15 apud FISCELLA, 2015, p. 157), once colonialist employee in India, wrote that ‘despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement’. For an analysis of how Mill’s ideas were mobilised by both (mainstream, *circa* mid-20th-century) right and left in the United States, see Wolff (1968, chap. 1).

¹⁷ Also noteworthy: ‘The Christian concept of political freedom[...] arose out of the early Christians’ suspicion of and hostility against the public realm as such, from whose concerns they demanded to be absolved in order to be free’ (ARENDRT, 1961, p. 150–151).

to obey a rational law'. Georg Hegel, in turn, similarly meant something very particular by the idea that "the will is free":

There was[...] only one way to be "free." [...] Only the infinite and the indeterminate was "real." To be "free" was to be bound to the infinite[...] to be in accordance with the inevitable and only way of being [...]. The universe provides a single song. Each person can choose to dance in rhythm to the song and be a part of the harmonious whole or they can be "unfree" and out of step. (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 153–155)

In the end, both authors thought 'there was a single rational truth that social relations would align with once people were enlightened enough to understand this rationality' (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 154). Note that, since late European antiquity, the idea that human rationality 'was simply the action of [the] divine principle within us' was 'absorbed into Christianity through Augustine', and informed 'pretty much all Medieval philosophy' (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 170). Thus it is not so much that Kant or Hegel replaced the Christian God with reason, but that churches (or individuals, for that matter) gave way to states as correct interpreters of reason's demands. While that makes a lot of difference in several respects, it does not do much in terms of freedom's "format" in contrast with Christian free will.

In other words, if Christian freedom could be reduced to "the ability to autonomously choose what is right", it would be as if modernity fractured this idea into pieces such as "the ability to choose", "to autonomously choose" and "to choose what is right". While the Renaissance basically meant that Christianity no longer needed to be the main source for innovative philosophising, a return to direct Greek or Roman references did little to change the overall directionality of mainstream political thought. The common element among all these new views, linking them through the ages to their inspirations, was the principle of sovereignty.

Granted, the *concept* of sovereignty would be born in European juridical thought only after the fall of Rome, but the reality of it – the right to exercise violence with impunity (GRAEBER, 2011b, p. 7), a definition which I shall use throughout this thesis – shaped Stoic-like, Christian, market and national colonial concepts of freedom¹⁸.

In Arednt's (1961, p. 163-165) view, the concept itself was a logical outgrowth of applying liberty as free will to the realm of interpersonal relations: to be truly free, in the presence of others, must mean having a will not only independent from them but also 'eventually prevailing against them'. But to think of freedom as sovereignty leads either to the realisation

¹⁸ See also Straumann (2016, p. 6).

that ‘whatever men may be, they are never sovereign’, or to ‘the insight that the freedom of one man, or a group, or a body politic can be purchased only at the price of the freedom, i.e., the sovereignty, of all others’¹⁹. Berlin (2002[1958], p. 171), for instance, reaches the latter conclusion: ‘the liberty of some must depend on the restraint of others’. This, Arendt (1961, p. 164) notes, ‘can be maintained only by the instruments of violence’.

The notorious flaw in Arendt’s analysis is in decrying the inflation of the private sphere over the public realm at the same time as reinforcing this divide, not only as if it were universal²⁰ but also as if it actually divided political from purely “technical” matters. Hence the irony of finding abhorrent that freedom be obtained through violent means and, on the same text, treating as ancient wisdom that “power over others” liberates the powerful from “the necessities of life” – which, while true, is presented as the *foundation* of freedom, not its opposite²¹.

Sovereign violence was already present in the Greek *polis* and the Roman republic, especially in the private sphere. ‘The realm of the ancient household was, literally, a miniature *patria* – a sphere of absolute, uncontested rule exercised by the father over women, children, and slaves’ (DIETZ, 1991, p. 239). Conversely, Cicero and Aristotle saw ‘the origin of the common wealth’ as ‘a result of the progressive expansion of the family’ (BARNES, 1923, p. 39), and contemporary scholars agree: the “city” was the outcome of social processes whose starting point was the *familia proprio iure*, which

underpinned both the law and the social order. It [was] the basic unit within a system centered on strictly monogamous marriage [... And it] was subject to the powerful authority, or *potestas*, of the father. [...] A daughter or granddaughter would leave the family upon marriage, at which point she joined her husband’s family and came under the authority of its *pater*. [...] From the start[...] a typical characteristic of Roman society was that all legal transactions and private rights, especially of an economic order, were the exclusive prerogative of the *patres*, the other family members having no say in such matters.²² (COLOGNESI, 2014, p. 10)

Sovereignty, in turn, involves “lack of restraint” because it implies a claim to exclusive choice-making – the ‘exercise violence with impunity’ definition above implying the success of the claim: not so much that violence *is* exercised often (or ever) nor that impunity is universally well-regarded, but that it *could* be exercised with *de jure* and *de facto* impunity. In general,

¹⁹ See also Martel (2011, p. 144).

²⁰ See e.g. Drummond (2000).

²¹ Again, this was a tenable position within Arendt’s framework only because she assumed that the domestic sphere was ruled by necessity, with no room for the creativity that politics requires: see Dietz (1991), Benhabib (1993), and Olson (1997). See also John P. Clark (2013b, p. 263) for how this plagues Bookchin’s thought.

²² Also, control over land was enforced with death penalties (COLOGNESI, 2014, p. 12).

‘the sovereign cannot count as a commander if the effectiveness of sovereign commands is conditional on the agreement of another agency’ (PETTIT, 2013, p. 180). ‘Sovereign Power Ought In All Common-wealths To Be Absolute’ (HOBBS, 2009[1651], line 6843), a point that Carl Schmitt would later echo (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 194–195). If sovereignty *could* be restrained, it would not be sovereign.

Living means constantly being interfered with, and yet it is a contemporary ‘article of faith’ to see freedom as ‘simply absence of interference’ (SKINNER, 2008, p. 213), as ‘doing as one likes and allowing others to do likewise’ (MACGILVRAY, 2011, p. 1). English Wikipedia’s “Freedom” entry primarily explains it as ‘power or right to act, speak, and change as one wants without hindrance or restraint’, while “Liberty” is first presented as ‘being free within society from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority’. Even OpenAI’s ChatGPT defines freedom similarly, as seen in the epigraph to this section²³.

‘The modern language of freedom is so persistently negative in character’, writes Eric MacGilvray (2011, p. 8), arguably due to the pervasive contentiousness of sovereignty²⁴, that it connects political traditions usually presented as contrasting in terms of thinking about freedom. Pettit (1998, p. 83–84), who used to argue more forcefully that Neo-Roman Republicanism held a specific, “status”-based concept of liberty, eventually conceded that Republican freedom ‘is a negative form of liberty, like the liberal ideal’, even if it requires more than *mere* absence of governmental interference to be achieved. Curiously, however, John Locke, retroactively identified as a forefather to the liberal tradition (BELL, 2014, p. 698), might have agreed to that (SPECTOR, 2010, p. 785; KINNA, 2019b, p. 60), even though he would have *also* been ‘shocked’ to hear himself ‘described as republican’ (SKINNER, 2008, p. VIII). A concept such as Hegel’s, inherited by the Marxist tradition and clearly different to the liberal and republican ones, does not escape this deeper negative logic either, as Berlin (2002[1958], p. 204) shows that it too relates to ‘holding off of something or someone’.

²³ I discuss Wikipedia not as an authoritative source but as evidence (due to its distributed nature) that these definitions are widely accepted. Note that I am choosing to focus on the foremost definitions, as they summarise what authors and editors think is more important about the words; this paragraph has also changed over time as the page itself changes. Italian, Greek, and Portuguese versions of the page follow a similar pattern (the latter after warnings about the complexity of the term); the French one leads with possibility of movement, the Spanish one talks about acting out of one’s own volition, and the German one focuses on choice. Also note that some traditionally edited reference books, such as the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, avoid defining freedom or liberty, focusing instead on specific articles such as “Free Will” or “Freedom of Association”. All websites mentioned in this paragraph and note were queried on July 2nd 2023.

²⁴ Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 552) argue that this is related to a Roman legacy concerning ideas of property, themselves tied to the experience of slavery and, which circles back to sovereignty. See section 4.1 and note 231 in section 4.3.2, page 162.

Freedom (any of its European variations) could hence be described as a relationship between an agent, an end, and, vitally, a *constraint*: ‘x is (is not) free from y to do (not do, become, not become) z’ (MACCALLUM, 1967, p. 314 apud FISCELLA, 2015, p. 162). If the concept of freedom one holds is closer in meaning to “choosing” or “choosing what is right”, all that could interfere with the choice-act (including all “wrong” possible choices, in the latter case) is cast as a hurdle to be “held off”. In other words, one must first free oneself *from* impropriety – be it people, things, irrational thoughts, fears – in order *to* choose autonomously, or to do what is right (notice how the verb “free” works in this sentence). Although freedom as an ‘exercise-concept’ (TAYLOR, C., 1985) means that not being hindered is not sufficient, it still is *necessary*; in reference to ancient Greeks and Romans, Arendt (1961, p. 148) stated so outright.

2.3 MODERN BRANCHES

The idea of less restriction [...] is permeating all modern thought.

Lucy Parsons ²⁵

In a trivial sense [...] all rules restrict freedom. [...] And in an equally trivial sense, all laws promote freedom.

Thomas Dewar Weldon ²⁶

Life was increasingly reframed as the individual soul’s quest for eternal salvation, an adventure mandated by God and riddled with hurdles. As this view spread, alongside sensibilities and institutions old (before Christianity) and new (modernity), liberty was increasingly associated with the subjective experience of not being restricted, or ceasing to be so, any hurdles in one’s way being either absent or pushed back, set aside, done away with. Precisely because of its simplicity, such an idea could be taken in many different directions. Lack of restraint requires a great deal of interpretation.

If someone is being restricted, their actions (related to the restraint) gain additional causes, traceable to whatever is imposing the restriction. Although other kinds of interactions may provide critical context for understanding motivations (perhaps even leading to the ascription of moral or juridical responsibility), restrictions are perfect preventions, and thus function like conditions outside the restricted agent’s powers.

²⁵ Parsons, 2010[1890], p. 3.

²⁶ Weldon, 1953, p. 71–72.

Compare two scenarios: driving through an unusual road because the regular path was blocked, and taking a different route after someone tells of a better one. In the second, even though the new information created the opportunity for a choice, there *was* a decision, and it was fully the agent's. In the first, the agent was restricted into choosing differently; hence, the action was not *only* caused by the agent. Likewise, if I am offered a frivolous prize for doing something, the decision to do it would be my own, in a way that it would not be if I knew someone would harm me if I did not do it (and if I were in no position to stop the threat from materialising). The person threatening me constitutes, like the blockage, an additional causal factor for the related actions I perform²⁷.

From this “connective” nature of restriction we reach the notions of interference and self-determination. The first, which evokes the disturbance of stable trajectories, more often denotes, in political theory, purposeful restriction. Hence despite the possibility of interferences that do not restrict (that e.g. incentivise or teach), I shall use this term and “restriction” interchangeably, unless noted otherwise.

Secondly, if you are under no restrictions whatsoever, if no one interferes with your decisions, no one else is an additional causal factor for your actions. Your behaviour can only be traced back to your own self; you self-determine “by default”. Self-determination is in a way the corollary of freedom as this “unrestriction”²⁸, both descriptively (if there is freedom, there is self-determination) and normatively (to have freedom, one must seek self-determination).

Examining unrestricted behaviour and concluding determination-by-other-than-self requires an idea of what the self is or ought to be²⁹. Take the example of Christianity. A child of God should want to live according to the scripture, to achieve eternal life. If someone's spontaneous actions are not in accordance with their “true” self, it is as if they were not themselves acting; they were not *self*-determining. Restrictions resurface: something (if not someone) is still preventing free action (Christian philosophy posits an inherently broken will, offering at least one possible explanation out of the gate). The premise is sustained: if someone is not self-determining, some form of restriction is unaccounted for.

²⁷ In the last example, someone is trying to control rather than restrict; to ensure a third party *does* something specific instead of seeing to it that a particular action *is not* taken by them. The concepts are different enough, but controlling ultimately relies on restricting, while the opposite is not true. If I want someone to not read this thesis, incalculable alternatives remain open if I successfully restrict them in this manner. The best effort to make sure they *read it*, on the other hand, involves preventing all competing movements within a time frame.

²⁸ This is technically “not a word”, but it is easier to refer to than “lack of restraint” every time, and hence I shall subsequently use it without quotes.

²⁹ See section 5.2.

Unrestriction identifies liberty with a kind of relationship between elements (such as ideas, practices, states of being), but it cannot by itself determine what these are. Is a fine or a tax hike freedom-reducing? Benjamin Tucker (2009[1926], p. 47–48), for example, thought so: they ‘share alike the nature of a penalty, and are equally invasive of liberty’. Others might say that people are free to do something insofar as they have the capability to accomplish the action, reactions from third parties notwithstanding. If a restriction is perfect prevention, human interference, at least, is not a feature of reality but an interpretation of it, born of each one’s knowledge, perspective, experiences, and values. By saying “I will like you less if you do this”, the speaker might be trying to constrain the listener’s behaviour – but even if it works, others can reasonably dispute that the first became co-responsible for the second’s decision by perfectly preventing action³⁰.

Epistemological and axiological ideas are therefore crucial for constituting fuller accounts of freedom as a form of unrestriction. They inform people’s interpretations of restrictions in many ways: are agents only supposed to be unrestrained to do something in particular to be considered free? Can we separate “natural” restrictions from those which would not exist without direct, conscious human intervention? And if we can, could, and should, anything be done about natural restrictions? In the next three sections, I discuss how liberalism, republicanism, and Marxism have answered questions like these.

2.3.1 Liberty among liberals

The most advanced moralists, like Mill and his numerous disciples, defined liberty as the right to do everything with the exception of encroachments on the equal liberty of all others. [...] This definition enabled them] to reconstruct tribunals and legal punishments, even to the penalty of death – that is, to reintroduce, necessarily, in the end, the State itself, which they had admirably criticised themselves. The idea of free will is also hidden behind all these reasonings.

Piotr Kropotkin³¹

Among liberals, liberty is measured by the scope of activity available due to unrestriction. A lack of restriction regarding an action makes it accessible, increasing one’s freedom; interference restricts one’s choices, diminishing one’s liberty. ‘The idea of “more” and “less” freedom is

³⁰ Tangentially, see also Daniel Kapust (2018, p. 85–88) on Machiavelli’s advice for giving counsel without being blamed for bad outcomes.

³¹ Kropotkin, 2014[1900], p. 638. See also Bakunin (1971[1871][a], p. 234) and Tolstoy (1894, p. 347–348).

[...] an ineradicable part of liberal discourse and theorising’, writes Ian Carter (1999, p. 4–5), who defines liberty as ‘the absence of preventing conditions on agents’ possible actions’.

As already mentioned in section 2.2, liberals consider laws restrictive in character: they introduce a preventing condition. On these terms, what would it mean for an agent to be completely free, to have a limitless scope for action? That no one is stopping them from or punishing them for anything (or threatening to do either). Since “anything” includes inflicting violence, that would logically make such fully free agent a *de facto* sovereign.

Strictly speaking, sovereignty is not a precondition for the specific activities people usually want to do. But even if others are not currently stopping me from doing something, unless there is a restriction on them *against doing so*, they are, also strictly speaking, free to do just that: ‘one [person]’s right is simply another’s obligation’ (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 205). Not only desires might be mutually exclusive, but liberal assumptions regarding human nature also give more reasons why people would want to restrict others, as these might want to increase their scope of activity more generally, or, sharing my own fears that this is the case, to ensure that I am not free to restrict their plans³². For individual agents, it might be hard to be fair and take others into account; pre-emptive attacks to establish dominance are a sound strategy.

Therefore, even assuming conflict can be avoided altogether, there *is* a “functional” relation between unrestriction and sovereignty beyond a “logical” one. It is not only that the freer one is, the more one could be described as sovereign (even if one never acted as one). It is also that the more power one concentrates (as in the force and the conditions needed to make credible coercive threats), the more one is likely to overcome any resistance to one’s projects, and hence the freer one effectively becomes. Sovereignty is the most direct tool someone can use to guarantee the expansive realisation of their “conception of the good”.

Liberals, however, often refrain from associating liberty with specific ends (SANDEL, 1998, p. 5–6, 10). Liberal freedom is defined by what one *can* do, regardless of what one ends up doing — Taylor’s (1985) “opportunity-concept”. Retaining the possibility of other goals, of other “utilities”, is an important component of one’s scope of activity. If unequal, concentrated coercive power is what allows for a particular goal to be privileged, with the social effect of

³² “Restricting others so that they do not restrict you” seems like a convoluted version of “bossing others to increase one’s own scope of activity”. However, with the first option focus is not on liberty as power (which can stay the same, decrease, or be magnified) but on a situation that can be conserved or “interfered with”. In the end, this is still about interpreting the feeling of restriction. Depending, for instance, on what one feels entitled to, interference seeking to increase power can be seen as the use of force to defend one’s “base level” of liberty (that had been or would otherwise have been restricted) — see the discussion at the end of the introduction to section 4.2, as well as note 34 in section 6.1.1, page 264.

suppressing others, it cannot represent freedom as a political project (even if it *absolutely does*, as seen above, from the point of view of an individual considered in isolation).

Liberty is then refocused away from complete unrestriction and into opposing power. But at the other extreme, this would lead to paralysis; ‘no man’s activity is so completely private as never to obstruct the lives of others in any way’ (BERLIN, 2002[1958], p. 171), and while liberty may have intrinsic value, it is not the *only* value. Liberty ‘cannot be unlimited’, wrote Berlin (2002[1958], p. 215), for it ‘must be weighed against the claims of many other values’, such as ‘equality, or justice, or happiness, or security, or public order’. Even though keeping one’s ends open realises freedom, committing to one of them, working toward it, especially in association with others, will lead to some level of restriction.

The appropriate middle ground, it would seem, is to prevent anyone from getting too carried away by their own views, establishing

a certain minimum area of personal freedom which must on no account be violated; for if it is overstepped, the individual will find himself in an area too narrow for even that minimum development of his natural faculties which alone makes it possible to pursue, and even to conceive, the various ends which men hold good or right or sacred. (BERLIN, 2002[1958], p. 171)

In other words, liberals seek to have ‘basic liberties’ that ‘allow sufficient social space’ for everyone ‘to pursue their [own] reasonable conceptions of the good’ (WENAR, 2021). This, however, brings sovereignty back into the picture. A sovereign power is welcomed (or perhaps “created”, in contractualist language) because the minimum area of non-interference must be *protected*, so others cannot be free to disrespect it. ‘To have a right’ is ‘to have something which society ought to defend me in the possession of’ (MILL, 1973[1863], p. 459 apud SANDEL, 1998, p. 3), and ‘unstable institutions would not secure the liberties, rights, and opportunities that the parties care about’ (RICHARDSON, 2010).

But the concentrated coercive power this requires effectively imposes ends; there are conceptions of the good it ultimately realises, which cannot be reduced to liberty itself, since *minimum* freedom is merely a *subset* of all possible freedoms. In other words, separating fundamental rights (to be included in the safeguarded area of personal liberty) from trivial ones requires principles and perspectives other than mere unrestriction. ‘A list of basic liberties is in fact a list of one’s own values’ (WILSON, M., 2011, p. 93), only pushed to the background as if they were politically neutral — as if they were ‘constitutional constraints’ that preserve liberty

because they allow ‘individuals to pursue their reasonable conceptions of the good, *whatever they may be*’ (RICHARDSON, 2010, emphasis added).

Once this area is constituted, it is supposed to simultaneously empower and restrict the sovereign. For example: religious freedom can mean both that the state cannot impose a religion or act against a specific one, and that it can be called to protect the devout if people of other creeds attempt to coerce their religious practice. The state should be powerless, but also powerful; as long as its behaviour is limited to the selected aims that provide the opportunity for “conceiving and pursuing various ends”, it advances the cause of freedom.

This is how “market freedom” often fits into liberal thought. If the self’s ends can be formulated and obtained through “goods and services”, all the license anyone needs is not being prevented from participating in the market. As the state takes on the task of protecting private property, buying and selling (including labour itself) is seen as essentially peaceful conduct that does not restrict anyone, even though the result of competition can be more or fewer actual restrictions overall: what cannot be taken away is the formal ability to compete in the first place.

However, there are many possible combinations of state-backed unrestriction and all other values³³, goals, and beliefs, including concepts of the self and ‘the basic demands of his nature’ (BERLIN, 2002[1958], p. 215). One source of contention is the disentanglement of human interference from natural restrictions. Complete freedom, as Bertrand Russell (1942, p. 231 apud CARTER, I., 1999, p. 12) writes, is ‘only possible for omnipotence’; some physical restraint is to be expected at any given moment. But once natural restrictions are conceived as (mere) “inability”, distinct and potentially disconnected from “unfreedom” (TAYLOR, M., 2000, p. 147), troubling questions can be raised. It would be ‘eccentric’ to say that my liberty is imperilled because ‘I am unable to jump more than ten feet in the air’, wrote Berlin (2002[1958], p. 169). But this is a tougher argument to make in the context of disabilities, for

what makes something a “disability” *per se* is not a specific body’s perceived deformity or lack of capability, but rather factors in the society, such as the built environment, discriminatory attitudes, punitive and harsh public policies. [...] a flight of stairs is a barrier to the freedom of someone who uses a wheelchair – rather than a “fact” that the wheelchair user must confront by herself. [...] “Normal” background conditions that constitute] a “barrier” to freedom [...] are the active products of social relations that can and should be changed.³⁴ (HIRSCHMANN, 2017, p. 16–17)

³³ Also, the meanings of other values can be as disputed as the meaning of promoting freedom, considering that this view of the market can serve as the basis for specific ideas of justice and equality – for example, as meritocracy and formal equality before the law.

³⁴ See also Simpican (2015, p. 7–8).

Considering these criteria, one possible position is the ‘liberal-conservative’ one that Rita Knudsen (2020) finds animating Woodrow Wilson’s post-World-War-I notion of international self-determination³⁵. The status quo was turned into baseline liberty; every agent’s scope of activity, as it existed then, should not shrink due to coercive intervention. That some had more freedom than others was justified by interpreting current restrictions as natural rather than man-made: liberalism has historically intersected with white supremacy in this manner³⁶, and this framework’s toothlessness on colonialism (then and later, throughout the 20th century) is extremely significant in that regard:

Western countries eschewed any suggestion that they were interfering with their colonies. When socialist delegates [to the United Nations] alleged that Western colonialism exploited and oppressed colonial peoples, thereby interfering and depriving them of freedom even according to the West’s own standards, Western delegates responded vehemently. Colonial powers did not insist that the colonial relationship was one of equality, but presented its unequal nature [...] in terms of colonial peoples’ lack of capacities, rather than as an absence of freedom. [...] Like Wilson had done previously, Western discourse [...] presented peace and stable order as a higher form of freedom [... In 1960,] France explicitly defended colonialism based on its promotion of freedom as non-interference. (KNUDSEN, 2020, p. 146)

Freedom was ‘non-interference’, but ‘with the affairs of established states’; it meant protecting the ‘peace’ and ‘stable order’ that enabled commerce, and that was all. In terms of the relationship between a state and the population in its territory, this might justify efforts to (even forcefully) introduce or strengthen market relations against other forms of economic activity³⁷. At its most progressive, it could inspire legislation combatting anticompetitive practices, from monopolies and cartels to non-elected governments³⁸.

More things can be considered essential for freedom, however, than the mere presence of functional market relations: health, dignified housing, education, to name a few (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 56–57, 125). ‘To offer political rights, or safeguards against intervention by the State,

³⁵ Applicable to individuals despite explicitly referring to peoples and states.

³⁶ Consider, for example, that schools in the United States can constitutionally be “separate and unequal” so long as the segregation is not mandated by the government (CARTER, R. L., 1968, p. 239–242).

³⁷ See the example of Madagascar in section 6.1.2 (around page 274).

³⁸ Which does not necessarily mean being against *undemocratic* governments, especially if democracy is taken to mean substantial popular participation in public life. Going only by the logic of the liberal-conservative freedom under analysis, limited participation in government is certainly acceptable if the unhindered operation of market mechanisms is guaranteed. In fact, Knudsen (2020, p. 74, emphasis in the original) writes that Wilson spoke of ‘consent of the governed’ even more frequently than self-determination; at times, even ‘indistinguishably’. His rhetoric ‘signalled sustained commitment to the same legitimising standards of peace, stable order and non-interference, if necessary at the cost of political subjects having a say of their own’, since “consent of the governed” suggests placing people as a passive and *governed* unit at the bottom of the political status hierarchy’. See also the beginning of section 2.4 below.

to men who are half-naked, illiterate, underfed and diseased is to mock their condition’, wrote Berlin (2002[1958], p. 171); ‘what is freedom to those who cannot make use of it?’. This indicates that the satisfaction of these needs, and liberty proper, are kept separated; the latter retains a meaning apart from the pursuit of the specific ends it enables. But if people are made less free by the lack of these conditions, should not the state guarantee that they are free to have them, that is, that no one can (by rogue force but neither by market mechanisms) prevent anyone from having them?

If what is causing these lacks are impersonal processes, then individuals can at best — *if* they wish to protect liberty thus conceived — attempt to tackle the situation with private resources, that is, without resorting to sovereign force. If, on the other hand, fewer social circumstances are naturalised, the answer is likely to be yes: people are starving because of avoidable human, albeit indirect and diffuse, interference, which the state has a duty to control in the name of freedom. Authors such as Leonard Hobhouse, John Dewey, Ronald Dworkin, and Amartya Sen are notable exponents from different eras of a brand of liberalism that advocates for concerted action, through the state, in order to reduce harmful disadvantages (THE INTERNATIONAL BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT, 1991, p. 421–425; DALL’AGNOL, 2005; BELL, 2014, p. 684). For Rawls, for example, an approach purely based on non-interference ‘does not assure all citizens sufficient means to make use of their basic liberties’ (WENAR, 2021).

Still, none of these authors go so far as criticising the market dynamic itself; Rawls’ liberalism, for one, favoured ‘either a property-owning democracy or liberal (democratic) socialism’, but the latter only meant ‘worker-managed firms’ (i.e. the market as a necessary background mechanism) (WENAR, 2021). Reinhold Niebuhr once complained that liberalism ‘signified two “contradictory” claims, namely, that liberty necessitated both the unleashing of capitalism and its radical restraint’ (BELL, 2014, p. 702). But once competition in the market and liberal freedom are strongly equated, it is harder to coherently stand closer to the second of the two positions outlined above while remaining a liberal (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 58). Enabling unrestricted market relations requires state action every bit as direct and purposeful, but sovereign institutions that move to “domesticate” markets are more easily seen, in the context of this discourse, as having been appropriated for particular ends³⁹.

³⁹ See also Graeber (2018, p. 169–170).

However operationalised, liberal freedom leads to sovereignty. This is not lost on liberals, who frame their political endeavour as a manageable risk in pursuit of a gainful trade-off: to control the “necessary evil” designed and empowered to rule over them; to trade some liberties for other values, including above all the security required to reflect upon what kinds of freedoms should not be traded at all.

2.3.2 Liberty among republicans

As sworn opponents of absolutism, these revolutionaries appreciated the tyrannous power that kings enjoyed as a result of the exclusive right they claimed to make laws. Yet rather than challenging the principle of lawmaking — the source of tyranny — they simply relocated the power of lawmaking [...]. The character of leadership altered dramatically, yet the principle of command was reinforced.

Ruth Kinna ⁴⁰

If restrictions are unavoidable, why theorise that “real life” somehow undermines freedom? Why confusingly argue, following Berlin (2002[1958], p. 195), that ‘every law is an infraction of liberty — even if such infraction leads to an increase of the sum of liberty’?

For republicans, restriction is qualified. As Pettit (1997, p. vii–viii) writes, ‘constrained interference that is designed for a common good’ differs from ‘arbitrary interference’. If someone interferes outside the bounds of any agreed upon standard of conduct, they act like a tyrant. Whoever is subject to this sort of interference is a slave: a person who, no matter how unrestricted might be in any given day, can have this benefit taken away at a whim.

This means that freedom cannot be quantified. The issue is not “how many” restrictions someone is arbitrarily made to suffer; the very *possibility* that they might happen (something perceivable in a given social setting) functions as a source of many indirect interferences, that is, ways in which actions are prevented but not by any particular deed by the dominator. Only having the status of a free person (being recognised by peers as under a protection against arbitrary interference) can actually release someone from the particular constraint of *fear*. It is thus that liberty comes to be understood as the relative invulnerability to arbitrary interference. It is a matter of status, seeing as it is hard to speak of being “more” or “less” invulnerable, although absolute protection can never be guaranteed (“relative” controls for realism).

⁴⁰ Kinna, 2019b, p. 63–64.

This concept is different in kind, but it is still tied to unrestriction in a few fundamental ways. As with liberalism, it provides a reading of human relations that allows for assessing what counts as a restriction, and which ones deny freedom. While some interferences — the institutional armature that protects against arbitrary interference — *establish* liberty, being “correctly restricted” is not really *the point* of this idea. The institutions are said to be working (to be properly establishing freedom) if they successfully prevent arbitrariness, which is bad because of the pervasive restrictions it introduces through anxiety. So this concept too centres on the subjective feeling of being or becoming unconstrained, only it privileges “freedom from fear”, generating the characteristics of the notion seen thus far: the focus on social standing and its format as a non-quantifiable condition.

A distaste for monarchical rule has always been an essential part of the republican “brand” (HOYE, 2021, p. 266). Monarchy is contrasted with self-government: no one stands superior to one’s own society, ruling it from outside. Rejecting a monarch, however, does not mean discarding sovereignty. Laws may prescribe and laws may forbid, but they cannot completely ensure dictated behaviours nor avert banned ones. Security, to some extent optional in “raw” liberal concepts⁴¹, is built right into republican liberty, and therefore one cannot do away with an overarching superior power, one with the unpreventable ability to exercise violence. After all, if a citizen could become immune to it, they would be able to arbitrarily interfere with others; if there were no sovereignty at all, anyone would be able to.

How is this sovereign entity different from a monarch? Here the variations within republicanism become relevant.

An emphasis might be placed on a group’s collective identity. Central to the republican argument, after all, is the idea that someone can only be free in a free society. So while self-government is essential, the “self” is not the individual⁴²: a *group* governs itself. One may then be asked to see oneself as free *in function* of being part of this “free totality”, to the point that it should not matter which *role* one has in sustaining it. This identification leads to seeing the sovereign’s actions as one’s own: the “people” are sovereign, not a particular person, and as the people have decided, so have I, for I am part of the people who are sovereign and free. Whatever

⁴¹ As Pettit (1997, p. 8–9) writes, liberalism has developed a deep association with ‘the assumption that there is nothing inherently oppressive about some people having dominating power over others, provided they do not exercise that power and are not likely to exercise it’. In other words, even if liberalism does tend to lead into an institutional concern with guaranteeing freedom (and a subsequent treatment of this security as “robust” liberty), as far as any specific situation is concerned, one could say that “raw” freedom is present even if it is not guaranteed.

⁴² See section 5.2.

it is the sovereign does (the agents of government, acting on behalf of the real sovereign, the people), *I* do it; if it affects me, I have done it to myself, and no one can be unjust toward oneself (ROUSSEAU, 1997[1762], p. II.6.7 apud PETTIT, 2013, p. 194).

Through this interpretation of social reality some restrictions do not even register as such. I am not “prevented” from doing something if there is a law forbidding it, because “I” passed the law, which would amount to “I have decided not to do it”. This relates to Rousseau’s idea of “general will”. The “Franco-German” wing of modern republicanism is wary of mixed constitutions because of factionalism. Just as Christians deemed the will impotent (and unfree, as it is restrained) if divided, a group’s will is not sovereign if people are not unified in constituting it. Dissidence is problematic. The people’s ‘primary job’ is ‘to participate in the creation and sustenance of [a] sovereign assembly’ or to ‘elect the members of that body’, in both cases treating it ‘as a collective spokesperson that should have to brook no individual resistance’ (PETTIT, 2013, p. 179). A nation must be unrestricted so that it can be said to self-determine; once that is the case, there is no more fear of determination by others (arbitrary interference; slavery) and therefore every individual within said nation is free in virtue of it being free.

Obviously, issues of internal arbitrariness are considered — Rousseau (1997[1762], p. I.5.1 apud PETTIT, 2013, p. 191) certainly makes a distinction between ‘subjugating a multitude and ruling a society’ — but they are translatable into matters of qualifying the general will so that it is not hijacked by private interest. The major concern, then, is how to determine the will of the group; what it is (i.e. how to consolidate a single will from the plurality among the citizenry) or even what it should be (e.g. what a *rational* citizenry should will). One possible, and popular, way out is democracy. Procedures such as elections are supposed to legitimise the actions of government officials. By rituals and covenants⁴³, the many regularly express their common (or at least “ultimate”) desire without the mediation of someone *outside* the process (such as a king), and so are able to self-govern.

Participatory or communitarian theorists, taking a cue from Athenian democracy, will often take this one step further. Political procedures should be as inclusive and direct as possible, and people ought to be a part of them to the fullest extent. That way, each individual can come to the independent conclusion that the group’s actions are their own, instead of merely being told they should feel that way.

⁴³ See also the discussion on rites of institution in section 5.2.1.

Taking this logic to an extreme would imply the obsolescence of sovereignty, if the group did not still need to be constituted as a sovereign in the sense of not being governed by exterior agents – which include the monarch but also, crucially, *other groups*. ‘Unless your government is respectable, foreigners will invade your rights’, wrote Alexander Hamilton (FARRAND, 1911, p. 473 apud KAPUST, 2018, p. 184). As Kinna and Prichard (2019, p. 231) write, ‘whether or not states regularly used armed force, the monopoly of violence placed the “domestic” and the “international” on a continuum of relations of violence’. In republican (as well as democratic) theory, sovereignty is there to enforce limits; to place restrictions *between* constituents, but also to liberate them, collectively, from outside (arbitrary, other-than-self) restriction.

However, the collective identity might not be so emphasised. In contrast with an approach such as Rousseau’s, neo-Roman republicans’ focus on the domination of an individual by another means that “using” sovereignty correctly is less important than restricting it, making sure it does not devolve into covert oppression. Romans of the late republic had already recognised something distinctly “rights-based” about their institutions in explicit contrast with Greek politics (STRAUMANN, 2016, p. 131); in this framework, democracy has a place, but it need not be particularly participatory: Pettit’s focus on contestation, for instance, gives more weight to the availability of channels to express dissatisfaction and challenge the acts of the sovereign. Factionalism is not exactly feared as much as operationalised, with Madisonian republicanism epitomising conflict as method. Judicial review is valued, especially in the context of contemporary renderings of mixed constitutionalism⁴⁴: a power to only limit the sovereign, instead of actively making or executing policy. This fractures sovereignty, which still separates citizens from outsiders but, once diluted, is arguably less efficient in quelling dissent. Institutions are designed to provide stability and predictability for individuals (countering arbitrariness), as well as controlled opportunities for change.

Republican views stress the way fear and unpredictability restrict one’s actions, and therefore portray freedom as a secured social standing, a mutual recognition of the good of self-determination. I do not want to be *arbitrarily* interfered with, and it is not enough for any interference to provide “predictability” if it is imposed by a monarch, as that *still* makes me liable to (the monarch’s) arbitrary restriction. If I can see that the restrictions were of my own making, or that they come from a process I can influence, designed to curb any *particular* person’s superior power, I become unbounded by the feeling that others control my life. Sovereignty is

⁴⁴ See also Flowers (2010, p. 3–34) and Colognesi (2014, p. 165–168).

still required: *within* the society of mutually recognising agents, it is supposed to enforce the (fair, egalitarian) predictability it promises; *without*, it should make sure no one can interfere with its dynamics (PETTIT, 2016).

2.3.3 Liberty among Marxists

Legend tells us that healthy newborn infants aroused the envy and hatred of evil spirits. In the absence of the proud mothers, the evil ones stole into the houses, kidnapped the babies, and left behind them deformed, hideous-looking monsters. Socialism has met with such a fate. [...] Indeed, the representatives of [Marxist] Socialism are more devout in their religious faith in the State than the most conservative statist.

Emma Goldman ⁴⁵

Marx dedicated much of his work to criticising the foundations of liberalism. How, then, can Marxism be grouped along with it within the unrestriction paradigm?

Adding a materialist twist on Hegelian dialectics, Marx saw human essence as having emerged in an antagonistic, co-constitutive relationship with nature⁴⁶. A person, according to Andrzej Walicki (1988, p. 16), was for him neither ‘a disembodied subject’ nor ‘a passive natural object’, but ‘a truly unique part of nature[...] capable of autcreation, increasingly independent of nature, endowed with the possibility of achieving conscious, rational self-determination’. This prospect defines humankind (O’ROURKE, 1974, p. 48). To perfect one’s potential according only to the rule of one’s own essence, rising above randomness and instinct, is freedom: ‘the march of a conqueror overcoming both nature and himself’ (KOLAKOWSKI, 1978, p. 414), the ‘inner content and the ultimate goal of history’⁴⁷ (WALICKI, 1988, p. 16).

⁴⁵ Goldman, 2020, p. 1.

⁴⁶ This means that nature is not “what was there before humans”. ‘Nature in itself’ does not exist for Marxists, only nature ‘in human history’ (WALICKI, 1988, p. 16). Both ‘objective conditions’ and ‘the producers’ change by human action (MARX, 2015[1861]); they become “co-authors” and “rivals” of nature (O’ROURKE, 1974, p. 156). The Western projection of such a thing as “nature” arguably leaves a limited number of stances toward it in the first place, and hence one can expect to find versions of this line of thought quite frequently. For example: for Kropotkin there was no “virgin nature” (TAVARES, 2021, 43:33), and a nature-humankind dialectic figured in Bakunin’s (1975, p. 23) view of human evolution. However, both saw human rationality as a natural phenomenon (CORRÊA, 2019, p. 333–348). As noted in section 1.2 earlier, anarchism and Marxism took a while to drift apart; insofar as ‘some anarchist theory’ can be denounced as having regarded ‘listening to “nature” as the very sign of human self-enslavement’, one can certainly see the influential echoes of Western modern, especially Marxist, thought within anarchism (COHN, 2022). See section 2.5 below, as well as Diegues (2001).

⁴⁷ O’Rourke (1974, p. 184) observes that ‘the affirmation of historical determinism [...] does not seem to entail, in any of the formulations (by Marx, Engels, Lenin or [...] Soviet philosophers of liberty), that individuals are fully determined in their actions by social and economic factors. Marx and Engels pointed out that individuals can escape the influences of their class position. They can be[...] both ahead of or behind the general course of social development’.

Freedom... can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature. (MARX, 1978, p. 441 apud MCLAUGHLIN, 2002, p. 168)

James O'Rourke (1974, p. 40–43) writes that this idea refracted into two concepts: one 'anthropological' (often called "humanistic" and linked to Marx's earlier texts) and one 'historical'. The former describes the self-realisation of individual human beings, the maximum expression of one's true self in one's behaviour. This can only be made possible, however, by the second kind, which relates to unleashing humanity's 'nearly unlimited' power to 'submit the forces of nature and the spontaneous tendencies of social life to [their] own designs'. Humans have not been free because, limited by their productive relations, they have had to work as nature (or the market) commanded instead of rationally (MARX, 2000[1845] apud COHEN, G. A., 2013, p. 248), and therefore they have not been able to express their own individualities either.

'Individuals seem freer under the dominance of the bourgeoisie than before, because their conditions of life seem accidental', but this is precisely the reason why 'they are less free' (MARX; ENGELS, 1975, p. 78–79 apud WALICKI, 1988, p. 14). Capitalists were enemies of freedom, despite having played 'a most revolutionary part' in developing humankind's productive forces (MARX; ENGELS, 2018[1848], p. 26), because class society inhibited individuality (SOWELL, 1963, p. 120). Work was deformed to the point of becoming entirely non-human: mechanical, self-centred, and forced as a condition for biological survival, rather than creative, social, and consciously deliberated. This criticism was clearly driven by the anthropological conception of freedom. Division of work itself was denounced, for it 'crippled human beings physically and spiritually' (KOLAKOWSKI, 1978, p. 307): 'the specialist who can perform well only [their] trade' is not free, since they develop 'only one side of [their] nature' and frustrate their humanity (O'ROURKE, 1974, p. 42).

However, people would not become free by *directly* restructuring society around the self-expressing work of each individual⁴⁸. First, they had to secure the proper conditions to one day be able to do so: the collective overcoming of irrationality, which means both controlling material reality and overthrowing class exploitation.

Marx attacked both the 'despotism in the workshop' and the 'anarchy of the market', but he 'saw the worst evil' in the latter, and 'did not deny that the socialist society of the

⁴⁸ See also Evans (2021): Marxists' 'ideological adherence to the progress of history sat uneasily with the requirement to fight for a better world in the here and now'.

future would bear some resemblance to “one immense factory”⁴⁹ (WALICKI, 1988, p. 34). Later, Engels would praise the ‘division of labor upon a *definite plan*, as organized in the factory’ (MARX; ENGELS, 1977, p. 136 apud WALICKI, 1988, p. 35, emphasis in the original), as if unlike old, spontaneous specialisation, it did not cripple people’s bodies and souls. In contrast with the liberal views, Marx ‘never conceived freedom as the mere ability to direct one’s life without interference from the other members of society’ (O’ROURKE, 1974, p. 43); in fact, as Thomas Sowell (1963, p. 120) writes, he ‘had no patience with those who “confused political emancipation with human emancipation”’. In the end, then, the individual’s anthropological liberty can only exist in the context of humankind’s historical freedom; one frees oneself ‘only as a member’ of ‘the whole of mankind’, through the reappropriation of the gargantuan productive forces unleashed by capitalism (O’ROURKE, 1974, p. 42).

The realization of freedom was [...] liberating people from the domination of things — both in the form of physical necessity and in the form of reified social relations. [...] freedom is opposed not to arbitrary coercion but to the uncontrolled objectivity of impersonal forces — both natural forces and [...] the quasi-natural functioning of alienated social forces. [...] freedom thus conceived is inseparable from rationality, rational predictability, and is opposed to the irrationality of chance. Capitalism is condemned as not being rational enough and the final victory of freedom is seen as the replacement of market mechanisms with “production by freely associated men, consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan.” (WALICKI, 1988, p. 11, 13)

Substantial deviation from Marx’s ideas are of course not to be expected of those who followed literally in his name. Engels cemented the bracketing of anthropological freedom by reaffirming ‘the growing [...] mastery of the human environment’, culminating ‘in a dialectical leap into the realm of freedom, where not only natural forces but also social forces will be subject to man’s conscious control’⁵⁰ (O’ROURKE, 1974, p. 67). Leon Trotsky (1992[1938], p. 48), while recognising the importance of abolishing ‘the power of one person over another’, wrote that revolution ‘is justified if it leads to increasing the power of humanity over nature’.

Lenin’s ‘scattered remarks’ on the subject, in turn, ‘do not amount to much more than an affirmation of the views of Engels’ (O’ROURKE, 1974, p. 77). If anything, they focus even more on defining liberty in function of revolutionary efforts (ŽIŽEK, 2001, p. 7). This is directly observable in his notion of international self-determination, at odds with Wilson’s (peace and

⁴⁹ That helps explain why he would eventually turn to the ‘sphere of leisure’ as the realm of individual freedom; work would always ‘fall short of the ideal’ (O’ROURKE, 1974, p. 41). See also Gerald Allan Cohen (2013, p. 373).

⁵⁰ Still according to O’Rourke (1974, p. 67), while Engels ‘repeats literally Marx’s anthropological concept of freedom’, it ‘does not seem to be an organic element of his thought’.

non-interference), discussed in section 2.3.1 above. Lenin, who declared that all peoples should have a right to self-determine (in the sense of seeking independent statehood), ‘highlighted the distinction between promoting a right to self-determination and backing real-life calls for implementing it’. He defended that ‘the approach to be taken in any particular instance should be determined by what would, at that point [...], best serve the progress of capitalism towards socialism’, which of course ‘did not preclude the necessity of robustly opposing actual secessionist claims at times’. His main Marxist rival in this regard was Rosa Luxemburg, who ‘consistently reject[ed] [...] any right to self-determination’ as a distraction from class struggle (KNUDSEN, 2020, p. 40–42). In both cases, whether a people is in fact determining themselves hinges not on independent statehood but their economic context: the persistence of capitalism should be the relevant, actually freedom-reducing, restriction.

As progressive revolutions spiralled into oppressive regimes over the course of the 20th century, Marxists in capitalist territories reflected on their political positions. Raya Dunayevskaya (1958, p. 211–214), for instance, brought attention to the humanism in Marx’s opus to portray socialist states as ‘the ultimate development of capitalism’ (and, as such, contrary to freedom). Interestingly, when attacking positions such as Dunayevskaya’s, defenders of state-socialist regimes often distanced themselves from liberty, as if it had become an irretrievably bourgeois notion, instead of reinforcing more “utilitarian” interpretations of the concept within Marxism (such as Lenin’s). Santiago Carrillo’s eurocommunist programme denounced the Soviet state as ‘a brake’ on the journey to communism, proposing it be ‘changed to make it fully democratic’; Bhalchandra Ranadive (1978, p. 25) mocked this position as giving ‘full freedom to all including the exploiters to exercise their rights and form their political parties’, adding that ‘President Carter may fully agree and endorse Carrillo’s thesis’.

Accelerated environmental degradation also stirred the tradition. However, other than criticism of “capitalist ecologies”, it mostly led to restating classic positions, as Marx’s ‘intransigent defence of the need for technological development’ was always ‘counterbalanced by the conscience that the structures peculiar to nature impose limits to their total absorption’^b (DUARTE, R. A. d. P., 1985, p. 162–163).

In the end, neither refocusing on anthropological freedom, nor calling for ‘a return not to nature but within nature’^c (MOSCOVICI, 1975, p. 365), impacted the specificity of the Marxist view on liberty. In both cases, it still pointed to the full rationalisation of life, opposing humankind to nature not as trees and rivers but as randomness and lack of control.

While investigating Marxist freedom, O'Rourke (1974, p. 152) makes a point of analysing Soviet philosophers of the second half of the 20th century. It is useful to include this exploration here, considering that the Soviet Union was the greatest material representation of Marxist socialism during its lifespan; that geopolitical and linguistic differences made their experience of Marxism quite different from that of, say, Western Europeans or Brazilians; and that, for the very same reasons, researchers such as myself were unlikely to ever come into contact with their work⁵¹. Even if they departed from Marx's work (or the Party's interpretation of it) unwillingly, that would still yield interesting information, for they would presumably have had to justify, *through* Marx, any original (if not outright dissenting) position.

Soviet thinkers, such as Bonifaty Mikhailovich Kedrov, V. E. Davidovič, and I. S. Narskij, still according to O'Rourke (1974, p. 152), generally developed more abstract definitions of Marxist liberty. Examples include 'the goal-setting, choosing activity of social man, accomplished on the basis of the cognition of objective necessity', and 'the knowledge of necessity, the activity of man in accordance with this knowledge, and the possibility and capability of choice in his actions'. "Necessity" does not entail absolute determination; 'although everything is causally conditioned, not everything is necessary' (O'ROURKE, 1974, p. 175). It only means that one must be able to tell what *necessarily* happens from what is contingent in order to pursue one's goals, as an engineer needs to understand gravity to project an aeroplane. 'The knowledge of necessity is just a precondition for free acts, the latter being realized in some kind of *control over nature and society*' (O'ROURKE, 1974, p. 185, emphasis added). Marx used the term "free" as 'a synonym for "consciously regulated"', as 'an antonym of [...] existing independently of man' (WALICKI, 1988, p. 21). Hence correctly understanding the dialectical relationship between humankind and impersonal forces (natural demands, capital) leads to acting freely, that is, toward ceasing to be determined by the latter, therefore self-determining, behaving solely according to one's rational essence.

This collective emancipation, understood as a necessary process itself — like gravity — leads to significant restrictions in the "spectrum of possibilities" for individuals: while freedom, for Soviet thinkers, was indeed a matter of choice, 'the alternatives among which [one] chooses are given [...] by the natural and social conditions of [one's] life' (O'ROURKE, 1974, p. 152). Again one sees that the humanist side of Marx's theory, his anthropological freedom, cannot logically serve as reference to judge the restrictions in force (that is, by assessing whether they

⁵¹ Case in point: it was impossible for me to even find on the internet the first and middle names of V. E. Davidovič and I. S. Narskij, which is why they are cited below in this form.

allow for the full development of one's potential) because this liberty *was already defined as dependent* on said restrictions, as they are synonymous with the collective rationalisation of life. With few exceptions, writes O'Rourke (1974, p. 176–177), the rule in Soviet philosophy of the time was to see 'moral good as the adaptation of the person to the needs of society'. This is deeply embedded in the Marxist tradition (PRICE, W., 2012a, p. 315, 2020, p. 4–5).

In summary, the development of one's potentials is simply what happens in the lack of limitations, when someone can really *self-determine*. This view is often called "positive", in contrast with liberal, "negative" freedom, because it focuses on exercise rather than on opportunity, as Charles Taylor (1985) analyses. In Soviet philosophy,

it is always emphasized that the primary sense of "freedom" is not freedom from but freedom for something. [...] Negative freedom is called "formal", and "abstract", "having nothing in common with the active, creative manifestation of the human being." A free act is always directed towards the transformation of some possibility into reality by striving for the realization of some goal. (O'ROURKE, 1974, p. 151)

Nonetheless, the "positivity" of a concept of liberty does not mean it is not based on unrestriction. Liberty is not doing something but being unimpeded to do so. The idea of "freeing the will" meant empowering it to fight off what was restricting it; therein lied freedom, not in good behaviour (if "free actions" did not follow, it only meant the will was still unfree). If that were not the case, the sentence "to be free to be a capitalist" for Marxists (or "to be free to act immorally" for Kantians, as seen in section 2.2) would be not merely misguided but entirely *meaningless*; a categorical mistake, like "to deep-fry respect" or "to listen to a colour".

Marxists disagree that anyone achieves *real* freedom by supporting capitalism, but they will allow "particular freedoms" (same structural meaning, smaller scale), and even that every class attempts to emancipate society, only the rules of its sphere of activity are (wrongly) taken to be valid for all⁵² (SOWELL, 1963, p. 121). The 'ordinary employment' of the word freedom (i.e. unrestriction) is not necessarily 'bourgeois'; we simply have to 'pay close attention to what we ordinarily say' (COHEN, G. A., 1988, p. 240). As Leszek Kolakowski (1978, p. 308, emphases added) writes, socialism promotes freedom by '*removing the obstacles which prevent* human beings from developing their creative abilities to the full'. Liberty is still ultimately based on the subjective feeling of unrestriction; the Marxist philosophical framework only establishes

⁵² This is ideology in the Marxist sense: the presentation of particular class interests as general ones (COHEN, G. A., 1988, p. 239). On a side note, the neoliberal theory of "the end of history", advanced by Francis Fukuyama, is also rooted in Hegelianism.

capitalism as the restraint to beat, or rather one more stage to be overcome in a longer, more fundamental struggle: against natural, impersonal, chaotic arbitrariness.

Perhaps more crucially, this view also presupposes sovereignty, and not only the “transitional” ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, which ‘expressed little more than the truism that a cohesive popular will would be overwhelming in a truly democratic state’ (SOWELL, 1963, p. 119). Marx did not approve of the states of his day because capitalist relations undermined their legitimacy; but, as Andreas Arndt (2016, p. 219–221) argues, law was for him ‘a means to change society’. Marx ‘never spoke of a “withering away” of the State’; only Engels and Lenin did, and even so, as Walicki (1988, p. 41) remarks, while stressing ‘the importance of the principle of authority in all social organization’, that is, valid ‘quite irrespective of how and by whom the decisions will be made’.

‘Although Marx and Engels anticipated the [eventual] demise of “politics” and “political power”, the future communist society they envisioned was [...] by no means anarchistic; the State was to be its one indispensable institution’ [...]. The Marxian sublation of the State represents [...] the abstract (post-transitional) negation of the (as Hegel describes it) ‘strictly political’ State [...]. The key passage from Marx on this topic is the following (from 1872): ‘[...] as soon as the goal of the proletarian movement, the abolition of classes, is attained, [...] public functions will lose their political character and be transformed into simple administrative functions of watching over the true interests of society [as determined by the sociological genius]’ (MCLAUGHLIN, 2002, p. 76, brackets with content in the original)

This is a consistent development; ‘full, conscious control of man’s collective fate’ presupposes, after all, ‘effective control over all spheres of social life’ (WALICKI, 1988, p. 24). For ‘social reason’ to be turned into ‘social force’ so that the restrictions of randomness and arbitrariness can be effectively fought off, ‘there exists no other method [...] than through general laws, enforced by the power of the state’ (MARX, 1996[1866] apud ARNDT, 2016, p. 219). As Pietro Gori (2000[1894], p. 41) relates, Marxists are considered ‘reasonable’ by authorities because they ‘seek to conquer public power and, therefore, move in the orbit of our laws’^d. This matches Lenin’s automatic connection between self-determination and independent statehood: ‘without having such an option, a people would not be free’⁵³ (KNUDSEN, 2020, p. 38).

⁵³ Knudsen (2020, p. 38) adds that ‘whenever “self-determination” was mentioned in subsequent important international contexts, the creation of a new state appeared to be the “default” method of implementing the concept’, even though the ‘proposed criteria’ for doing so were ‘certainly not based on his radical socialism’.

2.4 SEEING THE FOREST

*Law we sometimes call the wisdom of our ancestors.
But this is a strange imposition. It was as frequently
the dictate of their passion, of timidity, jealousy, a monopolizing spirit,
and a lust of power that knew no bounds.*

William Godwin ⁵⁴

*If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot
stamping on a human face — for ever.*

O'Brien, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* ⁵⁵

Berlin (2002[1958], p. 194) warned that positive liberty led to forcing ‘empirical selves into the right pattern’. But despite the oppression in the Soviet regime, its philosophers argued that the ‘unconditional surrender of one’s own wishes to social duty’ was not to be ‘fulfilled unwillingly’ (O’ROURKE, 1974, p. 177). On the other hand, “forcing others to be free” is a reasonable accusation against the colonialist and capitalist imperial adventures so closely linked to Christian and liberal “patterns”.

To go beyond sterile “whataboutism”, the point is that a common logic connects these views on liberty. As already discussed in section 2.2, no matter how “positive” or “negative”, achieving them in any meaningful way will always require a right to exercise violence with impunity (sovereignty). This explains some important ideological resemblances and institutional intersections among these views.

Sovereignty is required for the protection of a certain minimum area of non-interference, but not a specific type of sovereign power. ‘It is perfectly conceivable that a liberal-minded despot would allow his subjects a large measure of personal freedom’, wrote Berlin (2002[1958], p. 176–177). As a result, liberal definitions of liberty can be used to defend monarchical forms of government; in his last words, the English king Charles I defined the ‘liberty and freedom’ of the people as ‘having of government by those laws, by which their lives, and their goods may be most their own’ (CHARLES I; CHAMBERLAYNE, 2021[1654], p. 119).

By increasingly enshrining their liberties as ruler-restraining rights, however, liberals have in practice endeavoured not only to have liberty but to secure it — quite a republican impulse. As John P. Clark (2013b, p. 123–124) writes, Skinner’s ‘alternative to the classical liberal view’, encompassing points such as the sovereignty of the body of citizens, the rule of law, and

⁵⁴ Godwin, 2019[1793], p. 349.

⁵⁵ Orwell, 2003[1949], part III, chap. III.

security of possessions, are all ‘commonplace in modern liberal capitalist ideology’. Just as Benjamin Straumann (2016, p. 341) characterises the Roman-inspired, “constitutional” strand of the republican tradition as a ‘protohistory of liberalism’, Kalyvas and Katznelson (2008) write that liberalism is basically an adaptation of republicanism for a more commercial era. In keeping with liberal indifference to the wielder of sovereignty, some Renaissance republicans – echoing Cicero⁵⁶ (STRAUMANN, 2016, p. 138, 190) – thought that a state could be free, ‘at least in principle[. . .] under the rule either of a republic or a prince’; the main point was ‘that the head of state should be bereft of any power to reduce the body of the commonwealth to a condition of dependence’ (SKINNER, 2012, p. 54–55). Thus the liberal perspective converges with some republican ones: the sovereign order that prevents anyone from imposing a particular conception of the good, that does not advantage some private interests over others, obstructs the emergence of master-slave relationships.

In such a framework, as discussed in section 2.3.1, private property and market relations are usually intertwined with liberty; Jean Bodin, known for concept-defining analyses of sovereignty, saw in their preservation the definition of its lawful exercise (STRAUMANN, 2016, p. 289). They can be seen as actively preventing domination (DAGGER, 2006; TAYLOR, R. S., 2013).

However, republicanism can also be suspicious of market individualism, its rhetoric made compatible with socialism (KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019, p. 223). It was because market logic was seen as a factional idea of the good that delegates from socialist states in the United Nations challenged liberal colonialist discourse (also seen in section 2.3.1) *with republican arguments* (KNUDSEN, 2020, p. 147). And as shown by Ranadive’s apology in section 2.3.3, Marxists could argue that Soviet laws, for example, prevented advantaging of private interests, safeguarding the project of human emancipation (LANDAUER, 2010[1895], p. 1).

Yet other republicans stand out by stressing that the spirit of the laws must be actively chosen instead of determined in advance. Unless a group’s laws are willed by the group as a whole (whatever they are), an individual or a faction would effectively dominate, respect to legal process notwithstanding. Thomas Jefferson (1979[1789]) even wrote that every constitution and law ‘naturally expires at the end of 19 years’; if enforced longer, ‘it is an act of force, & not of right’. But there *is* enforcement – say, during those 19 years. The properly ascertained collective will must not be sidelined by factional, particular, or external profit.

⁵⁶ See also Kapust (2018, chap. 1).

Kant and Rousseau are great examples of the resemblances and intersections within the unrestriction paradigm. Kant, known for his idea of “liberal peace” and his proposal that ‘citizenship should only go to the relatively wealthy’ (PETTIT, 2013, p. 178), is probably his most liberal self when he argues for the moral autonomy of the individual, to be achieved when reason overcomes innocence. In this he echoes Rousseau’s ethical theory, which, as argued by John Chapman, makes the Genevan philosopher a ‘forerunner of modern liberalism’, despite the illiberal elements in his politics or his deep distrust of market relations (WATKINS, 1957, p. 1106). As republicans, both defined freedom as ‘not having to live under the will of another’ (PETTIT, 2013, p. 176) and concerned themselves with reconciling individual self-determination with obedience to the state (PRICHARD, 2012, p. 100). While the more romantic Rousseau favoured democratic processes to create obligation, Kant (1996, p. 462 apud PETTIT, 2013, p. 189) bound freedom to rationality and stability, arguing that an individual ‘cannot and may not judge otherwise than as the present head of state [...] wills it to’. Marxism is more often related to Rousseau than to Kant because of the former’s concern with economic inequality, his association with Jacobinism, and the trope of liberty overcoming “nature”. However, in a line of thought that strikingly parallels the Kantian one, most prominent Marxist philosophers in the Soviet Union argued that the truly free person

perceives the current needs of social development and then seeks to make these the goal of his actions. These needs often become expressed in laws, and freedom of will can be described as “the conscious, voluntary submission of one’s own energies, actions and behavior to the demands of the prevailing set of laws.” (O’ROURKE, 1974, p. 176)

A definition of freedom is elaborated as a general good, and sovereign force is used to make sure people remain unrestrained in the relevant sense. “Reason” and “choice” notwithstanding, one cannot lose sight of the partiality of what is enforced. ‘If Ciceronian slogans are separated from republican facts’, writes Hoye (2021, p. 266, emphasis in the original), ‘what remains is not popular non-domination but elite domination *characterized* as concern for the *salus populi* [the safety of the people]’⁵⁷. Was there not a specific, particular, factional interest embedded in Roman institutions instead of a natural or general one? That there seems not to be only speaks of the elite’s success in legitimising their mastership (MADDOCK, 1966 apud LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 215). Modern “popular sovereignty”, as argued by Edmund S. Morgan (1989, p. 169), is

⁵⁷ Straumann (2016, p. 184) argues that *salus populi* was for Cicero ‘the integrity of the people’s agreement about *ius* [the constitution]’.

too easily thought of as ‘a rising of the many against the few’, when in reality it was ‘a question of some of the few enlisting the many against the rest of the few’.

The proof is arguably in the pudding: if the promoted good were actually reasonable or consensual for a given group, it would not need to be imposed and ‘continually enforced’ in the first place⁵⁸ (CRIMETHINC, 2016b). Sovereignty ‘without hierarchy, without exploitation[...], loses its reason for being’, write Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 8); it is sought precisely because it is a very effective way to avoid taking other people’s perspectives into account (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 67–72; LAOGHAIRE, 2016, p. 15). It generates or entrenches inequality by making it harder to challenge any status quo that favours some at the expense of others. ‘Is it possible for the weak to impose the law on the strong?’, asked Ricardo Mella (2018[1913][b]); since it is not, the anarchist continued, ‘is not the law, then, one more weapon for the strong against the weak?’^e. Domination is thus not ‘in such or such other legislative enactments’, wrote Tolstoy (2019[1900], p. 39), but ‘in the fact that legislation exists’ — more specifically, ‘that there are people who have power to decree laws profitable for themselves’, asking a community to see particular unrestrictions as so fundamental to their aspired identity that they are willing to impose them at any cost⁵⁹.

When sovereign force exists, there is always competition regarding what it is supposed to do. It may involve more or less direct use of force, and be more open or closed in terms of who can take part in it. “Statist”⁶⁰ democracy can be defined by deliberative and inclusive configurations of this dispute, encompassing more than the electoral moment (MANSBRIDGE *et al.*, 2012). But even discounting exclusion from the contest or victory by conquest, more powerful groups have great influence over the limits and mechanics⁶¹ of the competition (GORDON, U., 2006, p. 143; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 161–162). The winning “project” does not necessarily reflect the wishes of the majority, let alone of all (KROPOTKIN, 2009[1920], p. 3).

Still, there is always a chance of underdogs winning the race for the right to impose views. But the more the “ultimate prize” (PRICHARD, 2012, p. 104) of sovereignty is “up for grabs”, the more vividly one can imagine a worsening of tensions leading to catastrophe⁶². This motivates

⁵⁸ See the discussion on immanent order in chapter 4.

⁵⁹ See also Tolstoy (1998[1900]) and Bonomo (2007, p. 144).

⁶⁰ Moraes’s (2020) neologisms ^fare theoretically interesting; they translate as statelatro / statelatrois, in a play with the words idolatrous / idolatry. Honestly I find these words ugly in English and hence will not use them, but it is for the most part what I am discussing when using the term “statist”. Tangentially, see also Goodman (2010[1945][b], p. 41) on “sociolatro”.

⁶¹ See also Kurrild-Klitgaard (2001) and Pacuit (2019) on voting methods.

⁶² See the discussion on perceived levels of threat against the social edifice in section 4.1, page 100, and on democratic legitimation of sovereignty in section 4.2.1, page 115. See also Graeber (2012, 2015b, p. 96, 149–206)

many to accept counter-majoritarian safeguards: inevitably, specific conceptions of the good to be defended with sovereign force. In fact, ‘Western countries almost invariably introduced the mass franchise’ only *after* they had already constitutionally entrenched individual property rights⁶³ (MICKLETHWAIT; WOOLDRIDGE, 2014, p. 262 apud LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 162). As these specific conceptions become harder to challenge, so do the inequalities and hierarchies based on them.

The limits might be justified on previous choices — such as in the settler cult of “founding fathers” — but also on “rational” grounds, as is often the case with liberal boundaries on representative democracy or the demands of “historical necessity”⁶⁴. Of course, the two kinds are not so different in the end. Choices are made for reasons and imposing one’s reasoning is a choice. The question is not only who gets to think and choose but to legitimately represent collective reason and agency⁶⁵.

In any case, this never really resolves conflicts (as shall be further discussed in section 4.2). On the contrary, it makes it more difficult for the dominated to compete, increasing the likelihood of attempts to win by more violent means. This logically motivates, either “progressively” or “reactively”, a turn from the dictatorship of the proletariat into the ‘dictatorship *over* the proletariat’⁶⁶ (SOWELL, 1963, p. 123), or the liberal acceptance of “monarchs” (dictatorships, even outright fascist regimes) (ERVIN, 2009[1993], p. 10; CONNORS, 2019). Throughout history, there is a nearly endless set of individuals who have been granted “extraordinary” powers to “save the republic” by “preserving law and order” — or who have founded a new “order” through establishing themselves as supreme dispensers of violence.

In other words, obsession over a general model of unrestriction leads to conflicts that often erode those very unrestrictions — or their universal reach, which is supposed to characterise

and Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 3, 4, 22) on fear of creativity, “ugly mirrors” (experiences constructed to justify conservative arguments against popular creativity and autonomy), and how they manifest in contemporary pop culture, particularly superhero lore (the “power to reshape the world” is inherently villainous and justifies the maintenance of the status quo).

⁶³ See also Robinson (1980, p. 18).

⁶⁴ For liberals, all sovereigns need to be controlled, and this logically includes “the people”; see Edmund S. Morgan (1989). There is also the case of Cuba, which has elections but state socialist laws entrenching certain principles (it is still a one-party system). On the other hand, Cuba’s constitution was recently changed to introduce some market-like values, such as some forms of private property; see Igor Martins Coelho Almeida (2019).

⁶⁵ Hence the anarchist critique of representation, which is not a wholesale condemnation but a reflection on possible alternatives for dealing with the inevitable dangers it poses; for a comprehensive account of the issue, see Cohn (2006). See also George Ciccariello-Maher (2011, p. 34–35) on Frantz Fanon: this move is usually accompanied by the racist assertion that some people are not just contingently but ontologically excluded from such constitution-(re)making realms of rational agency, undercutting any allegedly equal participation in subsequent, subordinated choices.

⁶⁶ See also Wayne Price (2020) and Swain (2021).

these traditions' progressiveness⁶⁷. Views of freedom based on unrestriction cannot do away with unfreedom because they are premised on some form of restriction (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 106–108); one's liberty depending on the restraint of others is a maxim valid throughout the paradigm, even if rephrased as collective freedom requiring gulags. Eliminating arbitrariness 'simply ends up producing more arbitrary power', as the position of power to be disputed 'just jumps up a level' (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 197, 205). As shall be explained in section 4.3.1, anarchists hold a specific concept of domination, and the dominated having a chance of becoming the dominators — majority voting, after all, ultimately means "might makes right" (GRAEBER, 2004, p. 87–91) — does not eliminate the sociability intrinsic to sovereignty.

This framework has similar effects regardless of whether competition is more or less open, or who is winning it: a build-up in state capacities; a consolidation of the logic of sovereignty more generally. Some desires would not be entertained (and others, not given up) without the impression that *someone* is going to win and impose their will. As people become invested in a game they fail to see themselves out of, more is demanded of sovereign force, which will never operate so as to *encourage* decentralisation of power, even if current underdogs prevail. While for Marxists no one would dominate if workers were in charge, for anarchists the ruling minority would consist only of 'former workers, who, as soon as they become [... rulers], will cease to be workers and will look down at the plain working masses from the governing heights of the State'. No longer representing the people but claiming that 'only dictatorship (of course their own) can create freedom for the people', they would treat those out of government like 'a regimented herd' (BAKUNIN, 1971[1873], p. 330–332). A 'change of position and perspective' thus accounts for 'the reddest democrats' becoming 'the most moderate conservatives' once in government⁶⁸ (BAKUNIN, 1971[1870][b], p. 221) — even when they are outside looking in: as Rocker (2009[1937], p. 24) commented, during the Spanish Revolution anyone 'too conservative to join the Left Republicans [joined] the Communists'⁶⁹.

Seeking to guarantee unrestrictions does more than "conserve" the modern state; it strengthens it to keep up with resistance. Techniques to overwhelm proponents of alternative ways to relate and manage resources are developed, and adopted "across the aisle". As Graeber

⁶⁷ See also Goldman (2018[1931], p. 429).

⁶⁸ See also Alfred (2005, p. 26); tangentially, see Bonomo (2007, p. 144).

⁶⁹ Workers clashed with 'the conservatism of the political parties *and the Marxists*', wrote José Xena (2022[1937], emphasis added) about the same period. 'By actively opposing political participation' in the state, writes Evans (2021), anarchists were 'able to resist much more effectively than its Marxist opponents the process through which capitalism extended its domination'. See also Acharya (2019[1950]) on post-Gandhi "Gandhian" governments in India.

(2001, p. 85–85) saw it, capitalism has tended ‘to be far more effective at the ideological game than almost any previously known form of exploitation’ – and if it did not exist, Eric Laursen (2021, p. 105) adds, the modern state ‘would have to invent some other mechanism that fulfills more or less the same function’, like in the Soviet or Chinese examples⁷⁰. The internet is the next frontier, as digital infrastructure becomes, all over the globe, ever more capable as a mechanism of surveillance and control (ABRAHAMIAN, 2019; ZUBOFF, 2019; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 107–108, 131–132, 138–140; TÜFEKÇİ, 2022).

In a conflict-ridden landscape, some dream of a way to guarantee the peace of their victory; or, in a more pacific scenario, few object to an organised force protecting what is unproblematically recognised as sacred. In any case, such dreams and agreements are the Petri dishes of strife itself; they lead to increasingly megalomaniac utopias of security that fail to reintegrate individuals and communities into equally and mutually healthy relations (*if* it ever crosses the utopians’ minds that this is the goal). Ideas can change, as their champions – liberals, republicans, Marxists, as well as others within the same paradigm – rise and fall. But the essence of sovereignty stays the same, continuing to configure identities and projects so that it continues to thrive.

2.5 BEYOND THE WHITE ELM

*There’s a feeling that I get, when I look to the west
Having all the answers, still failing the test*

Nada Surf⁷¹

*Anarchy wishes for social order, but not at everybody else’s expense.
Nobody else should feel degraded because you’re comfortable.
Everybody’s equal, you organize horizontally...
Traditional societies are no different.*

Mel Basil⁷²

In spite of the etymological roots of freedom and liberty, one should not establish Europe’s legacy as the sole source for reflecting on the idea the words were meant to represent. Arendt’s comment on ‘tribal societies’ is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of Eurocentric academic

⁷⁰ See also Rogério Nascimento (2002, p. 93), Springer (2014, p. 258), and William C. Anderson (2021, p. 76–79).

⁷¹ Caws, Elliot, and Lorca, 2008. Keeping with this chapter’s botanic theme, the elm, native to Europe, is referenced in this section’s title for having been planted in revolutionary contexts as a “liberty tree”.

⁷² Hill and Antlif, 2021, p. 109.

discussions of the subject. ‘There seems to be a certainty among many scholars’, writes Fiscella (2015, p. 54), ‘that Europeans invented’ freedom. However,

the basic ingredients in conversations about “freedom” are easily translatable into non-European languages and their long traditions of negotiating terms such as “violence,” “power,” “ability,” “equality,” “rules,” or “obligations” as well as concepts such as “access to decision-making processes” and “social justice.” Whereas Orlando Patterson had written that most languages did not have a word for “freedom” [...], [David] Kelly and [Anthony] Reid responded [...] that “[Asian peoples do not inhabit a separate planet. When they themselves appeal to freedom[...], this can hardly be dismissed as a bourgeois Western, hegemonic invention.”⁷³ (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 59)

If freedom could only ever refer to phenomena that took place in Europe in certain time periods, the extent to which the concept could be reimagined would be severely limited. Notably, any definition would have to be based on the unrestriction paradigm. By working within this framework, anarchists would undermine⁷⁴ the claim that their proposed political constitutions are derived from, or directly relate to, a defence of freedom: how could they favour the expansion of radically participatory decision-making processes into every level of society while, at the same time, championing the maximisation of liberty thus defined⁷⁵?

It is not that alternative accounts of freedom authorises anarchist deviance on the topic, but that anarchism has always been attuned to non-Western sensibilities and practices. These resonances have been recognised not only academically (EVANS-PRITCHARD, 1940; CLASTRES, 1989[1972]; ROBINSON, 1980, chap. V; KAPSOLI, 1984; GRAEBER, 2004; ALFRED, 2005; ANGELBECK, 2009; COULTHARD, 2014, p. 159; MORRIS, B., 2014; FALLEIROS, 2018b, p. 4–5; KNOLL, 2018[2007]; AMBORN, 2019; OCA, 2019, p. 22–23; DENVIR, 2020, 1:00:21–1:00:44) but in militancy as well. Reclus’s, Michel’s, and Kropotkin’s experiences (to mention a few) with non-Western Others were turning points for them (KINNA, 2016, p. 119–120; SKODA; TROYANO, 2020, 36:29–37:19; LAURENTIIS, 2021, p. 20–21). In contrast with more typical European ideologies, including Marxism⁷⁶ (WALT; SCHMIDT, 2009a, p. 311–312; EVREN, 2012, p. 303–304), 19th-century anarchists considered ‘forms of statelessness [...] historic achievements’ (KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019, p. 230), and lamented the ‘economization and Europeanization’ that threatened ‘genuinely progressive’ communal traditions (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 85). Anarchism

⁷³ See also Samuel Clark’s (2007, p. 47–74) discussion of Michael Walzer’s argument about incommensurable meanings and “internal criticism”.

⁷⁴ As it has been historically the case; see chapter 3 below, as well as Little (2023, p. 134).

⁷⁵ There would also be contradiction when contrasting anarchism with a “positive” understanding; horizontally deliberated decisions, for instance, could stray from a given yardstick for free behaviour.

⁷⁶ For a counterpoint, however, see also Glen Coulthard (2014, p. 11, 186).

‘held great appeal for Chinese intellectuals’ (KREBS, 1998, p. 25); in Indonesia, many traditional communities embed ‘anarchistic practices’ (ESTRELITA *et al.*, 2022); the same can be said of traditional Philippine cultures (PAIREZ; UMALI, 2020), or many Amerindian peoples, like the Navajo (NOWELL, 2020). Indeed, for Djane Poty Reté the libertarian movement is the one that most easily connects with American indigenous philosophies⁷⁷ (BLOCO A, 2021, 31:58–32:11). There is such alignment that for Tawinikay (2021[2018]) white people do not need to adopt non-Western world-views or institutions to find liberation – anarchism is *right there* for them⁷⁸. Jason Adams (2014, p. 4) therefore claims that anarchism should not be considered ‘a fully Western tradition in the usual sense of the term’. Marxism and anarchism, for example, should respectively be ‘Western and Eastern versions of socialism’, as Marx and Engels saw ‘Russianness in Bakunin’s ideas and behavior’⁷⁹ and the latter ‘expressed his fears that the social revolution would become characterized by “pan-Germanism” and “statism”’.

But this is not to say that the anarchist tradition *came from* anarchistic indigenous cultures⁸⁰. It could be argued that it was mainly built by people opposing the whirlwind of European culture and economy from the eye of the storm, even if they lived in different continents (COHN, 2022). This often limited the movement’s vision. Their use of ‘jarring terminology’ (‘savages’, ‘barbarians’, ‘primitives’) is explainable and was usually subverted (KINNA, 2021a, p. 8–9), but praise of non-Western cultures could be marred by condescension (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 90). ‘Early “American” anarchists never declared war on colonialism’, explained Klee Benally (2021b, p. 57–61), exploring particularly awful examples of a ‘blind spot’ that still led to anarchists ‘in the recent past [... excusing] themselves out of solidarity for Indigenous struggles’ – or, as Adam Barker (2021) documents, providing poor, insensitive aid. Some early anarchists saw “Westernisation” as progressive, especially under the influence of positivism (LEIBNER, 2013[1994], p. 7–8; WALT; HIRSCH, 2010, p. lviii; DUARTE, R. D. M., 2021, p. 181, 196; COHN, 2022); colonised ‘races’ were not inferior, ‘only latecomer’, Jean Grave (2020[1912], p. 5) wrote once. Efforts to actually engage indigenous philosophies in their own

⁷⁷ See also Bringel and Saddi (2018, 7:22–7:51) and Benally (2021b, p. 66).

⁷⁸ This opinion is used to “dramatically” emphasise the parallel, but it surely is not a unanimous point of view – e.g. Means (2011[1980]) and Benally (2021b) – and I do not use it to disengage decolonial thought; see also Gómez-Barris (2021).

⁷⁹ See also Ward (1991b, p. 61) and Finn (2021, p. 97–98).

⁸⁰ Graeber and Wengrow (2021, chap. 2) trace the origins of European discourses on inequality – including Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s – to indigenous critiques of European society widely circulated in Europe at the time. However, while Rousseau was an important influence on anarchism (in an oppositional sense) (KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019, p. 6–7), anarchists did not reject Rousseau *in explicit reference to that critique*, and hence the “chain of formative influences” can be said to have been broken.

categories and knowledge (to effectively “decolonise” anarchism) can be said to be relatively recent developments (ALFRED, 2005, p. 46; FISCELLA, 2015, p. 173; GALIÁN, 2020).

As explored in section 1.2, I strive to handle anarchism in a way that ‘gets beyond both transhistorical appeals to the struggle between liberty and authority, and false dichotomies of primitive and modern social movements’ (EVANS, 2021). It is indeed a historically situated phenomenon, but many non-Western peoples are also putting forward alternative, egalitarian, libertarian visions of modernity, having done so for much longer than there were anarchists⁸¹ (A ZAPATISTA..., 2019[2002]; CUSICANQUI, 2020, p. 46–48, 53–54, 67; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 214–215). The notion that nothing could be learned from them is precisely the issue with the current “common sense” (GRAEBER, 2004, p. 41), including the one around liberty. As Fiscella (2015, p. 150n318) points out, ‘the color line and creation of the “white race” were established during the same period as “freedom” began to take hold in Europe as a central value and, significantly, often by the same thinkers’⁸². In The Second Virginia Convention,

White lawyer, property-owner, enslaver, and soon-to-be governor of Virginia, Patrick Henry [... famously declared]: “Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!” That an enslaver could utter these words without a person in the room snickering in disbelief at the gall of it all (at least not that we know of) is testimony to the degree in which white supremacy was (and was to become) thoroughly ingrained in conceptions of “freedom.” (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 155)

As also seen in section 1.2, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and anti-racist struggles were (despite the issues presented a few paragraphs ago) quite important in shaping the movement (EVREN, 2012, p. 303–306), and hence the tradition. Building on Bakunin’s thought, Kropotkin ‘outlined an idea of colonialism that recognised the power advantages that Europeans enjoyed’ without ‘framing liberation in terms of the superiority of Western ideas or the logic of modernisation’. In fact, ‘the freedom that anarchy promised demanded the abandonment of the institutions and practices that emerged as a result of European colonisation’, with the state being a colonial enterprise even *within* Europe⁸³ (KINNA, 2016, p. 86, 95–96, 112, 190). Focusing on the importance of diversity in all contexts, Reclus identified ‘racism as one of the most pernicious forms of oppression and domination’⁸⁴ (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 89). This lives on in

⁸¹ See also Kinna (2019b, p. 63) and Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 9, 18).

⁸² See also Ervin (2009[1993], p. 5), Mebane-Cruz (2015), William C. Anderson (2021, p. 167–168), and Cowie (2022).

⁸³ See also Gelderloos (2016, chap. II), Kinna (2019b, p. 79–80), and Yazzie (2021).

⁸⁴ See also Ferretti (2013, 2015).

contemporary anarchism, which to Simon Critchley (2008, p. 125) ‘flows from an experience of conscience about the manifold ways in which the West ravages the rest’.

It goes without saying that using “mainstream” definitions of freedom does not *automatically and by itself* turn anyone into a racist or contribute to racial oppression. And yet, especially over time and in combination with other factors, it might. Definitions matter, if anything for the self-consistency landmines they lay. Although throughout this chapter notions of freedom have been associated with political settings, they should not be seen as mere epiphenomena⁸⁵. Like traditions in Bevir’s (2000, p. 33) sense, they impact how people read their own situations, even if they do not determine their actions: ‘social contexts only ever influence, as opposed to decide or restrict, the nature of individuals’. But influence is not nothing. The way certain understandings of freedom collaborate with systems of oppression is a frequent theme in anarchist thought (ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 25–26; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 176–177). Learning about the aforementioned influence of white domination on this subject, then, provides further criteria for judging the (historical and theoretical) coherency of the anarchist concept of freedom I shall propose.

⁸⁵ Especially nowadays, as MacGilvray (2011, p. 4–5) argues.

3 REINTERPRETING THE ANARCHIST APPROACH

Anarchism is the traveller that walks through the paths of history, and fights alongside people as they are, and builds with the materials available in its time.^a

Camillo Berneri¹

Freedom is never attained; it must always be striven for. Consequently, its claims have no limit, and can neither be enclosed in a programme nor prescribed as a definite rule for the future. [...] The worst tyranny is that of ideas which have been handed down to us [...] to steamroller everything to one flat universal level.

Rudolf Rocker²



THE INTELLIGIBILITY OF ANARCHIST CLAIMS about freedom is obscured by glossing over how they challenge ‘established dichotomies’ of the term (HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 111–112). As Matthew Wilson (2011, p. 52) analyses ‘what freedom means for anarchists’, for instance, he presents two different traditional European views and wonders which one anarchism favours. However, when made to fit in orthodox paradigms, anarchist considerations on the matter “refract” into precisely the mutually excluding views they were intended to overcome.

Relying on the widespread but misguided impression of anarchism as extreme individualism (KINNA, 2012a, p. 47, 2016, p. 128), many argue that ‘anarchism necessarily conceives of freedom in an extremely negative sense, as limited to a strict lack of coercion or interference’ (HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 118–119). Ritter’s (1980, p. 14–15) treatment of censure is even reminiscent of the Hobbesian liberty of the will, which might be construed as indifferent to laws³: ‘censure does not restrict the freedom of an individual, because when he complies with it, his directive is a self-imposed “secret commandment from himself to himself”’.

Analytical philosophers, writes Franks (2012, p. 55), see in anarchism the principle of ‘absolute sovereignty of the individual, based invariably on a Lockean or Kantian account of the self and negative rights’, which is ‘sometimes expressed as the absolute prohibition on coercion’. Andrew Vincent (1995, p. 129 apud HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 118) states that the anarchist concept of liberty is ‘virtually the same as that of many of the classical liberals’, and Matthew Wilson

¹ Camillo Berneri, 2009, p. 45–46.

² Rocker, 2005, p. 73 apud Little (2023, p. 40).

³ See discussion in section 2.2 (page 40).

(2011, p. 89) writes that, like liberalism, anarchism ‘strongly supports the ideal of individual freedom’, only “rendering” it differently⁴. Matthew Wilson (2011, p. 100) further claims that anarchist ethics ‘defines liberty by its absence’, as ‘the possibility of a privatised morality that is no longer the concern of society’; as ‘freedom from moral intrusion [...] always potentially limited by the freedom of others’⁵.

Although Matthew Wilson (2011, p. 52; 72) accepts that anarchism might not favour any of the two concepts of freedom in his sights, he cannot see past them: anarchist liberty should be ‘understood as an abstract, moral demand’ with unclear practical implications other than the absence of a state. There is indeed a tendency for those equating anarchist and liberal views of freedom to mischaracterise⁶ the former in terms of (mainly, or just) anti-statism, perhaps because that would be the only disagreement left to tell one from the other (KINNA, 2016, p. 30; 33). Even when it is recognised that anarchists do speak in terms of desired institutions (that is, beyond ‘abstract, moral’ demands), these are seen as having the effect of limiting autonomy and freedom⁷ (WIGGER, 2014, p. 748).

For John P. Clark (2013b, p. 177–178), only ‘those who are unfamiliar with anarchist thought’ associate anarchism with ‘mere belief in a voluntaristic society without coercive laws’. This supposed ‘no coercion’ rule (WILSON, M., 2011, p. 45) puts anarchists ‘on the back foot’ by pointing ‘to a potential problem in individual-community relations that liberals believed the state resolved’⁸ (KINNA, 2016, p. 30). Anarchism is then questioned in terms of the ‘conceptual and methodological instruments’ with which ‘non-coercive social compliance could be achieved’ (KINNA, 2016, p. 30), and a view on freedom opposite to what had just been assumed is usually seen as the answer: anarchists argue ‘more in the vein of positive liberty’, in the sense of ‘moral growth and self-development of the individual within a community’⁹ (VINCENT, 1995, p. 120; 129 apud HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 118).

⁴ This is also how OpenAI’s ChatGPT summarises anarchist liberty: ‘the concept that individuals should have the autonomy and agency to live their lives free from external constraints’. Queried on January 29th 2023. The program, running its “Jan 9” (presumably of the same year) version, answered to the question ‘What is the anarchist concept of freedom?’.

⁵ In terms of moral and ethical theory alone there is much to contradict this statement; see, for example, Kropotkin (2007[1889]) and Cubero (2015[1991][b], p. 47).

⁶ See section 4.3.

⁷ The issue here is identifying institutions with ‘government and domination’; see e.g. Karsten Schubert (2020, p. 9). That Schubert is speaking from a Foucauldian point of view explains but does not salvage his position; it rather highlights deep flaws with post-structuralist views on institutions, domination and freedom – or at least the difficulty of syncretising them with anarchism, a topic I have discussed elsewhere (SILVA, P. R. da, 2018) and shall bring up again in section 6.1.

⁸ See also Springer (2014, p. 252–253).

⁹ This is what John P. Clark (2013b, p. 178) goes on to do. See also Rowe (1991, p. 41) and Kinna (2011, p. 57).

This leads to accusations of hopeless incoherence and doubts about anarchism's commitment to freedom (RITTER, 1980, p. 25–26; HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 118–119), or to depictions of the tradition as unworkable. For Berlin (2002[1958], p. 195), anarchists believe in an ideal scenario in which formal rules would disappear out of obsolescence as everyone would act rationally and responsibly. Their goal would be 'the same as [their] precondition, that is, all individuals should share anarchist views and values' (BAÁR *et al.*, 2016, p. 488). One gets the impression that anarchists must either think naively about human nature¹⁰ or secretly harbour dictatorial desires (MCLAUGHLIN, 2002, p. 12).

I contend that a distinct concept of freedom is available in the anarchist tradition. But why is it so often missed, even when actively searched for? That analysts are too attached to more common meanings of the term can only explain so much, as anyone can easily find these very "popular" approaches in anarchist texts time after time. Franks (2012, p. 58) hints at the unfamiliarity of anarchist enthymemes ('hidden or accepted' premises) 'to the vast majority of practising political philosophers', which makes some arguments seem 'alien and inchoate'. While that might sometimes be the case (for instance, in the specific case he was analysing), it was definitely usual for anarchists to address audiences other than themselves, directly examining background assumptions in the process. 'Do not shrink at a word or phrase', read the salutary statement of *Free Society*, a San Francisco-based anarchist journal; 'investigate, rather, the meaning underlying them' (FERGUSON, K. E., 2018, p. 7).

Instead, I argue that strategic uses of popular definitions, as well as scruples regarding prescriptive and abstract theorising, are being overlooked. For anarchists, textually employing commonsensical notions of freedom within a broader dialogue might be a more effective, principled, and down-to-earth way of defining it differently¹¹.

¹⁰ See the beginning of chapter 5.

¹¹ See also Baker's (2023, introduction) approach to "rationally reconstructing" anarchist theory.

3.1 STRATEGY AND ETHICS

Never, without a struggle, will [people] give up their living speech to mechanical analyses and dissection. There is an instinct of self-protection in this living speech. If it is to develop, then it endeavors to develop spontaneously, and only in conformity with all vital conditions.

Lev Tolstoy¹²

As long as the propagandist sticks to certain anarchist principles — show, don't tell; stand with, not for; expose, don't conceal — then the job of propaganda was [...] “pushing” the people to demand and to seize all the freedom they can[...].

Craig Clark¹³

Convincing, through measured argument, power-hoarding elites to enact change was always less appealing to anarchists than inciting debate among the dominated on why they should, and how they could, directly transform society (plus what better ones could look like)¹⁴ (SHŪSUI, 1983[1907], p. 349; GRAEBER, 2009, p. 420; WALT; SCHMIDT, 2009a, p. 203; CORRÊA, 2012b, p. 144–146; EVANS; STAINFORTH, 2023). And by wanting to be read¹⁵ by people who might not immediately pick up on philosophical jargon, anarchists often used common sense meanings of terms and phrases.

For Max Nettlau, anarchist ideas ‘must be presented in a tangible way, more palpable than those in the most popular texts’, and this ‘is not done through theory’^{b,16} (GRUPO DE ESTUDIOS JOSÉ DOMINGO GÓMEZ ROJAS, 2017, p. 149). ‘Revolutionary feeling or thought expressed in exotic poetry or masked in high-brow philosophic dissertations’ is acceptable, wrote Alexander Berkman (1929, p. 183), ‘because it is neither accessible to nor understood by the public at large’. ‘I have not a tongue of fire as [Emma Goldman] has’, lamented de Cleyre (2009[1893], p. 7) in a speech, saying that she must ‘speak in [her] own cold, calculated way’ and wondering if ‘that is the reason [she is] let to speak at all’. In defending Proudhon against allegations of incorrectly using juridical language, Francisco Trindade (2001, p. 80) explains that he used words like “law” and “contract”¹⁷ in ‘absolutely different meanings’; Proudhon chose to

¹² Tolstoy, 2009[1862], §225.

¹³ Craig Clark (2021, 14:44-15:11), quoting Malatesta (2015c, p. 170).

¹⁴ See the discussion in section 6.2.1, page 291.

¹⁵ In many places, texts were also read aloud for those unable to do it themselves (COSTA, J. G. da, 2019, p. 102; SANTOS, K. W. dos, 2022, p. 238).

¹⁶ See also Ervin, Ervin, and Anderson (2021, 25:50–29:55) and Ribeiro (2021, p. 144).

¹⁷ See the discussion in section 7.2, page 348. See also Amaral (2021, p. 165n5).

use the ‘traditional vocabulary’ of his time to ‘avoid an esoteric language that would drive him away from his worker readers’^c. Prichard (2008, p. 287) agrees: the ‘second order contradictions’ of Proudhon are partly due to his writing in ‘turbulent times’ and ‘for a non-academic audience who looked to him for advice’. Some, like Acharya, ‘rarely mentioned the word anarchism’ in his texts, considering the meanings the term had already acquired by the 20th century, but he wrote ‘anarchistically’, discussing ‘the failure of parliamentary politics’ as well as ‘the dangers of bolshevism, nationalism, and fascism’ (LAURSEN, O. B., 2020, 5:47–6:02).

However, choosing to give voice to a ‘dissenting attitude in a popular manner’ came with the risk not only of facing ‘all the forces that stand for the preservation of the established’ (BERKMAN, 1929, p. 183), but also of being labelled as incoherent by the *intelligentsia*:

a departure from the popular use of language is accompanied by the risk of misconception by the multitude, who persistently ignore the new definitions; but, on the other hand, conformity thereto is attended by [...] confusion in the eyes of the competent, who would be justified in attributing inexactness of thought where there is inexactness of expression. (TUCKER, 2009[1926], p. 20)

Tucker could alternatively have begun texts with a “glossary”, proceeding to use a term as shorthand for its “unique” definition. The likely alienating effects of such “analytical” method might help explain why it was rarely chosen. It makes texts less appealing and their authors come across as condescending, rather than as equals with interests and outlooks in common with the audience. ‘Let us go to people’, exhorted Errico Malatesta (2014[1894]), but not with ‘smug arrogance’, not claiming ‘to hold the infallible truth’¹⁸. ‘When anarchists referred to their work as propaganda’, Kathy E. Ferguson (2018, p. 16) clarifies, ‘they did not mean feeding predigested thoughts to a passive audience but rather actively engaging their community of sense in the thinking that it required’¹⁹.

While it could be argued that this is merely a case for matching one’s message to one’s “target audience”, a communication skill that is obviously not exclusive to anarchists²⁰, this is not a strategic matter alone. For Ananda Coomaraswamy (2005[1943], p. 213 apud KINNA, 2020b, p. 10), it was impossible to ‘establish human relationships with other peoples if we are convinced of our own superiority or superior wisdom, and only want to convert them to our

¹⁸ Marxism began in Russia with students teaching Marxism to workers in underground training sessions. But these workers, then, became elitist; thinking they were now culturally superior, they did not want to mingle with other workers, so much so that a strike broke out at this workplace and none of the Marxists even knew it was happening (HARDING, N., 1983, p. 71–76 apud RICHTER; KHAN; BAKER, 2020, 1:19:59–1:20:40). See also ASHANTI... (2006, 37:23–38:19).

¹⁹ See also Chaeho (2020[1923], p. 2), Leuenroth (2007a), and Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, p. 286–290).

²⁰ See e.g. Blau (2004, p. 549).

way of thinking'²¹. Anarchists did not simply want to avoid *being perceived* as “holier-than-thou”; whatever they did was judged to be most aligned to libertarian tenets when it subverted theological *modi operandi*. This brings forth an immanent ethics (CUBERO, 2015[1991][b], p. 47; JUN, 2011, p. 238–239), based on the principle of coincidence between means and ends as it relates to the rejection of idealism. If the point is to overcome the domination of imposed concepts — which, as argued in section 2.4, are always partial concerns — one should not impose a viewpoint (even this one) but rather build one’s own and others’, in connection with these others, according to context²².

Anarchism is thus not a dogma (CLARAMUNT, 2016[1909], p. 81; MELLA, 2018[1913][a]; VENTURA, 2000, p. 197); not an abstraction that explains all of reality and mandates action. For anarchists, this was the case not only of Christianity, or religions more generally²³ (MBAH; IGARIWEY, 1997, p. 11–12; CORRÊA, 2012b, p. 110; OCA, 2019, p. 9–10), but also of liberalism, which for Bakunin began with “the abstract individual” and ended with the need for the state (CORRÊA, 2019, p. 354–356), and of Marxism, that for Kropotkin ‘deduced principles [...] from a philosophical method that lacked empirical support’²⁴ (KINNA, 2016, p. 190).

For Graeber (2020, chap. 24), anarchism is ‘deeply accepting of people as they are’²⁵, including their diversity and drives for development; hence why it favours changing relations and organisations so as to better accommodate for variety now and transformations over time. Idealism is the opposite: there are perfect institutions, at least for practical purposes; people are the ugly, faulty creatures, the “crooked timber” that must be made to fit (or discarded)²⁶. For

²¹ See also Bonomo (2007, p. 361).

²² Context not only historical but geographical; see, for example, Benally (2021b, p. 50, 54) on claiming the adjective “indigenous” to oneself: ‘when we say Indigenous, we mean of the land. That means who we are is specific to a place’; ‘we know the land and the land knows us. Where and who we are mean the same thing. This is an understanding that is cultivated through generations upon generations of mutuality’. As it pertains to the production of knowledge, he adds: ‘this is where our thinking comes from’. This can also be seen in the notion of “true education” for Zapatistas, true being associated not with objective truth but with the building of solid relationships based on the land (MOREL; MORAES, 2021, 32:32–34:04). While anarchism has not necessarily been historically as focused on place as the position Benally described, the importance that geographical science assumes in the anarchist tradition — Reclus’s and Kropotkin’s perhaps most pointedly (SKODA; TROYANO, 2020) — and the reasons it does so point to even stronger convergence regarding this topic. See the discussion on place-based resistance in section 5.1.

²³ This resembles non-Western criticisms of Christian idealism. As Reté puts it, Christians ‘prefer to respect an invisible being, a book over two thousand years old, rather than the ground that feeds us’ [respeitar um ser invisível, um livro de mais de dois mil anos atrás, a respeitar o chão que nos dá um alimento] (BLOCO A, 2021, 31:20–31:34). See also Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 43) on the Jesuit complaints that indigenous ways of life were ‘contrary to the spirit of the Faith’, as this requires people to submit themselves to ‘a Law that is not of earth’. However, there were also anarchists who interacted positively with religion; see section 5.2.2.

²⁴ See also Raekstad and Gradin (2020, p. 31–32), as well as McLaughlin (2002, p. 165–186), for whom Marx’s materialism ‘is not materialism at all’.

²⁵ See also Ardaya and Cusicanqui (1988, p. 21).

²⁶ See also Césaire (2010[1956], p. 149–150 apud ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. XXII).

Paul, as seen in section 2.1, only God’s power could fix the will’s inherent brokenness. Likewise, what ‘is most deeply characteristic’ of every state ‘as of every theology’ is the assumption of humankind’s essential wickedness: people need to be fixed through the imposition of models (BAKUNIN, 1971[1867], p. 138). Indeed, even Schmitt accepted (and doubled down on) the anarchist analysis that modern State theories are secular versions of theological concepts (GRAEBER; GRUBAČIĆ, 2021, p. 19; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 186), with institutional parallels to boot: ‘the organization of the Church, and of every church from every age, is a perfect fit for that of Governments[:] the same hierarchy, the same top-to-bottom descending order’²⁷ (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][I]).

The importance of this anti-theological, anti-idealist, or anti-dogmatic stance for the anarchist tradition can hardly be overstated. Life ‘always precedes thought’ and ‘objective or natural Being precedes human subjectivity’²⁸ (MCLAUGHLIN, 2002, p. 33). This has come to define the tradition because of its historical constitution, as discussed in chapter 1. Reflecting together on movements against domination, in diverse settings and on several levels²⁹, radicals would coalesce around the term anarchism as they concluded that struggling to conform to “universal” ideal concepts, to the relations and organisations they implied, was rarely helpful – and when it in some sense was, it still reinforced oppression in *another* way, undermining the general spirit of the effort³⁰ (PRICHARD, 2008, p. 280; ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 180). Departing from decontextualised notions to arrive at a perfect (or at least self-consistent) model with moral weight (KINNA, 2019c, p. 143) was seen as counterproductive, regardless of the model’s content³¹:

²⁷ The etymology of “hierarchy” is literally “holy rule” (KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, p. 39) – on that, see also Proudhon (2005, p. 40 apud MORGAN, R., 2021, p. 100–101). On the paragraph, see also Graeber (2011b, p. 1–2, 13, 50–55), Kinna (2020b, p. 11), João Vitor Santos (2021), and Eric Laursen (2021, p. 150–152).

²⁸ Notice then that anarchist discourse against “political theologies” is not within the current “discipline” of political theology as understood by Adam Kotsko (2018). On the left Hegelian roots of Bakunin’s anti-theologism, see McLaughlin (2002, p. 204). On how the difference between socialist and Kantian notions of autonomy relates to this discussion, see Cornelius Castoriadis (2006, p. 156). For more on subjectivity, see section 5.2. See also Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 28).

²⁹ See, for example, Goldman (2018[1931], p. 103–104) on conformity to motherhood: while she often celebrated it as “natural”, each individual’s inclinations (being *just as natural*, after all) should be respected. To turn birth capacities into a uniform rule meant disregarding (this latter) reality, possibly justifying violence against it, in the name of an abstraction. See the next section for more on appeals to nature, and also Saornil (2018[1935]) and Finn (2021, p. 135).

³⁰ See section 6.1.2. Anarchists, as Gelderloos (2016, introduction) writes, were those who felt that they should not have ‘died on the barricades and on the scaffolds to replace one form of hierarchy with another, softer hierarchy’.

³¹ Lynne Farrow (2002, p. 17–18) compares anarchism to ‘feminism as situationism’, drawing even more attention to contextualised practice: ‘elaborate social analysis and first causes a la Marx’ would be as fruitless as discussing ‘male chauvinism’, in that, ‘safely reduced to an explanation, we have efficiently distanced

I will be told that [Marxist] Socialism [...] wants a true, just, democratic, real State. Alas, the true, real, and just State is like the true, real, just God, who has never yet been discovered. The real God, according to our good Christians, is kind and loving, just and fair. But what has he proven to be in reality? A God of tyranny, of war and bloodshed, of crime and injustice. The same is the case with the State, whether of Republican, Democratic, or Socialist color. (GOLDMAN, 2020, p. 2)

Anarchism implies trust in the experience of situated struggles against domination; confidence that this is the starting point of both social order and reflection. For Juan Gómez Casas (1974, p. 18 apud GARCÍA, 1988, p. 337), the anarchist militant ‘organises daily activity at the base of their organisation and moves from the concrete to the abstract in the forging of revolutionary theory’³². One cannot ‘divide theory from practice’, wrote Luigi Fabbri (2021[1921], p. 3), and ‘to theorise effectively one must act’^d, proclaimed the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (fAu) (2009, p. 7); ‘theory is immanent in struggle’ (CLOVER, 2016, Introduction). Furthermore, ‘knowledge is not created by individuals, but by communities’³³ (TAWINIKAY, 2021[2018]); great libertarian thinkers influenced the movements of their time, but, just as much, their intellectual development was shaped by participation in radical spaces³⁴ (KROPOTKIN, 2009[1899]; LEIBNER, 2013[1994], p. 10; DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 4–6; SAMIS, 2004, p. 8–10; GRAHAM, 2010, p. 4; FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, chap. 3; MCKAY, 2014, p. 5; TURCATO, 2014; CORRÊA; SILVA, 2015, p. 33; KINNA, 2019b, p. 282, 286; SILVA; SANTOS, 2021, 83:01–83:55). Anarchists ‘identified notables in their ranks’ with reference to their ‘extraordinary commitment and dedication’³⁵ (KINNA, 2019b, p. 49): as Edgard Leuenroth put it, an anarchist ‘is worth more for the coherency of [...] their behaviour, at home and in public, than for their capacity to write or give a speech’^{e,36} (AVELINO, 2015, p. 8). In the late 1970s, Bookchin worried that ‘revolutionary potential will be subverted’ once ‘theory is taken from the streets or factories and into the academy’ (HARTUNG, 1983, p. 88), because anarchist concepts and schemes usually evolved from critical reflection on practical collective experience, not the other way around. ‘Janitorial work’ and ‘sitting with day laborers’, writes William C. Anderson (2021, p. XXIII), informed his politics ‘more than anything else’³⁷.

ourselves from a problem and the necessity to immediately interact with it or respond to other people’. Compare with Julieta Paredes’s comments in section 4.3.1, page 144.

³² This text was accessed via a translation by Danny Evans.

³³ See also Perissinotto and Szwako (2017) and Pelton (2021b, 8:00–8:35).

³⁴ This is one reason why canons seems so inadequate within anarchism, as hinted at in section 1.1.

³⁵ See Uri Gordon (2006, p. 158) on Mario Diani’s “relational view of leadership”, and also Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro (FARJ) (2008, p. 75) and ANTÔNIO... (2021, 30:40–31:03).

³⁶ See also Leuenroth (2007c, p. 82–83).

³⁷ As for how this impacted his prose, he says: ‘I’m coming from a place where people don’t have time to entertain nonsense’ (ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. XXIII). See also how only a tiny minority of 19th-century

Spiritual culture is not always bookish, and still less academic. It can arise from the very conditions of living, and when it does, it is more dynamic. [...] It was not by the work of our intellectuals — more literary than sociological, more agitators than practical guides — that the future has been illuminated. And the peasants — libertarian or not — of [the Spanish Revolution] understood this and acted alone. (LEVAL, 1958, p. 10)

Just as anarchists do not “plan” society, bending it to a shape decreed from above, they do not begin to theorise principles by drawing conclusions from abstractions. As Eugen Relgis wrote, ‘the ideal is born from reality, not dreams’^f (RODRIGUES, 1999b, p. 63). Anarchists begin by what exists; by e.g. employing a concept’s usual meaning in order to both think *from* popular experience and ease into arguments for *transcending* it. They complicate received wisdom until a word effectively means something else, hopefully more in tune with the relations one currently hopes to bring about through the struggles one is engaged in.

Berkman’s *The ABC of Communist Anarchism* is a great example³⁸. Matthew Wilson (2011, p. 56) quotes its ‘categorical’ statement on freedom: ‘a life without compulsion naturally means liberty; it means freedom from being forced or coerced’ (BERKMAN, 1929, p. 161). Surely a common sense view. However, Berkman *constantly* switches among different definitions, a handful of which at least potentially contradicting the statement that, in context, is anything *but* categorical! Besides absence of coercion, liberty also means equal rights, independence, political decentralization, the effective ability to do something — but it also has to be ‘built on principles of justice and fair play’, and it shall ‘permit no exclusive possession of the sources of life’, and it will also lead to people beginning to be themselves. At one point he agrees with ‘individualists and mutualists’ that liberty means ‘the right of every one to the product of his toil’, only to pull the rug from under this definition by saying there is no such thing as an individual product. ‘Opportunity and well being’, at one point he proclaims: if freedom does not mean that, ‘it means nothing’ (BERKMAN, 1929, p. 2, 16, 17, 118, 173, 184, 188, 252).

Anarchists, as Kinna (2019b, p. 102) explains, ‘have used a variety of techniques to avoid coaching or coercing opinion through written materials’, from posing open-ended questions to writing anonymously (*or* signing — ‘to show that they are only speaking for themselves and that all opinions carry equal weight’)³⁹. This is why they also experimented with textual genres, women above all. Apart from the importance of epistolary exchange — Emma Goldman

Italian anarchists had access to bookish theory (INSTITUTO DE ESTUDOS LIBERTÁRIOS (IEL), 2023a), but, on the other hand, see Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, chap. 1, 2) for a criticism of the ways discrediting academic arenas of knowledge production might lead to thinking that anarchism means practice without much theory.

³⁸ For another one, see Ward (1991a, p. 31, 36–37).

³⁹ Tangentially, see also Ricardo Diogo Mainsel Duarte (2021, p. 120).

alone wrote over 200,000 letters (FERGUSON, K. E., 2010, p. 198) — and fiction — Malatesta’s unassuming conversations, Tolstoy’s acclaimed epic tales, Lima Barreto’s subversive narratives, or Ursula Le Guin’s groundbreaking science fiction (KINNA, 2019b, p. 102; LIMA BARRETO, 2017[1921]; HINES, 2022b) — the movement birthed “social sketches” and “think pieces”.

A social sketch is ‘not quite an essay nor fully a short story’ (FERGUSON, K. E., 2017, p. 715). Lily Gair Wilkinson’s (2015[1914]) series “Women’s Freedom” is a masterful example of the form. The third essay opens with a familiar idea of a free person: ‘one who can dispose of [themselves] without let or hindrance, without reference to any master’. Wilkinson then asks women readers to take a walk with her — ‘to go out into the world as a woman in freedom’. By the characters and situations encountered in the narrative, the definition of liberty she began with is shown to be insufficient: ‘you recognize the social nature of freedom’. Then the reader-walker-protagonist must halt her adventure: ‘the clock insists you return to the office or the factory’, and there is no alternative, for ‘there is no land for you to live on, not even [“]so much earth as would fill a flower pot — hands off! It is private property! [”]’. The conclusion is that ‘men and women[...] can only be free together’ and only if they *all* have ‘free access to the means of life’ (FERGUSON, K. E., 2017, p. 716–717). A more complex notion of freedom emerges from the character’s experience. No one teaches her what it is. She walks into it.

The other innovative genre (think pieces) are ‘short conversational essays’ that use ‘voice, tone and pace to bring readers into the inquiry’. They address the reader as ‘a reasonable person who is part of the “we” who want a better life’. More straightforward than social sketches and not featuring characters nor settings, they describe a problem and imagine ‘a better way to handle it’ (FERGUSON, K. E., 2018, p. 8, 11, 27). One by Lizzie Holmes

on the public reception of soldiers returning from war [...] describes how] the government manufactured a glowing public story of brave defenders returning from noble struggle. In contrast, the soldiers appeared grim, generally glad to be home but embarrassed at the [...] extravagant public welcome. Soon[...] those soldiers will be looking for work and the money spent on the showy welcome ceremonies would have been useful to them. But “the face of the moment which welcomed them will be over and their need will not be remembered” [...] Holmes helps readers to do the emotional and cognitive labor needed to resist the seductive calls to loyalty (“support our troops”) or the thrill of patriotic fervor. (FERGUSON, K. E., 2018, p. 29)

Both social sketches and think pieces ‘cultivate intimacy with the reader and develop the political dimensions of personal feelings and specific experiences’ (FERGUSON, K. E., 2018, p. 27). In this sense, they are examples of the aforementioned tendency to ground thought in practical experience, with a concomitant scrutiny of subjectivities — a trend these “feminine” styles

decisively fostered within anarchism. Isabel Cerruti wrote ‘in a colloquial, almost conversational tone’, describing ‘daily situations observed [...] from the perspective of the working-class woman’^g (SILVA, R. R. d., 2018, p. 28); women-edited anarchist press in Argentina featured doctrine recited ‘in the first person’, commonly criticised then as ‘no way to write’ (CORDERO, 2015, p. 303, 311–312). For Fernanda Grigolin (2021, p. 160), anarchist women used the first person, ‘singular and plural, because for them writing was an extension of their fighting bodies and resistant actions’^h. This reflects a deeper sense in which women were crucial in the shaping of anarchism. Among the mostly anonymous masses linked to anarchist ideas, it was not uncommon for men to focus on theorising while ‘women were actually trying to live out their theories’⁴⁰ (GREENWAY, 1993, p. 44 apud FERGUSON, K. E., 2017, p. 711).

Rather than judge these styles as bound to lead to incoherence, one must, Cambridge-style⁴¹ (SILVA, R., 2010), take into consideration what these political actors were *doing* by writing what they did the way they did. By prefigurative and more accessible means, they wove conventional views into lines of thought that destabilised hegemonic perceptions to construct new approaches to freedom.

3.2 PREMISES AND PROSPECTS

The organisational forms promoted by an ideology are stronger indicators of its actual core values than the words it uses.

Iain McKay⁴²

*I'm not interested in no theory
In no fantasy, nor in what's beyond[...]
My hallucination is to withstand the daily grind[...]
Loving and changing things: that I can get behindⁱ*

Belchior⁴³

Due to the rhetoric characteristics just discussed, a distinct anarchist sense of freedom can easily be overlooked. Even sympathetic analysts focus on the ostensible juggling of established definitions. Prominent 20th-century English-speaking anarchists blurred ‘conventional dichotomies’, writes Carissa Honeywell (2012, p. 130–132), adding ‘a flavour of the negative view of the individual agent’ to a position ‘highly reminiscent of positive traditions of thinking

⁴⁰ See also William C. Anderson (2021, p. 30).

⁴¹ On anarchist literature as direct action, see Frankie Hines (2022a).

⁴² McKay, 2018, p. 115.

⁴³ Belchior, 1976a.

about freedom'. Jun (2018, p. 54) writes that "negative freedom" is valued, but only 'as a necessary condition for [...] autonomy or self-determination'. Prichard (2019, p. 72) describes the anarchist approach as a combination of takes on relatively familiar types of freedoms ('negative', 'positive' and 'institutional'), and Baker (2023, chap. 3) does something similar, only talking about "non-domination", "real ability to be or do", and "development" instead. Anarchists do not align with any *one* traditional meaning of the term, we are told, like mavericks getting off the beaten tracks. But without an *independent* description of anarchist freedom, one is just as likely to envision them as hesitant tourists rather than renegades.

If anarchism is not seen as having a distinct notion of freedom, then it might not be seen as worth learning about when studying the theme — already a loss for the student, and in a sense also for this tradition I subscribe to⁴⁴. Arguably, however, even worse than not knowing about something is misunderstanding it. Hence the purpose of this thesis: to conceptualise anarchist freedom; to turn into a useable (from an academic point of view) concept what is at the moment a bricolage of principles, desires, interpretations, and practices — particularly, I contend, around the ideas of balance, diversity, and mutual aid. Such a descriptive task is hard-pressed to get anyone to rethink their own views, even more as anarchists typically break consensus on words (other than liberty) that political theorists use all the time. The main concern here is to simply state and explain these differences, so as to perhaps prevent misunderstanding of the kind discussed in the opening of this chapter.

Because these are significant differences, these notions — balance, diversity, and mutual aid — must be read carefully, and in context. For example, anarchists see freedom as 'the MOTHER, not the daughter, of order'⁴⁵ (PROUDHON, 2009[1849], p. 280 apud PRICHARD, 2019, p. 71). But just as "order" in this sentence is not the violence-backed type, the liberty is also different. Far from implying (for instance) that completely unrestricted behaviour would lead to stable hierarchical relations, Proudhon is arguing that there is a better stability to be sought in not enacting sovereignty, which *in turn* requires not merely being unrestricted by a superior force, but alternative kinds of institutions.

⁴⁴ For Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. iii), 'however historically correct anarchist positions might be, without a rigorous theoretical foundation, most workers, peasants and other potential anarchists will remain indifferent to the philosophy'. It should be noted that they are pretty much outliers within anarchism in thinking like this. In any case, on disclosing one's political inclinations as a researcher, see Sandra Harding (2002), Uri Gordon (2012b, p. 92), Galián (2020, p. 16–17), and Raekstad and Gradin (2020, p. 98–99). Tangentially, see also Kinna (2019a, p. 107).

⁴⁵ See also Parsons (2010[1890], p. 6): 'progress leads and never follows order'.

The same goes for certain appeals to “nature” made by anarchists (PASSOS, D., 2019[1927]; MONTSENY, 2016[1929]; GRUPO DE ESTUDIOS JOSÉ DOMINGO GÓMEZ ROJAS, 2017, p. 52; COLSON, 2019, p. 155-156). Anarchy was to be understood as ‘natural order’ (MALATESTA, 2014[1892][a]); anarchism, as ‘the philosophy of a new social order based on liberty *unrestricted by man-made law*’ (PARSONS, 2010[1890], p. 2, 7, emphasis added), be it ‘economic, social, [or] moral’ (GOLDMAN, 2009[1910], p. 22, 25, 27–28). This might seem like an ordinary defence of limitless unrestriction, but the situated, tentative orders enacted by equally powered agents to fulfil their inclinations together *were* natural⁴⁶. For De Cleyre, who also expressed an ‘intense love of nature’, anarchism was ‘a condition of society regulated by voluntary agreement’⁴⁷ (DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 21-22, 108). For Kropotkin, ‘nature always tends to equilibrium, in search for points of stability’^j (PEDROSA, 2021, p. 10), and so using it as a guide meant rejecting the imbalances inherent to any relation of command and obedience. “Man-made law” is best understood as theologies⁴⁸, the projected utopias which, living outside both actuality and potentiality, could only breed violence (GRAEBER; WENGROW, 2021, p. 44). Perhaps it *would* be nice if all found their place by obeying the laws of good constitutional arrangements. Anarchism comes from a recognition that this is unlikely to happen, as an attempt to answer differently the question that follows: what, then?

Anarchists do not go where sovereignty-based definitions of freedom lead; where they actually go is hence key to understanding what liberty means for them. As seen in the beginning of chapter 2, concepts of freedom are intertwined with social arrangements. For example, after noting that Pawnee ideas of liberty ‘turned on values such as non-coercion, respect for one another, and respect for boundaries’, being thus seemingly compatible with ‘dominant European conceptions’, Fiscella (2015, p. 198) writes that indigenous and white ideals ‘referred to completely different social systems as starting points for conversations’:

One of them depended upon perpetual expansion, property management, and technological advantage acquired through constant scientific development while the other depended upon constant negotiation and cooperation with neighbors, shared use of the commons, and perpetual contact with (and adjustment to) the demands of the land. [...] Subsequently, the conceptions of “freedom” that developed within each of these distinct contexts would be, more or less, unrecognizable to [one another]. (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 198)

⁴⁶ While anarchists think that ‘There is no authority above yourself’, controversially wrote Benally (2021a, p. xii), indigenous anarchists would say ‘There is no authority but nature’. See also Bakunin (1975, p. 9).

⁴⁷ Notice how, going by those quotes, one would feel confident in sorting De Cleyre into the communist camp and casting Goldman as an individualist, when in fact the latter defended communism and the first journeyed from individualism to a “synthetic” approach (DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 24–26).

⁴⁸ See the previous section; for more on nature, see section 6.3.1.

Instead of focusing on the semantics of words such as “free” or “freely”, then, I shall analyse their *pragmatics*, reverse engineering⁴⁹ a definition from philosophical, sociological, and institutional debates. This allows for the emergence of a concept compatible with anarchist discourse, even if phrased in an unfamiliar way.

For anarchists, rejecting the imposition of order typically means refraining from prescribing social structures in a detailed manner. ‘Finalities are for gods and governments, not for the human intellect’, wrote Goldman (2009[1908], p. 3); Kropotkin, believing that all ‘groups were capable, and best placed, to make their own social and political arrangements’ (KINNA, 2016, p. 114), was ‘distinctly unenthusiastic about’ planned Utopian sites such as Fourier’s “phalansteries”, as they were artificial rather than organic communities⁵⁰ (KINNA, 2019b, p. 208). The beautiful thing about black anarchism, as Samudzi (2020, 11:54–13:51) sees it, is that ‘there is no prefabricated politic, and there is no end’: anarchists continually encounter violences and hierarchies, and in response endeavour to emancipate themselves from them ‘in ways that prioritize mutual aid and mutual considerations’.

However, attempts to develop the point that anarchists do not mean to design perfection are sometimes frustrating. Simon Springer’s (2014, p. 262) ‘means without end’⁵¹, for instance, is a nice turn of phrase, rejecting vulgar consequentialism and emphasising prefiguration. In a sense, if means and ends coincide, it seems unnecessary to keep two separate terms. But this also makes it seem as if anarchists do not want to *achieve* anything⁵². As Ward (1991b, p. 64) grumpily notes, it is not because ‘no road leads to Utopia’ that ‘no road leads anywhere’.

While structure and agency, actuality and potentiality, are inextricably entangled, nothing lives outside of time. It is important to recognise the open-ended and Protean nature of anarchist aspirations for the future; they are not ‘solution[s] for all human problems, no Utopia of a perfect social order’, Rucker (2009[1938], p. 12) tells us. Creativity, improvisation, and organizational complexity are cherished (ANTLIFF, 2012, p. 77; KINNA, 2012b, p. 21). ‘No system recommends itself to’ an anarchist, writes Voltairine de Cleyre (2017[1901], p. 3), ‘by the mere beauty and smoothness of its working’; it ‘only makes him sniff — “Pfaugh! it smells of machine oil”’. In sum: there are not definite, fixed, or final goals. But there *are* goals, even if qualified as indefinite, variable, provisional; there are ends, even if subject to revision. ‘A revolutionary

⁴⁹ A concept describing the process by which something is deconstructed to reveal its previously inaccessible inner workings (EILAM, 2008). See also section 1.3.

⁵⁰ See note 214 in section 4.3.2, page 158, as well as section 5.1.

⁵¹ See also Lowell (2023, 15:15–15:38).

⁵² See also Wayne Price (2009b).

strategy based on direct action’, determined Graeber (2009, p. 210–211), ‘can only succeed if the principles of direct action become institutionalised’.

An engineer wishing to build [...] has to draw up [their] plans, assemble [their] equipment and operate as if science and art had ground to a halt [... Maybe they] can find a use for new advances made in the course of the project without giving up on the core of [their] plan; [... they may] need to drop everything and start all over again. But in starting over again, [they] will need to draw up a new plan [...] and [they are] not going to be able to devise and set about implementing some *amorphous* construction[...] just because, some time in the future, science might just come up with better forms and industry supply better tools! (MALATESTA, 2014[1897])

Anarchists ‘supplement’ their ideas with ‘economic propositions’ in order to put their ideas ‘in practical shape’; however, they would ‘be perfectly willing to surrender’ any particular scheme if an alternative ‘worked better’, as systems were not ‘proposed for [their] own sake’⁵³ (DE CLEYRE, 2017[1901], p. 3, 8). Kropotkin (2019[1898], p. 6) posits ‘ever modified associations’ that ‘constantly assume new forms which answer best to the multiple aspirations of all’. Yet, specifically *anarchist* such organisations must ‘carry in themselves the elements of their durability’. As Zoe Baker (2019, 5:02) says, anarchy is ‘a society which successfully instantiates certain states of affairs’⁵⁴. Still, ‘the subject is not whether we accomplish Anarchy today, tomorrow or within ten centuries, but that we walk toward Anarchy today, tomorrow and always’ (MALATESTA, 2014[1899]). Institutional discussions involve *both* means and ends; ‘resistance against the imposition of any totalizing view’ *and* ‘recognition that *some* kind of regulating mechanism will have to exist’ (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 89). By both criticising current mechanisms and contextually debating what these should be, anarchists provide crucial insight into not only what they say they value, but what they mean by it⁵⁵.

Two methodological remarks are in order. First, it is not as if this technique (reverse engineering the concept) could only be applied to the anarchist tradition. The same could be done, for instance, with republican authors who discuss the life and death of republics and elaborate on how they relate to the question of freedom⁵⁶. Anarchists are only different in that their style *requires* this to be the method, whereas in other traditions the definition is more often analysed in technical detail in primary literature.

⁵³ See also Malatesta (2014[1922][f]).

⁵⁴ See also Reclus (2013[1894], p. 120-121).

⁵⁵ See also Albert (2012, p. 328–329).

⁵⁶ In fact, there are some who argue that ‘to understand any political ideology [...] it is necessary to examine how it operates, which means looking at its institutional arrangement’. For Alasdair MacIntyre, for instance, ‘principles and concepts can only be expressed and recognized through institutional activity, that is to say, through the ways they shape the interpersonal, material world’ (FRANKS, 2012, p. 62).

Finally, it does not seem to be the case that anarchists had a specific concept of freedom all along, but “hid” it – especially the further back one goes in time. When libertarians used words like “free” and “freely” the way they usually did, it was unlikely that they did so strategically every single time⁵⁷. The common sense meanings were also their own, for these were solidly established in the languages they were socialised into. But that is beside the point: *every* new concept of freedom came from a recombination or transformation of past understandings.

For Reclus (2002[1898], p. 41), revolutionaries must not only ‘understand with perfect rectitude and sincerity all the ideas of those [they] fight’, but also make these ideas their own by giving them ‘their true meaning’. His contention was that the reasoning of anarchists’ interlocutors should be ‘naturally categorised in its true place, in the past, not in the future’^k. If anarchists had not *outgrown* the concepts they inherited, transforming them into something novel even when they claimed to be, for example, the true heirs of modern revolutionary ideals, it is very unlikely that their political positions would be as unusual as they are in the contemporary Western landscape. Honeywell, Jun, Prichard, and Baker are not necessarily wrong; they just did not take the extra step of unlatching the end result of their investigations from the definitions shaped by the language of other traditions.

In the two next chapters, I focus on how anarchists’ premises and prospects anchor a singular way to approach freedom. This amounts to a concept that could and should be described independently, which will be done in chapter 6.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Kinna (2016, p. 146) and Felipe (2018, p. 72–73).

4 BALANCE

*We do not want to get in power, neither we want anyone else to do so.
If we cannot prevent governments from existing and being established,
[...] we strive, and always will,
to keep or make such governments as weak as possible.*

Errico Malatesta ¹

Anarchy is order through harmony. ^a

Louise Michel ²



QUILIBRIUM HAS PERMEATED ANARCHIST IDEAS from early on: Proudhon, for instance, ‘offered the concept of immanence and equilibrium as his alternative’ to teleological hierarchy (PRICHARD, 2008, p. 103, 283). Just like “conceptual” order can come from “impure” practical experience, political order for anarchists can emerge from processes other than the building of idealised, centralised structures.

Order would then relate to the horizontal organisation of social activity for the satisfaction of plural needs and desires, not to predetermined (however determined) fixed institutional armatures (ERVIN, 2009[1993], p. 62). The latter, for anarchists, did not create ‘transcendent’ order against chaos but only order ‘of a particular kind’³ (KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019, p. 231). The “order” that anarchism criticised when it was coming into its own as a movement was the set of circumstances that, providing stability for elites’ identities and activities, led to quite a lot of disorder for others⁴ (MICHEL, 1981, p. 143; RECLUS, 2002[1898], p. 54; KROPOTKIN, 2009, p. 2–3; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 12).

“Anarchy is order”, the slogan goes, but anarchists were ‘the only ones engaging in white European conversations about “freedom” who rejected [...] the fear of [disorder] that had been used to justify the state’⁵ (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 173). For Reclus, order comes from both conflict and agreement⁶ (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 23 apud LIMA; QUELUZ, 2018, p. 10); for Proudhon, it is ‘maintained and changes through emergent and transforming relations of group force’ (PRICHARD, 2012, p. 102). Harmony, for Bakunin, was nothing but a ‘temporary result of

¹ Malatesta, 2014[1922](i).

² Michel, 2021[1890], p. 29.

³ See also Eric Laursen (2021, p. 200).

⁴ And, so went their critique, “order” would continue to wreak havoc even if certain identities and activities were “democratised”; see section 2.4. See also Springer (2011, p. 528).

⁵ For Tucker (1897, p. 14 apud LITTLE, 2023, p. 167), anarchists were ‘simply unterrified Jeffersonian Democrats’.

⁶ See also Reclus (2002[1898], p. 21).

conflicts'^b (CORRÊA, 2019, p. 374). Disagreement, even the violent kind, works like pain to a body, signalling that a problem exists and thus inducing an opportunity for dialogue and renewed commitments⁷ (PASSOS, D., 2019[1927]; CULTIVE RESISTÊNCIA, 2022, p. 80). Granted, people who create or sustain conflict might not do so consciously nor with such purposes. Regardless, by prompting creative responses, they can still participate in a causal chain leading to relations that are more satisfying for everyone⁸. Justice is 'immanent to and emergent from social conflict' (PRICHARD, 2012, p. 103), and, just as well, "anarchy" for anarchists is

a society to which preestablished forms, crystalized by law, are repugnant; which looks for harmony in an ever-changing and fugitive equilibrium between a multitude of varied forces and influences of every kind, following their own course, – these forces promoting themselves the energies which are favorable to their march toward progress, toward the liberty of developing in broad daylight and counter-balancing one another.⁹ (KROPOTKIN, 2019[1898], p. 6)

In the 19th century, radicals often employed the language of "competition" to discuss this idea. 'Proudhon believed that once wealth is [socialised] and free credit made available, competition will have only beneficial effects', writes Robert Graham (2010, p. 10). Notice the *conditions* involved: he proposed safety nets to allow everyone to experiment with variety without going homeless or starving. People doing different things would be able to compare their results ("compete") and decide, as new contexts took shape, which combination of behaviours and relations would be preferable moving forward. Debating on the 1907 anarchist congress in Amsterdam, Goldman (2018[1931], p. 269–270) defended that 'the true function of organization is to aid the development and growth of personality' – entailing a diversity thereof, and hence "competition" via post-experimental comparison. Such institutions, however, could only fulfil their goal without 'fear, or punishment, [or] the pressure of poverty'.

This 'universal competition' was 'the antithesis of monopoly', wrote Tucker (2009[1926], p. 12), one of the main individualist communicators of Proudhon's ideas in the United States. "Monopoly" was any concentration of power that, enforcing unequal access to resources,

⁷ To anticipate the analogy with the field of engineering in section 6.3.3 (handling failure in complex systems), 'system failures can be viewed as a form of information about the system in which people are embedded. They do not point to a single independent (and human) component (a culprit) as the source of failure. Instead, [they] indicate the need for an analysis of the decisions and actions of individuals and groups embedded in the larger system that provides resources and imposes constraints'. This also relates to the processes to be discussed in section 6.3.1: knowledge of 'systemic features allows us to see how human behavior is shaped and to examine alternatives for shaping it differently' (WOODS *et al.*, 1994, p. 201). See also Sennett (2021[1970]) and Finn (2021, p. 68–69).

⁸ 'I bowed in the direction of the objector and said "There is what I call a brave man who deserves our admiration. It requires great courage to stand alone, even if one is mistaken. Let us all join in hearty applause for our daring opponent["]' (GOLDMAN, 2018[1931], p. 173).

⁹ See also Kinna (2016, p. 144–145).

reduced people’s ability or willingness to experiment with different identities and institutions – or perhaps allowing only a few to do it¹⁰. ‘Competition means war only when it is in some way restricted’, Tucker (2009[1926], p. 173) thought, for it meant people had to win to be able to experiment¹¹; otherwise ‘competition and cooperation are identical’.

This line of reasoning had at least two fundamental issues. First, people could refuse to “reset” after the results of competition, turning eventual advantages into an ability to reinstate “monopoly”. This shall be discussed in more detail in section 4.3.2. Most ironically, however, Tucker considered that states restricted competition. So, following his own logic, competition in his time did effectively mean conflict, not cooperation. In the end, then, he was being theological, using an abstract meaning of a word and faulting others for misunderstanding it. In Tucker’s (2009[1926], p. 123) analysis, people lived in squalor because they were denied aid (credit), so the problem was really a lack of solidarity; presenting it as a matter of “competition” reinforced individualistic¹² zero-sum games that did not challenge the framework of the contests themselves. In other words, it helped narratives in which the problem would be solved if people were better competitors in the job market or if there were more jobs available (changing nothing about the dependency by the dispossessed on “job offers”). Tucker wanted competition to be at the basis of (optional) cooperative relations, while anarchists increasingly concluded that people must instead cooperate *so that* they could compete – associate for equality to create the conditions for safe experimentation and divergence¹³. As the meaning of competition was increasingly defined by social Darwinists as struggle for supremacy, the term was abandoned within anarchism, with the concept of “mutual aid” taking precedence:

“Don’t compete! – competition is always injurious to the species, and you have plenty of resources to avoid it!” That is the *tendency* of nature, not always realized in full, but always present. [...] “Therefore combine – practise mutual aid! That is the surest means for giving to each and to all the greatest safety, the best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily, intellectual, and moral.” That is what Nature teaches us[...].¹⁴ (KROPOTKIN, 2021[1902], p. 75–76)

¹⁰ Since the current structure comes to integrate powerful people’s abilities and senses of self, experimenting also becomes more risky *for them*; see section 6.2.1.

¹¹ See also Graeber (2018, p. 261): ‘that’s how the game is supposed to work. If you suffer and scheme and by doing so manage to accumulate enough economic value, then you are allowed to cash in and turn your millions into something unique, higher, intangible, or beautiful’.

¹² See also DeLamotte (2004, p. 26).

¹³ ‘State socialism is a bad way of organizing capitalism in the same way as capitalism is a bad way of organizing grassroots communism’ (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 6).

¹⁴ See also Domingos Passos (2019[1927]).

This focus on cooperation notwithstanding¹⁵, the configuration of “anarchist order”, as just discussed in chapter 3, should indeed ‘be modified and improved as circumstances were modified and changed, according to the teachings of experience’ (MALATESTA, 2014[1892][a] apud BAKER, 2019, 6:32) — only not “from above”; not with some deciding for others what experience taught, or what they should want to do with this knowledge. Anarchism would then be, as Colin Ward put it, the ‘theory and practice of [constant] self-organisation’¹⁶ (FINN, 2021, p. 2). Bakunin even challenged Western European *metaphysics* by arguing that order is only possible in the universe at large *because* it ‘is not governed according to some system imagined in advance and imposed by a supreme will’¹⁷ (BAKUNIN, 1981[1871], p. 301 apud MCLAUGHLIN, 2002, p. 110). As Magón (1977, p. 83) put it, ‘Real Order, which is Harmony, requires no guardian, precisely because it is Order. It is Disorder that requires guardians’¹⁸.

For anarchists, therefore, the problem is ‘the attempt to impose a static order on a dynamic social milieu’, especially in ways that protect exploitation and entrench privilege (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 6). For them, this is the role of the state: ‘fixing the boundaries of legitimate movement, undermining independent judgement and institutionalising violence as a means to contain and repress change’ (KINNA, 2016, p. 144–146). It ‘always tries to force the rich diversity of social life into definite forms’, wrote Rucker (2009[1938], p. 12), allowing ‘for no wider outlook’ and regarding ‘the previously exciting status as finished’. In doing so, it is for anarchists the ‘historic means designed to prevent [the] blossoming of [...] a society based on equality and liberty’ (KROPOTKIN, 2009[1896], p. 6 apud LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 15). If no force enjoys ‘a special protection from the state’ the ‘ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of [their] equilibrium’ is much more likely to result in harmony (KROPOTKIN, 2000[1910] apud PRICE, W., 2012b, p. 317) — a ‘more durable’ one at that (WARD, 2011[1966], p. 49)

In other words, for anarchists what obstructs order is sovereignty. In the following section, I shall further explore this principle. Rejecting it generates differences in approaches to conflict resolution and the use of force, which are explored in the second part of this chapter. Finally, avoiding the emergence of sovereignty requires more than countering direct imbalances in capacity for violence; hence the last section, in which reflections on equality and non-domination reframe anarchists’ libertarian rhetoric¹⁹.

¹⁵ I shall deal with the subject in chapter 5.

¹⁶ See also Proudhon *et al.* (1988).

¹⁷ See also Bakunin (1975, p. 45).

¹⁸ See also Tolstoy (2009[1862], §172) and Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 42–43).

¹⁹ For this chapter, I rely on arguments I have made elsewhere; see Peterson Roberto da Silva (2018, 2021).

4.1 SOVEREIGNTY AND HIERARCHY

Thus this see-saw game, this swaying between conceding and withdrawing, this seeking allies among the people against the classes, and among the classes against the masses, forms the science of the governors[...].

Errico Malatesta ²⁰

It might be said that a robust notion of anti-hierarchy is the sine qua non of anarchism, the core concept that differentiates it at root from other ideologies.

Randall Amster ²¹

‘There is a significant difference between anarchism, whether individualist or communist’, writes Kinna (2019b, p. 203), ‘and the liberal and republican alternatives’: ‘anarchist constitutions had no [...] final point of authority’ that could render ‘final decisions’ and enforce them. However, a right to commit violence with impunity — people accepting this idea, acting on this premise, longing for its effects — rarely if ever results in a single absolutely unrestricted person or position (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 18). As discussed in section 2.4, there is always a rationale for seeking or accepting sovereignty, constraining the sovereign precisely because these are shared (even if partial, specific) reasons. However, if rulers can be called upon to ‘live up’ to their promises, their position also allows them to ‘stigmatize activities or persons that seem to call into question official realities’ (SCOTT, J. C., 1990, p. 54–55).

For anarchists, sovereignty should be understood as a principle structuring multiple dimensions of people’s perceptions, identities, and choices around relations of command and obedience. Projecting a “final point of authority”, onto “the king”, “the people”, or anyone else, results in a complex hierarchical layering within social relations based on such projection.

Hoye (2021, p. 266–267), for example, writes that Hobbes innovated in arguing that the ‘ancient liberties’ unrelated to the crown justifying the rule of borough oligarchies were ‘seditious attacks against the people and the sovereign’. But the oligarchies’ “defeat” did not mean their disempowerment in relation to *yet other* agents. Quite the contrary: that charters were granted by the monarchy ‘conferred security over time to privileges which otherwise were grounded only in custom and tradition’. Oligarchs cemented their power by being able to

²⁰ Malatesta, 2014[1892](a).

²¹ Amster, 2018, p. 15.

call for the monarch to protect them, and the latter thus gave them reason to be supportive: ‘the borough and the Crown were co-dependent’²².

Settlements like these go beyond adjustments to already strong national feelings; they form and strengthen them as well²³ (HOBSBAWN, 1990). As Ramsay (2021) writes on the notion of “Britishness” in subjugated Scotland, this was mostly ‘a ruling class phenomenon’: for them, ‘being British meant a chance to become the billionaires of their day – and they waved their union flags enthusiastically’. A similar example is Brazil’s perseverance as a single, large state, unlike its Spanish-speaking neighbours. A major factor for this was slavers’ loyalties to the crown, the only force capable of staving off English pressure to abolish slavery. Right after the formal emancipation of slaves, unsurprisingly, the country became a republic, but one whose outlines must be understood in light of a framework of solidarity among white elites against dominated races (RECLUS, 2011[1862], p. 73–4; BARRUCHO, 2018; FALLEIROS, 2018a, p. 177; ROSSI, 2018). On the other hand, wanting to benefit from superior power may create other kinds of linkages. The ‘middle and professional classes who led the national independence movements’ in Africa, for example, ended up ‘turn[ing] their backs’ on national populations to ‘align with foreign interests’ (MBAH; IGARIWEY, 1997, p. 81–82).

So when anarchists discuss sovereignty, they do not focus on emperors, politicians, and (state) borders. They talk about social structures more generally. Property (of people, land, means of production, ideas) is the archetypical pattern of any system of sovereignty; the continual reinforcement of a fixed notion of what is *proper* to each agent or class²⁴. “Government”, as command, ‘can and should imply more than the state’, writes Uri Gordon (2006, p. 104), as ‘one can easily speak of a worker being governed by his boss’, for example.

The precise configuration of power relations (or, the “location” of sovereign power) is, of course, not irrelevant. ‘In the early middle ages, land in England could not plausibly be said to be “owned”’, Samuel Clark (2007, p. 72) explains, as neither the position of lord or tenant ‘presented a sufficient analogy with the paradigm case of owning a thing’. The right to commit violence

²² See also Wood (2003, p. 30).

²³ See section 5.2.1.

²⁴ In this last case “proper” relates more to the term “propriety” rather than “property”, but etymologically it makes little difference. Mark Devenney (2020) has recently theorised this connection, although he basically “wonders” (through a postmodern route) if one can question property in a non-Marxist way, reaching “novel” conclusions that anarchists have been taking for granted for over a century. In any case, on the relation between property and the domain of the “sacred”, which ties it to sovereignty through theological thinking as denounced by anarchists, see Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 156–163); on the relation between property and the modern meaning of the word “state”, see Vincent (1992, p. 43), Silva and Silva (2009, p. 115), and Skinner (2011, p. 7–12).

with impunity based on e.g. birthright obviously existed — some acts of force would “get a pass”. But a concentrated, more abstractly justified right, upholding the actual centralisation of force, was helpful to make each proprietor ‘sovereign lord within the sphere of [their] property’²⁵ (MCKAY, 2012, p. 66); as Michel (2021[1890], p. 33) said about the France of her time, ‘our republic has thousands of kings’^c. This is what gives rise to “enclosures”, everywhere violent, invariably connected to the artificial scarcity and manufactured precariousness at the foundation of exploitation²⁶ (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 323–325; ENGLAND, 2015, p. 246; PRICE, W., 2019; KINNA, 2019b, p. 79–80; CUSICANQUI, 2020, p. 55; ENCLOSURE:..., 2021).

The monarch’s power might have meant the theoretical ability to expropriate the properties²⁷, but its entire point was to safeguard them. As Étienne de La Boétie (1975[1563], p.75 apud INTRONA, 2021, p. 2) noted, nothing makes people ‘so subservient to a tyrant’s cruelty as property’. Restrictions imposed by the sovereign do not ‘limit property’ but ‘prevent the domain of one proprietor from interfering with that of another’, which ‘is a confirmation of the principle, not a limitation of it’ (PROUDHON, 2010[1840], p. 44). Property is not the right to do whatever one wants with something, so much as the right to stop anyone *else* from using it (WILSON, C., 1886, p. 1), a right ‘against all the world’ concerning its disposition²⁸ (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 198–199). This requires tearing apart the coveted “asset” from the interconnectedness of everything — which can only be done, and sustained, by sovereign force (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 144–146, 159, 163). This is a classic critique by non-Western traditional cultures and anarchists alike: the state is only needed because of property (ERRANDONEA, 1990, p. 19–21; DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 135–136; ERVIN, 2009[1993], p. 58; GRAHAM, 2010, p. 9; KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019, p. 229; GRAEBER; WENGROW, 2021, chap. 2). Private property may be contrasted with state ownership, and large estates with small holdings; all of these, however, exist within a continuum that is entirely at odds with the commons, whose interaction with humans is inherently open to reconstitution (RECLUS, 2013[1905][a], p. 204; ERRANDONEA, 2003, p. 52; SPRINGER, 2011; KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019, p. 227; NEM..., 2019; GONZÁLEZ, 2021, p. 95; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 103).

²⁵ However, see also Reclus (2013[1905][a]). For parallels in Germany, see Blickle (1981, p. 29–35, 73, 83–86).

²⁶ See also its use today as a counter-revolutionary measure by the Mexican state against the Zapatistas (LA ESCUELITA ZAPATISTA, 2013?[c], p. 74).

²⁷ Hence why Michel (2021[1890], p. 45) favoured the terms “taking possession” [tomada de posse] or “appropriation” [apropriação] over “expropriation”: the latter ‘implies and exclusion of some or others, which[...] cannot exist. The whole world is for everyone’ [... pois esta implica uma exclusão de uns ou outros, o que[...] não pode existir. O mundo inteiro é de todos].

²⁸ See also Graeber (2001, p. 8–9).

That this was already a Greek and Roman framework, modelled on the experience of those forcefully extracted from their webs of interdependence (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 163–164, 198–207; KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019, p. 227), explains why an anarchist critique of sovereignty extends to some ideals of equality and non-arbitrariness. In ancient Rome, males in charge of a household had a great deal of unrestriction of movement and choice; they were sovereigns on “domestic territory”, their properties, as regards one’s right to do with one’s slaves as one pleased. This “area of non-interference”, so to speak, is evidently compromised if spouses, children, and serfs reject their roles and successfully resist one’s decisions. Conversely, it is made more secure by one’s ability to overpower their objections; much more, in fact, if people outside the home also uphold its logic, such as neighbouring patriarchs with an interest in legitimising such a culture for their own sake. Protecting one’s surplus power, then, meant recognising the dominion of others, which led to a certain stability (among dominators)²⁹.

Hence not all relations based on violence-backed rights have to be hierarchical; others might even be egalitarian (GELDERLOOS, 2016, chap. VII), as in the patrician balance: so that each man is discouraged from intruding in the others’ properties, they create, together, laws that enshrine their equal positions (of domestic dominance), electing people with the right to use force to uphold them. The republican system developed as Roman citizens strove to preserve their unrestrictions; the imperial one, as they reinterpreted them from a collective standpoint in a wider, “international” landscape. Roman political divisions, such as that between ‘agrarian conservatives’ and ‘pro-trade and “proto-imperialist” innovators’ (COLOGNESI, 2014, p. 153), were essentially disagreements about how to best defend the “glory of Rome”, securing the privileges that people either enjoyed or *hoped* to obtain. Hope was in fact particularly important, as Graeber (2011a, p. 229–230) writes that ‘the plebs practically had to force the senatorial class to take the imperial option’³⁰. Over time, a massive ‘military-coinage-slavery complex’ was put in place to secure the enjoyment of Roman liberties by more individuals. A similar dynamic was noted in the formation of a modern republic-turned-empire:

Racism made it possible for white Virginians to develop a devotion to the equality that English republicans had declared to be the soul of liberty. ... by lumping Indians, mulattoes, and Negroes in a single pariah class, Virginians had paved the way for a similar lumping of small and large planters in a single master class. ... Racism became an essential, if unacknowledged, ingredient of the republican ideology that enabled Virginians to lead the nation.³¹ (MORGAN, E. S., 1975, p. 386 apud FISCELLA, 2015, p. 203)

²⁹ See section 4.3.1 below.

³⁰ Tangentially, see also Maruyama (2022[1946], p. 188).

³¹ See also Graeber (2009, p. 241).

Concentration might be denounced, resisted, or tightly controlled by members of an egalitarian group. But this might be done in favour of an imbalance of power between this group and others. For another example, in the war for Venezuelan independence

the slaves, the creoles, the campesinos heard their bosses, the great land owners, and the upper classes of the cities speaking of a republic and liberty, and they didn't understand them, because there was no connection between their words and existing reality. This gave rise to the dispossessed uniting around the "royalist" cause, not because they felt any loyalty to the Spanish crown, but because they wanted to fight their historical oppressors.³² (OCA, 2019, p. 32)

What is new with progressive liberals, Marxists, and modern republicans, is how they attempted to universalise the unrestrictions one may expect to secure with sovereignty. This culminated in the modern state, which Kropotkin (1995, p. 94 apud LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 56–57) described as the 'mutual insurance between the landlord, the military commander, the judge, the priest, and later on the capitalist' to 'support each other's authority over the people' and exploit them³³. Here again one finds instances of equilibrium propped up as elements that supposedly exhaust democratic or egalitarian ideals in a backdrop of persistent exclusions or injustices.

Chattel slavery and patriarchal rule are no longer official in most states, but relations of sovereignty still regulate bodily subordination and access to spaces in many contemporary settings, the productive one arguably among the most relevant – the property of the means of production. 'A boss in his factory is usually a petty monarch with his ministries, flatterers, spies, lackeys, and favourites', wrote Manuel González Prada (2018[1906][a], p. 143); 'he spends no money on Praetorians nor on gendarmes, for he uses the public force to suffocate strikes and weaken rebels'^d.

Within republican thought, as discussed in section 2.3.2, non-arbitrariness makes for non-dominating sovereignty. Anarchists do not agree with this definition of domination, as shall be further examined in section 4.3. For them, legislators, judges, enforcers, members of the state's bureaucratic apparatus, are a class of their own, collectively imbalanced in relation to non-state actors³⁴ (MALATESTA, 2014[1892][a]). The "checks and balances" among them concatenate these agents through links of mastery and acquiescence, and as fractured as these

³² See also Matheus Gato (2020) for a similar (though more contained) episode in the Brazilian context.

³³ See also Kropotkin on the different arrangements between aristocrats and the bourgeois in its formation (KINNA, 2016, p. 88), as well as Eric Laursen (2021, p. 146, 150), who explains that 'in modern times there have never been just "states"', but 'a network or System of States that legitimize each other'.

³⁴ On the employment of non-state actors on behalf of the state see Eric Laursen (2021, p. 106–107).

chains of command may be, they have a certain directionality, that is, they work together in function of a necessarily partial project that is never, as seen in section 2.4, completely devoid of arbitrariness.

Tadhg Laoghaire (2016, p. 12–18) observes that, in neo-Roman theory, one’s capacity to interfere changes when dominium is transformed by sovereign regulation into non-dominium; however, ‘when the state moves from imperium to non-imperium’ – when its arbitrariness is explained away – ‘the range of choices that the state can interfere with does not lessen’. Of course, he goes on to admit, not every inequality of coercive capacity is important; otherwise, ‘Mike Tyson would dominate us all (at least in the late 80’s)’. But this imbalance is fundamental in the relationship between state and citizen; essential for the first to do what republicanism requires of it. In the end, so long as there is a distinction between decision-makers and the governed, anarchists are not contented with the *inclusion* of people in this scheme, for it still retains the fundamental inequality of sovereignty at its heart. Such division, regardless if already built on pre-existing inequalities, will form *new* ones – for anarchists, that is the tendency of any form of “accepted violence”:

The majority of women are already oppressed by both the government and by men. The electoral system simply increases their oppression by introducing a third ruling group: elite women. [...] When a few women in power dominate the majority of powerless women, unequal class differentiation is brought into existence among women. If the majority of women do not want to be controlled by men, why do they want to be controlled by women? Therefore, instead of competing with men for power, women should strive for overthrowing men’s rule. Once men are stripped of their privilege, they will become the equal of women. There will be no submissive women nor submissive men. This is the liberation of women.³⁵ (ZHEN, 2005[1907], p. 340–341 apud BOTTICI, 2019)

Restrictions on state actors might limit the reach of any singular one, but they are accepted for the defence of specific unrestrictions which would be threatened by harmony among the diverse needs and inclinations of all – the unholy “disorder” of disregarding the aesthetics³⁶ of hierarchy. ‘For those in power’, Proudhon (1998[1849], p. 102) said of his experience as an elected official³⁷, people are ‘the enemy’^e.

³⁵ For Sallydarity (2012, p. 44), as the ‘feminist movement progressed, critiques of [domination and control] were submerged as bourgeois activists began to focus on women overcoming their fear of [...] equally] exercising domination and control over others’. See also Soares (2021[1914]).

³⁶ ‘Why is it better to have a recognized authoritarian clique [...] than an informal one? The argument is that if the former abuses their power, they can be more easily called out, but a moment’s practical reflection makes it clear that this is anything but true. [...] This is ultimately, I am convinced, an aesthetic impulse’ (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 24). See also Graeber (2009, p. 234, 2015b, p. 201–205).

³⁷ See Salom Mesa Espinoza’s (1987, p. 49 apud OCA, 2019, p. 171) similar conclusions about his ‘forty-four years’ of involvement with representative government: they have served to ‘turn [him] into an animal,

This is not to say that the specific ways in which sovereignty is set up are not consequential within anarchism. As their differences represent more or less balance among agents, they become more or less preferable. Democracy, ‘so-called government of the people, is a lie’, yet ‘the lie always slightly binds the liar’ (MALATESTA, 2004[1924]); “fractures” in the Leviathan’s skin are openings for contestation. Regimes might also be differentiated in terms of how fervently people defend their imposition, which is linked to their dogmatism and (or) how threatened they feel. For example, Goldman denounced the ‘American kings of capital and authority’, connecting the intense repression unleashed on libertarian socialists in the United States with autocracy (BÉJA, 2022, 13:32–13:37), but she was constantly amused by her less persecutory (than many democracies) experiences in Canada or Denmark, among other formal monarchies³⁸ (GOLDMAN, 2018[1931], p. 269, 272, 297).

In any case, anarchists do not try to abstractly discover which unequal distributions of power guarantee any given set of unrestrictions. As William C. Anderson (2021, p. 27) writes in the context of racial oppression, they ‘distinguish between relative improvements and actually achieving liberation’. Anarchism uses equilibrium *alone* as benchmark – ‘anarchy as a constitutional principle’, as Kinna and Prichard (2019, p. 235) put it – to criticise the sovereignty behind any project to enforce such models, which leads to denouncing concessions for their contribution to making it more difficult (than otherwise) to get to a better order. As He Zhen (2005[1907], p. 341) asked, ‘why should we be content with the existing parliamentary system and the suffrage movement as the ultimate goal?’. By equalising forces, refusing to legitimise any superior one, anarchists wish to deny any agent the capacity to command; this will be the theme of the next section. By cultivating equal conditions, they hope to erode what might lead some to obey; this will be discussed in section 4.3.

to debase [him], to corrupt and degrade the children of the people’; through the state ‘we’ll never reach emancipation’. On people being “the enemy” for states, see also Ole Birk Laursen (2020, 13:43–14:12).

³⁸ This might have something to do with a heightened sense of safety (even if it is a misleading one) regarding the conservation of prevailing social norms if these are embodied by one person, whose bodily integrity is relatively easy to protect. Even if “the people are the enemy” for powerful conservative agents, as just mentioned above, in any circumstance, institutions premised on “popular consent” will seem to stand on shakier ground. As Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 10) put it, the state’s ‘use of violence depends almost entirely on the degree to which it feels challenged’. See the discussion on “the ultimate prize” of democracy in section 2.4, page 67, and the one on democratic legitimation of sovereignty in section 4.2.1, page 115.

4.2 VIOLENCE AND LEGITIMACY

*We reject every method of enforcing assent, as in itself
hindrance to effectual co-operation, and further,
a direct incentive to anti-social feeling.*

Charlotte Wilson ³⁹

*For the oppressor, “peace” isn’t the absence of violence
[... but] the absence of response to their violence.*

Zellie Imani ⁴⁰

‘Everyone knows’ that ‘anarchists are opposed to violence’, wrote Malatesta (2015b, p. 45, 50). However, the movement has historically set its sights on revolution, characterised by the same author as ‘violent action’ that ‘tends to develop, rather than remove, the spirit of violence’. What, then, do anarchists think about violence? As Saul Newman (2012, p. 43) asks, is it possible ‘to have a form of violence that is at the same time non-violent’? A force that, as Goodman (2010[1945][a], p. 37) put it, ‘heals as it violates’?

In this section (and its subparts), I shall demonstrate how anarchists’ reflections on violence turn on the notion of balance. By questioning the supremacy involved in predefining “offensive” force, they delegitimise the ability to rule in favour of mediation processes conceived to help reach immanent social orders.

For anarchists, amicable appeals to the state in face of injustice presuppose ‘a conscience which is very unlikely to exist’⁴¹ (BERGER, 1968 apud LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 193). Even if staunchly peaceful demonstrations are intended as communications with the population rather than with authorities, they might still be premised on an elitist notion: that people do not “withdraw their consent” to being governed because they do not actually *know* that they are oppressed or robbed of better alternatives.

“What bothers me about the whole concept of pacifism,” says [anarchist militant] Mac, “is that [...] people who have to live every day with violence by police, who are used to it, who expect it... they’re not going to see anything admirable, let alone heroic, in *inviting* police violence, and then facing it passively[...] the whole idea that you’re going to reveal the true coercive nature of the state by showing how they’ll attack you even when you are posing them no physical threat – well, come on. You’re telling poor people something they don’t already know?” (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 6, emphasis in the original)

³⁹ Charlotte Wilson, 1886, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Imani, 2016. See also Oiticica and Leuenroth (2007) and Baron *et al.* (2019).

⁴¹ See also Osvaldo Bayer (2020[1993], p. 328).

Gelderloos (2007, p. 2–3, 135) argues that exclusively using non-violent methods of social struggle encourages patriarchal and racist power dynamics, leading anarchists to strategic ‘dead ends’⁴². It is not that *only violence* should be used: he calls for ‘effective combinations drawn from a full range of tactics’⁴³, with the aim, as Graeber (2009, p. 420) wrote, of giving the dominated ‘some reason to think that the system is vulnerable; that it can be successfully challenged, or at least, that challengers can get away unharmed’⁴⁴.

The eventual use of violence within such a strategic mix is often justified via the notion of self-defence (WILSON, C., 1886, p. 1; BERKMAN, 1929, p. 257; CHRISTIE, 2021[1979], p. 83; MBAH; IGARIWEY, 1997, p. 9; KORNEGGER, 2002, p. 29; WALT; SCHMIDT, 2009a, p. 203; KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, p. 139). Anarchists are ‘consistent and logical pacifists’, wrote Acharya (2019[1948], p. 131), but they are ‘not averse to using’ weapons ‘in defense of their lives and ideals [...] if civil war is forced upon them’⁴⁵. Force may be ‘the absence of reasoning’ but at times it ‘is the reasonable option’ (DAY-WOODS, 2021, p. 23). fAu’s armed structure was developed only after a dictatorship had been implemented; the Spanish Civil War began not as a communist “takeover” but as a mobilisation against a fascist coup.

We are on principle opposed to violence and [...] wish that the social struggle should be conducted as humanely as possible. [...] However,] for two people to live in peace they must both want peace; if one of them insists on using force[...], then the other [...] will be obliged [...] to resist force with adequate means. [...] We do not] limit the right of self-defence to resistance against actual or imminent attack [...] but against all those institutions which use force to keep the people in a state of servitude. [...] For us the oppressed are always in a state of legitimate defence and are fully justified in rising without waiting to be actually fired on[...]. (MALATESTA, 2015b, p. 46–49)

Involvement in major conflicts that were *not* specifically revolutionary was more polemic. During the First World War, many anarchists supported no side whatsoever; for Kropotkin, however, ‘the defeat of Germany [...] offered the best hope of restraining state-centralising tendencies and maximising the space for future anarchistic evolutions’⁴⁶ (KINNA, 2016, p. 156). Tables were turned during the Second World War, when defeating Fascism made supporting war efforts seem more reasonable (GOYENS, 2021, 12:41–13:23); however, many anarchists also refused to engage the situation militarily (BERNERI, M. L., 2009[1943]; MATTSON, 2002,

⁴² For more by anarchists on the decreased usefulness of non-violent methods of confrontation against sovereign structures, see Michel (2021[1890], p. 34), Cerruti (2018[1918], p. 127), Black Flag Group (2021[1968], p. 30–31), Graeber (2009, p. 451–457), Jappe (2013, p. 28), Chelgren (2018), and Eric Laursen (2021, p. 189–193).

⁴³ See also Christie (2021[1971][a]) and Kinna (2019b, p. 133, 147).

⁴⁴ See also Crimethinc (2020c).

⁴⁵ See also Alfred (2005, p. 27).

⁴⁶ See also Adams and Kinna (2017) and Samanta Colhado Mendes (2021a, p. 102).

p. 106). Today, the movement appears to be split⁴⁷ between aiding Ukraine's resistance against Russian aggression and withholding support so as to not strengthen American imperialism (PRICE, W., 2022; ITALIAN ANARCHIST FEDERATION, 2022).

Perhaps even more contested are the acts of individual insurrection, from bombs to targeted assassinations, known⁴⁸ by the end of the 19th century as “propaganda by the deed”. While some were frustrated by these acts to the point of rejecting anarchism altogether (KINNA, 2012a, p. 53), others were supportive. This echoes a larger disagreement among anarchists concerning the use of force to instigate revolutionary circumstances:

Ravachol [...] said that revolution was only “a push” away[...]. For him, violence worked like a tool to create revolutionary movements, a trigger, a form of propaganda that, through revenge, would inspire members of the dominated classes to enter a more radicalised form of struggle. The [fAu ...] diverges by maintaining that [...] one of the conditions for a successful insurrection is “the support of the masses[...]”, which essentially requires “previous political work”. Hence violence must be used by already established popular movements to increase their strength in the context of class struggle, [...] not as a trigger to create them or the best way to attract people to struggle.^f (CORRÊA; SILVA, 2015, p. 47–48)

“Attentats” commonly elicited mixed feelings among anarchists⁴⁹. Although Kropotkin thought that they were not anarchism's proper goal, he did not judge those desperate enough to resort to such acts⁵⁰ (KINNA, 2016, p. 58–59). Tucker approved of them as last resorts, believing that so long as freedom of the press existed, they were not productive tactics (LITTLE, 2023, p. 184). For De Cleyre, these actions were “illogical”, but still might ‘make room for wider action and farther-reaching effort’ (DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 61). People would often change their minds, too. Goldman (2018[1931], p. 141) once stated that it was good to kill despotic leaders on whom a lot of oppression depended personally, while ‘if the ruler [were] as ineffectual as an American president, it [would] hardly [be] worth the effort’. She herself once aided Berkman in an assassination attempt, and refused to condemn other perpetrators, even organising help for them after the deed. But she would eventually argue that these actions would not be effective to ‘overthrow the *entire framework* of social violence’ unless they ‘emerged as a large-scale *group* effort instead of an easily co-optable or repressible individual response’⁵¹ (PORTER, 2006, p. 217, emphases in the original).

⁴⁷ I will refrain from saying much more about this division (e.g. how prevalent each position is) due to how current these developments are.

⁴⁸ See also Casanova (2010 apud SILVA, P. R. da, 2018, p. 204–205).

⁴⁹ See also Clark's (2013, p. 60) discussion of Reclus's view on theft.

⁵⁰ See also Gori (2000[1894], p. 52–53) and Samis (2018, p. 147).

⁵¹ For more on Goldman, see also Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, p. 35–36).

Many radicals objected strenuously to the attentaters' strategy of substituting "the messianic role of the self-sacrificial individual – or the magical totemism of the attentat – for the conscious movement of the masses." Terror on the left may actively discourage the development of that critical consciousness, as Alexander Berkman found to his dismay when the very workers for whom he attempted to assassinate Frick condemned his act. (FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, p. 44)

These disagreements indicate that self-defence, as force that effectively contributes to ending 'the daily sufferings and the savage carnage' afflicting humankind (MALATESTA, 2015b, p. 47), is not always easy to discern. Because violence is inherent to sovereignty, anarchists might be wary of unwittingly reproducing this logic through violent acts (CARTER, A., 1978, p. 324–333; MBAH; IGARIWEY, 1997, p. 10–11; SPRINGER, 2011, p. 531, 548, 550; ALBA, 2019). 'It is the nature of upper class radicals[...] to look at the world through abstractions and self-created ideologies', wrote Larry Gambone (1996 apud MORRIS, B., 2018, p. 133), leading them 'to glorify and romanticise violence'⁵² – indeed, modern propaganda by the deed was pioneered by an Italian republican, not by anarchists (WOODCOCK, 1998[1977], p. 40). Critical reflection on the matter certainly took place during the Spanish Revolution (PORTER, 2006, chap. 7), and post-1960s (especially post-Cold War) social movements have arguably become less inclined to violence, hoping to gain something from the occupation of a higher moral ground (GRAEBER, 2002). The Invisible Committee's (2007) call for civilisation-ending catastrophe is often criticised as statist rather than anarchist: 'admiring violence and hate for their own sake', that 'will without content', would actually 'help the capitalist system unleash the fury of its victims onto scapegoats'^{g,53} (JAPPE, 2013, p. 38–48).

Violence can also be criticised for less consequentialist reasons. For Tolstoy, it deprived its perpetrator (CHRISTOYANNOPOULOS, 2020b, p. 28). Goldman came to agree: 'by denying to some degree the deep-down understandable human and therefore common roots with the oppressor', the violent actor loses 'some of [their] own humanness in the act' (PORTER, 2006, p. 216). Graeber was an enthusiastic ally to the self-defence in Rojava, but he did once cast violence as 'the favored recourse of the stupid' (GRAEBER, 2004, p. 73).

Such positions can lead to strictly pacifist stances. For Tolstoy, 'barricades or murders' would not generate real freedom (TOLSTOY, 1990, p. 24; CHRISTOYANNOPOULOS, 2020b, p. 26, 171–173). Later on, Read would write about wanting an anarchism that was not about 'conspiracy, assassination, citizen armies'⁵⁴ (HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 122). Some may even write

⁵² See also Haider (2018, p. 48) and Alba (2019).

⁵³ See also Leval *et al.* (1988, p. 522).

⁵⁴ See also Grupo de Estudios José Domingo Gómez Rojas (2017, p. 89).

off any “action plan” at all. ‘The reason that I sit here and drink’, as indigenous anarchist Aragorn! (2005, p. 8)⁵⁵ was told ‘time and time again as a child’, ‘is because I am waiting for the white man to finish his business. And when he is done we will return’.

However, no anarchist, no matter how pacifist, proposes simply capitulating to what they see as a dominating situation. Even without recourse to “violence” one might run away or refuse to collaborate. Like indigenous populations have done the world over, one can resist orders to submit, to move out, and to be culturally converted (LEIBNER, 2013[1994], p. 11; ALFRED, 2005, p. 55; REGINALDO; MORAES; RETÉ, 2021, 1:00:00–1:04:23). As Goodman (2010[1945][a], p. 37) noted, patience and firmness were not ‘the restraint of force’; not ‘negative nor even passive virtues’, but ‘elemental forces of primary nature; of time and clinging to one’s place’. His resistance to the draft during the Second World War was justified not as a matter of individual conscience, but as a systemic denial of the inhuman forces unleashed by war: ‘the “nonviolence” of doctrinal pacifists’, he wrote, ‘is unnatural and even somewhat wicked’. In this he echoed Kropotkin (1998, p. 98), who wondered if ‘the talk of “No force”’ was ‘merely an excuse for supporting landlord and capitalist domination’, or Malatesta (2015b, p. 47, 51), who compared absolute pacifists to terrorists: ‘the [latter] would not hesitate to destroy half mankind so long as the idea triumphed; the [former] would be prepared to let all mankind remain under the yoke of great suffering rather than violate a principle’⁵⁶.

When anarchists positioned themselves against any side of a major war, they tended to respond with attempts to impair all involved states’ capacities to crush their populations for hierarchy-reinforcing ends (CUBERO, 2015[1991][a], p. 31–32; RODRIGUES, 1999b, p. 149). For Kropotkin, anti-militarism was not ‘a refusal to fight’ but ‘a willingness to resist militaristic forces of reaction’ (KINNA, 2016, p. 181–182), and as Evren (2012, p. 306) argued, it should be seen ‘as a part of anti-colonial activism and not solely[...] as a subcategory of pacifism’⁵⁷.

All of this requires *force* in a broader sense: deliberately moving or consciously staying put; “energy expenditures” for action and inaction alike. As Proudhon would put it, there is no way around the use of force. It is tantamount to acting, doing, being:

⁵⁵ The exclamation mark is part of his name.

⁵⁶ See also Wayne Price (2014b).

⁵⁷ In the first half of the 20th century, for instance, Acharya urged ‘the workers of England and Europe’ to ‘refuse the production of armaments and move towards a general strike against the capitalist attacks on Asian, African and South American farmers’ (LAURSEN, O. B., 2020, 4:25–4:47). Consider the complementarity of Shifu’s call for ‘a worldwide people’s revolution’ in place of a nationalistic (Chinese) one to end Western imperialism (FLOOD, 2010). As Clover notes, ‘people who oppose violence often defend strikes, forgetting that strikes are historically every bit as violent as riots’ (CHELGREN, 2018). See also Addor (2021) and Goyens (2021, 14:58–15:12).

Sentient beings and groups [...] exert force when they express and affirm their individuality or autonomy. One defines oneself and one's goals against others. One acts against others. Social life is characterized by relations of force exerted by social groups upon one another. This is not to say that might makes right, only that might underpins all conceptions of right. Without force, there is no order as society would atrophy.⁵⁸ (PRICHARD, 2012, p. 102)

Which forces are categorised as violent is therefore key⁵⁹. What I may see as non-violently refusing to do something, someone who is trying to force me to do it might see as a violent act *by me*, for I would be leaving them with alternatives they do not like. The agent making me do something could even claim self-defence (“look at what you made me do”), depending on which symbols, standards, or rules are involved in the constitution of their sense of selfhood⁶⁰ (DORLIN, 2020).

Anarchists thus do not claim to have found a golden rule for defining self-defence, nor universal formulas to check whether ‘cruelties increased or decreased over time’ (WOLIN, 1960 apud KAPUST, 2018, p. 13), for these would be theological definitions to be imposed⁶¹. Their goal is to challenge precisely any enforced absolutism regarding these criteria: ‘the most important form of political power’ is not ‘to win an argument’, wrote Graeber (2009, p. 432), ‘but the power to define what the argument is about’. Sovereignty allows for the concentration of such an ability to the point of forcibly warping discussions around one’s definitions. Resistance to state orders, no matter the kind, no matter *how* “kind”, is often deemed violent by modern supporters of sovereignty — a label they would seldom, if ever, apply to taxes, prisons, or environmental degradation, for example; to ‘competitiveness’, that ‘nameless violence’^h (PERES, J., 2023, 37:55–38:03). These, occurring within official norms, are *legitimised* forces⁶² (COADY, 1986 apud GRAEBER, 2009, p. 448–449). There is hardly any way to challenge what one experiences as oppressive while agreeing with the overall framework that makes such perceived oppression ‘popular, respectable and possible’ (HEYWOOD, 1876, p. 23 apud LITTLE, 2023, p. 122). Sovereign power ‘claims to be that which establishes the balance; it’s the hand holding the scales; therefore, it cannot by definition be weighed in the balance itself’ (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 425-426).

⁵⁸ See also Reclus (2002[1898], p. 26–27).

⁵⁹ Notably, Tolstoy never provided a ‘clear and consistent definition’ of violence (CHRISTOYANNOPOULOS, 2020b, p. 45).

⁶⁰ See note 32 in section 2.3.1, page 48, as well as section 5.2 and note 34 in section 6.1.1, page 264.

⁶¹ See section 3.1.

⁶² See also Berkman (1929, p. 158), Carmichael (2007[1969]), Uri Gordon (2006, p. 172), Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, p. 44–57), Springer (2011, p. 549–550), Matthew Wilson (2011, p. 91–92), Jappe (2013, p. 13–15), Wynn (2017), Oca (2019, p. 42), Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 26), Butler (2020, chap. 3), Seis, Nocella II, and Shantz (2020, p. 10), Correia (2021), Linnemann (2021, p. 164–166), and McHarris (2021, p. 35).

4.2.1 The anarchist critique of statist legitimacy

*What peace was that? [...]
The silent peace of fear
that won't abandon our hearts [...]
Days of peace without first there being balance [...]
And it's no peace beside you, it's war:
the peace of deathⁱ*

Cláudia Tomaszewski⁶³

*Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until
[...] the rule of law finally replaces warfare;
humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules
and thus proceeds from domination to domination.*

Michel Foucault⁶⁴

Legitimacy is the absence of conflict about something in relation to a set of values and beliefs. Arguing for the legitimacy of something is trying to create such absence of conflict about it; to convince others that it should be accepted without dissent. Conversely, characterising something as illegitimate is an attempt to justify disobedience and resistance against it (BOBBIO; BOVERO, 1987, p. 87 apud CADEMARTORI, 1997, p. 127). This definition holds even if — or, rather, *because* — conflict is unavoidable. Just as there is a point in brushing one's teeth, even though meals are needed frequently and incessantly, legitimacy refers to the frameworks put in place to deal with conflicts, since these are expected to continually occur. Hence models of legitimacy tend to be discourses on why certain methods for settling disputes must be accepted.

Sovereignty, as the right to exercise force⁶⁵ with impunity, implies the legitimization of centralised, concentrated, superior force, with the ostensible aim of solving conflicts or at least managing them better. This has shaped European political philosophy since at least Greek antiquity (ZELDITCH JR., 2001, p. 34; WILLIAMS; HAWTHORN, 2005). The “we” who ought to not be conflicted about this object of legitimacy (a *demos*, “all rational individuals” ideally conceived), as well as the “why” (certain kinds of unrestriction, stability, justice, etc.⁶⁶), is what varies between different versions of this model — let us call it statist — of legitimacy.

Constant among variations is the point that people (whoever the “we”) cannot be trusted to cooperate (toward whichever “why”, even respect for diversity) without awe-inspiring

⁶³ Coletivo Anarquista Bandeira Negra, 2021, 18:42–19:33.

⁶⁴ Foucault, 1984, p. 85.

⁶⁵ The earlier definition referred to “violence”, but both work equally well for present purposes.

⁶⁶ See also note 33 in section 2.3.1, page 50.

oversight; conflict would spiral into assault, confinement, destruction⁶⁷ (BAKUNIN, 1971[1867], p. 139, 1975, p. 28–29; KROPOTKIN, 1998, p. 75; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 157–159, 186, 190). Thus order could not exist without hierarchy, and the association between the two trickled down into popular perception from its portrayal as scientific truth (HARTUNG, 1983, p. 84–87). ‘Our whole education, since childhood up to the grave, nurtures the belief in the necessity of a government and its beneficial effects’, wrote Kropotkin (2009[1887], p. 5–6); ‘we may open any book of sociology, history, law, or ethics’ to find these same teachings, ‘daily repeated in the Press’. ‘Outside the State is the void’, as Eric Laursen (2021, p. 19) summarises⁶⁸.

The incorporation of the social in the political was a process characterised by the excision of the rights vested in independent associations through the state’s constitution. [... Martin] Buber observed that the civil society associations that embody the social principle are painted out of existence in the anarchy that Hobbes had imagined. Individuals possess rights, but there are no social rights because individuals in the state of nature are said to lack the capacity to co-operate. Moreover, the natural rights they possess are nearly all surrendered to the state as a condition of its order. (KINNA, 2019c, p. 145)

So that quarrels can be channelled into peaceful arenas, from parliaments to courts, authoritative forms of assault, confinement, and destruction are justified. ‘We have no rights without the State, can never get justice without the State, and no abuse can ever delegitimize the State to the point of justifying forcible defiance or overthrow’ (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 190). The authorities must ‘secure social coordination’ (EGOUMENIDES, 2014, p. 35–36) and whoever opposes their prerogatives threatens to thrust everyone into the chaos of unsupervised disputes, and is therefore, by definition (the sovereign’s, that is), promoting violence.

Anarchists’ disagreement with this framework runs through this thesis. I shall now specifically deal with something only briefly explored in section 2.4: that for anarchists, sovereign

⁶⁷ Consider also that it was often not “we” who cannot be trusted but “they” (FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, p. 218).

⁶⁸ Anarchists contest this logic not only by pointing to non-Western, non-statist sociability, as discussed in section 2.5, but to how people usually behave when “natural” disasters strike: what one sees is ‘the same [thing] that anarchists promote for ‘normal’ times: [...] the anarchy that reigns is often more like the condition anarchists describe than the chaos statist warn against’ (KINNA, 2019b, p. 260–261). Indeed, statist and market dynamics tend to make things worse. For example, this is how a co-founder of a community crisis-response initiative after Hurricane Katrina described their situation: ‘the police drew guns on us constantly[...] and kept] saying that we’re going to overthrow them. But they weren’t doing anything to help people[...]. We’re talking tens of thousands of people are going to die, and all they want to do is restore law and order, and they’re turning a blind eye to all the white militia’ (MARTIN, A. S., 2015, p. 42 apud KINNA, 2019b, p. 249). Here are non-anarchist but convergent findings by Jon Mooallem (2020) on the Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964: the American government, fearing people ‘would behave like frightened and unsatisfied children’ in the case of nuclear war, ‘had locked on to natural disasters as realistic proxies’ to study. But ‘a mere 28 hours after the [1964] earthquake, [...] the] community was meeting the situation with a staggering amount of collaboration and compassion. [...] virtually none of the looting, violence or other antisocial behavior that [...] city officials and researchers expected] ever materialized. One of the few cases of looting I found [...] appeared to have been perpetrated by an actual police officer’. See also Ward (1982[1973], chap. 2), John P. Clark (2013b, chap. 8), Amborn (2019, p. 22), Finn (2021, p. 146), and Rhiannon Firth (2022).

force increases or at least maintains conflicts instead of helping solve them. It adds attrition to disputes, culminates in domination⁶⁹, does not lessen suffering afterwards, causes agents' problem-solving capacities to atrophy, and projects an illusion of harmony by rigging the options until conformity is spontaneously chosen. To quote the republican Giovanni Bovio:

Proud and upright toward subjects, envious of neighbours, the state is aggression within and war without. Under the pretext of protecting public security, it is necessarily violent and dispossessing; under the pretext of looking after peace among citizens and interested parties, it provokes internal and external wars. It calls obedience, goodness; silence, order; destruction, expansion; concealment, civilization.^j (GORI, 2000[1894], p. 43)

The wise are to govern the less capable, leading them into appropriateness. However, asked Bakunin (1971[1867], p. 141), if people are not already appropriate, would they not disobey, or follow demagogues⁷⁰ instead? “Non-chaotic society” is then necessarily guaranteed ‘through civil war’, which produces ‘a disgruntled opposition party, beaten but still hostile’. ‘Authorising violence [...] guarantees a vicious cycle of tit-for-tat violence’, writes Alexandre Christoyannopoulos (2020b, p. 28–29) about Tolstoy’s view. ‘It aggrieves victims, relatives, and sympathisers’, who are in turn likely to seek ‘violent retaliation (or even pre-emption)’; in the end, ‘violence is not reduced, but multiplied’⁷¹. For an example from the past two decades or so, international “liddism” (‘military responses’ aimed at ‘keep[ing] the lid on problems’ caused by ‘increasing socioeconomic divisions and environmental limits to growth’) has resulted in even more issues, encouraging the marginalised to revolt violently (ROGERS, 2021).

What if the opposition is beaten to the point of total submission? The extreme suffering this would signify exposes the hypocrisy of the statist argument. Destructive situations cited as having been resolved by the emergence of states were actually *caused* by their emergence, that is, by the path toward establishing sovereignty there where it did not exist in practice.

Take the religious strife in post-reformation Europe: it was only *after* the “different” were already murdered to extinction, chased into exile, or docile in defeat’ that ‘it became possible to demarcate exclusive territorial jurisdictions for the princes’. Today, the state paradigm worsens rather than diminishes violence in the Palestinian context, perhaps because for it to “work” as it did in the past one side would have to be basically exterminated⁷² (SAZAK, 2016).

⁶⁹ On non-domination from an anarchist perspective, see section 4.3.

⁷⁰ See also Mella (2018[1913][b]) and John P. Clark (2013a, p. 75).

⁷¹ See also Berkman (1929, p. 261–262), Goldman (2018[1931], p. 104), Duman (2018, p. 88), and Neocleous (2021, p. 153).

⁷² Or “absorbed” into uniformity — see e.g. Rosner (2022) — which seems less likely in November 2023 than when this note was first written. See also Goldman (2021[1938]), Wayne Price (2009a), and Butler (2013).

As Ramón Grosfoguel (2013, p. 73) argues, genocides and epistemicides ‘in the long 16th century’ were central to erecting the mirage of the sovereign as a rational judge⁷³. The hopeful-revolutions-turned-nightmares that came later do not owe their trajectories to people getting rid of the state, unleashing the bestiality that it had kept in check, but precisely due to pursuing the statist model (FABBRI, Luigi, 2021[1921], p. 3; KINNA, 2017). Never mind revolutions: the default contemporary approach to peacebuilding in general, ‘implanting democratic governance and economic liberalism through a broad range of interventionary practices’ fails to such a degree (RUSCHE, 2022, p. 18–19) that the academic consensus is that it literally is ‘not compatible with the formation of peace’⁷⁴ (KENNEDY, 2016, p. 93 apud RUSCHE, 2022, p. 19). Throughout history, the consolidation of an unstopably superior force in the name of peace is the greatest source of massacres (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 89). As Charles Tilly’s (1975, p. 42) famous saying goes, ‘war made the state, and the state made war’.

But is that peace not worth it? Is it not the case that there is better conflict resolution within each state’s boundaries for the conformed population that is left? Anarchists deny it⁷⁵. This is because there is no metaphysical sovereign disinterestedly forcing individuals to sign fair contracts, or shackling equal contractors to their honourable obligations⁷⁶ (WILSON, M., 2011, p. 91–92; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 196). There is only agents leveraging their powers (within the hierarchy structured by the principle of sovereignty) when entering into agreements and managing others’ (LITTLE, 2023, p. 93). ‘A government, with the best intention, could never satisfy everybody, even if it succeeded in satisfying some’, wrote Malatesta (2014[1892][a]); ‘it must therefore always be defending itself against the discontented, and for that reason must ally itself with the satisfied section of the community for necessary support’.

Wage contracts, for instance, might make labour relations ostensibly peaceful at any given moment, but the parties remain intrinsically in dispute within the imposed market logic that structures their interaction. The state’s threat of violence ‘fails to address the causes of

⁷³ See also Ciccariello-Maher (2011, p. 20).

⁷⁴ See also Springer (2011, p. 550), as well as Sharath Srinivasan (2021, p. 286–291) for a critique of ‘peacemaking governed by transcendent theory or abstract design’ (including “Republican” peacemaking), and even of “peace” itself, a term ‘too static, too abstract, too unworldly, too unpolitical’, that ‘seems to miss much of what lies in between, which, politically speaking, is all that matters’.

⁷⁵ See Leeson (2007) and Amborn (2019, p. 6–7) for interesting arguments about the “Somalia” situation. On the common argument that the sovereign threat of force historically diminished episodes of acute violence in the long run, Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 20) offer an interesting comment: “Security” takes many forms. There is the security of knowing one has a statistically smaller chance of getting shot with an arrow. And then there’s the security of knowing that there are people in the world who will care deeply if one is’.

⁷⁶ And if there were, as Bakunin (2009[1871], p. 16) wrote, it could only ‘serve human liberty’ by ‘ceasing to exist’. See also Paul McLaughlin (2002, p. 76–82) on the Marxist “non-political state” as the alleged anarchic communism humanity is supposed to transition to after the dictatorship of the proletariat.

the injustices that lead to the upheaval in the first place’ (CHRISTOYANNOPOULOS, 2020b, p. 29). Spectacular destruction, so feared by statist, will surely continue to erupt in this context from time to time. But even if it does not, the continued victory of one side produces its own nasty effects: ignorance, addiction, misery, crime, burnout, depression (RECLUS, 2002[1898], p. 54; CERRUTI, 2018[1917]; NASCIMENTO, R., 2002, p. 91). These are all refractions of social conflict that elites shriek from recognising as such, and that they usually tackle with *even more* repressive force, reproducing cycles of trauma (CORREIA, 2021, p. 75; CORREIA; WALL, 2021a, p. 181). Through the eyes of the state,

a multitude of problems, from drug peddling to homelessness to foreign opposition to American imperialism, [... are seen] as dangers that need to be addressed with force rather than as social or political issues. Individuals, broken families, low-income communities, and occupied countries collapsing into civil war — generally, people and societies that don’t fit the Core Identity Group’s self-image — are to blame for their ills, and the burden of recovery and regeneration is on them. (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 182)

Indeed, relations between “identity groups” never cease to be relevant. For Eric Laursen (2021, p. 176), although most states are ‘the product of long-term campaigns of subjugation or elimination’ of “the Other”, ‘humanity always inclines toward diversity and difference’ — which means such campaigns will continue to be conducted as long as sovereignty is enshrined⁷⁷. Racism is structural in state society because it is used to justify violence by getting some people to be seen as killable bodies. For the racialised in particular, “state of exception” is actually the default paradigm of government (AGAMBEN, 2004, p. 13; FLAUZINA, 2006; ALMEIDA, S. L. de, 2019, p. 75–76; ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 98–98; LINNEMANN, 2021, p. 166; SILVA, R. R. d., 2021, p. 217–218; SOW, 2021; WALL, 2021, p. 19).

Gender relations are a different kind of field in terms of how states might deal with conflict. Still, to pick an example from the United States, the 1973 “Roe v. Wade” decision does not seem to have decreased animosity around abortion rights; if anything, it crept onto greater peaks. The judgment came from an unelected body instead of from institutions ‘designed to channel mass opinion and activist mobilization into stable settlements’ (DOUTHAT, 2022), but if the continued racial tensions in the same country are any indication, representative action would not have fared much better (ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 122–124).

Regardless of particulars, whenever one is dealing with minority communities, the idea that daily life or the passage from one legal situation to another is at least “peaceful” completely

⁷⁷ See also Jongerden and Akkaya (2013, p. 170).

misses the mark by neglecting the consequences of continued, if ever repressed, strife (NASCI-MENTO, R., 2002, p. 91). ‘The liberal peace is a dystopia’, writes Jonas Rusche (2022, p. 24), ‘a vision for post-war societies that remains unrealized even within those western societies that propagate it’. In Brazil, where abortions are only allowed in special circumstances, people might not be engaging in street fights over the content of abortion rules, but the prohibition still means thousands of women (especially those suffering from additional, intersecting oppressions) die or are otherwise hurt every year⁷⁸ (CARDOSO; VIEIRA; SARACENI, 2020). As noted in last section’s epigraph, ‘the oppressor is only opposed to violence when the oppressed talks about using violence against the oppressor. Then the question of violence is raised as the incorrect means to attain one’s ends’ (CARMICHAEL, 2007[1969]). Otherwise, people are asked to support the state’s “war on crime”, which can never be won, partly because it ‘is a transposition of the underlying war [...] between sovereign and people’ (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 25). As James Martel (2022, p. 9) writes, communities around ‘forms of identity that are not privileged’ – ‘the queer, the trans, the undocumented, [...] those with disabilities and so many other[s]’ – ‘are, in some sense, always disappointed’ by the promises of sovereignty.

For anarchists, then, states do not diminish violence. They change it, dispersing or transforming it, reinterpreting it through narratives of individual or subcultural failure⁷⁹ or models of legitimacy (for state actors), case in which violence, as seen above, is literally defined away: it is only “reduced” because the state will not recognise it as such.

Police, the state’s ‘bureaucrats with guns’ (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 446) embody legitimised violence. Having evolved from slave patrols or trash-collecting companies that saw non-compliant humans as similar threats to an ideal of urban order (CERRUTI, 2018[1920]; TURNER; GIACOPASSI; VANDIVER, 2006; BRETAS; ROSEMBER, 2013; ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 132–133; MCHARRIS, 2021; NEOCLEOUS, 2021, p. 145–146), the police are an ongoing (re)establishment of sovereign power, a ‘ghostly presence in the life of civilized states’ (BENJAMIN, 1986, p. 287 apud FISCELLA, 2015, p. 172). Innocent citizens are more likely to be beaten by police than criminals because the first, being innocent, tend to challenge the police’s narrative, and the

⁷⁸ See also Alfred (2005, p. 70–71).

⁷⁹ See failure in complex systems in section 6.3.3, and also Cavallero and Gago (2021, p. 38) on the increase in private debt as crisis management: ‘nothing explodes, but everything implodes. Inside families, homes, jobs, neighbourhoods, financial obligation make the bonds more fragile and precarious’ [nada explode, mas tudo implode. Para dentro das famílias, nos lares, nos empregos, nos bairros, a obrigação financeira faz com que os vínculos se tornem mais frágeis e precários]. The issue of debt, of course, also applies to group relations; see, for example, Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 87–88).

prerogative to define the situation ‘is the power that police guard most jealously’ (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 504). When dealing with protests⁸⁰, cops

regularly engage in practices which, in war, would be considered utterly dishonorable. Police regularly arrest mediators. [...] If one does negotiate an agreement with the police, they will almost invariably break it. Police frequently attack those offered safe passage. [...] There’s no need to come to an understanding about how to treat prisoners if you can arrest protesters, but protesters cannot arrest you. [...] the refusal to honor the rules of war is a means of refusing the implication of equivalency [...]. The state has a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Hence, it is by definition incommensurable with any other element in society.⁸¹ (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 430–431)

As noted in the previous section, police are constrained by what brings them into being, as is the sovereign more generally (ERRANDONEA, 2003, p. 50–51). However, as Reclus (2013[1905][b], p. 197) noted, in some respects ‘minor officials exercise their power more absolutely than persons of high rank’, whose ‘brutalities, crimes, or misdemeanors’ are more likely to ‘engage everyone’s attention’, making them ‘constrained by a certain propriety’⁸². More importantly, the point of the restrictions of the law is to guarantee a set of unrestrictions, which cannot exist without the enforcement of a related order against the dissatisfied. This creates a tacit “social pact”, manifested in police-supporting discourse (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 180–181), that makes it extremely difficult to prosecute abuses: the Leviathan says ‘I, the state, am the people’, and ‘if there is one thing that “the people” does not wish to imagine itself as, it is monstrous. [...] Any hint of the state’s own monstrosity must therefore disappear from view’ (NEOCLEOUS, 2021, p. 152).

The police have constantly extended the boundaries of “legal” behavior to the point where the law itself has been transformed[...] and have] often simply ignored demands that something called the rule of law be followed. Indeed, research suggests that most officers believe that to fully impose the rule of law on police work would render it impossible, and senior police officers are on record saying that there is a “moral justification for getting round the rules.” [...] Police] legitimate their actions by persuading judges, politicians, and the

⁸⁰ ‘Criminal law enforcement is something that most police officers do with the frequency located somewhere between virtually never and very rarely’ (NEOCLEOUS, 2000, p. 93 apud GRAEBER, 2009, p. 446); see also McHarris (2021, p. 36). Consider as well places, such as the United States, in which police do not have a duty to protect the public against crime (CYRUS, 2022).

⁸¹ ‘The most truly vicious wars that have been fought in recent memory are ones which aren’t wars at all[...], but police actions. Like Vietnam, or Algeria, or Angola, Syria, Iraq’ (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 25). See also Cubero (2015[1991][a], p. 25), as well as, tangentially, Kelly (2023, 2:42–3:57).

⁸² I would be remiss not to cite a notable episode at the beginning of the military dictatorship in Brazil. In 1968, generals asked puppet vice-president Pedro Aleixo to sign a decree (the “AI-5”) that basically suspended many constitutional guarantees. Aleixo reportedly refused, and when told not to worry, for power would be put in the hands of generals he knew well, he replied: ‘I do not worry about generals, but about the officer down at the corner of the street’ (BRANCO, 2022).

public that what they are doing is necessary to curb crime and in the name of [...] security.⁸³ (NEOCLEOUS, 2021, p. 148)

Police power operates ‘independently from a purely legal logic’, write Correia and Wall (2021b, p. 6): in the context of policing, ‘law only matters[...] if police insist it should’⁸⁴. That this is the language of criminal gangs⁸⁵ (GRAEBER, 2012) results in curious circumstances: the hiring of pirates as privateers; serial killers, racists and fascists becoming police officers so as to do what they like with less scrutiny (NEOCLEOUS, 2021, p. 143, 216–217); official permission for private citizens to use violence on immigrants (JAPPE, 2013, p. 17–18); or the connection between official and unofficial force in contexts such as the heyday of the Ku Klux Klan or present-day Brazilian death squads (KU..., 2021; DOWNS, 2016; A MILÍCIA..., 2021; SIMÕES, 2019; GALEOTTI, 2017). Acemoglu, Feo, and Luca (2020) write about local elites bolstering the Mafia in response to socialism in late 19th-century Sicily, attributing the ordeal to the weakness of the Italian state. That might be the case only in the sense that the police would have likely done what the Mafia did for the elites, *not* that violence would not have taken place⁸⁶. In the United States at around the same time, police were used to brutalise workers so often that, as Joseph R. Buchanan observed, ‘they were as much a part of the corporations as their accounting departments’ (FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, p. 46). The police (and military), writes William C. Anderson (2021, p. 122), are ‘merely the legitimate and institutionalized extension of social forces that, in other circumstances, would be called extremists’. Citing only a few incidents on her mind around 1897 – ‘Montjuich, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Hazleton’ – Goldman (2018[1931], p. 132) decried the murder of strikers: ‘everywhere the same butchery!’.

A common statist response is that law must be improved and followed strictly. Moreover, the continued victory of elites (or perhaps the same ones) is not a given, not in democracies; by political yet legal action the downtrodden too can take control of decision-making processes

⁸³ See also Coordenação Anarquista Brasileira (CAB) (2019). For a counterpoint, see Gerber and Jackson (2017), although the rejoinder is that, if notions of legitimacy constrain police activity, the problem is the brutality they *do* allow (encouraging people not to see it as such) as well as the way the arrangement impacts the very *judgments* regarding the legality, the reasonableness, or the excessiveness of the force employed.

⁸⁴ See also Jeremias (2017).

⁸⁵ Of course, anarchists have often been considered criminals, and so have been prone to relativise the term, not unlike what they did to “anarchism” itself (GORI, 2000[1894], p. 22; GOLDMAN, 2009[1910], p. 28). Banditry is ‘ancient and universal’, writes Rodolfo Oca (2019, p. 41–42), and often means communal and democratic lives in which the concept of private property is rejected; see also Hakim Bey (2009[1985]) and Matt Dagher-Margosian (2021) on pirates. However, many anarchists saw in criminal independence-seeking the same shortcomings of e.g. medieval city-states – the maintenance of patterns that would lead right back to embracing sovereignty (see section 5.1). See also Cuesta (2020, p. 149).

⁸⁶ In Japan, the *yakuza* were used to ‘break up unions and left-wing demonstrations’. This even helps explain why these criminal gangs are, in fact, *legal* in the country (THE ECONOMIST, 2015). See also Godoy (2017, p. 127) and, tangentially, Harmsworth (2023).

and have their way. But this misses the point of solving conflicts; of actually ceasing to relate to others on the basis of threats of violence. “Having their way” means exacting a force that will *always* haunt its objects: being the object of policing is terrifying no matter its legitimacy⁸⁷. If strife is to be funnelled into disputes for control over enforcement of peacefully promulgated laws, then most conflicts the state oversees to prevent from turning violent are converted into disputes to *become the violent overseer oneself*. This simply plunges agents right into the aforementioned dynamics of state building, in which peace is guaranteed by attempting to dominate the opposition.

Consider alternation of power as a contemporary democratic ideal. Ancient Athenians also believed that liberty resided in commanding and being commanded in turns (MANIN, 1997, p. 28–30). Of course, Athenian rulers were not elected. Today, power rotation as evidence of democracy relates to incumbents losing elections and leaving when they lose (PRZEWORSKI, 2019, p. 5). Still, Athens had its “Core Identity Group” with tightly controlled boundaries. All the electable (those allowed in the lottery for offices) were educated to seek the same ideals, and the unelectable were forced to obey whatever regardless (FINLEY, 1998, p. 24, 34, 36–41; STRAUMANN, 2016, p. 197–198). When electability is expanded to groups who would rather live very differently, things change. As Adam Przeworski (2019, p. 8) declares, representative democracy ‘works when something is at stake in elections but not too much’. When socialists attempt to undo capitalism democratically, this elicits repression⁸⁸.

Legitimising superior force to solve conflicts seems to anarchists akin to putting out fire with petrol: strife just snowballs into the future. But this is not only because “losers” become bitter and resentful. Those who decide *not* to engage in the dominance game lose opportunities to practice conflict resolution for themselves. For Kropotkin, when people were ‘relieved of the burden of negotiating disagreements and differences directly, they were required only to cultivate “the virtue of being equally [...] slaves”⁸⁹ (KINNA, 2016, p. 167).

In this sense, the state’s gaze is comparable not only to that of a theologian on “broken” beings, but also to that of an overbearing parent (LITTLE, 2023, p. 94). It is based on an

⁸⁷ See the discussion on “the ultimate prize” of democracy in section 2.4, page 67, as well as on perceived levels of threat against the social edifice in section 4.1, page 100, and the comment on objectification by violence in section 6.1.1, page 266. See also Springer (2011, p. 526).

⁸⁸ For Kinna and Prichard (2019, p. 233), the problems democracy is asked to solve, even disregarding resistance, amount to ‘a labour of Sisyphus’. See section 5.1 for a discussion on not remaining “stably united over time” as a group, as well as section 6.1.2. See also Rocker (2009[1938], p. 51–52), Malatesta (2015b, p. 47), and Haider (2018, p. 90).

⁸⁹ See also Kinna (2019b, p. 61).

assumption, ‘going back to the “noble lie” of Plato’s Republic, [...] that the masses will not and cannot understand the actions being taken in their interest’⁹⁰ (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 137–138). As Bakunin (1975, p. 40) would add, the powerful require ‘a people reasonably ignorant, insignificant, incapable’, so that they ‘always find occasion to dedicate themselves to the public cause’ as superiors^{k,91}.

This seems to indict socialist states’ bureaucratic planners, alone ‘free from false consciousness’ and thus able to know what was ‘in the best interest of the people’, which dovetailed with elites’ interests (SPANNOS, 2012, p. 46). But capitalism features a similar rhetoric, especially regarding economic policies: not only they should be directed by “experts”, their main contribution is the maintenance of a landscape in which “entrepreneurs” and “stakeholders” have greater decision-making power in terms of resource allocation. Regardless of the subject, it is unsurprising that infantilised people will act like “spoiled” children: dealing with disputes by appealing to the *adultus ex machina* in the room, rather than engaging with problems in their own merits among equals (NASCIMENTO, R., 2002, p. 100–101; SCHULMAN, 2016; KINNA, 2019b, p. 225). Self- and collective deliberation are dissuaded; servility, flattery, manipulation, and overstatement of harm are incentivised; the seed of distrust finds fertile ground.

Of course, voluntary, consensual agreements are routinely reached under sovereignty-based regimes. But, as seen in sections 2.1 and 2.4, imbalances deform volition itself. Superior force is sought to impose behaviour, but because doing so ostensibly is onerous, one seeks to manipulate the moral weight of promises⁹²: imposition happens when power differences incentivise an agent to agree to terms they would *otherwise* deem unjust⁹³. This reinforces the divide, constraining the settling of future disputes by protecting an earlier “promise”. Contract, as this forceful guarding of promises, ‘refers back to the original terms’, assuming them ‘to

⁹⁰ For Asef Bayat (1997, p. 61), ‘governments tend in practice to promote autonomy as an effort to transfer their responsibilities to their citizens’, i.e. shake off cumbersome activities while maintaining the essentials of wealth extraction and forceful maintenance of the status quo. However, they also ‘display apprehension about losing political space’. The result is that states often implement conflicting policies of ‘both promoting and restricting autonomous and informal institutions’. Malatesta (2014[1892][a]) anticipated this sociological observation in different terms: ‘a government cannot wish the destruction of the community, for then it and the dominant class could not claim their exploitation-gained wealth; nor could the government leave the community to manage its own affairs, for then the people would soon discover that it (the government) was necessary for no other end than to defend the proprietary [sic] class who impoverish them’. Compare something like the Brazilian Public Ministry [Ministério Público], unelected prosecutors officially responsible for suing state agents *on behalf* of the population due to the civil society’s alleged “undersufficiency” [hipossuficiência] (ARANTES, 2012, p. 24), with a typical anarchist position: ‘to the alleged incapacity of the people we do not offer a solution by putting ourselves in the place of [oppressors]. Only freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom’ (MALATESTA, 2015b, p. 50).

⁹¹ Not to mention a people under constant stress (COMFORT, 1970, p. 110 apud LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 143).

⁹² See section 5.2, in particular the discussion on rites of institution in section 5.2.1.

⁹³ See also Graeber (2011a, p. 202–203) and, tangentially, Coulthard (2014, p. 17).

be fair’ despite having been ‘skewed by prevailing power relations’, and so ‘is inherently conservative’⁹⁴ (KINNA, 2019c, p. 143, 146).

The contract paradigm, however, is problematic for anarchists regardless of the contracts’ particular contents, for a promise does not have the same weight ‘if you can’t break it’ (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 14). It would not matter for anarchists if sovereign institutions were created by peaceful consensus and to protect equal responsibilities. ‘As soon as [a sovereign] institution is established, even if it should be only to combat flagrant abuses, it creates them anew through its very existence’ (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 77). There is a crucial slippage between not punishing force because one accepts it and accepting force because one cannot punish it (BENJAMIN, 1986, p. 288 apud FISCELLA, 2015, p. 172). The *minute* the protected state of affairs becomes good for some and bad for others, the violence that strives to make it unchallengeable would immediately represent a new imbalance in forces.

Feminists often call attention to how patriarchy renders consent nearly meaningless (ANGEL, 2021; RED AND BLACK LEEDS, 2017), and concerns about prostitution dovetail with labourers’ assent to wage relations: ‘sex workers are in no better a position to choose not to work than anyone else’⁹⁵ (ANARCHIST FEDERATION, 2012, p. 23). Under capitalism, as Berkman (1929, p. 15) communicated to a fellow worker, ‘you “consent” all right, but you do so because you cannot help yourself, because you are compelled’. ‘While capitalists go to the market to profit, workers do it for fear of hunger’, writes Corrêa (2019, p. 398); ‘juridical equality means nothing when two economical agents so different in terms of social force meet’^{1,96}. In each case, people *want* things; but how much did legitimised power structures contribute to making alternatives incredibly hard to work toward?

For anarchists, legitimising sovereignty prolongs disputes, even if it transforms them (ACHARYA, 2019[1948], p. 131; RUSCHE, 2022, p. 24). Police logic ‘does not produce genuine safety or even[...] productive modes of discipline’ (CORREIA; WALL, 2021a, p. 183). This causes as much suffering, if not more, hampers social creativity and personal growth, and either baits people into working toward an impossible transcendent order or gaslights them into thinking it already exists. I end this section with two examples to summarise these arguments.

The effectiveness of Brazilian laws criminalising domestic abuse and gender-related homicide is questionable. For anarchists, patriarchal violence should be publicly discussed

⁹⁴ See also Benally (2021b, p. 47).

⁹⁵ See also Baker (2021b).

⁹⁶ See also Heywood (1868, p. 5 apud LITTLE, 2023, p. 128–129) and, tangentially, Alfred (2005, p. 194–195).

and denounced, and in this sense these laws have succeeded. But this could have been done in other ways, and state-sponsored solutions have been underwhelming *because* of statist prejudices: the non-punitive aspects of the laws (e.g. publicly-funded victim shelters) have been severely neglected, affecting poorer and racialised communities the worst (GARCIA; FREITAS; HÖFELMANN, 2013; CÁSSIA GUSMÃO *et al.*, 2014; CERQUEIRA *et al.*, 2015; ANJOS; DIP, 2016; MEDEIROS, 2016; SILVA; GURGEL; GONÇALVES, 2019; AFIUNE; ANJOS, 2020; FERNANDES, 2021). Instead of resources for safe mediation and the construction of alternatives, women are given a rigid template of solution by superior force. This infantilises them⁹⁷ through victimhood and fuels the backlash attempting to link feminism to overreaching punitivism (FREITAS, 2013, p. 30–31; HOLMES, 2022; LISNEK *et al.*, 2022; MARICOURT; BURRELL, 2022; VALENTE; BATISTA, 2021). The connection is surely misleading; it generalises the feminist movement and wilfully ignores gender inequalities, against which anarchists certainly approve forceful measures. But it pulls on a nugget of truth: under *these* forceful measures, the carceral system’s legitimacy is reinforced⁹⁸ – as is sovereignty’s, this tenet of both patriarchy (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 144–146) and the economic logic that eroded the budget for non-punitive measures in the first place (SOUTO, L., 2018; CAVALLERO; GAGO, 2021, p. 21).

The murders of Bruno Pereira and Dom Phillips in the Amazon provoked a surge of claims, in the Brazilian mainstream media, that the state is “absent” from the region. Skirmishes between miners, loggers, fishers, and farmers on one side, and indigenous populations and environmentalists on the other, entail “lawlessness” (EDITORIAL FOLHA, 2022; ALONSO, 2022; CARVALHO, 2022). But as Txai Suruí (2022) wrote, ‘there is no absence of the Brazilian state in any aspect, in any death in the territorial war the Amazon lives’^{m,99}. The Brazilian state has always been a colonialist force in the region, either directly or by undermining minority actors under its direct authority (such as Pereira) against agents whose dire situations get them to volunteer as pawns of “primitive”¹⁰⁰ accumulation (ROCHA, 2021; PALMQUIST, 2018). If there is a war, legitimising state forces allows one side to decimate the opposition. For anarchists, the Brazilian state is not entitled to do so, and neither should anyone be. Statist peace would mean,

⁹⁷ See Mary Wollstonecraft (GRUPO DE ESTUDIOS JOSÉ DOMINGO GÓMEZ ROJAS, 2017, p. 128) and Marianne Weber (2003, p. 92) on the imbalance of power for the sake of protecting women being part of the problem, as well as Wendy Brown (1995, p. 173 apud COULTHARD, 2014, p. 101), for whom ‘domination, dependence, discipline, and protection, the terms marking the itinerary of women’s subordination[...], are also characteristic effects of state power’. See also Haider (2018, p. 94–95).

⁹⁸ See also McHarris (2021, p. 34).

⁹⁹ See also IEL (2023a).

¹⁰⁰ On this characterisation, see Coulthard (2014, p. 7–8) and Wayne Price (2019).

now again as it has done for centuries, that elites get to frictionlessly decide what is done with the territory. Veneers of respectability would certainly appease foreign investors amidst the not-so-metaphorical gold rush. If the state decided to act forcefully in favour of indigenous reservations, that could hurt the aforementioned pawns¹⁰¹ (VALENTE; MEDEIROS, 2022), who also turn to the state to legalise their current (and in the long run destructive) operations. In the end, the existence of a central power promises a solution that does not involve dialogue and transformation. It structurally tempts the parties to dispute the sovereign's grace rather than cooperate to change conditions and relations.

4.2.2 Legitimising equality of forces

We will succeed in our fight simply because we are too large and too well organized to be ignored or quashed by the Powers.

An anonymous Zapatista ¹⁰²

The yardstick that counts is not the preconceived, authoritarian idea of how much one conforms to an idealised theory. [...] This applies quite as much to those who apply the yardstick of 'violence' as those who apply that of 'non-violence', for the real yardstick is freedom [...].

Stuart Christie ¹⁰³

'We believe that any liberating movement must unavoidably involve some violence', wrote Christie (2021[1979], p. 83); but 'that is not to say we "believe" in violence'. It 'can achieve nothing' beyond resisting domination (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][a]), failing 'completely' when 'used to accomplish positive goals' (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][i]). 'Merely physically beating back the fascists is not the issue', wrote Ervin (2009[1993], p. 12–14) about anti-racist, anti-fascist action. Conflicts are only *truly* resolved when the constituting tensioned forces are *voluntarily realigned* – in his case, for example, when "white" people 'redefine themselves and their relationship with others', refusing 'to be saddled with the historical legacy of colonialism, slavery and genocide'. 'Only what is achieved through the great upsurge of the human spirit, out of the impassioned desire of the multitude endures', wrote Ethel Mannin (2009[1944], p. 73 apud SPRINGER, 2014, p. 261); 'what is imposed by force has no roots, and cannot last'.

¹⁰¹ During the Yanomami crisis in early 2023, this was exactly what happened; it relieved some of the pressure on this indigenous culture – possibly endangering others, by the way (STABILE *et al.*, 2023) – but the region is still a pressure cooker (VALENTE, 2023; PEREZ, 2023; RAMALHO; RUFINO; BARRETO, 2024).

¹⁰² A ZAPATISTA..., 2019[2002].

¹⁰³ Christie, 2021[1971](b), p. 46–47.

While it would be idle to say that Anarchists in general believe that any of the great industrial problems will be solved without the use of force[,] it would be equally idle to suppose that they consider force itself a desirable thing, or that it furnishes a final solution to any problem[.] From peaceful experiment alone can come [... solutions], and that the advocates of force know and believe as well as the Tolstoyans. (DE CLEYRE, 2018[1903], p. 6)

To reiterate, people *can* always “voluntarily realign” their efforts within a hierarchical environment, but as seen above, this often entails the persistence of conflict, which for anarchists is in circumstances, not in attitudes – not calling attention to a problem will not make it go away (GORI, 2000[1894], p. 51–52; CARMICHAEL, 2007[1969]; ERVIN, 2009[1993], p. 35–37; SEIS; NOCELLA II; SHANTZ, 2020, p. 12–14). ‘Freedom is the great reconciler of human interests’, wrote Malatesta (2014[1922][a]), ‘as long as it is rooted in equality of conditions’¹⁰⁴. A context of inequality of forces militates against mutually beneficial outputs that effectively dissolve tension. Anarchists want the oppressed to be empowered so that they do not have to kneel (HUNTER, 2019, p. 115); once they are standing, fair dialogue, leading to creative solutions, is thought of as much more likely to take place¹⁰⁵. This is not only because of the impossibility of either side imposing a solution, but because ‘the elimination of hierarchical divisions’ makes it so that ‘open communication can be achieved’ (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 47).

The best way to minimize selfish, spiteful, duplicitous, or petty behavior is by effectively daring people to be mature. [...] This, and the refusal to apply moral pressure, makes it extremely difficult for anyone to cast themselves in the role of the victim or to tell themselves they’re only doing what they have to do to win a pre-established political game.¹⁰⁶ (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 330–331)

This is not to say there will not be, in Graeber’s (2020, chap. 24) words, ‘selfish assholes in the world’, or pathologically aggressive people. On one hand, as Matthew Wilson (2011, p. 67) discusses, ‘these individuals exist today, and the state does little or nothing to protect us from them’, as they are unlikely to be deterred by fear of prosecution and their unpredictability makes it hard for even states to anticipate their acts. On the other hand, a situation of people “failing to be mature” is still usually a far cry from the systematic oppression enabled by bureaucracies: at least selfish assholes ‘won’t be in command of armies’¹⁰⁷ (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 24). Goodman (2010[1945][a], p. 37) argued that ‘anger is at least contactful’, and

¹⁰⁴ See the discussion on competition from the beginning of this chapter.

¹⁰⁵ In terms of fighting to remain “equally powered”, so to speak, see how the disbanding of popular militias by the republican government was the death knell of the Spanish Revolution (FINN, 2021, p. 126). See also Alfred (2005, p. 76–77).

¹⁰⁶ See note 128 below, and also Graeber (2007, p. 97).

¹⁰⁷ See the discussion on “human nature” in the introduction to the next chapter, especially on page 177.

often ‘the one exchange of blows, is the last; for it has re-established contact’¹⁰⁸. ‘If there were less false politeness’ and ‘conformity’, Goodman (2021[1962]) insisted, and more ‘loud quarrels’ and ‘fist fights’, ‘there would be less ultimate and catastrophic explosiveness’¹⁰⁹. When first reaching America, Jesuits were surprised that native populations had ‘no punitive laws, just compensation’, but experienced far less crime than in Europe¹¹⁰ (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 8). For Samuel Clark (2007, p. 144), peoples like the Nuer provide ‘empirical demonstration that, even where people have culturally-sanctioned tendencies towards violence, conflict resolution can be managed in and by anarchic networks’. Still, as Douglas Fry (2007, p. 81) summarises, ‘examination of cross-cultural data reveals that people usually deal with conflicts without using any violence at all’¹¹¹.

As mentioned in section 1.2, anarchists have always been inspired by episodes of “popular violence”. But interestingly enough, contrary to common statist portrayals, one often finds they were usually quite measured in the way they employed forceful action. Edward Thompson (1971, p. 78, 112) describes food riots in 18th-century England as ‘a highly-complex form of direct popular action, disciplined and with clear objectives’; as something whose ‘restraint’ was remarkable rather than the disorder. Furthermore, their goals were hardly about sequestering sovereignty for themselves. Cusicanqui (2020, p. 7) writes that the 1781 indigenous uprisings in Bolivia ‘proposed a social order grounded in the recognition of differences’ and the ‘possibility of shared civility’; one that ‘did not necessarily imply expulsion or extermination, but rather adopted the image of a restitution or reconstitution’, providing ‘a space of mediation [...] thought and lived in its own syntax’¹¹².

If equality of forces can dissuade from violent dispute, encouraging their redirection, this does not *necessarily* happens through increases to one’s capacity for violence. In the case of domestic abuse, for instance, it could involve providing the means for battered individuals to be away from their aggressor safely, as well as getting more people involved in mediating new arrangements that hold the latter accountable, providing a path for social reintegration without jeopardising anyone’s safety or autonomy (CORREIA; BOMBINI, 2020, *passim*, 48:07–

¹⁰⁸ bell hooks, as quoted in Sallydarity (2012, p. 43–44), makes the point that ‘patriarchy both creates the rage in boys and then contains it for later use, making it a resource to exploit later on as boys become men’.

¹⁰⁹ See also Tolstoy (2009[1862], §173–175).

¹¹⁰ See also Kropotkin (2021[1902], p. 95) and Amborn (2019, p. 149).

¹¹¹ As reported by Christian Jarrett (2019), humans ‘have evolved to be uniquely tolerant among fission-fusion species’, which does not mean that they are ‘peaceful all the time’, but that ‘where and when access to nonlocal resources is important, humans have often managed to find ways to be tolerant towards members of other communities at least some of the time’. See also Poole (2018).

¹¹² See also Oca (2019, p. 95–96).

48:48). This is the basic principle behind restorative justice, as practised in Rojava as well as by Zapatistas, with the former's state-averse model working quite well in terms of accommodating multiple ethnicities and religions in the same territories (EDITORIA DESCONTROL, 2016c; DUMAN, 2018; STAHLER-SHOLK, 2019, p. 10; NORDHAG, 2021). In the Amazonian case, to refer back to the other example from the previous section, de-escalation between locals — also of different ethnicities, religions, cosmovisions — would have to begin by a recognition of shared difficulties, leading to mutual collaboration against neoliberal, colonial pressures, for it is weakness against these forces that pushes them into becoming cogs in wider exploitative schemes, or fragile actors dependent of external solutions.

While these examples involve empowering weaker agents, anarchist efforts also include campaigns to weaken or change oppressive agents' behaviour, opening space for better conflict resolution; see, for example, Smith and Mac (2018, chap. 3, 9). In many cases, this will be hard to distinguish from calls for state actors to act or to not act, or from disputes over positions of power and their prerogatives. For anarchists, however, this should never limit one's political horizon or one's definitions (such as that of freedom). Anarchists refuse to legitimise sovereignty so that equality of forces can continually be pursued.

In other words, it would be good to force states to adequately fund non-punitive measures outlined in laws against domestic violence. Nonetheless, this infrastructure would be controlled by elites who could later "legitimately" tear it apart¹¹³ (CUBERO, 2015[1989], p. 174; CAB, 2020, 59:52–1:01:29). The same can be said of social security, educational spaces, or health providers, which states absorbed not too long ago (to undercut socialist movements) but are not themselves inherently linked to a hierarchical logic¹¹⁴ (SPRINGER, 2014, p. 254; DUPUIS-D'ERI, 2016, p. 52; GRAEBER, 2020a). The state is not the only issue; privately-owned, profit-driven enterprises would not be advisable either. In any case, shelters for victims of domestic violence, or resources for the defence of indigenous territories, can be used productively no matter the provider. Ervin (2009[1993], p. 26–28), for example, calls for the construction of a 'Black survival program'; Hunter (2019, p. 116) talks about initiatives that 'alleviate some of the symptoms of capitalism'. While that might involve demands to existing power structures, it is important that these projects be 'community specific', 'established with the guidance of those who need them',

¹¹³ Speaking of this very process in the United States, Kim Brooks (2020) wonders 'how meaningful' feminist progress 'in the last three decades' really was 'if it can be undone so quickly and so ferociously'. For a discussion of this matter in an indigenous context, see also Coulthard (2014, p. 159); generally, see also Ward (2011[1992], p. 287, 2011[2000], p. 272), and tangentially, Varga (2022[1937], p. 142–143).

¹¹⁴ On issues of health care in particular, see Anarchist Communist Group (2020[2018]) and Saunders (2021). On states' absorption of mutual aid institutions, see also Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 423–427).

and do not allow for ‘poverty pimps’ (HUNTER, 2019, p. 116–117). They must help organise around a revolutionary analysis of their situation, for the anarchist goal (and, mostly, the challenge) is to do what is currently feasible in ways that combat sovereignty more generally; entrenching its logic would only again transform conflict rather than solve it¹¹⁵ (KINNA, 2016, p. 88).

At any rate, as seen above (especially in the last section), there are limits to what can be expected from democratic sovereign arrangements. ‘In congresses nothing is done that scares the state’ⁿ, wrote Bartolomeu Constantino (VENTURA, 2000, p. 127). For anarchists, seeking to increase one’s forces to act directly is an expedient tactic even if one’s goal is not the immediate and complete abolition of sovereign institutions (CERRUTI, 2018[1920], p. 86; CUBERO, 2015[1989], p. 174; WALT; SCHMIDT, 2009a, p. 53–54; MCKAY, 2014, p. 40; KINNA, 2016, p. 88; FINN, 2021, p. 9; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 213–216). From the welfare state (GRAEBER, 2009, p. x–xi) to reproductive rights (BESWICK, 2022), every improvement ‘is only given when it becomes dangerous, for holders of power, to refuse it for longer’^o (GRAVE, 2000, p. 12). ‘Asking for rights only empowers those who would ration them’ (DAY-WOODS, 2021, p. 98); ‘they have rights who dare maintain them’¹¹⁶ (DE CLEYRE, 2004[1891], p. 235).

For Gelderloos (2007, p. 136–137), then, ‘it is vague, meaningless, and ultimately untrue’ to say that violence is always oppressive. ‘Violence is one thing’, wrote Luigi Fabbri (2021[1921], p. 2), ‘government authority is another, whether dictatorial or not’. What all anarchists oppose are the latter – ‘coercive hierarchies’, institutionalised imbalances among forces, which impair constructive peace-building strategies¹¹⁷. Especially considering the effects of *inaction*, the Crimethinc collective (2012, emphasis in the original) notes that ‘there is no such thing as nonviolence’, and hence ‘the closest we can hope to come is to negate the harm or threat posed by the proponents of top-down violence’. The alternative to ‘asking whether an action is violent’ is to ask ‘*does it counteract power disparities, or reinforce them?*’¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁵ See Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés and Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano (2018 apud STAHLER-SHOLK, 2019, p. 15) on the difference between ‘the struggle for freedom’ and a struggle for ‘legal recognition’, as well as Tawinikay (2021[2018]) and Coulthard (2014, p. 102), the latter based on the work of Sarah Hunt and Dory Nason in the context of indigenous struggle: appeals to the state must be ‘used very cautiously and strategically’ to not reproduce colonialism, and even then ‘must be supplemented’ and ‘replaced’ by other practices. See also Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, p. 281–286).

¹¹⁶ See section 6.3.3, as well as Reclus (2002[1898], p. 33), Springer (2011, p. 548), and Eric Laursen (2021, p. 82).

¹¹⁷ See Uri Gordon (2006) on coercion and enforcement. See also Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, p. 55) and ziq (2019, p. 10), as well as Kinna (2012d, p. 323, emphasis added) on Weber’s characterisation of anarchist ethics, also taken up by April Carter (1978, p. 334): ‘the means-ends distinction that anarchists draw might be construed as a rejection of *the monopoly of violence* rather than its deployment’, and decisions about [non-]violence ‘might be justified with reference to either ethic’ (of ultimate ends or of responsibility).

¹¹⁸ For more interesting questions to ask, see also Stevens (2018).

Of course, as seen earlier, anarchists can still disagree each time this question is posed. This can be explained in part by the many definitions of violence in different geopolitical and cultural contexts, as well as by less context-dependent ethical disagreements (something I shall soon return to). The common ground, however, is the refusal to legitimise sovereignty¹¹⁹. Phrasing it positively, all anarchists legitimise an equality of forces: they want power to be horizontally distributed so that fairer, more spontaneous orders can be brought about. They know that ‘any proposed remedy will throw up new injustices’, but this just means that new efforts should then be employed to identify and tear down the ‘institutional barriers’ that represent the novel imbalances and, as such, ‘inhibit groups and individuals from initiating change’ (JEPPS, 2020).

‘Striving for peace’, writes Hermann Amborn (2019, p. 150), is ‘a condition for the maintenance of nonhegemony’. But there is ‘a curious paradox’ here, as Saul Newman (2012, p. 43) writes, echoing Goodman: ‘the violent metaphor’ of confrontation makes possible ‘the radical transformation of violence into non-violence’, while the state, ‘that instrument of social pacification’, leads ‘to the shedding of blood’¹²⁰. For anarchists, however, statism is not an “honest mistake”. The state ‘cannot solve problems that it cannot comprehend, because it is a weapon that was not designed to rectify them’ (ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 182). Just as it does not try to develop people’s capacities for self-organisation, it does not try to solve conflicts (ROBINSON, 1980, p. 68). When realigning forces means giving up privileges or the fixity of one’s identity, tensions are allowed to persist, and “solving conflicts” means guaranteeing the peace of a victory, as written earlier, in the form of hegemony. A statist political system is not meant to resolve disputes as they emerge, with individuals, relations, and institutions changing as a result, but to continually reproduce the *same* conflict so the system can persist as it is over time. Violence is co-opted for the defence of inequality, ‘ensuring the persistence and preservation of both’¹²¹ (ROXBURGH, 2018, p. 71 apud RUSCHE, 2022, p. 24–25).

Embracing conflict to work toward improved peace is not much of a paradox, then, if force is anchored to egalitarianism (even against current norms). Thus why Kropotkin did

¹¹⁹ Even more than talking about violence, then, ‘the general distinction’ that anarchists must make, for Shawn Wilbur (2020[2016], p. 1, emphasis in the original), ‘is between *the capacity to act* and *various sorts of social permission or sanction for action that include some right to command others*’.

¹²⁰ See also Alfred (2005, p. 77), John P. Clark (2013a, p. 53, 2013b, p. 73), Springer (2011, p. 531, 553), and Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 4), as well as Thistle Writing Collective (2021) on how minimising conflict within an anarchist organisation may have led to the maintenance of an unsatisfactory status quo.

¹²¹ See Stafford Beer’s (2002, p. 217) adage that ‘the purpose of a system is what it does’, which is not very far from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s “the meaning of a word is its use” (NELSON, 2021, introduction). For more on Beer and anarchism, see Swann (2020, chap. 3, *passim*).

not approach the matter of legitimacy by asking whether ‘individuals had a duty to obey’, but by examining why they ‘were not prepared to rise up against oppression’¹²² (KINNA, 2016, p. 114). Anarchists take up arms ‘to eliminate the causes of civil wars and wars’ (ACHARYA, 2019[1948], p. 131). An equality of forces is seen as a minimal condition for voluntary “peace treaties” that actually address the issues; that do not feel humiliating or conceiting for anyone involved. In those cases, there are no winners and losers – and hence less incentive to go looking for ways to “revert” what was agreed upon (AMBORN, 2019, p. 143–144).

Immediate self-defence is certainly included in this model, but not protecting what is already a superior force. It also helps differentiating “original” aggressions from “reactive” ones by considering which application of force first disturbed an equilibrium. Responding to original violence is important because not doing so would effectively constitute sovereignty: if nobody reacts to a forceful assertion, everyone is logically to understand such force is generally accepted¹²³. So long as one’s force is meant to match the opponents’ and not go beyond it, it will not produce a situation in which one becomes untouchable oneself. Shifu argued revolutionary violence should by no means be mistaken with authority (KREBS, 1998, p. 137); revolution ‘as conceived by anarchists’, wrote Malatesta (2015b, p. 50), ‘seeks to halt all violence as soon as the need to use force to oppose that of the government and the bourgeoisie, ceases’¹²⁴. Not only one’s forces are not rhetorically legitimised, there is no *practical* attempt to elevate them above disagreement through *de facto*, material superiority.

However, as mentioned above, discerning self-defence is not easy; it is usually far from obvious that any situation is “balanced”, and who first broke balance when it is not¹²⁵. Consider the aforementioned debate on assassinations: even if “level of concentration of power” is the relevant criterion, as Goldman at one point thought, controversy remains around at least two points: first, circling back to the discussion above about less context-dependent ethical disagreements, whether some acts of force are not always inherent concentrations; secondly, and perhaps more importantly, if they help people grapple with their *desires* for concentrated power in the first place.

¹²² See also Zinn (1977 apud FISCELLA, 2015, p. 262).

¹²³ If people know that others do not accept it but that these same others will not do anything anyway, the practical conclusion is the same. The aggressor has unsurmountable firepower, regardless of how superior it actually is *were* conflict to break out. On “original” violence in general, see also Ward (2011[1973], p. 261), Graeber (2015a), Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 24), and Schulman (2016, *passim*).

¹²⁴ See also Luigi Fabbri (2021[1921], p. 3), Bertoni (2007), and Mintz (2013[1970], p. 31), as well as Knapp, Flach, and Ayboga (2016, p. 54–56, 139) on the initial process of liberating Rojava.

¹²⁵ See also Maggie Nelson (2021, chap. 2) on sexuality: ‘determining what constitutes power or privilege in any given encounter between two consenting adults is by no means settled or easy business’.

More generally, this is why it matters not to presume to know (much less predetermine according to an abstract ideal) who is or when it is “right” to use force, which leads to certain instances of force being left unpunished. No act, by any agent, is allowed to escape contestation by virtue of being e.g. “security measures”¹²⁶. Not even anarchists’ own forces in pursuit of balance: all should be “punishable”. As Malatesta (2015b, p. 49) remarked, ‘we do not say that violence is good when we use it and harmful when others use it against us’¹²⁷.

“Punishable”, however, is not an accurate word. For all aggrieving forces ‘there should be restitution to the victims’, writes Ervin (2009[1993], p. 36); no further pain will undo what cannot be undone or serve justice. Even so, anarchists do not want to turn responsibility into a matter of cost-benefit calculations by giving every action an anticipated penalty (even if restitutive)¹²⁸. The major issue, however, is that “punishment” already implies a top-down relationship. Indeed, Kropotkin identified ‘unfreedom’ with ‘imprisonment’ not because of the literal physical shackles, but because of the ‘regimes of punishment’ that it represents, the mindset that affects people ‘by ordering them in particular ways, not necessarily by immobilisation’ (KINNA, 2016, p. 145). For anarchists, prisons should be abolished, not ‘exist but mean something else, or have different people — the real “criminals” — in them’ (DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 136). The unfreedom their establishment entails is experienced through the principle of sovereignty, even if it does not mean a great deal of restrictions for oneself¹²⁹; ‘a society with prisons is a prison’¹³⁰ (DAY-WOODS, 2021, p. 192, emphasis added).

“Consequential”, then, is a better fit. ‘We all know’ what ‘the best method for settling problems and conflicts’ is, writes Jacques de La Haye (2021, p. 77); it is ‘dialogue, reconciliation, discussion — in short, mediation’. But for a voluntary realignment of forces to take place, this method must bring about consequences¹³¹. In the processes that anarchists typically envision,

¹²⁶ Which is why the tradition has decidedly moved away from Tucker’s (2009[1926], p. 51) “voluntary associations for defence”; see, for example, Malatesta (2014[1892][a]) and DeLamotte (2004, p. 25–26). Theoretically, of course, all acts by security forces can be “contested”, even within statist theories, but the problem is precisely the idealisation of a *final* instance that will be able to declare whether the complaint is righteous or not, with people having to obey such determination under threat of further penalties.

¹²⁷ See also William C. Anderson (2022), and Mintz (2013[1970], p. 52) on forces ‘answerable to nobody’.

¹²⁸ In other words, anarchists do not want bureaucratised game-like relations (see the discussion in section 4.3.2, page 154), which are not the same as the agreements they envision as desirable institutions. See e.g. Graeber (2020b) on how managerial classes confuse society (‘a web of human relationships, of love, hate, or enthusiasm) with ‘democracy, and rule of law’.

¹²⁹ I shall return to this theme in section 6.1. On this paragraph as a whole, see also Amborn (2019, p. 147).

¹³⁰ See also Augusto (2010) and Lima (2018).

¹³¹ As Natália Parizotto (2018) argues about domestic violence (but also pulling from scholarship on international relations), mediation that stifles conflict in the name of harmony tends to conservatively reinforce power imbalances basically as much as not doing anything. See note 204 of section 6.3.2 (page 324), Rusche (2022, p. 21), and also Tawinikay (2021[2018]) on “reconciliation” (as state policy) and decolonization.

conflicting parties sift through the history of their conflict, laying out *all* the instances of force they feel aggrieved by¹³². ‘Not all harm and violence are experienced in the same way’, as Philip McHarris (2021, p. 36) notes; utterances can be differentiated from punches and bullets. But none, by no one, may be pre-emptively ignored for being “legitimate”. As Kinna (2019c, p. 149) writes, the meaning of justice must not be ‘determined in advance of the negotiations’, and this matters beyond not anticipating penalties for every action: the consequences brought about by anarchistic conflict resolution might be the creative transformation of ‘unsustainable structures’¹³³ or the integration of innovations (AMBORN, 2019, p. 150–151, 161).

To refer back to the “paradox” of peace by refusal of sovereignty, conflict resolution should not lead to the expectation of *preventing* conflicts that justifies the power to punish. ‘Most people’, writes McHarris (2021, p. 36) perhaps optimistically, ‘will be harmed and engage in harmful behaviour’. In contrast with ‘ever-lasting fault-finding’ and an ‘incapacity to understand [people] and events in a generous way’, acknowledging this fallibility is supposed to lead to assessments concerning what to do next without making those involved ‘so bitter’ (FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, p. 299–300), diminishing anxieties about having one’s life destroyed by one’s own disagreements or mediations of others’. ‘The obsession with punishing the alleged monsters’ obstructs the development of a common life ‘where people have safety interventions, reliable mechanisms of accountability, and their basic needs met’¹³⁴.

Perseverating on the fantasy that, had the care been good enough [...] we would not have been exposed to the bad thing and would not now be suffering [...] is not an accurate, fruitful, or fair model. At its worst, it risks activating [...] punitive sadism[...] and] reducing care to giving, protecting, and fixing, rather than treating it as a negotiation of needs that involves assuming strength in the other, resisting the temptation to provide all the answers, [...] and making space for pain, individuation, and conflict without falling apart[...]. (NELSON, 2021, chap. 1)

Therefore, despite an understandable pragmatic emphasis on conflict *resolution*, this never-ending cycle of dispute and adjustment could just as accurately describe permanent *tension*¹³⁵. Harmony as ‘permanent movement or agitation’ is a ‘dominant theme’ in anarchist writing, especially in the 19th century (KINNA, 2019b, p. 175). Proudhon thought it necessary

¹³² Tangentially, see also Amborn (2019, p. 124–127).

¹³³ After all, as Asad Haider (2018, p. 59) argues, certain struggles – such as that against racism – should not be ‘reduced to the redress of individual injuries’. So mediation may begin with particular damage but conversations can provoke those involved to think more complexly about what exactly needs to change to address the conflict at hand productively.

¹³⁴ See note 145 in section 5.2, page 211, as well as (and in connection with) McHarris (2021, p. 34).

¹³⁵ See also Ward (1991a, p. 111–112), Clastres (1994[1980], p. 167), Hunter (2019, p. 184), and Lowell (2023, 15:15-15:38).

to ‘permanently seek forms of social organisation that allow conflicts to appear, and to learn to *endure* tension’^p (TRINDADE, 2001, p. 73, emphasis added). His and Bakunin’s dialectics do not feature a moment of synthesis; disputes do not lead to a “more perfect” situation, only to a changed but still tense balance¹³⁶ (MCLAUGHLIN, 2002, p. 54–55; FERNÁNDEZ, 2018; FALLEIROS, 2018b, p. 57, 59). For John Henry Mackay, social tensions ‘could only be mitigated, not resolved’. But ‘whatever the costs, it was better that disputes were left to the process of living’, as ‘particular’ judgments ‘could never act flexibly and would always fix the boundaries of acceptable behaviour in repressive codes’ (KINNA, 2011, p. 48). Laughing at the classic anarchist insistence that anarchy ‘doesn’t mean chaos’, Samudzi (2020, 11:54–13:51) reflects on black anarchism as a ‘praxis of understanding what it means to [...] sustain one another within [the] chaos’ imposed on black lives. The tension anarchists accept is a flux of changes, not the ‘permanent violence’ found in enforced constitutions (MALATESTA, 2015b, p. 49).

As bell hooks theorises, when harm, from physical violence to ‘put downs and humiliation’, is allowed as a regular outcome of conflict, people are educated to ‘develop an incompetent approach to self-assertion’ – that is, to ‘practice avoidance or aggression’ (LOWELL, 2023, 8:50–9:24). To endure tension productively, then, anarchists wish to involve more balance-promoting agents in these processes so as to create conditions for safely working out divergences. In other words, equality of forces is protected so that conflict results not in domination but in change. To paraphrase a Buddhist notion theorised by Nelson (2021, chap. 2), anarchists look for “safe environments with threatening teachings”. Hence, despite anarchism indeed involving ‘reclaiming the power of negotiation by [...] the assertion of individual force’ (KINNA, 2016, p. 167), that is, developing each person’s capacity for standing up for themselves and solving their own conflicts with others, *mediation* by a diverse set of agents is fundamental. Kropotkin (2021[1902], p. 154, emphasis added), for example, approved of social arrangements which were the ‘always varying result of struggle between various forces which adjusted and re-adjusted themselves’ with ‘*the support they found in their surroundings*’.

Through mediation, by maintaining an equilibrium that safeguards everyone’s agency (without legitimising their own forces), mediators also assert themselves and practice solidarity (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 317; AMBORN, 2019, p. 153–154). In a recognition of human fallibility, one helps others expecting that they will mediate one’s quarrels in return when the time comes, respecting one’s autonomy and capacity for being reasonable should one be found harmful.

¹³⁶ See also Pelletier (2016, p. 16) and Corrêa (2019, p. 374). On this idea as a component of Aymara philosophy, which takes it even further with the idea of simultaneity, see CRÍTICA... (2018[2014], p. 11).

Rather than infantilise those involved in a dispute, the presence of mediators reminds them of their attachments and responsibilities to more than that which they disagree about (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 251; SCHULMAN, 2016, chap. 5; AMBORN, 2019, p. 140–141). By celebrating ‘the courage and honesty [...] expressed during conflict’¹³⁷ (LOWELL, 2023, 8:50–9:24), mediators provide resources — and an audience — for them to exhibit personal qualities as people who are able to creatively get out of a conflict in a non-dominating fashion¹³⁸.

Other than “consequential”, “accountability” is a relevant word as well. It speaks to the typical anarchist concerns that ‘responsibility should be delegated, clearly-mandated and recallable’, and that influence ‘be exercised as visibly as possible’ (GORDON, U., 2006, p. 187–190). It also connects with Berkman’s (1929, p. 184–185) advertisement that life in anarchy would mean replacing ‘thou shalt not’ with ‘thou mayest, taking full responsibility’¹³⁹. The perspective of a common life means taking seriously one’s responsibility toward others, which means that agents might have to show their commitment to mutual care and respect by accepting the revoking or reworking of previously established prerogatives. As shall be seen in section 5.1, disputes call on several networked agents to reconstitute and rethink their relations with one another in order to (re)build peace. Justice, ‘however noble and necessary’, will always be turned ‘backward’; to ‘ensure coexistence’, one ‘must move from injustice, through struggle, to a mutual respect founded on the achievement of justice and then onward towards peace’ (ALFRED, 2005, p. 27–28).

Some might fear that the “contestability of everything” enables profligate overstatement of harm and the manipulation of “fuzzy” rules to terrorise disaffects. However, anarchism is not about a lack of rules, but about fighting any mandated rulebook with sovereign enforcement. Rules will always exist and matter, but they must remain changeable¹⁴⁰. Rules or the lack thereof can be more easily manipulated if there are agents who can do this despite resistance; indeed, as mentioned earlier, anarchists argue manipulative strategy makes much more sense in a hierarchical environment. Conversely, the only punishment mediation processes offer is

¹³⁷ See note 8 in the introduction to this chapter, page 92.

¹³⁸ For more on these mediation processes and (or) their relation to anarchist or anarchistic practice, see Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 30), La Escuelita Zapatista (2013?[a], p. 58), Amborn (2019, p. 1–2, 101, 106–111, 129, 140–143, 166–167), David Brooks (2020), Correia and Bombini (2020), Eric Laursen (2021, p. 210), McHarris (2021, p. 46–48), and Holmes (2022).

¹³⁹ See also Malatesta (2014[1922][d]) and Cubero (2015[1991][b], p. 47), as well as Mel Basil about North American indigenous peoples: ‘in our language, our word for “Law” is the same word we have for “Responsibility.”’ (HILL; ANTLIF, 2021, p. 109).

¹⁴⁰ Indeed, one could argue for the construction of rules as tradition, which does not have to be breached or changed but reinterpreted; see note 99 in section 5.1, page 198.

nagging into needless meetings, and then tables might be turned as this practice itself may be deemed an aggrieving force (which even states often do – see e.g. anti-SLAPP laws in the United States). Mediation in an egalitarian scenario is important because we might need help escaping solipsism, as Mariame Kaba and Jackie Wang explain:

we have to be in community with each other enough to be able to say [...] you're being reactionary as hell... We're not going to extrapolate your personal harmed feelings of fear and anger and turn that into a policy that then is going to govern a whole bunch of other people who did nothing to you. [...] we need to critically consider whether [victimization] is being used [...] to construct themselves as innocent and exert power without being questioned.¹⁴¹ (NELSON, 2021, chap. 2)

Regardless, as understanding the nature of the damage done (AMBORN, 2019, p. 164), and hence understanding *each other* better, is essential to these procedures, frivolous denunciation can still evoke useful questions: why is someone so fragile that they argue over the smallest of things? How can “overreacting complainers” be helped out of this pattern? Have they been enabled somehow? Equality of forces allows for this sort of approach, and it does not mean an “unrestricted flow of forces” – in fact, most conflicts will emerge from people hitting the proverbial walls around them, some of them likely built to curb power-grabbing manoeuvres. It does mean, however, a flux of disputes that is not restricted by a sovereign force specifically meant to manage conflicts from above.

This framework explains what it means to say that anarchists can act “violently” without legitimising violence. They can be forceful for the same reason someone might want to tie a towel tourniquet around a leaky pipe; it could be necessary, but there is no extra argument that others should, on principle, roll over and submit to their (or anyone’s) forces, the equivalent to permanently incorporating a towel into an hydraulic system (ALFRED, 2005, p. 54; GRAEBER, 2009, p. 97; CICCARIELLO-MAHER, 2011, p. 28–29).

For Ervin (2009[1993], p. 36), ‘we cannot wait until after the revolution’ to fight crime, but any attempt to deal with it must lead ‘to socialize, politically educate and rehabilitate offenders’, involving them in community life and ‘giving them social and vocational training’. It is understandable, he continues, that many ‘want to end the rape, murder, and violence in our communities today, and wind up strengthening the hands of the State and its police agents’ to do so, but that is a ‘trap’: as Malatesta (2014[1922][a]) put it, they do not ‘have the ability to prevent crime or clear up after it’, and are themselves ‘the source of a thousand woes and

¹⁴¹ See also Schulman (2016, *passim*).

a standing menace to freedom'. Indeed, he proceeds, 'if arms must be taken up in order to defend ourselves, we want to see everyone armed rather than a number of us constituted as some praetorian guard'¹⁴². This is exactly what is happening in Rojava, where the goal is for all to have completed at least six weeks of security training, abolishing the Asayîş [security forces] as a separate organism: 'they want everyone to be capable of practising self-defence and interfering in situations in which, in other societies, only police would be able to'^{q,143} (EDITORIA DESCONTROL, 2016c, p. 143–144). What is expected is precisely a much more contained use of force, directed at, to return to the metaphor, "fixing leaks" beyond a first step of containing them¹⁴⁴. Imprisonment might happen in Rojava, but it is an extreme measure that Peace and Reconciliation Committees (PRCs), organs of restorative justice, strive to avoid:

Although it is practised, imprisonment is not considered to be a solution [... because of] two main disadvantages: (a) it punishes criminals by taking their freedom; and (b) the hostility and sense of revenge usually persist, which threatens peace and security in society. The PRCs are not authorised to imprison people. They rather encourage disputing people to compensate each other's financial loss, heal each other's suffering and pain, and transform their perceptions to find a mutually accepted solution. (DUMAN, 2018, p. 88)

Defending equality does not excuse anyone from facing consequences (compensatory acts, institutional changes, new responsibilities), collectively worked out until they are voluntarily accepted, aimed at the restoration of interpersonal faith. 'Even in the midst of the most violent and bitter, even mortal, combat[...] I must respect [my enemy's] human character' (BAKUNIN, 1971[1867], p. 146). Anarchists want 'the disappearance of the bourgeoisie as a privileged class, not the death of the bourgeois'^r, wrote Gori (2000[1894], p. 51), and 'even if he or she is a class enemy', specifies Ervin (2009[1993], p. 37), 'they should retain all civil and human rights in society, even though they of course would be restrained if they led a counter-revolution'. For anarchists, this ideal 'serves to restrain, correct and destroy the spirit of revenge' that revolution 'would tend to develop' (MALATESTA, 2015b, p. 50). A notable aspect of anarchism during the Spanish Revolution was

¹⁴² On the other hand, see also Kelly (2023, 4:28–4:50).

¹⁴³ See also Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 32).

¹⁴⁴ For now, however, the security forces still exist as a specific institution. I find it relevant to add more information about its functioning: 'To ensure that an arrest does not in itself constitute punishment, the Asayîş strive to maintain the best possible prison conditions. We observed this ourselves when we visited the alleged terrorist Bashar Abdulmecid Mussa while he was in prison in Tirbespî. [...] We could not find any evidence that Rojava had political prisoners. [...] The Asayîş] wear no insignia of rank, and collegial relations are considered important. [...] Once a month, there is a big meeting where new commanders can be nominated and elected. [...] The Asayîş] have structures for systematic criticism and self-criticism. [...] Commanders] regularly stand before their units and not only self-criticize but receive criticism from members' (KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, p. 172–173).

the absence of hatred: [... anarchists] had stressed that [communism] was for the good of everybody, including former foes [...]. In the villages operating under self-management, widows, Civil Guards' families and the families of rebels killed during the coup were respected and catered for[...]. Marxist-Leninists[... operated] along very different lines. They pigeon-hole and keep files on people, holding generations of ex-bourgeois at a distance (the way Catholics did for centuries with Jewish converts) and establishing social pariah categories[...].¹⁴⁵ (MINTZ, 2013[1970], p. 145–146, 243)

So far, I have argued that anarchists see sovereignty, a pervasive logic of power, as an obstacle to immanent social order — one based on balance and well-being, but for that very reason welcoming of conflict and change. Not agreeing with sovereignty-based models of legitimacy denies the very foundation of forms of freedom predicated on guaranteeing unrestrictions. But while overwhelming, concentrated, centralised force tends to trump however people think power should be understood and organised, it is not the only condition that incentivises agents to mobilise *for* hierarchy. This is why anarchists adopt an even broader egalitarian stance, calling for more than just an equality of forces.

4.3 EQUALITY AND NON-DOMINATION

Equality is not genuine if some people are ruled by others.

Nicolas Walter ¹⁴⁶

To qualify as libertarian, an organisation must be based on certain core principles that ensure that liberty is not reduced to simply picking masters.

Iain McKay ¹⁴⁷

States, as Samuel Clark (2007, p. 10) writes, are for anarchists just examples (though ‘currently large and important’) of ‘alternative ways of organising domination’¹⁴⁸. Viroqua Daniels (1900, p. 1 apud FERGUSON, K. E., 2018, p. 9), for instance, attacks ‘paltry parental domineering, sex subjugation, mastery of chattel, neighborhood meddling, military bullying, arbitrary religious regulation’, among others. These patterns of ‘bossing’ are the fractal repetitions of each other in different contexts and scales. Domination for anarchists is ‘shorthand for

¹⁴⁵ See also A Batalha (2007, p. 22) and Editora Descontrol (2016c, p. 136–137). Consider, too, Makhno’s warnings for the libertarian army to hold itself accountable to the highest standards. Examples are difficult to find in English; one of them is available in Sean Patterson’s (2023) Facebook account.

¹⁴⁶ Walter, 2020[1969], p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ McKay, 2018, p. 121–122.

¹⁴⁸ See also Bookchin (1982, p. 3), Kinna (2016, p. 13–14, 87–88), John P. Clark (2013a, p. 53), Ciccariello-Maher (2011, p. 28–29), Shannon (2012, p. 278–279), and Eric Laursen (2021, p. 20).

multiple intersecting regimes that render us less free or unfree’, Prichard (2019, p. 73) writes, and ‘to combat these directly is what makes anarchists anarchists’¹⁴⁹.

It is not surprising, then, that one finds in libertarian circles a variety of explanations for the “origin” of contemporary domination. Property in lands or modes of production are certainly important (KINNA, 2016, p. 87), but why would people willingly lock themselves out of the means to live in favour of a minority? ‘It is not the division between rich and poor, exploiters and exploited’, wrote Pierre Clastres (2012[1974]), that establishes political inequality; ‘the first division [...] is that between those who command and those who obey’^s. He, along with H el ene Clastres, Bakunin, and Tolstoy (albeit in different senses), thought about religion and war-making as the origin of hierarchy (BAKUNIN, 2009[1871]; TOLSTOY, 2012[1908]; SZTUTMAN, 2009); Bookchin (1982, p. 80–83) talked about the domination of elders over the young; Abdullah  calan (2017, chap. 3) prioritised male oppression over women; Goldman and Baginski (1906, p. 1–3) pointed to the nature-society divide¹⁵⁰.

Regardless of factual accuracy, this shows how much anarchists value equality in *any* relationship. More importantly, this is never seen as an issue for freedom: the concepts were ‘not only compatible, but in fact mutually re-enforcing’ (WILSON, M., 2011, p. 60). Equality is the ‘supreme condition’ of liberty, this being true ‘not only for whole nations but also for classes, companies and individuals’^t (BAKUNIN, 1975, p. 48); unless it is present, freedom is a ‘mockery’ (DE CLEYRE, 2009[1893], p. 5). Berkman (1929, p. 173) short-circuited the two: ‘no life can be free’ unless ‘it is built on principles of justice’, and ‘the first requirement of justice is equal liberty’. Kropotkin (2014[1883][c], p. 112–113) was concise (‘there can be no liberty without equality’), and Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 8), categorical (liberty is ‘indivisible from equality, and vice versa’); hence Saul Newman’s (2010) suggestion that freedom for anarchists should only ever be described as “equal-liberty”¹⁵¹.

The direct link between non-domination, equality, and freedom is not exclusively anarchist; indeed, anarchists have engaged this typically republican identification (especially discourses on slavery) from the beginnings of their movement (BAKUNIN, 2009[1871], p. 16; KINNA, 2016, p. 86–87; KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019). Progressivism entails the prospect of all being equally free, which in turn requires that no one dominates anyone else. Anarchists,

¹⁴⁹ See also Benally (2021b, p. 47–48).

¹⁵⁰ See also Shannon (2012, p. 278) and Gelderloos (2016).

¹⁵¹ See also Malatesta (2014[1892][a]), Reclus (2002[1898], p. 22–23), Leuenroth and Negro (1919, p. 36), Tucker (2009[1926], p. 22), Prada (2018[1936], p. 48), McKay (2014, p. 75), Kinna (2016, p. 89), Jun (2018, p. 53), and Little (2023, p. 238).

however, criticise statist's contributions toward this goal. They denounce inequalities left unchecked, or even reinforced, by the imposition of a uniform ideal standard of equality. These ideals are weaponised against struggles for justice concerning those other inequalities; if people are already free and equally so, anyone complaining must be after "factional privileges" (ROCKER, 2009[1938], p. 9; MAKHNO, 2011, p. 39; COORDINATION OF ANARCHIST GROUPS, 2016[2013]; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 189–190). Anarchists seek to bring balance to the very process of continuously and contextually (re)elaborating standards of equality.

4.3.1 Slavery and domination

I felt as though I could travel no further. But when I thought of slavery with its Democratic whips — its Republican chains — its evangelical blood-hounds, and its religious slave-holders — [...] all this paraphernalia of American Democracy and Religion behind me, and the prospect of liberty before me, I was encouraged to press forward[...].

William W. Brown ¹⁵²

They'll say [...] that bad people make bad use of the laws. So the laws don't correct them? It's because they're powerless to do so. [...] If an action is just, but hurts capitalism, law must punish it, and those in power won't hesitate to sacrifice justice in favour of the law. "

Maria A. Soares ¹⁵³

Equality is an exceptionally broad idea (GRAEBER; WENGROW, 2021, p. 73–77). Regardless of its meaning as 'responding to' or 'over-looking' difference (WILSON, M., 2011, p. 61), it is essentially a comparison, and therefore practically meaningless unless one knows what is being compared. Contestatory movements are historically motivated by the pursuit of being equal according to the criteria of their time and place. Indeed, the equality embedded in the notion of contract¹⁵⁴ seemingly increases the likelihood of revolt more than an allegedly inherent inequality (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 8).

However, these pursuits can also further reinforce the cultural purchase of currently prevalent forms of value, entrenching other forms of inequality. A basic example is any proposal for equalising the amount of money people have or periodically receive (e.g. salary), which would restate bourgeois standards of equivalence (BOOKCHIN, 1982, p. 9). This is 'a way

¹⁵² William Wells Brown, 2005[1847], chap. IX.

¹⁵³ Soares, 2021[1920](b), p. 126–127.

¹⁵⁴ See also Amborn (2019, p. 53) on the exclusion of Clastrean chiefs from the community's system of mutuality.

of framing social problems appropriate to technocratic reformers', who can 'tinker with the numbers' and 'argue about Gini coefficients' instead of confronting what anarchists would say is the actual problem: 'power over others'¹⁵⁵; that some people 'end up being told their needs are not important' (GRAEBER; WENGROW, 2021, p. 7).

In other words, 'slavery can hardly be alleviated by the conferral of rights' when the rights in place 'uphold and regulate the cultures of domination that elites had secured'¹⁵⁶ (KINNA, 2016, p. 88). As Kinna (2019c, p. 144, 147) discusses elsewhere, 'the liberal commitment to moral equality', for example, is supposed to provide 'a yardstick to assess the injustices of actual societies' and 'facilitate redress'. However, this *contract* 'obliges groups to adopt the standards that previous "masters" used' rather than allow the oppressed to explore 'justice and injustice as they perceive or experience them'¹⁵⁷. This could involve challenging, and fostering alternatives to, currently prevailing forms of value (i.e. criteria for evaluating equality). For anarchists, transformation should be driven by perception of 'the gaps between actual injustice and its ideal, but the ideal [should be] elaborated through social interaction', and so 'as injustices are addressed, the conception of the ideal also changes'. The enforcement of the "liberal social contract", to stick to the example, leaves one stuck with a predetermined fixed ideal.

Liberal equality is not the only such ideal. In the Marxist tradition, for example, the correct understanding of "historical necessity" will set all of humanity equally unrestricted in the relevant sense, explaining the need for obeying enlightened leaders and protecting the bureaucratic apparatuses that vest them in concentrated power (ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 74–75). But people's equality as soldiers in the march toward unbounded rationality reinforces the differences in decision-making ability between the army and its "generals", so to speak, including the latter's monopoly on the interpretation of the flow of dialectical development.

When liberals aim for equal enjoyment of the personal unrestrictions included in a "minimal area of non-interference", they open a connection to Marxism — that is, if the content of this "minimal area" is as "rationally ascertainable" as the progression of history and if sovereign action to enact them is sought. In a sense, this is what enabled "social democracy", a term initially applied to Marxism, to mostly morph into liberal welfarism over the 20th century.

¹⁵⁵ See also Anselme Bellegarrigue (1848 apud SPRINGER, 2014, p. 255): 'one cannot redistribute wealth without first becoming master of all wealth'.

¹⁵⁶ See also Alfred (2005, p. 103–104).

¹⁵⁷ See also Coulthard (2014, p. 70–71, 95) and Fiscella (2015, p. 183), as well as Fanon (1991[1952], p. 221 apud COULTHARD, 2014, p. 39) — for whom the colonial contract must be overcome through struggle or the colonised will be left with (at best) 'white liberty and white justice', values 'secreted by [their] masters' — and Lorde (2011, p. 47 apud ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. XXIX–XXX).

On the other hand, as discussed in section 2.3.1, liberals are sensitive to state tutelage, considering this an infringement of an ideal of equality from the standpoint of competition¹⁵⁸. The right to “an adequate standard of living”, for example, is there so long as the state does not forcefully act to deny it; individuals are equal insofar as they, in their interactions amongst themselves, have an equal *opportunity to try* to have it. Of course, for anarchists, the issue is how this very guaranteeing of rights favours some against others in the competition for the enjoyment of yet other rights. There are no “neutral” state policies, and yet this is what many liberals have spoken of enacting, based on their own curated parameters of neutrality: sovereign power must only provide the background conditions (such as the enforcement of property rights) that allow for relations patterned by market logic (SPRINGER, 2011, p. 549).

However, competition (elections, plebiscites, etc.) may also be applied to determine the very contours of the “minimal area of non-interference”. Factions of liberals may be concerned with how this could threaten unrestrictions they consider essential (rational, even). They may unironically express worries about the “political” use of what should remain a neutral instrument, to the point of, as mentioned in section 2.4, siding with dictators so long as they secure “market liberties” on a territory. Nonetheless, an unwillingness to apply the same standards to every decision-making level would make them vulnerable to accusations of inconsistency, and so democracy and universal suffrage — at the very least — are often featured as the more coherent position in the tradition¹⁵⁹.

In summary, competition is employed within the liberal tradition as the main logic by which people can be considered equal and hence not dominated. The oft-invoked image of the contract is notoriously always a *hypothetical* covenant; a metaphor whose virtuality perfectly demonstrates the abstraction of this form of equality. It represents equal subjection to a dynamic of competition that, at the end of the day, is *actually* used to legitimise sovereignty. Even at its most egalitarian, with “the equalisation of outcomes” as a goal, liberalism cannot undo the inequality between the ability to directly define the rules and boundaries of competitive arenas¹⁶⁰ and those subject to this sovereign power. Representative government, as Laoghaire (2016, p. 7) notes, ‘neither can nor desires to remove the whim of the representative as a factor in decision-making’.

¹⁵⁸ Not to mention an ideal of individualism; see section 5.2.

¹⁵⁹ This also leads a few to more extreme positions according to which even competition-based collective decision making *itself* should be subjected to competition. One could be talking about ultraliberals, or, for example, what Lawrence Hatab (1995) would call a Nietzschean form of democracy.

¹⁶⁰ See the discussion on issues with statist legitimacy, especially regarding the equal chance to participate in the process to choose what the “ultimate” value is, in sections 2.4 and 4.2.

The republican position addresses pitfalls of Marxist and liberal frameworks by focusing on arbitrariness as the criterion for domination. By codifying what leaders are allowed to do and the processes they must follow in order to act at all, one avoids the issues with Marxist governance, which are those of autocracies or oligarchies more generally. On the other hand, inequalities between non-state agents (due to unrestrictions derived from governmental inaction) allow some of them to arbitrarily interfere with others; these interactions, then, must also be codified. All are equal in that none can arbitrarily interfere.

“Arbitrary” [...] just means “non-determined.” In a system of arbitrary authority, decisions reflect the “will and pleasure” of the despot. But from the perspective of the despot, “arbitrariness” is freedom. So the people are free if the ruler is not. Powerful people have to follow the rules. But since all citizens have a certain degree of power, so does everyone else. Ultimately, since freedom means protection from the arbitrary (non-rule-bound) power of others, and since power is everywhere, the logic provides a charter for the reduction of all aspects of human life into sets of transparent rules. (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 260)

It is not that republicans do not care about measures of arbitrariness: one must feel secure (unrestricted by fear) about the possibility of behaving arbitrarily, with all the waves this makes on other people’s lives, only within legal parameters. But that is at the heart of the issue. A boss may not do *literally whatever* it pleases with a means of production, or their employee, but there is a greater amount of unbounded decision-making power in their hands by virtue of their position. Such a position is not only forcefully protected by sovereign power, but a structural reason for the proprietor’s support for the existence of such power in the first place. Bringing something under collective control so that it stops being an *arbitrary* interference does not necessarily mean it stops happening; it might just mean it is official, as once was chattel slavery. A ‘distaste for arbitrariness itself’ leads to accepting ‘authority in its most formal, institutional form’ (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 199). One of Pettit’s paradigmatic cases of economic domination, for another example, is ‘the pharmacist who agrees to sell an urgently required medicine [...] only on extortionate terms’. But his contention is only ‘that the system should abide by its own explicit rules’. Pharmacists can still place a barrier against access to life-saving medicine based on regular market prices (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 114).

When power inequalities are considered non-arbitrary because of overarching codes that regulate them, arbitrariness is simply chased into a superior hierarchical level, where the details of the regulation to be imposed (which implies imbalances) will be decided¹⁶¹. These

¹⁶¹ See section 2.4, as well as Tolstoy (2019[1900], p. 38).

choices will be arbitrary. ‘The law cannot rule’, as Ignacio Sanchez-Cuenca (2003, p. 62 apud PRZEWORSKI, 2019, p. 6) puts it; ‘ruling is an activity, and laws cannot act’. Law-making might be constrained by even higher parameters, but for anarchists ‘constitutional questions’, too, should not be detached ‘from arguments about power and policy’ (KINNA, 2019b, p. 65). The pyramid has a peak, no matter how flat: in a system based on sovereignty, one eventually finds the hand holding the scales, to use an image from earlier, and it cannot be weighed by them. For anarchists, sovereign law ‘can never be the guarantor of liberty’ because law-making is ‘always mediated by background conditions of domination that are removed from public scrutiny’ (KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019, p. 232).

Republicans must then re-establish a parameter according to which this arbitrariness or inequality ceases to be relevant. They could insist on enforced order: ‘so long as any interference undertaken is in accordance with rules or laws clearly defined, it is not arbitrary’ (LAOGHAIRE, 2016, p. 14). Content of legislation would be less important than clear-headedness about one’s prospects; all are equally free from unpredictability, and that is what matters (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 196). But this leads to unwanted consequences. If all arbitrariness disappeared, a group would become unable to break out of the regime in force and the direction it is going; it would be self-determined (in a sense) but not self-determining¹⁶². As the liberal Robert Talisse (2012, p. 127–128) writes, ‘there is surprisingly little — maybe nothing, in fact — that a [republican] state can do which will count as lessening the freedom of its citizens’. Standards of equality other than “equally subjected to law”¹⁶³, and hence unreachable by mere appeals to the internal consistency of current laws, are necessary to deal with inequalities ignored by the status quo; to get rid of official chattel slavery, for example. This means making peace with a measure of unresolvable, residual arbitrariness.

At the risk of anticipating (and thus breaking the flow of the) arguments, we may reflect on one way anarchists distance themselves from republicanism. A search for non-arbitrariness could be interpreted as a constant production of plans for coordinated action to tackle any inequality anyone feels aggrieved by (essentially, the mediation processes explored in section 4.2.2¹⁶⁴). But, of course, this would amount to not *really* having a problem with “arbitrariness”¹⁶⁵, as anyone’s “whim” could trigger procedures by which rules — or more broadly, for

¹⁶² See section 5.1, as well as Grupo de Estudios José Domingo Gómez Rojas (2017, p. 135) and, on the relation between democratic sovereignty and rule of law, Przeworski (2019, p. 6–7).

¹⁶³ See also Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 7) and Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 425).

¹⁶⁴ See also Amborn (2019, p. 151) and Mendes, Saigg, and Azevedo (2019, p. 88–90).

¹⁶⁵ See sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.3.

anarchists: relationships, their patterns — should be reconsidered somehow. This is unacceptable for republicans, as it completely undermines the inequality of forces needed to make sure a “plan of action” is followed through as it was once decided. Their premises lead them to want a single, uniform criterion for the assessment of equality from which the legitimacy of enforcement could be derived.

If enforced order itself is, as just seen above, not enticing, then one must look for such a criterion elsewhere. Reason is a key term for many in the republican tradition, such as Kant or even Pettit (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 119). Competition is also extremely common, especially as it can mean various things. As discussed in section 2.3.2, there are electoral disputes on one hand, and fractures within sovereign power on the other; competition for the definition of popular will *and* “checks” on hierarchically empowered agents by their peers, opening the system for more opportunities to contest its outcomes. In a sense, these criteria are combinable; the complexities of political histories certainly explain why this is overwhelmingly often the case. The reason of judges is trusted to identify and correct overreach — even by “the people”, however represented — and popular consultation offers opportunities to change the composition of at least some public agencies.

But, as seen above, contestation for republicans should not go on for too long; that it does not have to is precisely an alleged virtue of sovereign power. There is going to be an outcome, whose enforcement will be majorly legitimised based on one criterion when two or more clash, once again leading to a measure of unavoidable arbitrariness. A concentrated, exclusive power to make, enforce, and interpret laws implies a relation of command and obedience, and while for republicans everyone would (ideally) be equally obliged to obey the rules, as all behaviour — even this minority’s — would be regulated, not all would be equally empowered to directly (re)make regulations and “jurisdictions”.

At the end of the day, what motivates republicanism is fear (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 193), one rooted in a notion of “society” forming from interactions between bellicose strangers. This speculation about what “life without the state” must be like — what it must “have been” like — masks the historical conditions from which republicanism emerged, in which slavery was contrasted not with non-slavery but with mastership; with *owning slaves*. Liberty was found in the institutions that maintained the balance among actual or potential masters so that none of *them* was treated *like* a slave by one another.

Modern, democratic (Christian, even) sensibilities increasingly required philosophers to figure out what politics without slavery, but *with* hierarchical social structures, entailed. They set out to use varied ideals of equality – from the preterite (“a contract was signed”) and the virtual (“you *could have won* the contest”¹⁶⁶) to future ones (“one day society will be fully rational”) – to justify the imposition of rules. Hence why one can conceive of “republicanised” Marxist and liberal regimes. As in antiquity, unresolved conflicts, colonial wounds in particular (AMBORN, 2019, p. 36; GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 8), generate fears of revenge, and one can certainly appreciate how elites might begin to think of enforced order as inherently valuable; why they might entrench specific social patterns in law and then de-emphasise “reason” or “majorities” when defending it.

This is, basically, bureaucratisation. Cold as “bureaus” may seem, the legitimisation of bureaucrats’ claims of sovereign prerogative still implies an imbalance in relation to non-state agents, not to mention the necessarily partial nature of the very rules they are meant to enforce, upholding other inequalities. Bureaucracy, as the sociologist Alvin Gouldner (1977, p. 43 apud FERGUSON, K. E., 1984, p. 17) put it, ‘is the routinization of domination’, with terror employed when these routines collapse or before they have developed.

To summarise the argument so far: many inequalities are sustained by the hierarchical web of relations that conforms sovereignty, but in mainstream theory they are ultimately dismissed for not fitting in an ideal criterion that agents are to be judged as equal or unequal by. For statists, failure to live up to the prescribed regime does no harm to its validity; its very prescription validates it. Its misgivings are exorcised into the messiness of real life, so not the systems but the people are flawed¹⁶⁷. Anarchists think of this as an idealism, as “political theologism”, as discussed in chapter 3, not because it means believing that things will one day be perfect or that the mere official existence of rules is sufficient by itself. Any reasonable person will agree that perfection is unreachable and appearances can be deceiving. The issue is in insisting on the pursuit of the ideal so intensely that one is willing to legitimise overwhelming violence in its name, and then concluding that it is the refusal to conform to it that leads to suffering and domination¹⁶⁸. No matter what arbitrariness or inequality actually exists, it only

¹⁶⁶ See also Robert Dahl (1989, p. 265–279) on this strategy for denying the dominating nature of contemporary democracy (his “polyarchy”), as well as Pettit (2016) on the “tough luck test”.

¹⁶⁷ See section 6.3.3.

¹⁶⁸ As discussed in chapter 2 regarding unrestriction-based liberty, this is about understanding an ideal as self-evident, and so if people are not conforming to it, there must be some restriction somewhere preventing it – and it must be destroyed so the path is cleared. See also Graeber (2018, p. 169–170) on the ‘profession of faith’ on markets (any problem that might seem to be produced by it ‘is really caused by government interference’,

matters if sovereign power says it does. Even then, sovereignty is not set up to foster conditions for conflicts around said inequalities to be directly solved as safely, but justly, as possible. It is set up to demand obedience of all, inevitably thereby constituting a new form of imbalance.

There remains one aspect of mainstream discourses on non-domination, the republican one in particular, to discuss: the personal character of arbitrary interference. The argument goes that ‘there can be no domination without agents of domination’ (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 101) – no slaves without masters. Although there is inequality between state and non-state actors, it is hard to say *who* exactly dominates when one agent cannot act unsupported by many others, when measures are produced by colleges, or when decisions are appealed, etc. On the other hand, progressiveness implies a project of actively shaping one’s future. All progressives who interpret this to mean “being the master of one’s destiny” legitimise sovereignty, as they recognise in it the necessary means to achieve such goal. In the end, they desire constitutional frameworks in which all are slaveless masters¹⁶⁹.

In basically defacing arbitrariness (in the literal sense of it no longer having a “face”) one returns to bureaucratisation. This tracks with the consideration above about this being driven by fear – it is important for the beneficiaries of a social system that disgruntles many more to not be *personally responsible* for it. For Arendt (1970, p. 81), however, this meant less freedom: ‘the rule by Nobody is not no-rule, and where all are equally powerless we have a tyranny without a tyrant’. Notice she was not even discussing totalitarianism, but countries whose extensive formal liberties still did not ‘open the channels for [...] the meaningful exercise of freedom’. As C. Wright Mills (1956, p. 110 apud ALFRED, 2005, p. 59) wrote, this scenario of ‘impersonal manipulation’ is ‘more insidious’ than the direct coercion of personal domination ‘precisely because it is hidden; one cannot locate the enemy and declare war upon [them]’¹⁷⁰.

a questionable argument since ‘all actually existing market systems are to some degree state regulated’, and then it is easy to say that ‘any results one likes’ are due to market workings, but ‘any features one doesn’t like [...] are really due to government interference’, as well as Josiah Warren (1849, p. 36 apud LITTLE, 2023, p. 93): ‘nothing is more common than the remark that “no two persons are alike,” that “circumstances alter cases,” that “we must agree to disagree,” etc., and yet we are constantly forming institutions that require us to be alike, which make no allowance for the Individuality of persons or circumstances, and which render it necessary for us to agree, and leave us no liberty to differ from each other, nor to modify our conduct according to circumstances’.

¹⁶⁹ No wonder a figure such as Morris, who linked freedom to a fellowship of slaveless masters, eventually distanced himself from anarchism (KINNA, 2012a, p. 40–41). Another way of thinking about this is that progressive sovereignty asks us to see ourselves ‘as both master and slave simultaneously’ (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 206–207). This is true of liberal self-ownership, of republican self-government, and of Marxist self-management of work. On the last one, Goldman (2018[1931], p. 583) tells of a Soviet official who sneered at the possibility of strikes in the Soviet Union: ‘against whom, indeed, should the workers strike in Soviet Russia[...]. Against themselves?’. See also Prichard (2019, p. 75) on Proudhon’s rejection of self-ownership. I return to this discussion in section 6.2.1 (around page 290).

¹⁷⁰ See also Matthew Wilson (2011, p. 94).

Anarchists agree with such an assessment. ‘No one would argue absurdly that a system of social domination could exist without the presence of human beings who act socially’¹⁷¹, John P. Clark (2013b, p. 101) explains. But, he continues, this ‘in no way demonstrates that the phenomenon of domination can be reduced to domination by specific agents’, or that there cannot be ‘domination by systemic forces that do not correlate with specific agents’ – akin to how sovereignty matters regardless of an absolute concentration of sovereign prerogatives in an individual or small group, as discussed in section 4.1.

There are different ways to explore this idea within anarchism. Classically, exploitation and privilege are marks of belonging to a dominating class – a sociological phenomenon rather than a conspirational club. So, as Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 7–8, 16) writes, it is not that ‘elites have no ability to command’, but that the superior power they do have ‘is disguised’, bureaucracy being the ‘scientific organization of inequality’. As Tolstoy put it, ‘even though the “slaver owner” is deprived of “slave John”’, a minority of people still conserve the means to get ‘anyone out of hundreds of Johns [...] to climb down into the cesspool’ in their place (KINNA, 2016, p. 87). If this analysis can already distinguish between the domination of despots and that of contemporary elites (while refusing to redeem the latter), one may also think of an increased prevalence and relevance of “extra” roles within a bureaucratized social system – not only “the marginalised”, but “dominators subordinated to yet other dominators”, either simultaneously or in different circumstances, roles that sometimes merge in the complexities of oppression¹⁷² (ERRANDONEA, 1990, p. 81–82).

One can otherwise focus on the many ways in which cultural and political arrangements are enforced to the point of severely limiting, in practice, the ability to transform them. The “panopticon” and sovereign management of “biological life” are almost always associated with Foucault’s work, but anarchists had already developed a similar analysis decades before. Kropotkin, in particular, considered ‘the expansions of the disciplinary power beyond the limits of the prison’ (TULLEY, 2018, p. 18–20). With the panopticon it is important to note that domination is in its very *architecture*; there is no need for any jailer to be present in the all-seeing tower. This kind of domination is also exercised and experienced differently:

Kropotkin’s biopolitical power is not overtly visible and can only be seen through the special lens of biomedical knowledge. [...] His] concern is not so much with force but with a power that penetrates human life through social

¹⁷¹ See also Errandonea (1990, p. 78), Samuel Clark (2007, p. 65), and Amborn (2019, p. 44).

¹⁷² See also Maruyama (2022[1946], p. 186–187), Coulthard (2014, p. 94), Esparza (2018), and Hunter (2019, p. 133–135).

environments. In the conditions they create for human organisms to exist, states and capitalism set in motion a power that is felt inside the bodies of human beings, whose harm to society can spread horizontally, anonymously, and subtly, yet no less destructively.¹⁷³ (MORGAN, R., 2021, p. 8)

Prisons can also serve as metaphors for the loss of privacy experienced in surveillance capitalism, in the sense that people have — arguably unwittingly (ZUBOFF, 2019) — built and locked themselves into a constant expectation of being watched, perhaps even recorded, which deeply affects their subjectivity and behaviour (AMBORN, 2019, p. 40–41). In such an environment, one finds not slaveless masters; only, at best¹⁷⁴, masterless slaves.

Anarchists claim that, without such an understanding, ‘much of social domination [would be rendered] invisible’ (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 109). As seen in section 4.2.2, the mediation processes they endorse de-emphasise the perpetrator(s) of a grievance: as Julieta Paredes puts it, ‘if there is a rapist in our community, why did we let them grow into one?’^{v,175} (AFIUNE; ANJOS, 2020). In contrast, Pettit, for example, chooses to focus on greedy pharmacists, or criminals who rob citizens at gunpoint, shifting attention ‘from the systematically social to the incidentally individual’, even though ‘much of domination never fit this model’¹⁷⁶. Capitalists dominate not because individual capitalists ‘exhibit undesirable character traits’, but ‘because the ever-increasing concentration of wealth and power is built into’ capitalism, which subordinates ‘the human good and the natural good [...] to the demands of capital’ (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 98–113). Feminist concerns are particularly relevant here, since women tend to ‘have a radically different approach’ to ‘the oppressor’ (AFIUNE; ANJOS, 2020). Women do not see themselves as ‘one class struggling against another’, and so it would make little sense to ‘envision a women’s liberation army mobilised against male tyranny’ (FARROW, 2002, p. 18).

¹⁷³ See also Rago (2014[1985]).

¹⁷⁴ Even despite financial oligarchs or elected officials who do not clean their own cesspools; see section 6.2.1.

¹⁷⁵ See also Schulman (2016, introduction). There is an odd connection here to Stacy Simpican’s (2015) distinction between a social and a medical model for conceiving of disability, especially as Abigail Thorne (2022a, 1:15:04–1:17:58) reads it. As the latter explains, the medical model allows for the able-bodied to imagine a ‘distinct line between them and [the disabled], a line located in [the latter’s] bodies, where the problem is’, which also presents an obvious solution — exclusion. The social model considers disability as emergent from institutional barriers to diverse participation; see the discussion in section 2.3.1, page 50. Likewise, but obviously in an inverted sense, requiring the existence of clear dominators favours an assignment of blame that underplays collective agency. Consider also how frequent it is for the ‘entire household’ or ‘extended family’ to suffer with an offender, ‘sometimes for’ the offender (MBAH; IGARIWEY, 1997, p. 30) — see also Amborn (2019, p. 120). This seems unjust from a Western perspective, but this can be reframed if “punishment” is understood more in the vein of shared responsibility for compensating damage and repairing relations. Finally, see also Oveja Negra (2020) and Lowell (2023, 9:31–10:09).

¹⁷⁶ See also Adam Cohen (2020, chap. 6), Chowdhury (2021), and Hoye (2021, p. 276), as well as Coulthard (2014, p. 127) on the Canadian state’s efforts at reconciliation with indigenous peoples regarding the “residential school” program: ‘Indigenous subjects are the primary object of repair, not the colonial relationship’.

This leads to thinking ‘it is a mistake to locate a conflict with certain people rather than the kind of behaviour that takes place between them’. Even further, however, individual cases of misbehaviour are less an issue than the pattern they constitute¹⁷⁷; for Paredes, confusing patriarchy with sexist chauvinism ‘is a huge political mistake’^w (AFIUNE; ANJOS, 2020).

The differences between these ways of understanding domination come from three intertwined historical-theoretical factors. First, the angle from which one approaches the experience of slavery, which relates to, second, a concern with actual conditions rather than with abstractions — a contrast that is, third, only exacerbated through modern technological and demographic conditions.

Ancient republicanism was, to reiterate, mostly about the fear, by masters, of being treated *like* slaves by their peers. This is relevant because domination was experienced as the *exceptional* moment in which a peer disrespected deliberative rituals so as to act arbitrarily. Republicans corrected the situation by mobilising their material and social resources not only to re-establish equilibrium among them but to make these processes more resilient. For the actually enslaved, however, lack of agency was the default circumstance. The issue was not only that someone violated them, not even exactly that the law allowed it, but that they had no resources to mobilise and this left them little choice but to submit. The earliest republicans were worried about tyrants, but while slaves could differentiate between cruel and lenient masters, having someone specific to blame for their need to do as told would not make much practical difference in terms of their predicament.

Thus when republicans talk about domination, they focus on personal dependence and servility; on an inability to speak frankly and, as a result, to “produce” politics. But as Kapust (2018, p. 1–29) noted, based on the work of James C. Scott, flattery might also be a measure of agency from a subaltern point of view, often the *only* viable strategy for influencing one’s master. It is understandable that this is taken, from an outside perspective, to mean lack of autonomous thought and pride. A will to please one’s owner at great or all cost may genuinely take over the slave’s heart, too. But then one returns to the issue of the constitution of “the will”¹⁷⁸. Servility obviously poisons balance, but those watching it from above tend to judge it as a choice they would not make¹⁷⁹, possibly stemming from something essential about the enslaved — a sociologically asinine conclusion (FIRMIN, 2000) that nonetheless thrives

¹⁷⁷ See note 31 in section 3.1, page 81.

¹⁷⁸ See section 2.1, page 38.

¹⁷⁹ The “moralised” view of behaviour such as flattery, which Kapust (2018, *passim*, esp. chap. 1) also addresses as connected to hierarchical environments.

by exploiting wishes for exculpation and several cognitive biases. From the inside, however, this choice is only logical¹⁸⁰. Hence why it can be hard to disentangle “feeling” from “tactic”. One starts to wonder whether one is not really a pathetic bootlicker. This is what is *cruel* about slavery and what masters focus on, especially as they are *not* used to feeling that way. However, they can count on obedience to the current social edifice to combat the arbitrariness that threatens to turn them into servile beings. For those who cannot do so, obedience is what creates the conditions that make servility a logical pattern of behaviour for them.

In other words, what stands out to the slave is not the arbitrariness of the master’s will, but that the first must do what the second wants. The command’s “origin” might be a factor in judging whether complying is desirable, but, being an order, it leaves no room for judgment by the underling; it does not enable saying no without punishment. This difficulty is for the slave the mark of an enslaving relationship: the diminished capacity to resist someone’s obstinate desires; the unlikelihood of seeing one’s autonomous judgment respected, if it ever comes to take shape at this point. But this goes beyond one relationship. It is the result of a submissive environment in which obedience is both enforced and hailed as virtuous, leading to a dearth of solidarity around imbalances of power.

Thus every time a relation is shaped by obedience — to whatever, however indirectly legitimised and ensured — radicals recognise the *essence* of slavery¹⁸¹ (DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 108), a telling sign of dominating structures even within contestatory movements (ERVIN, 2009[1993], p. 18). Considering North American tribes described in the 16th century as ‘truly free’ for not believing in ‘taking orders’, Graeber hails the ‘freedom to ignore orders’ as ‘perhaps the most important’ of unrestrictions¹⁸² (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 8, 18). Indeed, one can barely speak of non-Western egalitarianism (even more broadly than in America) if not in the sense that people were equally able to disobey (GRAEBER; WENGROW, 2021, p. 44–45). Similarly, Moraes (2020, p. 75) writes that the ‘centre of libertarian thought’ might as well be that ‘a free person doesn’t obey orders[...] but meets requests and/or performs the social responsibilities they consider just’^x.

Modern chattel slavery seemed poised to demonstrate the systematic character of domination as stemming from the principle of command and obedience. Slavery-abhorring sensibilities

¹⁸⁰ See also criticism of the concept of “codependence” (HAGAN, 1993, p. 5–7 apud MORGAN JR., 1991, p. 724), with Fuller and Warner (2000, p. 7) further complicating the question by writing that labelling strategic behaviour in the face of ‘environmental stressors’ as “codependent” serves to ‘attribute pathologies to women’s caregiving behaviors’.

¹⁸¹ See also Rodrigues (1999b, p. 93), Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 5–6), and Cavallero and Gago (2021, p. 27).

¹⁸² See also Samuel Clark (2007, p. 113) on the Nuer and Oca (2019, p. 22–23) on the Wotjuja.

impacted more than intellectual parameters; moral equality – again, grounded in Christianity – was an important ingredient of abolitionist movements, which understood the need to take illegal action; to disobey. But the fork in the road separating radical abolitionists from significant factions of modern republicanism (and the subsequent liberal tradition) was precisely how to conceptualise slavery and, as a consequence, what it meant to end it. For the latter, the goal was to strike it from the law, improving the constitution of sovereign force so as to equalise all as individuals unrestricted in particular ways (e.g. as market agents). Radicals, however, engaged the views and concerns of the oppressed. No longer having to obey others was supposed to be the whole point of abolition, and even if regime change helped, the conception of the ideal should progress as it is reached. Former slaves were still being made to conform to several unwanted conditions in order to survive; they were, to use an expression by Fanon, ‘emancipated slaves’ (COULTHARD, 2014, p. 39). Once more, obedience to current ideals for ascertaining equality (or stubborn legitimisation of the *old* laws) was an issue.

Radical abolitionism thus gave socialism (anarchism in particular) an ‘extended definition of slavery’¹⁸³ (EVREN, 2012, p. 307), which is really just slavery thought non-theologically, “from below”. Hence Kropotkin’s criticism that the tsarist emancipation of serfs left relations of servitude intact (KINNA, 2016, p. 80, 87). ‘Physical compulsion’ and ‘personal serfdom’ disappeared, but obedience was immediately secured again by other means, and this happened, ‘one way or another, everywhere in Western Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ (KROPOTKIN, 2014[1883][a], p. 266). For Reclus, the result of the abolition in the United States was ‘slavery, minus the obligation to care for the children and the elderly’, especially considering overtly discriminatory laws (now abolished) and the use of ‘forced prison labor’ (still very much alive today) (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 90). The process by which a majorly black enslaved population in Brazil was set “free”, but remained impoverished, also led anarchists in the last state in the Western hemisphere to formally abolish slavery to frame its abolition as a mere *transformation* of its terms, using the socialist expression “wage slavery” to describe the new situation¹⁸⁴ (SILVA, R. R. d., 2018, p. 31; STIFFONI, 2021, p. 33–34). In the end, as Cubero (2015[1993][a], p. 63) writes when discussing anarchist liberty, a slave who is merely ‘free of chains does not yet know the freedom [anarchists] speak of’^y.

¹⁸³ See also Little (2023, p. 116–118, 122, 128).

¹⁸⁴ In describing the case of the United States, Hartman employs the term “refiguration of subjection”, characterising emancipation as a “nonevent” (ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 26–27). See also Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, p. 215–216) and John P. Clark (2013b, p. 113), as well as Graeber (2006, p. 80–81) on capitalism as a ‘permutation of logical terms’ of slavery.

For Morris, enslavement varied but always boiled down to a minority living exclusively off the labour of others¹⁸⁵. ‘Bond-slavery, feudalism and wage-labour were not moral equivalents’, but in terms of the essence of the phenomenon ‘the differences between them were irrelevant’¹⁸⁶ (KINNA, 2012a, p. 39). ‘The whole life of the worker is simply a continuous and dismaying succession of terms of serfdom’, wrote Bakunin (1964, p. 188 apud KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019, p. 226–227) about the proletariat of his own time; these terms were ‘voluntary from the juridical point of view but compulsory in the economic sense[...]; in other words, it is real slavery’. Curiously, Graeber (2018, p. 103–104) pointed out that in antiquity ‘slaves were usually the ones to do wage labour’; in classic Athens or Rome¹⁸⁷ one ‘would probably find it impossible to locate a [non-enslaved professional] willing to enter into such an arrangement’. As he put it elsewhere, wage labour is ‘the renting of our freedom in the same way that slavery can be conceived as its sale’¹⁸⁸ (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 206–207).

Renting anything is, of course, not the same as selling it. This distinction is seized upon by supporters of sovereignty to argue against an extended definition of slavery. However, this ends up becoming the claim that unless servitude is absolute, it must be a situation of freedom. This is quite convenient, as even formal slaves, after all, can fish for opportunities to provoke change through e.g. flattery, as just mentioned, or staunch loyalty, even “side hustles” they were often allowed to do (REIS, J. J., 1996, p. 403–410). The issue, again, is privileging an ideal in detriment of presently lived experience: actual obedience and diminished agency, as a result of legitimised imbalances and incentive structures, are deemed less important than the notion that, alternatives and their costs notwithstanding, one *could* have not chosen what one did, or *might* choose differently after the current contract is up, so on and so forth¹⁸⁹.

It could be said that anarchists do the opposite, considering anything short of full equality a form of slavery. But this is a false symmetry. First, the mere existence of inequalities does not imply domination, insofar as social processes are geared to targeting them. On the contrary, domination is in situations that forcefully and systematically contribute to maintaining these

¹⁸⁵ See also note 31 in section 1.2, page 26.

¹⁸⁶ See also Kinna (2019b, p. 29) and Rothman (2021a, 21:33–23:20).

¹⁸⁷ Or modern Madagascar, for that matter (GRAEBER, 2007, p. 47–50).

¹⁸⁸ See also Graeber (2006) and Ricardo Diogo Mainsel Duarte (2021, p. 184). On wage work and prisons via Foucault, see also Cavallero and Gago (2021, p. 42).

¹⁸⁹ One could talk about a branch of the liberal tradition concerned with “substantive freedoms” over (or at least as much as with) “formal” ones. However, anarchists would still be different in the sense of methods recommended for achieving an equalisation of such liberties (obedience to currently existing systems that command obedience versus prefigurative direct action that defies their legitimacy). See also Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 125–135).

inequalities, to undermining the work to undo them, including pre-emptive demobilisation based on a socialisation for obedience. Secondly, anarchists' goals involve the promotion of anti-idealism; a non-attachment to any particular set of institutions and standards they could at any given moment recommend as essentially representative of equality¹⁹⁰. Therefore anarchists do not care for achieving an "ideal balance" but worry about the quality of actual social processes, bearing in mind what sovereignty does to them.

Adopting an abstract standard of equality enables one to distance oneself from responsibility regarding actually existing inequalities ("they are not really a problem; the truly relevant ones were already extinguished in the realm of law"). But, of course, much more than ideology leads to such a judgment. Creeping bureaucratisation, along with an increase in population and technological complexity, makes it reasonable for individuals, even relatively "privileged" ones, to conclude they are not personally responsible for most suffering and inequity around them.

There is no institution that is frankly, clearly authoritarian[...] power no longer dares to be absolute or is so only by caprice, against prisoners for example, [...] or] people without friends. Each sovereign [...] is] obligated, bonded by precedents, considerations, protocols, conventions[...]: the most insolent Louis XIV finds himself entangled in a thousand threads of a mesh he'll never get rid of.^{z.191} (RECLUS, 2002[1898], p. 94)

Hence socialism's distinctiveness in decrying a continued *experience* of slavery in situations of diminished personal arbitrariness, for they still involve relations of command and obedience leading to the maintenance of several inequalities deemed important by those suffering them. 'Even under the most advanced republican forms', wrote Kropotkin (2014[1895], p. 426 apud KINNA, 2016, p. 110), 'the slave to the soil and to the factory would always remain a slave'. In any case, as discussed above, the very bureaucratisation that aims to quench personal arbitrariness still means for anarchists a condition of modern, impersonal domination — even one that is not necessarily based on work relations (MBAH; IGARIWEY, 1997, p. 7–8). Reclus denounced 'a hierarchical order' expressed through multiple forms of 'dominance and subordination within the system', which 'mutually interact' to shape 'diverse institutions, values, and practices' (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 95).

However, anarchists disagree with Marxist interpretations of socialism, which see in the return to sovereign arbitrariness the proper corrective for domination. Just in an era where individual figures are less likely to amass power, Marxists chose to counter this trend by

¹⁹⁰ See sections 5.1, 6.1, and 6.3.3.

¹⁹¹ See also Tolstoy (1894, p. 318–319). One can, however, see the seeds of this trend much earlier — see e.g. Straumann (2016, p. 300).

swapping the rulers in charge of sovereign offices (MBAH; IGARIWEY, 1997, p. 21) — getting “zealous working class people” into them — and then supercharging these institutions. Marxist states became quite bureaucratic, even if such bureaucracy was autocratically structured; Stalinism, for example, ‘reproduced itself structurally as a grotesque persistence of bureaus amid a chronic execution of bureaucrats’ (BOOKCHIN, 1978, p. 18 apud FERGUSON, K. E., 1984, p. 18).

For libertarians, addressing the complexities of modern systems of domination involved paying attention to equality in many dimensions of life. Unlike binary constructions of “free” or “slave” (“there is no institution that is clearly authoritarian”), this allows us to consider *how* (un)equal one is in relation to others, even taking into account many different criteria at once or depending on the context at hand¹⁹², while attaching this analysis to questions of obedience. Anarchists work toward balance in order to make it easier to resist the imposition of *one* specific model or standard of equality, enabling the pursuit and productive combination of diverse forms of value (ROCKER, 2009[1938], p. 11); ‘maximum equality is that in which everyone can exercise their differences plainly’^{aa} (CUBERO, 2015[1991][b], p. 49).

Do not make the mistake of identifying equality in liberty with the forced equality of the convict camp. [...] It does not mean that every one must eat, drink, or wear the same things, do the same work, or live in the same manner. Far from it; the very reverse, in fact. Individual needs and tastes differ, as appetites differ.¹⁹³ (BERKMAN, 1929, p. 182)

Skilful coordination of efforts and mediation of conflicts are certainly required, and a condition of balanced forces is a fateful part of this process: repudiating cultures of concentrated decision-making power, in which grievances can be dismissed for being “improper” and direct action to redress them repressed for being “illegitimate”. For anarchists, fighting slavery means struggling to equalise capacities to directly oppose inequality. This does not mean that the difference between “rule of law” and autocracy is negligible; that attacking personal arbitrariness is not worthwhile, or that it has not been used to good effect in the past. This is just not the continuum on which anarchists project the distinction between domination and its opposite; the difference is important for them only insofar as it is translatable into a matter of different levels of concentration of power and (or) dogmatism¹⁹⁴. Granted, the contrary of sovereignty, “equality of forces”, is somewhat vague, but reasonably so, considering all the changing diversity

¹⁹² See section 6.2.

¹⁹³ See also Knowles (2002, p. 15) and Souza Passos (2007, p. 34–35).

¹⁹⁴ See the discussion in section 4.1, page 100.

of perspectives and projects it is meant to validate. Only reflection on real life contexts can substantiate analyses concerning the *extent to which* balance is broken or shaky, these theories themselves not constituting eternal truths but a constant dialogue.

In summary, anarchists adopt a radical view of slavery and approach equality approvingly yet critically. To assess any social landscape in light of these views requires a lot of context, but libertarians can still debate *non-domination* — a term only recently taken up again, as mainstream definitions were seen as whitewashed mastership (BOOKCHIN, 1982, p. 2; KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019, p. 224–225) — as a general concept.

John P. Clark (2013b, p. 94) defines it according to ‘three major elements’: ‘the systematic use of coercion’, a systematic denial of ‘real agency’, and a systematic ‘imposition of constraints on self-realization’. Fábio López (2013, p. 70–71, 83–87), in turn, uses Nietzschean and Foucauldian theory to argue that domination is using the social force of others to realise the dominator’s goals instead of those of the dominated. The shortcoming of these frameworks, even of Morris’s mentioned earlier, is in defining domination by its (very) likely consequences rather than by its structure, that is, some having overwhelming power to decide for others regardless of *what* they decide (ERRANDONEA, 2003, p. 50–51). Unless this root is emphasised — as “radicals” are etymologically wont to do — one may unwittingly neglect paternalistic domination, or the periodic wrestling of concessions from the powerful that does not threaten the institutions that allow these positions of power to exist.

Uri Gordon (2006, p. 104, 141–149) writes that ‘a person is dominated when s/he is involuntarily subjected to any number of intersecting social relations involving the systematic use of force, coercion and manipulation’. This subjection is present in every situation of ‘exclusive and absolute control and jurisdiction’, which is how Kinna and Prichard (2019, p. 232) write about the subject. For Laoghaire (2016, p. 17–18), domination depends on ‘a greater coercive capacity’ that is ‘more or less constitutive of a relationship’ and from which there is ‘little or no practicable exit options’. This approach gives more weight to the imbalance inherent in sovereignty, but it seems to turn on relationships between specific agents, with the state given centre stage. As anarchists focus on domination more broadly, it should be described as a feature of a social environment rather than one of a single relation. As Landauer’s (2019[1910], p. 2) saying goes, the state itself is, after all, ‘a social relationship; a certain way of people relating to one another’.

Domination might then be defined as ‘a diffuse kind of power, embedded in hierarchy – pyramidal structures, pecking orders and chains of command – and in uneven access to economic or cultural resources’ (KINNA, 2019b, p. 59–60). It is present in another discussion by Uri Gordon (2006, p. 104–105), that on ‘regimes of domination’: impersonal and compulsory sets of rules, ‘not autonomously constituted by those individuals placed within [a] relationship (including the dominating side)’, conditioning ‘people’s socialisation and background assumptions about social norms’. These are not to be confused with sociability itself (CLARK, S., 2007, p. 143). A regime of domination is not just any agreement about living together, even one created before one was born, but a specific pact for the legitimisation of sovereignty, enabling command and increasing the likelihood of its counterpart, obedience.

Domination typically manifests itself in relationships of command/obedience[... which do] not in [themselves] represent the regulating function. One does not “obey” a norm (for example that which forbids killing or requires us to drive on the right side of the road), rather one follows it. One obeys a command, that is the form in which the norm is presented in a society of domination. The fact that respect for the norm is seen in terms of obedience is, in fact, a result of the expropriation of the regulating function by one part of society which must therefore impose it on the rest of society. And the lower the level of access, whether real or fictional, to power in society, the more explicitly must this be imposed.¹⁹⁵ (BERTOLO, 2021[1983], p. 7)

Errandonea (2003, p. 50–51) writes that domination ‘consists in a “probability” composed of internalised mutual expectations – made common – which set the possible contents for commands’^{ab}. In the case of “classic” slavery one sees an almost absolute probability of obedience, with contours to the content of commands defined by the master alone. But even when the odds are lower than that and the contents are thoroughly and collectively determined (even deemed “rational” or “progressive”), one still experiences a measure of domination because interaction is structured by commandment¹⁹⁶. ‘Domination can proceed seemingly without violence’, Kinna (2019b, p. 75) adds, ‘though not without the power advantages’ that the socially produced capability to exercise it involves. As mentioned in section 4.2.1 above, it is only too easy to go from not punishing force to rationalising further lenience because one has lost the capacity to do anything about it. ‘The slave recognises the power asymmetry which could be activated, and thus adjusts [their] behaviour accordingly’ (LAOGHAIRE, 2016, p. 16); the

¹⁹⁵ See also the difference between “governance” and “government” in organisational cybernetics (SWANN, 2020, p. 45).

¹⁹⁶ As Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 44) observe, the first Christian colonisers of America found it ‘extremely difficult’ to ‘translate concepts like “lord”, “commandment” or “obedience” into indigenous languages’, and ‘explaining the underlying theological concepts, well-nigh impossible’.

same can be said of anyone woven into a sovereign structure without being actual chattel. For anarchists, being a part of a regime of domination is bound to produce feelings of being dominated to some degree, even for those who are or have the hope of being more empowered than others at some point. Voluntary adherence to a system of rule is as difficult to tell apart from mere subjection to it as cunning servility is from becoming servile.

4.3.2 Inequality and obedience

*Do you want to prevent [people] from ever oppressing [others]?
Arrange matters such that they never have the opportunity[... due
to] the actual organization of the social environment, so constituted
that [...] it gives no one the power to set [themselves] above others[...].*

Mikhail Bakunin ¹⁹⁷

*To socialise is to make property and work instruments, all wealth and
what produces it, available to society, ending exploitation[...].
But for libertarian socialism[...] it's also necessary to socialise
knowledge[...] and culture. [... Moreover,] there will
never be socialism if power is not socialised[...].^{ac}*

Jaime Cubero ¹⁹⁸

Political progressiveness is generally tied to equality. Anarchists' interpretation of that is wanting everyone to (re)formulate their own ideas about the inequalities that exist and how they affect them; wanting this to be consequential, for these grievances to be aired and solved to the benefit of all (which will likely require social transformation). To that end, sovereignty is rejected in favour of equilibrium of forces. Equality is used as a means for equality to be achieved as an end.

Albeit for anarchists this formulation remains highly contextual, it indicates inequalities that should be especially guarded against: those of material resources, of knowledge, and of "responsibility". These disadvantages may be created by an unplanned, unintentional 'accumulation of otherwise non-harmful actions or situations' (WILSON, M., 2011, p. 120), but if allowed to persist, they can create a scenario in which it becomes *rational* to engage in relations of sovereignty. Hence Bakunin's (1971[1869], p. 150, emphasis in the original) connection between 'the three great causes of all human immorality': 'political, economic, and social inequality; the ignorance resulting naturally from all this; and the necessary consequence of these, *slavery*'.

¹⁹⁷ Bakunin, 1973[1870], p. 152–153, emphasis removed.

¹⁹⁸ Cubero, 2015[1994](b), p. 36.

Exclusive control of life-sustaining resources, from water and land (especially as sources of food) to “means of production” more broadly, creates an obvious incentive for sovereignty. Some must submit, or will starve; others must force the first to submit, or will lose what they were socialised to feel entitled to; either way they will compete for the “permission” to subjugate others¹⁹⁹ (KROPOTKIN, 2014[1914], p. 203; GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 18).

Anarchists see this inequality as a result of agents profiting to the detriment of others, with people failing to resist this predation on adequate scales. Taxation, property, and loans with interest structure a competitive (even if not ostensibly “violent”) arena for allocating resources, necessarily breeding concentration of power (SPANNOS, 2012, p. 55). The issue is further complicated, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, by the legitimization of competition as the foundation of sociability; of the status of competitor as a criterium for assessing equality. It is not uncommon for liberal progressivism to mean an equalisation of “opportunities” rather than “outcomes”²⁰⁰ (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][j]; MATTHEWS, 2015). However, outcomes of a “contest” in life are just another one’s initial conditions. The narratives that create the contours and contents of disputes legitimise winners’ rewards, shaping their identity according to their new superior position. This leads winners to ‘refuse to start from scratch again once the game is over’, making it harder to correct for that, to creatively “play” with access to material resources, for it will be seen as “unfairness”²⁰¹ (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 14).

Wealth inequality is evidently not an exclusively anarchist concern. For Rousseau (1997[1762], p. 78), no one should ‘be so very rich that [they] can buy another, and none so poor [that they are] compelled to sell [themselves]’. However, anarchists think state-based solutions maintain other important inequalities, as already discussed in the previous section. Marxism’s shortcomings are comparable to those of Rousseau’s thought from an anarchist perspective. Not all republicans, however, have issues with market logic (TAYLOR, R. S., 2013), and minorities within anarchism (whose impact is inversely proportional to the passing of time) see them as a reasonable method for peacefully coordinating activities so long as minimum precautions are taken (CARSON, 2007).

¹⁹⁹ See also ANTÔNIO... (2021, 18:09–18:13).

²⁰⁰ Tucker also thought along these lines (LITTLE, 2023, p. 182).

²⁰¹ Graeber comments of the Nuer and Dinka, who didn’t understand that losing a war meant prolonged subservience; ‘as far as they could tell, they’d just lost a game’. On the other hand, he also notes that violence does not seem to create ‘the means of its own enforcement so much as [...] the means of its own memorialization’, as it ‘carves monuments in ruined flesh you are unable to forget. [...] You can’t simply reshuffle the cards and start again’ (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 14). See also Hunter (2019, p. 50–51).

Internal criticism to this position focuses on rebuking its characterisation as “peaceful”, considering it ‘short-sighted naivety’ to leave to each individual ‘the determination of work and the principles of exchange’ (KINNA, 2016, p. 142); one would be simply rebooting a competitive dynamic and thus eventually legitimising violence (SHANNON, 2012, p. 284; PRICE, W., 2014a; KINNA, 2019b, p. 200). “Minimum precautions” against this generally assume the problem to be restriction on credit (TUCKER, 2009[1926], p. 13–15), but this would lead to ‘misallocation and waste of resources’ as well as ‘rampant inflation’²⁰² (GRAHAM, 2010, p. 12–13). Even if it did not, debt basically implies a promise to work more, and limitless credit would lead to manic exploitation – of non-human entities, at least – to make these promises good²⁰³.

Market dynamics are then incongruous with anarchism, the latter not meaning “each one does whatever they want”. Of course, neither does the first – in economics as in politics, markets depend on certain shared rules, such as respect to the results of previous disputes, which lead to conflict that must be quelled in favour of one side, reinforcing or recreating inequalities²⁰⁴. Anarchists argue that for each one to do what they want, their wills must be made compatible, a dialogical activity that will transform what they want, and even *who they are*²⁰⁵, in the first place. Collective resource management is key to this endeavour, and people ‘cannot be said to actually manage’ a market economy, with its ‘negative externalities’ (SHANNON, 2012, p. 285), ‘business cycles, unemployment, and a distinction between more prosperous and poorer enterprises and regions’; they are bound by ‘uncontrollable forces’ that deepen rather than erode inequalities²⁰⁶ (PRICE, W., 2012a, p. 318).

Rather than planning our social lives (or, better yet, living), we leave those things to the proverbial “invisible hand.” [...] We remove our selves from the process and replace them with the motive to profit. [...] Maintaining markets in a post-capitalist society maintains the atomization of any profit and

²⁰² Graham (2010, p. 13) also notes that raising interest rates in response would lead more businesses to fail, increasing inequality ‘as some workers succeed while others do not’; plus, ‘enterprises more favourably situated in relation to markets and resources enjoy a competitive advantage’ of the sort not capable of ‘being evenly distributed’. On the other hand, see Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 250–251) as it pertains to handling plots of land of varied quality.

²⁰³ Behaviour combining ‘a general attitude of unprincipled, cold-blooded calculation with outbursts of almost inexplicably vindictive cruelty’ seems to ‘embody something essential about the psychology of debt’, or rather about ‘the debtor who feels he has done nothing to deserve being placed in his position: the frantic urgency of having to convert everything around oneself into money, and rage and indignation at having been reduced to the sort of person who would do so’ (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 325). See also Cavallero and Gago (2021, p. 31) and note 232 on page 162 below.

²⁰⁴ Sovereignty turns not only “inward” but “outward” as well, as ‘an artificial situation of overproduction’ resulted in ‘continuous wars’ for ‘supremacy in the world market’ (WALT; SCHMIDT, 2009a, p. 51); see also DeLamotte (2004, p. 27) and Cavallero and Gago (2021, p. 85).

²⁰⁵ By means of how one prioritises the wants affecting one’s self; see section 5.2.

²⁰⁶ See also Walt and Schmidt (2009a, p. 92), Wayne Price (2014a), and Pairez and Umali (2020, p. 25).

competition-oriented system. Further, it incentivizes negative externalities and de-incentivizes positive externalities. (SHANNON, 2012, p. 284–288)

For anarchists, collective yet non-sovereign resource management initially meant “collectivism” — equal exchange without private property (land and the means of work were to be held collectively and federally by region and trade). Their target was what was seen as the motor of growing inequality: exploitation, not only by surplus-value extraction but also by reserving worse conditions and activities to some while not recognising their extra burden. In other words, the greatest concern was avoiding the theft of the product of one’s labour: once everyone was guaranteed to be able to work and retain the true value of their contribution, oppression would be effectively uprooted.

Collectivism, however, was still flawed. Assigning the “true value of someone’s contribution” requires a single standard of value for proper comparison. This would replicate an operation at the heart of capital itself: ‘the quantification of claims over qualitatively complex social processes’²⁰⁷ (COCHRANE; MONAGHAN, 2012, p. 114). For anarchists, respecting this very complexity means considering the comparison (and the standardisation it demands) a domineering power play. ‘Various collectivist wages were proposed’, Scott Nappalos (2012, p. 307–308) explains, based on hours of labour, difficulty of tasks, amount outputted, proportion contributed, among others. However, the ‘basic problem with all of these’ was that they were ultimately ‘arbitrary and inequitable’, seeing as ‘in our time, production is largely social’²⁰⁸; an individual’s contribution ‘is very difficult to isolate from the contributions of countless others’. Capitalism, he continues, ‘doesn’t try; it just pays what people are forced to accept’; in any case, ‘value is not a neutral thing to assign’. In the end, as Walt and Schmidt (2009a, p. 90) write, there is ‘no possibility of operating a fair postcapitalist wage system’.

Many anarchists pointed that, beyond contemporary settings, work has *always* been deeply social, and thus “true” measurement of individual efforts was never possible (and will never be)²⁰⁹ (GRAHAM, 2010, p. 13). For Kropotkin, production is ‘a collective process, based on the knowledge, experience, and resources developed in the past’; in that sense, ‘the work of the metalworker was not separate from that of the miner who retrieved the ore, the railway person who transported it, or the worker who built the railway, and so on’. As the playwright

²⁰⁷ And then ‘it matters little’ if this standard is comprised of ‘labor notes’ or ‘coin stamped with the effigy of king or republic’ (KROPOTKIN, 2009[1920], p. 4). In any case, this is the issue with privileging the concept of exploitation over that of domination, or reducing the second to the first, which anarchists increasingly identified with Marxist socialism (ERRANDONEA, 1990).

²⁰⁸ See also Berkman (1929, p. 188).

²⁰⁹ See section 5.1.

Avelino Fóscolo (2009, p. 35) put it, ‘work instruments, inventions representing a legacy of anonymous past generations, cannot be the exclusive property of a few’^{ad}. Furthermore, as Luigi Galleani argued, the value of ‘less tangible products’, such as “Pascal’s theorem... Newton’s law of gravitation, or... Marconi’s wireless telegraphy,” could scarcely be assessed’, as these innovations cannot ‘be separated from the ideas and discoveries of others’ (WALT; SCHMIDT, 2009a, p. 89). There is also all the quite intangible care and education needed to raise human beings and entangle them in functional social relations that allow for all this production — work going back thousands of years, as Michel (2021[1890], p. 39) pointed out.

Therefore, anarchists contend that collectivism would reinforce inequalities too. Consider Kropotkin’s (2009[1920], p. 6) comment on an hour of a doctor’s work being worth ‘two or three hours’ work from [...] the nurse’: ‘to establish this distinction is to maintain all the inequalities of our existing society’²¹⁰. The ‘experiences of revolutionary societies’ increasingly led the anarchist movement to reject wage systems because they showed that ‘given the opportunity, capitalism can emerge out of its enemy’, with ‘class inequities provid[ing] a launching ground for potential ruling classes’ (NAPPALOS, 2012, p. 307). ‘The moment work done was appraised in currency or in any other form of wage’, wrote Kropotkin (2008[1892], p. 195 apud SHANNON; NOCELLA II; ASIMAKOPOULOS, 2012, p. 31); when ‘it was agreed upon that [each person] would only receive the wage [they] could secure to [themselves]’; it was then that ‘the whole history of [capitalism] was as good as written’²¹¹. For Ervin (2009[1993], p. 13), capitalists create inequality ‘as a way to divide and rule over the entire working class’; setting us against one another, Graeber (2018, p. 282–283) wrote, is ‘what all these mechanisms for assessing the relative value of different kinds of work are necessarily going to be about’.

²¹⁰ Part of the collectivist argument (something else it has in common with a market-based one) refers to the cost of specialisation, e.g. it takes more time to fully train a doctor than a nurse. In some cases it might be more costly to train someone in less efficient techniques, and, within an unequal scenario, the possibility of using more advanced methods or tools is unevenly distributed; payment, then, has more to do with accumulated privilege than with merit (KROPOTKIN, 2009[1920], p. 7). Still, the case of doctors and nurses *does* involve a different cost of specialisation, even if it should not be overstated considering the many social biases everyone, especially outside the medical field, brings to analysing it. Anarchist responses might involve at least three elements. First, tasks that take more time to be learned are not necessarily “more important” than others. Surgeries are dramatic, but without nurses and cleaners, recovering patients would die from infections even more than they already do — see also Graeber (2018, p. 219). Secondly, individually paying for the cost of training obviously generates an expectation of higher individual remuneration, but that is precisely the problem. If doctors are needed, “society” should help so that their becoming so is not destructive. Finally, “doctors” and “nurses” are just amalgams of responsibilities, which could be shared or recategorised into different sorts of specialisations, especially considering the importance, for anarchists, of combining manual and intellectual labour — e.g. FARJ (2008, chap. 5). In addition, concerning differences of *knowledge* rather than of technical proficiency, see the discussion below on educational equality (starting on page 165).

²¹¹ See also Hunter (2019, p. 220–221).

As a result, anarchists increasingly concluded that market individualism and collective ownership were just different expressions of a same inadequate answer to inequality (WILSON, C., 1886, p. 3). ‘The problem is not how capital is managed, but that it is capital, regardless of who manages it or how democratically they do so’, writes Shannon (2012, p. 278–283). Market logic should be abolished because it is a set of ‘abstract rules [...] that require obedience for themselves’; ‘a machine of domination’ that would make it ‘harder to non-conform (based on violence)’ – and the same could be said of strict collectivism.

The main issue behind both projects is, again, equalisation based on an abstract and flattening standardisation of value (BEKKEN, 2005). Anarchists raised ‘ethical objections’ to distribution of resources according to labour (i.e. retaining the “true value” of one’s work) because ‘needs are not proportional to a person’s ability’, especially as ‘some, due to illness and age, simply cannot work at all’²¹² (MCKAY, 2012, p. 78). For collectivists, of course, people who could not work should be provided for. They are not individualists, for whom ‘the nurse and the teacher, like the doctor and the preacher, must be [...] paid for by those who patronize them’ (TUCKER, 2009[1926], p. 15). Nonetheless, both converge on reinforcing, even if unintentionally, modes of thinking that frame those unable to labour as “burdens” on others²¹³.

For these and other reasons anarchists turned to the communistic “satisfaction of needs” as the most relevant criterion of economic equality. For Kropotkin, a crucial figure in the popularisation of “communism” within anarchism²¹⁴, this was not ‘a lofty religious ideal’, but a principle ‘that provided the best conditions for liberty by protecting social groups from the forces that militated towards the re-emergence of slavery’²¹⁵ (KINNA, 2016, p. 143–146). There is something “selfish”, too, in attempting to guarantee that everyone’s needs are attended, for this diminishes the likelihood of anyone resorting to violence or rule-breaking²¹⁶. In the end,

²¹² As Walt and Schmidt (2009a, p. 90) note, even for those who are able to work, remuneration (by any measure; output, effort, etc.) ‘provided no mechanism for linking income to needs; if the hypothetical engineer lived alone without family commitments and was healthy, and the hypothetical cleaner supported several children and had serious medical problems, the engineer would nonetheless earn a higher wage than the cleaner’. See also Wayne Price (2014a), who distinguishes between ways of distributing labour capacities ‘among the various tasks which need to be done’ and doing so through the exchange of commodities in a market setting, which require not the measurement of values but, again, a single abstract, standardised understanding of value.

²¹³ See section 5.1, especially the discussion on independence as an aspirational goal on page 181.

²¹⁴ Since the beginning of the 19th century, this term was identified with authoritarianism, from phalansteries to Jacobinism. Kropotkin strove to “recycle” the word, arguing that it better represented anarchists’ proposals: by the 1880s, he argued that ‘the association of socialism with the principle of collective ownership dangerously blurred the differences between anti-authoritarian and authoritarian collectivism’; only “communism” ‘clearly signalled the determination of anarchists to collectivise through communalisation’ (KINNA, 2021b, 2:59–3:22, 7:52–8:11). See also McKay (2014, p. 68n301) and IEL (2023b).

²¹⁵ See also Déjacque (2012[1858]) and DeLamotte (2004, p. 23).

²¹⁶ See section 5.2.

one is looking out for one's own non-domination, which turns the idea of "the fruits of labour" on its head. The consequence of one's work is reframed as the very institutions that provide for everyone's well-being; the peace of mind of knowing material and social safety nets are in place should things go awry. As Bookchin (1982, p. 143–144) wrote, 'social responsibility' (which arguably encompasses self-care) moved anarchists to approve of economic frameworks in which no one would be 'denied the means of life', even if 'their productive powers are limited or failing'. Even further, this had to be the result of the frameworks' own logic, rather than of makeshift attempts to compensate for predictable, inherent defects (NAPPALOS, 2012, p. 306).

In the passage above, Bookchin was in fact describing a principle behind many non-Western economies, whose connection to anarchism has an even longer history — see e.g. John P. Clark (2013a, p. 82). Anarchists were drawn to ethical refusals to reduce people to slaves through debt (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 79–80); to ways of life which inherently countered 'poverty, hunger or destitution' — not only, or even mainly, for fear of these in themselves but because individuals preferred to live 'where no one else was in a position of abject misery' (GRAEBER; WENGROW, 2021, p. 20). At the very least, one often found an 'irreducible minimum' of 'food, shelter and clothing' to be granted 'irrespective of the amount of work contributed': to deny this to anyone 'was equivalent to saying that [someone] no longer existed, that [they were] dead'²¹⁷ (BOOKCHIN, 1982, p. 56). This sort of arrangement Marcel Mauss called the 'elementary form of social contract': 'an open-ended agreement in which each party commits itself to maintaining the life of the other'²¹⁸ (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 162). Anarchist reflections on the basics of desirable economic principles would go on to echo these ideas: 'everything belongs to everyone', wrote Malatesta (2014[1922][h]), with each of us doing 'on behalf of society all that [their] resources allow [them] to do', and being 'entitled to insist that society meet all of [their] needs, insofar as the sum of production and social forces allow'²¹⁹.

Among frequently raised concerns are the issues of productivity and efficiency; whether everyone would work dangerously less (or not at all), or if 'producers of great value need the incentive of high income' (SPANNOS, 2012, p. 53). Anarchists sidestep these concerns in two

²¹⁷ See also Mbah and Igariewy (1997, p. 50). On another note, Ali 'Abd al-Wahid Wafi remarked that 'one becomes a slave in situations where one would otherwise have died' (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 169). Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, p. 47) and Hunter (2019, p. 64), albeit from very different angles, say something similar of class, echoing the matter of wage work being (merely) a transformation of slavery. See related discussions in section 4.1, page 97 above, and section 6.1.1, page 266 below.

²¹⁸ See also Graeber (2001, p. 230–231), as well as Guilbert de Nogent's observation that the then-emerging commune was 'an oath of mutual aid', this being a 'new and detestable word' through which 'the serfs are freed from all serfdom' (KROPOTKIN, 2021[1902], p. 144).

²¹⁹ See also Samis and Motta (2021, p. 100–101, 110–111) and Martins and Souza (2021, p. 118).

ways. First, they deem it unlikely that people would simply wither. Humans ‘certainly tend to rankle over what they consider excessive or degrading work’, noted Graeber (2018, p. 97), and ‘few may be inclined to work at the pace or intensity that “scientific managers” have, since the 1920s, decided they should’; however, they ‘almost invariably rankle even more at the prospect of having nothing useful to do’. Post-disaster scenarios are good examples of how dealing directly with people’s needs might get things done efficiently without sovereign oversight²²⁰. Conversely, anarchists generally do not think it empirically verified (nor morally acceptable) that people *need* to essentially become superior to others in order to use their powers and seek their development. Chris Spannos (2012, p. 53), for one, favourably cites Castoriadis’ argument that ‘to the extent that someone has a gift’, its ‘exercise is in itself a source of pleasure’; indeed, ‘if Einstein had been interested in money, he would not have become Einstein’²²¹.

Secondly, efficiency is reconsidered. Centuries of increased global productivity did not eliminate immense inequity, waste, suffering — not to mention “useless” employment²²² (GRAEBER, 2018). As with political bureaucracy, ‘talking about rational efficiency’ is often ‘a way of avoiding talking about what the efficiency is actually for’ (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 39). And as with rethinking what the “fruits of one’s labour” are, people have needs, but being ever increasingly productive does not have to be one of them. For Kropotkin, Kinna (2019b, p. 208–209) explains, profit-driven efficiency ‘dehumanized workers locally’ for an ‘ultimately unsustainable’ general goal. When it trumped any other concern, there was ‘no sense that labour could and should be fulfilling’²²³, condemning labourers ‘to a lifetime of mindless, repetitive tasks’ while spreading ‘monocultures and the intensive exploitation of natural resources’. Anarchists rethink efficiency in terms of labouring less and allowing all to contribute while fulfilling needs but, in the process, reconsidering what is actually needed in the first place (which would be less taxing on people *and* the environment)²²⁴ (DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 27; SHANNON, 2012, p. 287).

²²⁰ See note 68 in section 4.2.1, page 109, for more discussion and references. If anything, these circumstances seem to indicate the market is like a game taken only too seriously, being rather parasitic on the “communistic” cooperation that is deeply ingrained in everyday life, as Graeber and Grubačić (2021, p. 23) discuss; see also Cavallero and Gago (2021, p. 76–77, 80–81). I would also add that anarchistic non-Western peoples can lead quite industrious and fulfilling lives; see Graeber and Wengrow (2021, *passim*).

²²¹ See Graeber (2018, p. 220–221) for a more detailed rebuttal to unequal remuneration by the Marxist Gerald Cohen. For another point altogether, see Mintz (2013[1970], p. 112).

²²² See also Oiticica (1983[1925], p. 38–40).

²²³ See also Eric Laursen (2021, p. 103).

²²⁴ See the motto attributed to a 2020 socialist demonstration in Italy: “to work less, to work all; to produce what is needed, and to share it all” [lavorare meno, lavorare tutti, produrre il necessario, redistribuire tutto] (MORVILLO, 2020). Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 38) wrote about a common indigenous claim around the 17th that Europeans may have had ‘more material possessions’, but they had ‘greater assets: ease, comfort and time’. See also Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 12).

For libertarian communists, it is not enough that we share some measurable and calculable social product. We do not solely want a quantitative shift in how we allocate goods. We want a qualitative shift in how we organize our social world. What might society look like if, rather than being organized around profit, rational exchange, and calculated self-interest, we organized our world around fundamentally different values like pleasure, desire, or even adventure?²²⁵ (SHANNON, 2012, p. 286)

Note that Shannon writes about *values* (plural). Satisfying needs equally means accepting many forms of value, ideas ‘if not necessarily about the meaning of life, then at least about what one could justifiably want from it’ (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 3). Every agent would define for themselves what “development” means in their context, and then figure out how to combine efforts to reach these goals or live in coherence with certain principles (SOARES, 2021[1920][a], p. 77; NAPPALOS, 2012, p. 307; KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, p. 198; TAWINIKAY, 2021[2018]; KINNA, 2021b). Agreements for the *interoperability* of different values are essential because, as Graeber (2001, p. 45, 55, 67) posits, value is the process by which the importance of a person’s agency is transformed into concrete forms by recognised representation, entailing incorporation ‘into a larger social whole’. Money represents actors’ intentions by compressing everything into commodities²²⁶ (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 8–9; KINNA, 2012c, p. 6; ZUBOFF, 2019, p. 98–100; MILLER, A., 2021, p. 115). Anarchists seek a plurality of mechanisms allowing for comparison and decision but also non-dominating cooperation for diversity. As Pairez and Umali (2020, p. 25–26) put it, anarchy is about systems ‘designed to accommodate highly diverse interests, views, conceptions, and identities in a horizontal manner’²²⁷.

As Graeber (2001, p. 221–222) wrote, people develop criteria for “balancing out” a relation in order to renegotiate its terms; standards provide ‘a way to call it even’, and ‘hence, to end the relationship’ as it is²²⁸ (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 104–105). If ‘communism is built on an image of eternity’ (there is no need to keep records of debt because ‘each moment is effectively the same as any other’) (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 217–218), there is good reason to break with its logic in case someone does *not* want the current situation to go on forever²²⁹. For anarchists, however, this

²²⁵ See also Graeber (2001, p. 38–41).

²²⁶ See also Benally (2021b, p. 43) and Flexner (2021, 3:33–4:08), as well as Reclus (2002[1898], p. 73–74) on the conflict between seeking profit and providing for needs from the perspective of everyone seeking a single form of value versus combining for a diversity of ends.

²²⁷ See also note 238 in section 6.3.3, page 334.

²²⁸ Graeber (2011a, p. 104–105) comments on the Tiv in rural Nigeria, who visit each other bearing gifts of comparable (but never exact) value in relation to what was previously given to them by the host: ‘It had to be either a bit more or a bit less. To bring back nothing at all would be to cast oneself as an exploiter or a parasite. To bring back an exact equivalent would be to suggest that one no longer wishes to have anything to do with the neighbor’.

²²⁹ See Tucker (2009[1926], p. 40): ‘to indefinitely waive one’s right of secession is to make one’s self a slave’. See also Tolstoy (2009[1862], §184–185).

should always be a contextual discussion, without an abstractly imposed standard of value. An example is the way Zapatistas – who have publicly stated that their struggle ‘is a product of [their] histories and [their] cultures and cannot be bent and manipulated to fit someone else’s formula’ (A ZAPATISTA..., 2019[2002]) – have dealt with the following squabble:

There was a case in which comrades were placed in recovered land and they were told to work communally, but eventually working together became troublesome for them. Soon it was agreed that the terrain was to be divided, but each comrade was not going to be a proprietor of this land, as it is the people’s. [...] when someone owns the land there is no room for everyone; for example, [...] there’s a custom of the landowner’s youngest son inheriting the property, [...] and the other children must go away. So where are they to live? These are the practices [we are] learning to change.^{ae} (LA ESCUELITA ZAPATISTA, 2013?[c], p. 74)

Communism, then, is not economic panacea. As Spannos (2012, p. 53) comments, “take what you feel you need” and “anything goes” is ‘not only utopian, but also dysfunctional, hiding the relative benefits and costs of alternative options’²³⁰. It should hence be understood as a negative political principle of decision-making: if everything “belongs” to everyone, there is no a priori excuse for dismissing complaints – no *property*²³¹ (MELLA, 1975[1900] apud CUBERO, 2015[1991][b], p. 49). Anarchists therefore do not think of communism as ideal resource allocation, but as the legitimation of questioning the meaning and distribution of value. People should, indeed, discuss the costs of their way of life, and decide on how to share them – or, to cut them back altogether. As the indigenous anarchist ziq (2019, p. 4) complains, ‘free bread for everyone today means no bread (or any food) for anyone tomorrow as the top-soil washes away’²³². However, the point of anarcho-communism is precisely to elevate

²³⁰ Although *the commons* as a framework for resource management has been shown to result ‘on the whole in better care for them than is the case with either private or state management’ (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 10).

²³¹ See also Kinna and Prichard (2019, p. 233–234) on Proudhon’s theory: there not being property did not mean ‘Athenian or Jacobin communism’ but ‘limitless possessory claims’ to be negotiated in ‘infinitely plural ways’, with no exclusive title ‘based on dominium’, i.e. ‘no absolute right to ownership of anything’. See also Bookchin (1982, p. 50), Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 50), Editora Descontrol (2016a, p. 131–132), Amborn (2019, p. 130–135), and Little (2023, p. 120–122) for anarchist discussions of ‘usufruct’ in many different contexts. For Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 158–163), in fact, usufruct is the key to differentiating “Roman” (by now, Western) and non-Western understandings of property; it is enough for the second, whose idea of ownership implies care, but *not* the first, for whom the right of *destroying* that which one owns is essential to fully characterising property. As Tawinikay (2021[2018]) develops, ‘anarchism envisions a world where there exists a system of land stewardship, but not ownership’. From this vantage point, it is not so much that everything belongs to everyone, but that anyone has a right to point out that something (and themselves for related reasons) is not being taken care of by somebody else’s actions (even if toward this somebody else’s own “property”). Tangentially, see also Garcia (2018, p. 264–267).

²³² This was not only an issue with anarcho-communists. Tucker’s (2009[1926], p. 123) market economics, for example, necessitated not only ‘free credit’ but also ‘free land’, which it should be at the very least noted that, insofar as it can even be seen as a “resource”, it is clearly a finite one. For Warren, ‘all natural wealth’ should be ‘rendered free and accessible to all without price’ (LITTLE, 2023, p. 100–101).

the dignity of environmental concerns and get people to face this issue as a need that must be considered (NAPPALOS, 2012, p. 306; POPYGUA, 2017, p. 65). Single standards of value distort these discussions, creating for instance artificial distinctions between a “technical” matter (not having enough money) and “political” reservations about a same issue.

In terms of practical propositions, Nappalos (2012, p. 301–306) discusses “planned” and “emergent” communism. The first means decisions by federated groups based on ‘an analysis of the amount of materials and labor available, what to produce and how to allocate the products based on the needs (rather than wages)’. The second counters the first through ‘a suspicion’ about ‘our ability to plan successfully, consciously, and explicitly a full economy’²³³. Based on historical cases of successful yet unplanned revolutionary economics (which did not mean a lack of *organisation*), this position understands economies as emerging out of ‘problem-solving at countless levels’, with stability produced ‘once equilibrium can be reached’²³⁴.

More detailed proposals mix elements of both, going even further in their heterogeneity²³⁵. Some combine a moneyless (or at least marketless) subsistence economy with an artificial market for non-basic needs (WARD, 1991b, p. 127; PRICE, W., 2012a, p. 319). Rationing ‘is to be avoided at all costs’, but it may at times ‘represent the only real equitable solution’ (NAPPALOS, 2012, p. 305). Most anarchists do not oppose industrialization, only the consequences of its capitalist management (DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 27; FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, p. 164). Kropotkin (2010[1912]) in particular had a novel and complex vision for integrating “fields, factories, and workshops”²³⁶. ziq (2019, p. 4–5), on the contrary, rejects what industrialism seems to require, and is particularly concerned with involving as many people as possible in decentralised food production²³⁷. In all cases there is a concern with division of labour, which is strongly related to matters of knowledge and responsibility to be explored below, and is less a common thread among anarchists than a shared beginning to a conversation. For two very different ways in which this issue manifests itself, there is Shûzô Hatta (1983, p. 14–15 apud CRUMP, 1996,

²³³ See also DeLamotte (2004, p. 24–25) and Aston (2021, 1:49–2:02).

²³⁴ This certainly resembles market logic, but in rejecting individualism, contract morality, sovereignty, and an imposed standard of value, it would be a very different market; it is certainly not what I have been referring to as such. ‘The state and its coercive powers had everything to do with the creation of what we now know as “the market”, as Graeber (2001, p. 10) explained. Since it ‘assumes that people will normally try to extract as much as possible from [others], taking no consideration whatever of [others’] interests – but at the same time that they will never [... resort to] taking it by force’, market behavior ‘would be impossible without police’. Nonetheless, see also Graeber (2011a, p. 271–282) and Cusicanqui (2020, p. 46–48).

²³⁵ Anarchic non-Western economies were also quite “mixed”; see e.g. Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 47, 295–297).

²³⁶ See also Paulino (2023).

²³⁷ On the second proposition, see also Landauer (2010[1895]).

p. 24), writing in pre-World War II Japan that ‘those engaged in vital production’ could end up having ‘more power over the machinery of coordination than those engaged in other lines of production’²³⁸. At the same time, there is the women’s movement during the 2006 Oaxaca mass uprising, which exemplified a ‘conscious confrontation with the social division of labor’ via both ‘the de-commodification of common resources and the de-privatization of domestic and reproductive labor’ (PELLER, 2016). Most anarchists agreed that some form of non-dominating compensation must be devised for work deemed indispensable but that requires ‘longer hours, greater intensity’, or that is ‘less pleasant or more onerous or dangerous’ (SPANNOS, 2012, p. 54). Consider what is done in many countries for overnight workers (extra rest) or radiologists (early retirement). The Rio de Janeiro Anarchist Federation (FARJ) (2008, p. 33) propose rotation for such tasks, which might not replace specific compensation entirely but would transform the nature of its costs.

In the end, without a way to ‘force a single vision onto people’, ‘all sorts of experiments’ will be tried²³⁹ (SHANNON, 2012, p. 283–284). Strong anarchist influence on revolutionary processes corroborates this statement. During the Spanish Revolution, the communist motto ‘from each according to [their] abilities, to each according to [their] needs’ refracted into different initiatives (PRINCIPLES..., 1958, p. 7–8). ‘Where money was abolished, a certain quantity of goods was assured to each person’, and ‘where money was retained, each family received a wage determined by the number of members’; additionally, ‘the right of women to livelihood’ was asserted ‘regardless of occupation or function’. District federations created reserves to help ‘poorer Collectives’ and ‘villages less favored by nature’. Interestingly, ‘small landowners were respected’; “individualists” joined collectives only ‘if and when they were persuaded of the advantages of working in common’²⁴⁰. There were ‘just two restrictions: they could not have more land than they could cultivate, and they could not carry on private trade’. Kornegger (2002, p. 24) adds that workers ‘benefited from a shortened work week, better working conditions, free health care, unemployment pay, and a new pride in their work’²⁴¹.

For a more contemporary situation, Bookchin’s influence on Rojava is perhaps most readily felt in terms of the region’s “communalism”²⁴²: its structure is aimed at economic

²³⁸ See the discussion on “accepting dependence” in section 5.1 (around page 199).

²³⁹ See also Uri Gordon (2012a), Wayne Price (2014a), and Little (2023, p. 204).

²⁴⁰ See also McKay (2014, p. 75).

²⁴¹ See also Mintz (2013[1970], p. 145, *passim*) and Finn (2021, p. 123–124).

²⁴² One hears the echoes of Marx’s considerations of life under (stateless) communism in the following description of women’s lives: ‘in the mornings, they can for the first time harvest their own tomatoes from the land’, while mediating conflicts in the afternoon (DIRIK, 2016, p. 39).

regulation by citizens' (rather than necessarily *workers*) assemblies. It is still a mixed economy, seeing as the revolutionaries' aspirations are not imposed but only encouraged; wages are paid even within the cooperative system, although they are calibrated for people's needs²⁴³ (EDITORIA DESCONTROL, 2016a, p. 133). The idea is that 'everyone should have the opportunity to participate and, as a minimal first step, to achieve subsistence'. So far, land was socialised and the cooperative form has spread across the region for many types of production and in several scales. Cooperatives are 'directly connected to the communes', with these in turn networking 'through their economics commissions'. Unemployment is basically non-existent, discussions about communalising the 'invisible, unpaid work that women do for the family' are under way, and while 'of course society must find ways to prevent waste', water and energy are considered 'essential' and hence 'not to be sold' (KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, p. 197–207).

Information, skills, and knowledge are different kinds of resources: when shared, they are "multiplied" rather than "redistributed" (GORDON, U., 2006, p. 161). On the other hand, sharing them can often take much longer than sending a "physical product" somewhere. Additionally, people's inclinations may affect knowledge acquisition. One might not like carrots and still possess them and be nourished by them, but not caring about a field of activity can severely impact one's ability to remember certain information or employ certain skills. As a consequence, "specialisation" is to some extent unavoidable. Not that anarchists find it undesirable; loathing equality as "sameness according to a single standard", they seek to balance diversity through combinations of solidarity, reciprocity, and complementarity (FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, p. 260; AMBORN, 2019, p. 14–15). There is no way to equalise knowledge, thought Cerruti (2018[1933], p. 208), but such inequality 'would be much reduced' in anarchy, giving way to 'inequality of vocations only, to differences of taste for the variety of professions'^{af,244}. Nonetheless, the trade-off of specialisation harbours dangers that must also be dealt with through "socialisation" – the literal kind: education.

There might be knowledge that, once ignored, makes some agents unilaterally dependent and others "artificially" indispensable – to the point of being able to exchange their needlessly exclusive intelligence for privilege²⁴⁵ (WILBUR, 2020[2016], p. 2–3). 'The one who knows more will naturally dominate the one who knows less', wrote Bakunin (2003[1869], p. 39 apud

²⁴³ See also Graeber's (2016, p. xix–xx) comments on the threat that classism (as per the libertarian communist critique of collectivism) represents to the revolution.

²⁴⁴ See also Amaral (2021, p. 170).

²⁴⁵ See also Armin (2021).

SANTOS, K. W. dos, 2022, p. 238), and even if ‘between two classes there is only a difference of education and instruction, this inequality will shortly produce all others’²⁴⁶.

For anarchists, the deeper issue is legitimising this state of affairs: endorsing organisation of superior coercive force on the basis of inequality of knowledge. Bakunin (2009[1871], p. 17–18) makes three major points in his notorious attack on “government by scientists”. First, ‘human science is always and necessarily imperfect’²⁴⁶; secondly, following reason not because one agrees, but because one has to, develops slavishness (obedience for its own sake); and, third, ‘every privileged position [kills] the mind and heart’, and so ‘a scientific body to which had been confided the government of society would soon [devote] itself’ to ‘its own eternal perpetuation’. As mentioned in section 4.2.1 above, since the source of its superior power, prestige, even self-worth, would depend on the relative brutishness of others, such scientific body would tend to render those ‘confided to its care ever more stupid and consequently more in need of its government and direction’²⁴⁷.

Two feelings inherent in the exercise of [sovereign] power never fail to produce [...] demoralization — contempt for the masses, and, for the [one] in power, an exaggerated sense of [one’s] own worth. ‘The masses, on admitting their own incapacity to govern themselves, have elected me as their head. [...] They need me; they cannot get along without my services, while I am sufficient unto myself. They must therefore obey me for their own good[...].’²⁴⁸ (BAKUNIN, 1971[1867], p. 145–146)

Merit is not out of the question, but as Nancy Hartsock (1981, p. 116 apud FERGUSON, K. E., 1984, p. 206) put it, those chosen to hold specific prerogatives due to skill and knowledge are made ‘responsible’ when they are ‘compelled persistently to demonstrate’ the ‘force’ of such skill and knowledge ‘to those concerned in terms which they can grasp’. In any case, the issue is more fundamental in that it is hard to insist on such “persistent compulsion” when major inequalities exist. Especially in crises — education disparities can not be erased overnight — who would not prefer that decisions be made by better trained or otherwise smarter people?

²⁴⁶ See also Wilbur (2020[2016], p. 3): ‘even if we could establish the present legitimacy of an authority based on the most rigorous sort of scientific truth, in some way that the non-expert could verify (and this is not at all clear), we have no guarantee that the legitimacy would remain as circumstances changed, while the exercise of the authority as such is itself at least potentially a break from the exercise of the practices of the field of expertise on which it is presumably based. Once [an expert is crowned with sovereign power], it is easy to stop renewing one’s expertise’.

²⁴⁷ Notice that, this being an argument against sovereignty more broadly, it is against liberal representative government, technocracy, and Marxism alike. As Wilbur (2020[2016], p. 1) puts it, just as ‘the capacity to kill another individual does not generally carry with it any right to do so’, neither ‘the capacity to understand complex social relations’ should ‘itself grant any right to arrange them for others’. See also Reclus (2002[1898], p. 51–52), Bakunin (1975, p. 57), and Robinson (1980, p. 61).

²⁴⁸ See also John P. Clark (2013a, p. 74).

‘In history’, Cubero (2015[1993][a], p. 61–62) concluded, ‘those who desired to dominate their peers always used ignorance or kept the dominated ignorant’^{ah}. The greatest risk therefore is that inequality of knowledge makes obedience “reasonable”, and that is why anarchists think it should be fought directly, building conditions for experts to be productively challenged (FARJ, 2008, p. 33; SHANNON; NOCELLA II; ASIMAKOPOULOS, 2012, p. 13). In Rojava, for example, ‘information about the society’s needs are to be taken out of the hands of experts and socialized’²⁴⁹ (KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, p. 207). ‘The expertise possessed by particular individuals’, wrote Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 206) about feminist practices, should ‘be shared with others so as to empower both the individual and the group, providing an opportunity both to learn and to teach’. For anarchists this would be advanced ‘through dialogue and the free flow of ideas, the abandonment of copyright, travel and inter-cultural exchanges’, with locals ‘applying knowledge they gained about other localities to their own and sharing insights about practice’ (KINNA, 2019b, p. 107–108).

The political risk of unequal distribution of knowledge is high, and so is the cost of broad education, since it can be a long process for any given subject and there is always more for anyone to learn about anything and for all to discover. As a consequence, anarchists put it at the centre of the political sociability they desire; Kathy E. Ferguson (2014, p. 392) writes that ‘the printer’ is historically a much more ‘representative figure’ for anarchists than ‘the bearded, black-clad, bomb-toting’ aggressor; for Toby from the Reconstruir library²⁵⁰, ‘to practise anarchism is to establish libraries’^{ai} (ALBA, 2019). However, bearing in mind what was already mentioned in section 3.1 about the meaning of their “propaganda”, for them education means much more than maximising the “broadcasting” of knowledge (SANTOS, K. W. dos, 2022). It is a social process by which people’s very desire to learn — and to *unlearn*, and to *relearn* (KINNA, 2019b, p. 58) — is stimulated by mutual aid regarding investigations on the causes of their grievances (MARTINS; SOUZA, 2021, p. 127). For Edgar Rodrigues (1999b, p. 14), anarchism ‘is a school without owners, tutors, hierarchies, elitisms’, and ‘authors’ cannot be distinguished from ‘collaborators’; everyone does what they can^{aj}. However, education goes far beyond schooling and ‘book-learning’ (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 72; KINNA, 2019b, p. 89;

²⁴⁹ See also Ward (2011[1983], p. 130), Wilbert and White (2011, p. xviii–xix), and Dirik (2016, p. 38) and, more tangentially, Cavallero and Gago (2021, p. 20–21).

²⁵⁰ This is literally the way he ‘insists he should be cited’ [insiste en que lo cite]. See also Alfred (2005), who describes warriors for decolonisation in a similar light: those responsible for resistance-driven regeneration and sharing of culture and learning.

LITTLE, 2023, p. 107–108), and it is supposed to shape all “spheres” of life²⁵¹ (KROPOTKIN, 2010[1912]; VARGAS, 2009; WARD, 2018; AMARAL, 2021, p. 180–181, 185–190; MENDES, R., 2021; NEPOMUCENO, 2021; PADILHA, 2021, p. 74–82; LOPES, 2022, p. 88–110).

While data availability is relevant, focusing too much on it misses the importance of enabling people to sort truth and utility from hazards, underplaying the risk that specialists and gate keepers (such as news media editors) sift one from the other in ways that reinforce inequalities (HERMAN; CHOMSKY, 2010[1988]). For anarchists, it is essential for everyone to have direct experience with *building* knowledge; to not be passive consumers of information but incorporate a scientific mindset by directly experiencing the intricacies of the process. People should be empowered to question the production (or lack thereof) and circulation (open or otherwise) of certain data to begin with (ALFRED, 2005, p. 230). For example, while in some places laws or lack of funding may prevent statistical investigations on social issues, data produced by “smartphone culture” is made available for businesses to aggressively influence behaviour in increasingly customised, minute, and non-accountable manners²⁵² (ZUBOFF, 2019). As Graeber (2007, p. 25–26) noted, ‘most of the people who work in a state bureaucracy’, including ‘soldiers and the police’, are, ‘on a day to day level, much more concerned with processing information than with breaking people’s skulls’. However, these ‘technologies of information’ are ‘essential elements in ensuring that small handful of people willing and able to break skulls will always be able to show up at the right place at the right time’. To what extent, if any, should *that* sort of information be produced and made available? In a sense, if command is the suppression of autonomous judgement, anarchists want individuals to be good judges to begin with. Better understanding how we come to know what we do and active participation in these processes creates social resilience, if anything because there is more ‘trust in people who actually do have specialized knowledge’ (GRAEBER, 2020a).

In the end, education is not just for understanding more accurately what *is*; it is also supposed to ‘release creativity’²⁵³ (KINNA, 2019b, p. 96). It is a revolutionary activity (AMARAL, 2021, p. 165–168) when it helps ‘visualise other possibilities for interpreting reality’^{ak,254} (MIRANDA, 2006, p. 30). It develops ‘a form of social consciousness’, triggering conditions for

²⁵¹ See ANTÔNIO... (2021, 11:43–12:18) on the founding of a union based on the thought of educator Paulo Freire as interpreted by anarchists.

²⁵² See the introduction to the concluding chapter.

²⁵³ See also Tolstoy (2009[1862], §291): if children are not taught to create, they ‘will go on through life imitating and copying’.

²⁵⁴ And oneself, one might add; see section 5.2. I will return to the connection between education and freedom in section 6.3.1. See also Biehl (2015).

both ‘carrying out the wanted revolution and protecting what comes into effect through it’^{al,255} (SANTOS, K. W. dos, 2022, p. 238). ‘The quintessence of nurturing child-rearing’, as Ehrlich *et al.* (1979, p. 26) put it, ‘would be the teaching of children to like themselves, to learn how to learn, and how to set standards for self-evaluation’. If mechanisms to assess (equal) needs satisfaction are needed, education would be the process by which everyone’s capacities for evaluating such mechanisms are continually developed and reviewed²⁵⁶.

Finally, while access to “raw data”, specialised training, and critical reasoning are important, there is also political expertise, or “organisational proficiency”, which cannot be obtained from anything other than practice. This could refer to ‘the ability to initiate a task and do it one’s own way’, in Goodman’s terms (WARD, 1991b, p. 147), or to the ‘confidence’ which is ‘gained by being listened to’ (ZIEGLER, 2022b, p. 71–72); as Uri Gordon (2006, p. 161) puts it, this is about “non zero-sum” resources that are ‘harder to duplicate’²⁵⁷.

In early 20th-century Argentinian anarchist press, for example, men were less troubled by women writing texts than by them having their own newspapers, which allowed them to acquire experience in editorial roles traditionally held by men (CORDERO, 2015, p. 319). For anarchists, undoing this inequality involves the distribution and rotation of roles and tasks²⁵⁸ (GORDON, U., 2006, p. 136). ‘It is said that women have their rights’, one reads from the Zapatistas, ‘but if they only know about them without practising them, where are their rights?’; women comrades ‘must do all kinds of work along with their male counterparts’^{am,259} (LA ESCUELITA ZAPATISTA, 2013?[a], p. 55).

This, of course, exceeds gender. Within any kind of group “execution” matters because it always entails a measure of discretion (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 272), and being deprived of the valuable experience of handling responsibility leads to legitimising hierarchy over oneself. At a minimum, joint operations are at more risk should the “workaholic” few falter or manipulate others (FABBRI, Luigi, 2021[1921], p. 5; PESOTTA, 2010[1945], p. 169; FIRTH, W.,

²⁵⁵ See also Ricardo Diogo Mainsel Duarte (2021, p. 78, 257).

²⁵⁶ As Nelson (2021, chap. 2) writes on sexuality, ‘without scenes of learning, we have no chance of figuring out what we want (or what we might want to get away from)’. See also Callahan (2020) (on the connection between knowledge appraisal and horizontal, insubordinate conviviality) as well as Ward (1991b, p. 13–47).

²⁵⁷ This is perhaps the material inequality closest to “inequality of forces” itself, as allocating responsibilities often implies bestowing upon someone’s actions a sense of propriety regarding a greater capacity to act, even if not explicitly backed by violence. As Hunter (2019, p. 134) writes, domination ‘does not always come out in physical form’, as it can be due to (among other things) ‘a leadership role within an organisation, or in the capacity to win or present an argument and to be listened to and respected’ while others are not; an ‘entitlement to take up as much space as possible until someone bigger than you says stop it’.

²⁵⁸ See also Knoll (2018[2007], p. 3).

²⁵⁹ See also hooks (2017[1994], p. 123), DeLamotte (2004, p. 80–81), and ASHANTI... (2006, 33:38–34:29).

2009[1998], p. 8–9; BRINGEL; SADDI, 2018, 1:59–2:37). This imbalance can also give rise to “meritocratic” sensibilities: disproportionate contributors might feel scorned if their opinions are not given more weight, or comrades may pre-emptively feel uncomfortable criticising their agendas²⁶⁰. In the end, similar tendencies affecting “government by experts” plague those who end up believing they have a right to command because of superior dedication. As Malatesta (2014[1897]) opined, ‘if an organization heaps all of the work and all of the responsibility upon a few shoulders’, and then ‘puts up with whatever those few do’, these few will eventually, even unintentionally, ‘substitute their own will for that of the community’. They are likely to ‘stop seeing their power as a gift or burden demanding constant reflection’, assuming instead that it is ‘part of the fabric of their being’²⁶¹ (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 352–353).

In this sense, ‘rotation is important to maintain constant accountability, democratize information, and develop everyone’s leadership’²⁶² (IAF, 2020[2009]); the anarchist movement, as William C. Anderson (2021, p. 66) suggests, ‘should be rooted in education and truth, not personalities’. Anarchists practise this within their own militant circles regardless of social circumstances at large, prefiguring the second through the first²⁶³; ‘far from fostering irresponsible individualism’, writes John P. Clark (2013b, p. 191), the contemporary anarchist movement ‘constitute a project for making shared responsibility a reality in the everyday lives of the group members’. It is important not only for tasks to be ‘taken in turns by everyone’, but that all are able, in practice, to contribute; initiative must be encouraged, ‘whilst errors or faults are accepted and in solidarity corrected instead of shaming those who tried to participate’²⁶⁴ (RUSCHE, 2022, p. 30). The leader is ‘a social construction’, explains Cedric Robinson (1980, p. 63); ‘an expedient use by the community of the social, psychological and phenomenological materials contained in an individual’. Anarchists thus strive for groups not to be “leaderless” but “leaderful”, with a model of ‘permeable’ leadership that understands it as empowering others and helping ‘facilitate a group’s self-directed activity’²⁶⁵ (GORDON, U., 2006, p. 138, 156–157).

²⁶⁰ Pliny (1969[100], p. II.85.8 apud KAPUST, 2018, p. 58) already remarked on how the emperor Trajan used his powers to, via gifts and favours, put others ‘under obligation’, the result being that ‘no one, without ingratitude, [could] fail to make sure that [their] love exceed[ed]’ the emperor’s. Of course Trajan was already a hierarchical superior, but straining to please others through extra work could have a similar effect among equals. For a story on aversion to meritocracy, see Fernando Cuesta (2020, p. 108).

²⁶¹ See also Alfred (2005, p. 116).

²⁶² See also John P. Clark (2013b, p. 275) and Eric Laursen (2021, p. 214).

²⁶³ See section 5.3.

²⁶⁴ A version of not hinging someone’s life on an offence, as written about mediation in section 4.2.2.

²⁶⁵ In fact, Casas (1974, p. 18, emphases in the original (as translated by Danny Evans) apud GARCÍA, 1988, p. 337) created a distinction in that ‘the libertarian sections of the International would give rise to a new type of activist – the *militant* – [...] in the same way that the party structure favours the creation of the

After the revolution in Rojava, for example, everyone's homes facilitated the coordination of people's needs: 'every member of the community becomes a leader', and 'social issues' become 'everyone's responsibility' (DIRIK, 2016, p. 40).

This is not about "commanding and being commanded in turn", even if people follow and give guidance in turns. While *concentration* of power is undesirable, anarchists question the logic of command and obedience more broadly. 'The question of how power operates' is different to that of how 'access to it is distributed in the first place', as 'even equally-distributed influence can be abused and abusive'²⁶⁶ (GORDON, U., 2006, p. 166). So in addition to apportioning responsibility as widely as possible, so that no minority is alone able and willing to take it on, anarchists strive to enact a "reverse dominance hierarchy" (BOEHM, 2001) to collectively regulate leadership and make the responsibilities more like duties rather than mandates²⁶⁷ (MBAH; IGARIWEY, 1997, p. 29).

Another aspect of this kind of equality is that encouragement for widespread leadership must go beyond the improvement of each individual's "emotional intelligence". It is also a matter of considering whether the environment is sufficiently and effectively welcoming; it is also the improvement of *collective* emotional intelligence. "Charisma", for example, is hard to "distribute" because it is not only about cleverly timed smiles and artful body language. It is also "cultural capital", skilful manipulation of social symbols, and in this sense it almost invariably has as much to do with politics as with personal trajectory²⁶⁸. In many places, for example, black women performing the same actions as white men may not be perceived as favourably on an emotional, visceral level: even if they are formally afforded chances to acquire political experience, being able to speak or act does not mean they will be heard or respected²⁶⁹. This does not mean rotation is useless in this case. The frequency with which black women get to participate in a leading position is itself a factor in combatting these perceptions, and affirmative action might be helpful²⁷⁰. Because 'the kinds of power that come from white, or male, privilege [...] are never formally granted', and since their essence 'is precisely that their

leader'. See also Ward (2011[1966], p. 50–51), Graeber (2009, p. 20), and Amborn (2019, p. 15–16); notice the latter's use of the term "polycephalic" (many heads; many leaders) to describe anarchic African cultures.

²⁶⁶ See also Rodrigues (1999b, p. 92–93).

²⁶⁷ See section 6.3.2.

²⁶⁸ I thank colleague and friend Carlos André "Cazé" dos Santos (personal communication) for this insight. See also Robinson (1980, p. 42, 49), James C. Scott (1990, p. 221–224), and Amborn (2019, p. 138–139, 153–154).

²⁶⁹ See a not necessarily anarchist version of this idea in Pateman's critique of inclusive diversity within a contractualist framework as discussed by Abigail Thorne (2022b, 37:15–37:38).

²⁷⁰ The most recent example anarchists have practised and (or) embraced is probably Rojava's "dual leadership" model (*hevserok*), according to which 'everywhere leadership is vested in two people, and one of them must be a woman' (KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, p. 69–70). Consider, however, Coulthard (2014, p. 18–19).

holders never have to think about them’, combatting these imbalances must be a conscious collective endeavour (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 352–353). Roles must be “redistributed” in the realm of representation as well, for the stories people tell one another influence the way different agents are interpreted. How diversely are various groups and personalities represented? Who even gets to be a storyteller?

Finally, it might be essential to deconstruct common stories altogether. In this vein, John P. Clark (2013b, p. 264–265) criticises the ‘masculinist’ character of the virtues attributed to ideal citizens by Bookchin: ‘highly competent, very intelligent, morally scrupulous, and socially committed’. ‘As valuable as these qualities may be’, he continues, these people ‘are sometimes not the best community members’, and qualities such as ‘care, compassion, sensitivity, patience, generosity, and humility’ are often crucial for thriving egalitarian relations²⁷¹. Similarly, one may think with Simplican (2015, p. 3–4) that ‘no human can emulate the disciplined and idealized cognitive demands of the fictive democratic subject’, which ‘people with intellectual and developmental disabilities’ directly ‘subvert’.

In other words, rather than merely trying to get everyone accustomed to being a “leader” – which is, of course, *not nothing* – anarchists would also strive to change the features attributed to leadership, encouraging all to appreciate the ‘actual range of ways people act politically’ (SIMPLICAN, 2015, p. 3).

These axes²⁷² intersect in many ways. Books or computers are physical products, even means of production, and may also contain information; scant time as a barrier to leadership opportunities might relate to poverty. An incredibly interesting case (although there is no way to do it justice here) is that of “romantic affection”. It might be thought of as a “resource”; people want it (more often than not) and it is currently tied to many material advantages. However, it cannot be (genuinely) “collectively managed” or bought in the market. At the same time, it is a role²⁷³ in someone else’s life, and the way people are differently judged regarding

²⁷¹ Hunter (2019, p. 151–152) writes that, partly due to his harsh, marginalised male upbringing, he was ‘persuasive’, ‘organised’, had the ‘capacity to multi-task’, and felt more at ease in situations that were ‘stressful for those raised in comfortable environments’. Then he mentions how this was highly valued by social movements, whose ‘activities and ways of working were not changed in order to place less value on these characteristics’.

²⁷² For similar analyses, see Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 362–365) and Stiffoni (2021, p. 43).

²⁷³ See Keally McBride (2011, p. 163, emphasis added) on the role of love in Goldman’s theory: ‘love is not [...] redemptive, saving and transforming the world[...]. Instead, being cherished and nurtured gave her the conviction that there are *experiences and roles available other than those that are socially sanctioned*. [...] This knowledge gave her inspiration to change the world in such a way that such love would be more likely to blossom and more likely to persist, and that the pleasures of female sexuality would not have to be a miracle against all odds. In other words, rather than love changing the world, she concluded that she needed to change the world to make it safer for love’. This closely parallels the argument throughout this thesis that

their fitness for this role (in the affluent “West”) currently mirrors both representational and material inequalities along at least class, gender, and race divides (PONZANESI, 2005; CLARKE, 2011; CURINGTON; LUNDQUIST; LIN, 2021). Challenging these “imbalances of love” by deconstructing attributes of the role might entail fighting not only capitalism, ableism, and racism, but also heteronormativity, monogamy, and the gender system itself²⁷⁴.

In any case, a clear pattern emerges as anarchist concerns about these tangible equalities are shown to be strongly grounded in the underlying principle of non-domination as equality of forces. Equal satisfaction of needs is as important as equal power to define what is needed and how to measure this balance. Equal access to knowledge is as relevant as intellectual honesty and humility, coupled with widespread participation, in the production of science. Teaching everyone certain skill sets for taking on responsibility is as crucial as being critical of the match between the skills and the responsibilities, or the nature of the latter. However, no lived circumstance can be neglected in favour of a “political” equality based on the explicitness with which a constitution shuns domination, even if by this it meant sovereignty itself²⁷⁵. Conversely, that is why equalising circumstances is wanted: so that these deeper questions are asked, and the agency to (re)structure our lives in more significant ways is experienced.

Believers of political theologies deliberately seek sovereignty to guarantee property — of land, tools, manners, knowledge, prerogatives, etc.; to secure unrestrictions which mean one or many of the kinds of inequality described above. But as already mentioned in the beginning of this section, life is chaotic. Environmental changes, epistemological pitfalls, even personal and collective development itself, spur asymmetries of these kinds irrespective of, sometimes even *because* of, people’s best intentions (e.g. the will to use one’s privilege for social causes smothering the input of the oppressed). The question is how to respond to burgeoning inequality, whenever and however it emerges: in a conformist or in a creative way²⁷⁶.

Leaving inequalities or injustices unchallenged, not taking advantage of an existing equilibrium of forces nor seeking to build it so as to combat them, *normalises* the new situation. Then, not only statist will be defending “precedents” rather than top-down utopias, *normal* conditions themselves will be constituted by pressures for the have-nots, the ignorant, and the insecure to obey. The whims of elites will become commands not so much due to bullying

anarchist freedom relates to the non-dominating changeability of social patterns for the sake of meeting people’s diverse, and often odd, needs. See also Cerruti (2018[1934][a], p. 172) and Lowell (2023).

²⁷⁴ See section 5.2.2.

²⁷⁵ See section 6.3.2.

²⁷⁶ See note 62 in section 2.4, page 67, as well as Graeber’s criticism of statist misreadings of Jo Freeman’s classic argument about the “tyranny of structurelessness” in note 36 of section 4.1 (page 100).

(although that might be a factor), but because social norms operate to make their wishes difficult to ignore or even rewarding to satisfy. It is obedience to these norms that creates a measure of domination, one as large as the inequalities they uphold, for they instil the sense that no one is going to help rebel against the system. And at the end of the day, the general, bureaucratised norms of contemporary progressive regimes must be obeyed even by those who also get to command (intermittently or in other contexts), or hope to eventually do so. Anna Nguyen (2022), for a quirky example, reflects on a suggestion given to her by a fellow scholar regarding her outspokenness in the workplace: ‘If [she] wanted to stay in the department [... she] would have to find a way to “submit” in the least humiliating way for [herself]’. She was not a slave, and there was no clear master. Yet it was common wisdom that she had to *submit*.

For anarchists, therefore, sovereignty does not lead to non-domination, regardless of how regulated, consented, appealing, or competitive sovereign political institutions are. What does is establishing, protecting, and enhancing the conditions for voluntary and changing agreements that do not (re)produce hierarchy and the violence that accompanies it. These conditions are less in the terms of the agreements themselves, in what they prescribe or disavow, than in outlooks and practices that sustain an objective equality of forces. ‘The quest for equilibrium’, writes John P. Clark (2013a, p. 5–6), ‘is a creative project’ in which people have ‘over the course of history invented diverse modes of cooperation[...] and cultural self-expression’. The focus of the next chapter is therefore on two fundamental features of these outlooks and practices: diversity and mutual aid.

5 DIVERSITY AND MUTUAL AID

Nature is variety itself[...]. Uniformity is death.

Piotr Kropotkin ¹

Freedom is the result and the clearest expression of solidarity.

Mikhail Bakunin ²



ORDER WITHIN ANARCHISM RELATES TO BALANCE BETWEEN AGENTS. But this scenario can be fragile. It may refer to a group in which many, or everyone, would actually *want* to become hierarchically superior. Mutually matched in power, they would not be able to do so, but if certain circumstances arise – and they may be deliberately brought about by these agents – equilibrium will obviously fall apart.

As already explored in the introduction to the previous chapter, for early individualists, such as Tucker, balance among uncaring competitors ‘would offer no danger’³ (KROPOTKIN, 2000[1910], p. 9). Anarchism increasingly moved away from this position, recognising that widespread disposition for predation will result in imbalance run amok: ‘whoever scores the first victory gains certain advantages that almost always guarantee [...] further successes’⁴ (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][h]). Even more, as just discussed in section 4.3.2, disruption can develop accidentally or unintentionally. One may simply “find oneself” in a situation of privilege; one in which the risks of power-grabbing are diminished, and its rewards, otherwise ethereally hypothetical, feel solid, perhaps even “rightfully” or “naturally” one’s own⁵.

This chapter deals with two premises and prospects anarchists employ to structure sustainable balance: mutual aid and diversity. The first represents a cooperation that structures relationships, while the latter refers to conditions providing resourcefulness for change and development. As shall be explored in the next section, competing can become enticing for any given agent stuck in a miserable (even if egalitarian) situation. Conversely, equality is key to maintaining situations of complex cooperation among varied agents; inequality breeds competition and, as shall be seen especially in section 6.1, conformity.

¹ Each sentence is from a different work: 2021[1902], p. 53 and 2019[1898], p. 20–21, respectively.

² Bakunin, 1964a, p. 156.

³ See also Kinna (2011, p. 58).

⁴ See also Prichard (2019, p. 85).

⁵ See e.g. Cavallero and Gago (2021, p. 52–53).

Understanding the experience anarchists call freedom requires untangling this tightly knit conceptual system: curtailing discussions of mutual aid and diversity in the last chapter was already difficult (cross-referencing was rampant); discussing separately what each one of these two concepts means for anarchists is next to impossible. Without diversity, cooperation is brittle, and the inverse is also true⁶: solidarity is ‘capable of reconciling all present antagonisms in society, otherwise irreconcilable’, causing ‘the liberty of each to find not its limits, but its complement, the necessary condition of its continual existence[,] in the liberty of all’⁷ (MALATESTA, 2014[1892][a]).

In any case, this coherent “system” is a political project, a set of values, and there would be no point in imposing it, for this would imply a fatal imbalance (this was already discussed in the previous chapter and shall be further reviewed in section 5.3). For it to function as anarchists envision it, not only must no one be ‘equipped to exploit others’; work must be done so that they are not ‘*inclined*’ to do so either (MALATESTA, 2014[1897], emphasis added). The question, however, is how people get to *espouse* such values in the first place; how they become “disinclined” toward domineering behaviour.

Anarchists do not answer this by simple appeals to human nature⁸ (GUSTAVO, 2016[1928], p. 99; CARRIER, 1993; MORLAND, 1997; GRAEBER, 2009, p. 352–353; FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, p. 140, 165; JUN, 2011, p. 161; FRANKS, 2012, p. 61; KINNA, 2016, p. 146–149, 192, 2019b, p. 84; DUARTE, R. D. M., 2021, p. 133; BAKER, 2022b). In fact, such rhetoric is more often found in statist “state of nature” arguments⁹ (WALL, 2021, p. 25). These can be found in ancient Western sources, including Polybius and Horace (BARNES, 1923, p. 38–39); Marshall Sahlins (2005) called them the essence of an entire metaphysics, going back to at least Thucydides¹⁰:

⁶ For example, cooperation facilitates the survival of mutations: as Kelly Clancy (2017) reports, ‘populations can relax selection on themselves through their own [cooperative] behavior’, allowing them to ‘explore the fitness landscape’ and thus ‘stumble on large adaptive innovations faster’ (see the discussion on “competition as experimentation” in the beginning of chapter 4). For Bookchin (2011, p. 6), diversity may be seen as a source of greater ecocommunity stability, but is also an ‘ever-expanding, albeit nascent, source of freedom within nature, a medium for objectively anchoring varying degrees of choice, self-directiveness, and participation by lifeforms in their own evolution’. Since among humans cooperation may relate to unequal mutual dependence, as shall be seen in the next section, anarchists desire a kind of mutual aid that *actively* encourages the growth of variety as this helps sustain balance; conversely any communist interdependence they might approve of, for example, exists ‘not in opposition to but in support of individual freedom’ (GRAEBER; WENGROW, 2021, p. 48) — see section 5.2.2, as well as Rodrigues (1999c, p. 27).

⁷ See also Padilha (2021, p. 72).

⁸ I have discussed anarchism and human nature elsewhere (SILVA, P. R. da, 2018).

⁹ That something was natural was not however only a reason to decry it. Values could also be imposed on the basis of their declared naturalness; see e.g. Straumann (2016, p. 251–252, 317–318). Still, the two arguments are combinable in defence of sovereignty, with discourses on the “animality” of others naturalising power inequalities (CORREIA; WALL, 2021c, p. 4).

¹⁰ Whose *magnum opus* Hobbes translated. See also Bookchin (1982, p. 109) and Lorca (2003, p. 3–5).

For more than two millennia, the peoples we call “Western” have been haunted by [...] an apparition of human nature so avaricious and contentious that, unless it is somehow governed, it will reduce society to anarchy. [...] This] is a specifically Western metaphysics, for it supposes an opposition between nature and culture that is distinctive to the West and contrastive with the many other peoples who think beasts are basically human rather than humans are basically beasts — for them there is no “nature,” let alone one that has to be overcome. (SAHLINS, 2005, p. 1)

Anarchists have historically responded to these claims by *also* including some form of “benevolence” into an idea of what humans are. As Samuel Clark (2007, p. 39) then notes, ‘someone who believes that humans are wholly and irredeemably self-interested may read anarchist claims that we are also or sometimes altruistic as expressing unbounded optimism’¹¹. As a whole, however, humanity for anarchists is nothing but possibility: climbing up from the slippery slope of sovereignty is not a certainty but rather something that must be tended to. As we successfully do so, institutions become more anarchic and, according to anarchists, encourage pro-social desires. They make it more likely that, rather than tactics for self-reliance and deceiving others (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 95), newer generations are given the means to navigate equality and diversity through cooperation, even if this “virtuous cycle” can always be disrupted.

In other words, anarchist principles cannot be imposed, and will not come naturally; they must be nurtured, and insights from the previous chapter indicate how anarchists strive to do so. Balance of forces must be legitimised so that people are motivated to build it, but unless this also leads to substantive equality, structural incentives will militate against it. Likewise, engendering an appetite for diversity and mutual aid involves both acting directly on people’s relations in a material sense *and* fostering different perspectives on subjectivity.

The first strategy refers to the flexible nature of the human character for anarchists: statistically speaking, one cannot expect goodwill if circumstances punish it (or reward cruelty). ‘It is precisely because people are not angels’, writes Ken Knabb (2010[1997], p. 11), ‘that it’s necessary to eliminate the setup that enables some of them to become very efficient devils’¹². For Kropotkin, ‘utopia meant changing the environment in ways that enabled different behaviours

¹¹ See also Ricardo Diogo Mainsel Duarte (2021, p. 133–134).

¹² See also Parsons (2010[1890], p. 2), Goodman (1968 apud COHN, 2006, p. 215), Amborn (2019, p. 11), Cox (2019, p. 205 apud ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 88–89) and Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 24). Note that, in addition to considerations about general human nature, this also relates to condemnations of specific individuals or groups (see note 9 above, too). As Stuart Christie once wrote: ‘before I went to prison my world-view was simple and clear cut[...]. But the ambiguities in people I came across in prison made me uneasy and I began to question my assumptions about the nature of good and evil. I came to recognise that apparently kind people sometimes had a duplicitous side to them that was amoral, treacherous, self seeking or brutal, while those with a reputation for cruelty sometimes showed themselves capable of great selflessness and

to flourish' (KINNA, 2016, p. 128); for Ward, anarchism required 'a different sort of human environment, not a different sort of human being'¹³ (WILSON, M., 2011, p. 65).

This is the theme of the next section: 'mutual aid can be encouraged or inhibited by the kinds of social organisation we adopt' (JEPPS, 2020). And, concerning such social organisation, anarchists do not want equality between "independent beings", but one produced by interdependence. They want a scenario in which one looks around and concludes (because this would actually be the case) that one's good quality of life depends on the assent and effort of variegated others, *as much as* these others' well being depends on one's agreement and initiative. If this is the case, if things are not set up to allow some to dominate others (nor to encourage all to try to become dominators in some sense), then cooperation structures daily life. This life being good, people would, more likely than not, work to reproduce it, hopefully even fight to protect it; they would espouse its values and frown at sovereignty-based alternatives.

However, agents in this scenario could still support it *strategically*, without an axiological attachment to it. In other words, they might not *really want* this so much as think this is unfortunately preferable at the moment. Subjectivity cannot be dismissed, for it influences the efforts that can change circumstances. 'We must also try to extirpate the hierarchical orientation of our psyches', wrote Bookchin (1982, p. 340), 'not merely remove the institutions that embody social domination'; for Malatesta (2014[1922][b]), in fact, 'everything depends on what the people are capable of wanting'. In section 5.2, I turn to the second strategy outlined above: fostering a different understanding of human subjectivity; one that leads to valuing diversity and seeking equilibrium through egalitarian rebellious mutual aid. In this case, anarchists want a scenario in which people find these values to be integral to their sense of who they are, rather than "external" demands.

In the end, these two strategies (acting on the circumstances to influence inclinations; reframing the subjectivities to influence action on circumstances) are, each one considered in isolation, necessary but insufficient. This is, for anarchists, as it should be; outside and inside, materiality and subjectivity, are woven together¹⁴ (WILSON, C., 1886, p. 3; BONOMO, 2007, p. 183–184; GALANOPOULOS, 2017, p. 81; RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, p. 54–55). They operate not exactly as two sides of a coin but as a thaumatrope: a toy in the form of a thin two-sided shape, with half of an image on its front side and the other, complementary half on its back. Any

generosity of spirit. This didn't make me cynical, but it did make me less judgemental about my fellow human beings' (THORNE, J., 2021[1979], p. 245).

¹³ See also Goldman (2009[1910], p. 27).

¹⁴ Tangentially, see also Graeber (2001, p. 46, 143) and Garcia (2018, p. 387n27).

one side only reveals a partial picture, but if the shape is spun around quickly, and observed from its side, the human eye captures the complete figure *within the movement*. Agents and institutions exist simultaneously as constant, intertwined becoming; as partial manifestations of the more fundamental notion of social processes in movement¹⁵.

With that in mind, anarchists support a combination of the two strategies¹⁶: they employ discourses about humankind to encourage the construction of diverse networks of mutual aid, strengthening interdependence, which is the material basis for a form of intersubjectivity that is emancipatory rather than oppressive. People take ‘and will always take into consideration the interests of [others] in proportion to the establishment of relations of mutual interest between them’, considered Kropotkin (2014[1900], p. 639), ‘and the more so the more these others affirm their own sentiments and desires’¹⁷. Finally, in section 5.3, I discuss how these practices and their resulting patterns are not schemes to impose freedom as a future end result: liberty is felt through action itself – something captured, within the anarchist tradition, in the notion of prefigurative strategy.

5.1 INTERDEPENDENCE

*God does not wish [people] to live apart,
and therefore [God] does not reveal to them
what each one needs for [themselves];
[God] wishes them to live united, and therefore
reveals to each of them what is necessary for all.*

Lev Tolstoy¹⁸

Anarchism is universal interdependence.

Charlotte Wilson¹⁹

For anarchists, the ‘complete independence of every individual [...] is not merely impossible’ but ‘inconceivable’ (MORRIS, W., 1890, p. 5 apud KINNA, 2012a, p. 38). Humans ‘are extrusions of the ecosystem’, writes Jamie Heckert (2012, p. 50–51); not ‘separate, independent beings’ but mutually dependent bodies²⁰.

¹⁵ See also the “topological approach” in human geography as discussed by Carrie Mott (2016).

¹⁶ See e.g. DeLamotte (2004, p. 24).

¹⁷ See also Rucker (2009[1938], p. 54).

¹⁸ Tolstoy, 2004[1881], p. 24.

¹⁹ Charlotte Wilson, 1886, p. 3.

²⁰ See also Bottici (2019).

Surely the dichotomy between dependence and independence works to an extent. New-born babies and those with minimally responsive wakefulness may be absolutely dependent; Crusoe can only be said to depend on others in the abstract sense of sharing a planet²¹. Daily life usually involves switching between the two poles along a spectrum (DOMINGOS *et al.*, 2022, p. 289). Everyone requires or fancies help of several kinds and is effectively independent when achieving goals without supervision. This situated or functional independence is how we discern learning; we teach, or otherwise help, so that others can get out of a situation of unilateral dependence.

Even further, there is no denying that “independence” features often, and prominently, in anarchist texts. From Proudhon’s approval of the right to use what is necessary for ‘one’s economic independence’ (GRAHAM, 2010, p. 2) to Goldman’s (2009[1910], p. 28) call for ‘independent spirits’, one finds exhortations of the idea in an even larger scale: true internationalism, Kropotkin wrote, is ‘the independence of each nationality’, just as the essence of anarchy is ‘in the independence of each individual’ (MILLER, M. A., 1976, p. 231 apud PRICE, W., 2022).

However, anarchists mostly talked about situated independence, or referred to remedying unilateral or asymmetric dependence (e.g. a slave-master relationship, conceived more broadly as seen in section 4.3.1). For Magón (1977, p. 62), for example, liberty and justice spring from being ‘able to live without depending on a master’; for Malatesta (2014[1897]), anarchy does not mean that everyone ‘should be sufficient unto [themselves] and do for [themselves] in everything without trade-off or pooled effort’²². ‘We’re sure [...] you’ve wanted [...] to make an independent life for yourself’, wrote the anarchist group Mujeres Libres (2022[1938], p. 4–5) to fellow women during the Spanish Revolution; however, they further explained: ‘we want you to have the same freedom as your brothers, [...] your voice to be heard with the same respect as your father’s’, and this requires ‘the help of other women[...], you have to rely on them and have them rely on you’^a.

This also frequently appeared in discussions about romantic relations: for Cerruti or Shifu, for example, if women remained economically dependent, unequal, the approach then

²¹ Although, of course, he’s a fictional character. In any case, sharing a planet is consequential for two sufficiently large *groups* of people. See also Malatesta (2014[1892][a]) (‘the well-being [...] or liberty] of [someone in the Apennines also depends] on all the great and small circumstances which affect the human being in any spot whatever of the world’), Ward (1991b, p. 7), as well as Doukas (2003, p. 148–149) and Fiscella (2015, p. 216–217) on the politics of distance, the latter remarking that ‘by removing prisons, poverty, enslavement, and dictatorship far away from the sight of those who make decisions’, it is hard for these to ‘avoid casting relationships’ in the ‘illusory terms’ of independent agents.

²² See also Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 3).

known as “free love” would leave them vulnerable²³ (CERRUTI, 2018[1934][a], p. 172; KREBS, 1998, p. 104–105). For Bakunin (2010, p. 43–44), to love was to want the loved one’s “complete independence”, but this meant not putting another under one’s dependence; it would be very unlike lovers to barricade themselves against providing care for and being influenced by each other (and unlike Bakunin to think in these terms)²⁴ (BAKUNIN, 1975, p. 17–18). For Kropotkin, apropos, ‘freedom was about recognising interdependence’ instead of ‘seeking independence’; being free ‘did not mean being released from social ties and obligations, or asserting uniqueness through egoistic actions, as if those social ties did not or should not exist’ (KINNA, 2016, p. 193).

The point is that no one can be an independent being *overall*. The ‘absolute independence’ of ‘idealists and metaphysicians’²⁵ is ‘a wild absurdity’ (BAKUNIN, 1971[1871][b], p. 257); ‘largely an illusion thrown up by the market, whose anonymity makes it possible to ignore the fact that we rely on other people for just about everything’²⁶ (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 221). As mentioned in the introduction to chapter 4, cooperation is less an optional course of action and more the bedrock of life – even of individuation. We are enmeshed, writes Nelson (2021, introduction), but the question is how this mutual dependence is organised; ‘how we negotiate, suffer, and dance with that enmeshment’²⁷.

The statist reply might be that independence is only an aspirational ideal and, as such, an actually good way to organise mutual dependence²⁸ – in the context of commerce, for example. It allows for framing dependency in itself as repugnant; tolerable, at best, if temporary. Even if we never become completely independent, we should strive to be self-sufficient to the fullest extent, living without assistance from others as much as possible. And if this is perhaps too “harsh” a thing to defend, the ideal’s pull is still strong, as it relates to freedom as unrestriction by allowing for an ever larger scope for self-determination. In other words, like liberty for many liberals, independence could be counterbalanced by other values, such as community; but, like freedom, it can still play an enormous role in legitimising certain institutions and cultural patterns.

The anarchist rejoinder is that organising sociability around independence encourages and increases inequality by emphasising competition over cooperation. As mutual dependence

²³ See note 273 in section 4.3.2, page 172, as well as the discussion on intersectionality in section 5.2.2, around page 236, and Ricardo Diogo Mainsel Duarte (2021, p. 205–206).

²⁴ See also de Cleyre (2004[1907], p. 309), Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, p. 200), and Lowell (2023, 10:56–11:15).

²⁵ See section 3.1, as well as, tangentially, Ward (1991a, p. 14).

²⁶ See also the discussion on generosity and selfishness in the introduction to the next section.

²⁷ See also Bakunin (1975, p. 23).

²⁸ See note 13 in the introduction to chapter 4, page 93, as well as Ward (1991b, p. 126–127).

is thought of as optional for some or inimical for all, rather than generally inevitable or enjoyable, its optimisation may be neglected – indeed, attempts to organise it would entail “violence” against the spirit of independence, whose entire point is not having to give or ask for help. Furthermore, does not the notion that everyone *can* become independent allow for more easily loathing, and blaming, those who are not²⁹ currently so? This world view plays with the fire of human cognitive biases, tingeing reality so that those who require assistance are seen as a riff-raff of gatecrashers burdening the righteous with their neediness³⁰.

Heckert (2012, p. 50–51) notes that hierarchy ‘relies on the belief in separation’³¹, but perhaps more importantly the opposite is also the case. As seen earlier in section 4.3.1, domination is a ‘cooperatively created’ capacity, not one of individuals (‘except derivatively’); ‘individuals dominate [...] because they have the cooperative (not necessarily the voluntary) support of others’ (CLARK, S., 2007, p. 65, emphasis removed). In other words, no one would be able to establish one’s independence without a (hierarchical) social setting that enabled it. A classic scenario is that of the slave-owner head of family, who does not “need” anyone because he can, due to threat of force (however indirectly), reliably expect everything he wants to be delivered to him (anything beyond his reach can come under it through further conquest). Another one is the market: payment conceals the buyer’s literal dependence beneath the seller’s artificial need for money, the symbolic artefact that supposedly marks the mutual *independence* of agents but in fact tends to enslave one side (BERKMAN, 1929, p. 16; CERRUTI, 2018[1927], p. 63; KINNA, 2016, p. 142; GRAEBER, 2018, p. 243). In both cases the aforementioned psychological mechanisms contribute with these social settings’ ideological environments. The conquered, having demonstrated weakness, could not become independent and must therefore serve. In the case of the market, consider how the wealthy pay to have all their needs cared for so seamlessly that they no longer register this as dependence; they get to experience their lives as direct consequences of their own individual labour. The poor, on the other hand, exponentially encumbered with handling all kinds of tasks themselves (or failing to do so), are often judged by the first as lazy, or bad decision-makers. Class is seen as ‘the residue left over when people either work hard and prosper, or fail to do so and flounder, in each case getting what they deserve’³² (FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, p. 289). In summary, the imbalance implied by striving to

²⁹ This does not preclude current “dependents” from hating other ones *and* themselves. See Christian readings of Epictetus in section 2.1 (page 38), note 38 in section 6.1.1 (page 265), and more generally section 5.2.

³⁰ See the discussion about “burdens” in section 4.3.2, especially around page 158.

³¹ See also White, Springer, and Souza (2016, p. 19).

³² See also Skeggs (1997, p. 1), Fiscella (2015, p. 182–183), and David Brooks (2020).

become or remain independent turns the already scrawny reciprocity of purportedly independent beings into denial of service, loans with interest, charity³³ – which overpowers, controls, and humiliates (BOOKCHIN, 1982, p. 144–145; CAVALLERO; GAGO, 2021, p. 38).

Independence as a normative ideal therefore relates to sovereign power. Unrestriction-based notions of freedom assume that *someone* must be independent – the individual, the territorial group, or humanity as a whole (in relation to “nature”). Placing this relevant agent in relations of equal dependence would be unfathomable (they should be *less* restrained, not more!). But for some to be (more) independent, others have to be made relatively (more) dependent; working toward it, even if it is recognised as an unachievable goal, means doing things that push others into unilateral or asymmetric dependence in more and more relations and fields of activity. Anarchists find this unacceptable, and thus operate by a logic that is incompatible with the unrestricted paradigm. ‘Kropotkin’s idea of freedom would never satisfy those who understood liberty as independence’, ponders Kinna (2016, p. 147); ‘he acknowledged the difference’, the ‘incommensurability’, even, ‘between the two perspectives’. But then anarchists seem to be left in the uncomfortable position of defending dependency itself.

Mitchell Verter (2021, 9:38–10:18, 12:38–17:46) attempts to do so with the aid of Emmanuel Levinas and feminist theory. Political philosophies must often neglect the reality of motherhood³⁴, as having been born disturbs attempts ‘to posit one’s own individual self as an unconditioned first principle’. Encouraging us to embrace ‘the dependencies that constitute who we are’, Verter calls for a sociopolitical system based on what Sara Ruddick termed “maternal practice”, which ‘does not require enthusiasm or even love’³⁵, but ‘to see vulnerability and respond to it with care rather than abuse, indifference, or flight’.

Maternal practice and its complementary embrace of dependence, especially in the long run, is said to generate an ever-increasing debt toward the past, making private property, for

³³ On charity, see the discussion at the end of section 5.2.2.

³⁴ For example: ‘consider men as if [...] sprung out of the earth’, wrote Hobbes (1991[1642], p. 205), ‘and suddenly, like mushrooms, come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other’.

³⁵ See also Kinna (2016, p. 132), and especially Lansbury and Saltman (2021) on the attachment paradigm (which I bring up again in section 5.2.1): ‘attachment is, very simply put, [...] a whole body and mind system, like respiration or digestion[...]. And it’s a series of cues essentially that tell us when we need to go and find safety in the person who is charged with our care. [...] And] if we think about breathing and digesting, [...] there’s efficient and there’s less efficient, and there are ways to fix those systems. It’s not a moral issue, it’s not an ethical issue, and it’s always something that we can shift’. On the other hand, there *is* something about characterising such care as “maternal” that is slightly problematic (see note 237 in section 5.2.2, on page 243). Maternal care itself, one tends to forget, requires solidarity by others (POOLE, 2018), and more than that, as Nelson (2021, chap. 1) explains, the problem is in ‘relying on the maternal as an idealized model for selfless care provision without contending with the experience of actual mothers[... , who have] their own needs, not to mention an understanding of caregiving as historically and psychically interwoven with disintegration, failure, inequity, and coercion’. See also Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 170–171).

example, impossible (VERTER, 2021, 15:20–16:47). As early anarchists insisted, ‘the individual is a spark of the soul stream that we know as humanity’; ‘what we are, is what our ancestors are in us’ (GALANOPOULOS, 2017, p. 81). However, this is not the same as saying that everyone owes each other consideration³⁶. Debt tends to mean, after all, the organisation of obedience (CAVALLERO; GAGO, 2021, p. 21) through ‘guilt, shame and loneliness’^b (MARTINS, F., 2021, p. 12). “Ancestrals” could hang over people’s heads, demanding the perpetuation of the status quo regardless of discontent³⁷.

As briefly mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the lack of dynamism this could imply is precisely what might impel some toward independence: escaping from a bad situation, one in which equilibrium means no one has the power to change anything. Equality ‘should not involve long hours of painful toil for little more than the necessities of life’ (MBAH; IGARIWEY, 1997, p. 15). Of small, parochial rural communities in Europe, Reclus (2013[1905][a], p. 204–205) commented that ‘the routine that binds them to the hereditary soil also holds them tightly in the grip of the customs of the past’, and so ‘however free they may appear to be, they nevertheless possess the souls of slaves’. Equal forces in this case work as dams against the flood of *any* change (RECLUS, 2002[1898], p. 26). Proudhon prescribed that ‘social groups should relate commutatively or horizontally, according to need, in recognition of their mutual vulnerability and interdependence, and on the basis of reciprocal equality of status’ (PRICHARD, 2012, p. 103). In this scenario, as discussed in chapter 4, balance would push agents to negotiate by stripping them of any ability to dictate terms. But what happens if a stand-off lasts for too long? Supremacy would become alluring for those looking for change; only superior violence could break the weight of tradition³⁸.

Moreover, “embracing dependence” is perilous because it can undermine the impulse for situated independence that can rebalance a given relation. Even if this “primordial debt” functioned more like a “progressive” metaphor (every living being must be generous so as to repay what the universe has provided), there is a historical link between this notion, its “administration”, and hierarchy:

³⁶ Compare with the discussion on communism in section 4.3.2: everyone’s dependence on what came before makes it impossible to measure “original” inputs, but interpreting this as a *debt* is a dangerous operation.

³⁷ See e.g. Graeber (2007, p. 57) and Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 399–409, 414–418). See also Nelson (2021, introduction).

³⁸ See the discussion about being “self-determined but not self-determining” in section 4.3.1, page 139, as well as Ziegler (2023, 9:23–10:14). Also note that this is the explicit ideology of many present-day fascists, such as those in Poland who dub it “legal impossibilism”: ‘the notion that it is impossible for a democratically elected Polish government to fulfill the “nation’s will” because of the checks and balances imposed on it by the Polish constitution’ (DAVIES, 2018).

theories of existential debt always end up becoming ways of justifying – or laying claim to – structures of authority. The case of the Hindu intellectual tradition is telling here. The debt to humanity appears only in a few early texts, and is quickly forgotten. Almost all later Hindu commentators ignore it and instead put their emphasis on a man’s debt to his father. (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 68–69, emphasis in the original)

But dependence does not need to be seen as positive; just “neutrally” thinking of it as unavoidable, as disability and feminist theorists often do (INTRONA, 2021, p. 7; LIMA COSTA; SILVA; BECHE, 2022, p. 10), has its own political consequences (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 253). ‘Impairment is the rule, and normalcy is the fantasy’, writes Lennard J. Davis (2002, p. 31 apud INTRONA, 2023, p. 87); ‘dependence is the reality, and independence grandiose thinking’. The “spirit” of equal satisfaction of needs is even extended by this. Instead of being meant as a mechanism to “compensate” for those “unable to work”, the very mechanics of contributing to (re)producing sociability must be rethought, as this contribution, an essential form of agency, is *itself a need*, and always takes place in a scenario of multiple, very contextual and unique forms of impairment. In other words,

we need to stop thinking about disabled people as those who can’t contribute to society; we [...] can, and we want to. Often it is the capitalist state itself which imposes restrictions on our contributions. For example, insisting on structured working hours; [...] imposing work practices which are profitable, but not accessible, and so on. So we need to [...] ensure [disabled people] have involvement rather than be seen as people who can’t contribute and need looking after.³⁹ (O’BRIEN; EMERY, 2023, 20:10–21:07)

Not seeing dependence as foul is the first step to organise mutuality better, which for anarchists means in *egalitarian* ways. This is, in fact, the key for undoing the contradiction of approving and disapproving of dependence at the same time, for *balance* neutralises its issues (KINNA, 2016, p. 147). This even concerns ecological relations more generally. ‘It may seem precarious[...] for species to require each other to survive’, Clancy (2017) explains, ‘but the overwhelming ubiquity of interdependence suggest[s] it must have serious advantages’⁴⁰. Equality is directly related to such advantages; ‘ecology knows no “king of beasts” and no “lowly creatures”’, only ‘ecosystems in which living things are interdependent and play complementary roles in perpetuating the stability of the natural order’⁴¹ (BOOKCHIN, 1982, p. 5, 36–37).

³⁹ Regarding a direct connection between disability justice and social ecology – something I also deal with in this section for its obvious connection to the idea of interdependence – see McLeod (2019).

⁴⁰ Notoriously within anarchism, see also Kropotkin (2021[1902], p. 33). Moreover, Anthony Ince (2022, 16:54–17:18) adds that the concept of “ecosystem”, along with others like “regions”, ‘have limited appeal in statist thinking because they’re generated from below, through everyday practices, and not only by humans but also ungovernable or even feral non-human agents’.

⁴¹ One such system – “patches” of interdependent mushrooms – picked Erica Lagalisse’s curiosity, as she saw in it a pattern similar to that of grassroots activists: their coalitions are not “hygienic” networks that connect

This explains how dependence *may* be wanted; however the “existing order” might become a problem. As Kropotkin observed, ‘our interdependence can be more or less coerced or enjoyed’ (JEPPS, 2020). The challenge is thus having egalitarian dependence conserve (ideally, enhance) the agency of all involved, so that it can be appreciated rather than merely endured.

The answer to this challenge might lie in community. Mutual dependence can take many forms for any two agents. Some are unequal, asymmetric; those over which the illusion of independence is constructed⁴². ‘At present we live under a vast system of cooperation’, wrote Magón (1977, p. 87), but a ‘hideously oppressive’ one which denies ‘the equal right to life’ to the co-operators who, ‘in a thousand grades of varying dependence’, are not free⁴³. Then there are equal forms, which I distinguish by labelling *interdependences*. These can be reciprocal, complementary, or both. Two people might rely on one another for nearly everything, for few things, for no “thing” other than companionship, but also to “keep their distance” if they do not want to be around one another at all. However, this is always mediated within a larger set of relations; only then can the mutual *independence* of “keeping one’s distance”, for example, exist: with the rest of a “tribe” providing the material basis for this kind of relation (i.e. they would be independent *from one another* but not *in general*).

However, the tribe may refuse (or not be able) to do that, forcing them to live together. Or, if only one of them wants to transform the relationship, they might fail to prevent domineering behaviour (either “conservative” or “transformative”). To refer to what was discussed in section 4.2.1, a demand for the unity of a network of mutuality (in this case, “the tribe”) does not truly pacify anything. Whoever can hijack its decision-making processes, and (or) convince all other members that one’s favoured outcome must be enforced in light of the group’s interests, will get their way (NEWMAN, S., 2010, p. 179 apud WILSON, M., 2011, p. 38).

As a consequence, agency-enhancing, equal mutual dependence is brought about not so much by “community”, but by *diversity*⁴⁴ (CULTIVE RESISTÊNCIA, 2022, p. 57), which means both participating in a wide array of intersecting communities *and* variation within these very

individual autonomous nodes, and neither do they subsume everyone into one homogenous species’; there is a lot of overlap instead, as well as ‘impurities of all kinds’ (ZIEGLER, 2022b, p. 66).

⁴² Independence and, one might add, control (SCHULMAN, 2016, chap. 5); see section 6.3.1. Solidarity can be a reactionary force, not only because oppressors might help one another, but when some of the oppressed collaborate to compete with other sectors of the browbeaten, or when well-meaning people help oppressors (“they are human too”) or help others in their social circles better fit into stifling moulds or perform servile roles (ERVIN, 2009[1993]; GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 326; HAIDER, 2018, p. 56; MENDES, S. C., 2021a, p. 104). See also Coulthard (2014, chap. 1).

⁴³ See section 6.2.1.

⁴⁴ Tangentially (and ironically) see also Prichard (2012, p. 97–103).

networks of interdependence⁴⁵. ‘It is diversity and not unity’, wrote Ward (2011[1992], p. 287), that ‘creates the kind of society in which you and I can most comfortably live’⁴⁶. Ecology again bears such conclusion out. ‘In nature, balance and harmony are achieved by ever-changing differentiation, by ever-expanding diversity’, explained Bookchin (1982, p. 24); stability ‘is a function not of simplicity and homogeneity but of complexity and variety’⁴⁷.

The first meaning of diversity is about leveraging more agents in response to disputes; about (re)balancing forces (if needed) through their presence, their care, their resources⁴⁸. This extends the notion of “balanced forces” beyond a simple equality among atomised individuals, entailing, instead, ‘an *interwoven network*’ of ‘an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, [...] temporary or more or less permanent [...] for all possible purposes’⁴⁹ (KROPOTKIN, 2000[1910], p. 3, emphasis added). The ‘interpenetration of social networks and institutions’ may obviate ‘the need for centralized power’, writes Amborn (2019, p. 2), as it gets people to help one another be heard and respected in their various communities without becoming a dominating force. This horizontally, and to a certain extent spontaneously⁵⁰, boosts confidence, produces knowledge, and cushions the impact of changes.

⁴⁵ Ritter (1980, p. 26–27) admits a variety of models of community ‘advanced’ by anarchists, from productive enterprises to ‘every kind of cooperative association’, even “conversations”, yet he fails to conceive that one could be in a lot of such communities simultaneously and that this fundamentally changes the dynamic he describes between the individual and “community” in the abstract — see also Bookchin (2011[1992], p. 4). This is the fatal flaw in an already strange argument that makes anarchists seem incredibly conformist (WILSON, M., 2011, p. 66). This is, in a sense, the same issue with Robinson’s (1980, p. 163–164) reading of anarchism, except he finds this diversity in non-Western anarchistic practice, as shall be seen below.

⁴⁶ See also Honeywell (2012, p. 122).

⁴⁷ One may also talk about “pluralism” — see e.g. Springer (2011) — a word which does not seem to be used as often among anarchists, possibly because it is associated with liberal rhetoric. Diversity evokes detour, deviance, divergence; orthogonal or concurrent arrangements rather than parallel ones. People and relations might be plural but conformed to an overall pattern, evolving in a same rhythm, while diversity seems to denote variety of a more substantive nature.

⁴⁸ See the discussion about mediation in section 4.2.2, as well as Robinson (1980, p. 203). Finally, see also Amborn (2019, p. 144, emphases in the original) on appeals in ‘hierarchical societies’: ‘a *reduced* elite furnished with higher powers has the right to revise and abrogate lower court decisions’. In anarchic societies, however, ‘large gatherings with an *expanded* sociopolitical integration framework are charged with finding solutions benefiting consensus that elude other bodies’.

⁴⁹ See also Cinazo (2007, p. 127–128) and Springer (2014, p. 253).

⁵⁰ See Kropotkin’s quote at the end of the introduction to this chapter. “Participating in a community” is meant as establishing mutual dependence so that the problems one faces becomes other agents in the network’s problems too, with the latter’s well being or the portion of it they derive from being in this community *depending* to a certain extent on one’s well being. In a sense, the early Bakunin (2016[1866], p. 6–7) mirrored this logic when he discussed a weird “right”: to abuse or kill (but not subjugate or enslave, somehow) an individual who ‘no longer wish[ed] to take part’ of any group and thus fell out of any one’s ‘guarantee and protection’ (later he would of course discuss universal human identification, allowing for the remaking of social bonds). A much less “cold” way of discussing this is that people just become friendly when sharing spaces or activities, and thus interested in each other’s happiness (see note 36 in section 1.2, page 27). Regarding decolonial struggles, Tawinikay (2021[2018]) urges white people to ‘understand what struggles are about and [get to] know who is participating in them’, building ‘meaningful relationships outside of the [struggle], as friends’. I shall return to all of this (with “colder” tools) in the next section.

East African polycephalic societies have integrated conflict potential structurally: there is a complementary arrangement of important societal institutions, from the lineage system with parallel lines and heritable offices, to the territorial associations, generation group system, and societally desirable associations of personal networks. These make equilibrium possible, though hardly inevitable[...]. This array of fields with their different orientations is a precondition for a polycephalic form of socialization. Only a multitude of contradictory interests can produce a diversity of power relations opposed to centralization and requiring constant recalibration. (AMBORN, 2019, p. 150)

The mere existence of this diversity tends to offer practicable “exit options”. For example, when people establish and practice the ‘responsibility of hospitality’, as Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 18) put it, then one can talk about real “freedom of movement”: one can leave because there are tangible alternatives elsewhere⁵¹, and thus ‘acute limits’ are placed ‘on creating abusive social relations’. ‘Fluid movements forged across diverse populations’ were Kropotkin’s model for ‘cooperative living’, not finding an “optimal combination” of relations and fighting for its perpetuity⁵² (KINNA, 2016, p. 105).

Still, being in more networks does not necessarily mean that anyone in them will think “out of the box” when facing a predicament. And in this case, even “moving” might not suffice if a same pattern occurs in different places with other people, leading to similar issues. The second meaning of diversity therefore refers to variety of *perspectives*, of *kinds* of agents and relations, as anarchists defend the development of a ‘positive relationship with difference’⁵³ (CRIMETHINC, 2020a apud LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 128–129). Living with “bad-tempered” or “grumpy” individuals, for example, might be challenging (hence the need to build strong communities, defined by the IAF (2020[2009]) as those which ‘embrace diversity’ rather than ‘suppress those who don’t fit’⁵⁴) but these traits seem to be connected with people’s ‘sense of fairness’ and ‘haphazard innovation, or so-called “unstructured” thinking’⁵⁵ (GORVETT, 2016). “Eccentrics” often serve as a ‘reserve of potential talent and insight that can be called on’ in ‘a crisis or unprecedented turn of affairs’ (GRAEBER; WENGROW, 2021, p. 97). On embracing neurodiversity, Ben-Moshe *et al.* (2009, p. 114, emphases in the original) write that ‘anarchist theory foregrounds diversity as the great social reservoir of human particularity, with people, *all* different, working together *in common* toward mutual goals’.

⁵¹ Compare with states not being able to ‘guarantee a practicable right of exit to its citizens’, given that other states can and often do deny them (and republicanism rarely says much about the *duty* to accept ‘dominated migrants’) (LAOGHAIRE, 2016, p. 10). See also Falleiros (2018b, p. 73).

⁵² Tangentially, see also Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 121–125).

⁵³ See also Lowell (2023, 3:11–3:18).

⁵⁴ See note 204 of section 6.3.2 on page 324, as well as Lorde (2007[1979], p. 111–112) and Matthew S. Adams (2012, p. 165–166).

⁵⁵ See also Coulthard (2014, p. 107–109).

It is easy to find examples of diverse interdependence among non-Western peoples. Indeed, it is arguably the presence of such sociality that makes some of them (like the ‘East African polycephalic societies’ just referenced) an inspiration for anarchists. They constitute ‘transversal social assemblages in which horizontal alliances and reciprocal subordinations abound’, as Carlos Segovia (2019, p. 51) explains; in which ‘binary serial relations [interdependences] of all sorts operate to prevent domination, competition, and conflict’.

In order to deal with the contradictions of ‘mutual subordination’, Amerindians introduce multiple pairs of ‘moieties’ [...]. Through such a collective interweaving, the relation between what used to be called ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ shows some variations and inversions, affecting external and internal relations. According to [Tânia Stolze] Lima, it is [...] a sort of formal perspectivism whereby perspectives differ about the same relation rather than encompassing one another. There is no consolidation of hierarchy. [...] Without unities, there is no way to measure equivalence, so there is not a ‘classic’ (European) ‘wish for equality’, but a will of ‘parity’, to create symmetries between asymmetric relations. (FALLEIROS, 2018b, p. 61)

It is important to note that these manifold divisions do not come “automatically” from exogamy or division of work⁵⁶. Indeed, in African communalism ‘coordinating segments’ were ‘characterised by equivalence and opposition’, hindering ‘the emergence of role specialisation’. Groups are created explicitly to spur diverse intersection: age sets (somewhat arbitrarily defined), for example, rose ‘in response to the need for greater communal solidarity, since age grades cut across families and lineages’ (MBAH; IGARIWEY, 1997, p. 29–31). ‘Non-segmental lineages’ and ‘fuzzy sets’, whose membership can be ‘gradual’ instead of ‘absolute’, are part of political projects that contrast with those more intensely concerned with unity. This, on top of open, “communistic” mutual aid, allows for more mobility: ‘one can move from one village to live in another and get together with “distanced” relatives who will now become one’s “fathers”, “mothers”, “brothers” and so on’⁵⁷ (FALLEIROS, 2018b, p. 67–68). Among the Guajá, for an example of a system not based on moieties, “alliances” are multiple and fluid, begin early in everyone’s lives, and generate affective bonds as the basis for interdependent relations that do not entail *control* of any side by the other (GARCIA, 2018, p. 263–320, 340).

Robinson (1980, p. 199) speaks highly of the ‘principle of incompleteness’ present in many African anarchistic peoples: we are all, and always, incomplete (one might even say

⁵⁶ I thank colleague and friend Guilherme Lavinias Jardim Falleiros (personal communication) for clarifying this for me; I get easily (and thus embarrassingly) confused by complexities within *my own* kinship paradigm, let alone different ones.

⁵⁷ See also Robinson (1980, p. 198), Cesar Gordon (2006, p. 410–415), Amborn (2019, p. 27), and Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 456).

“[socially] impaired”) and therefore dependent; this is baked into elementary institutions⁵⁸, which entails striving for interdependence instead of independence. Furthermore, if one can never find “perfect complementation”, one’s relations are never permanently settled, and diversity is encouraged as one might need alternatives in the future. Consider how non-Western anarchic formations do not make up a uniform landscape but, like in traditional peoples of the Philippine archipelago, ‘decentralised political patterns that facilitated the proliferation of highly diverse cultures and lifestyles’⁵⁹ (PAIREZ; UMALI, 2020, p. 18). In all cases these are ‘anarchist formations’ because they ‘specialise in the art of turning asymmetry into symmetry’ (SEGOVIA, 2019, p. 51), *at the same time as* (or perhaps *because*) ‘openness to otherness’ is ‘the basis of their way of life’⁶⁰ (FALLEIROS, 2018b, p. 69).

If[...] a Winnebago decided that gods or spirits did not really exist and refused to perform rituals meant to appease them, or even if he declared the collective wisdom of the elders wrong and invented his own personal cosmology (and both these things did, quite regularly, happen), such a sceptic would definitely be made fun of, while his closest friends and family might worry lest the gods punish him in some way. However, it would never occur to *them* to punish him, or that anyone should try to force him into conformity – for instance, by blaming him for a bad hunt and therefore refusing to share food with him until he agreed to perform the usual rituals. (GRAEBER; WENGROW, 2021, p. 96–97, emphasis in the original)

One *does* find indigenous discourses on independence, even sovereignty, which, linked to an emphasis on their belonging to certain land, would seem to indicate a drive for self-sufficiency and self-determination not much unlike those of liberals, republicans, and Marxists (COULTHARD, 2014, p. 7). But that is deceiving⁶¹. This rhetoric ‘is a critical language game in the conditions of settlement’ (SIMPSON, 2014, p. 105), being often recognised as pernicious within indigenous communities⁶² (BENALLY, 2021b, p. 46–47). In any case, just like with anarchist exhortations toward independence seen above, they mean encouragement for the oppressed to rise in order to *rebalance* a relationship. What is wanted is not “independence” or “sovereignty” but ‘a reassertion of a very different kind of land tenure’ (COHN, 2022) and

⁵⁸ Even sensibilities; the flip side of attributing collective responsibility for bad outcomes – e.g. Amborn (2019, p. 120) – is doing the same for *good* ones – e.g. Garcia (2018, p. 520–521). This is, often very deliberately – e.g. Lee (1969) – meant to be a reminder of mutual dependence, diminishing everyone’s sense of self-importance, and thus lowering the probability that people will actually *believe* in any superiority that would form the basis for political hierarchies.

⁵⁹ See also Skoda and Troyano (2020, 38:18–39:39).

⁶⁰ See also ASHANTI... (2006, 41:04–41:17) and Amborn (2019, p. 152).

⁶¹ See the discussion about “Pawnee ideas of liberty” in section 3.2, page 87.

⁶² See also Tawinikay (2021[2018]): ‘anarchists don’t believe in nations. But I would argue neither do Indigenous folks. The word nation is a funny one, imposed on Indigenous communities [...]. It’s useful in some contexts, often it’s not, and it has never quite fit’.

‘peaceful coexistence grounded on the ideal of *reciprocity* or *mutual* recognition’ (COULTHARD, 2014, p. 3, emphasis in the original); not the right to exercise violence with impunity but, as Basil puts it, the power to assert one’s equality, and thus force the forging of mutually beneficial agreements that protect⁶³ environmental balance:

You as an outsider must ask permission to be on our land. On our territory[...] everybody went through a protocol, but it wasn’t police standing at the bridge telling you that ‘you have to ask us for the right to be here.’ [...] We stood there very openly and welcoming, but stern — [...] asserting, as sovereign Indigenous people in our territory, ‘I’m not going to get erased. I’m not going to get bulldozed. I’m not going to get railroaded[...] I’m thankful you are here. This is the protocol we’re going to go through first.’ Before you enter the territory you need to [...] ask:] ‘how can we share responsibility to be on the land?’ Sharing responsibilities, sharing the Law: self-regulation. To me that totally relates to anarchy... (HILL; ANTLIF, 2021, p. 110)

Much can be said of “grounded normativity”, or of Vine Deloria Jr.’s argument that ‘American Indians hold [...] places] as having the highest possible meaning’, while Westerners place ‘*time* as the narrative of central importance’⁶⁴. However, there is the most basic consideration that colonialism, centred as it is on territoriality (COULTHARD, 2014, p. 7, 13, 60), dispossesses entire populations, placing market competition (or white tutelage, religious or secular) as the intermediary in these peoples’ relationship to their own subsistence. Engulfed by relations of unilateral or asymmetric dependence, they may — *may* — survive *as individuals*; without place-based resistance, however, their (political) culture might sink into coma. ‘That we cannot live freely from the land is the ultimatum of capitalism’, analysed Benally (2021b, p. 43–44); ‘we can exist with the condition that our world ends within us’. ‘Access to land is access to a collective imagination’, poetically summarises Shaun Day-Woods (2021, p. 50); without it, ‘freedom is short-lived’⁶⁵.

This does not mean “self-reliant isolation on exclusive land ruled by essentialist tradition”; this is not what *drives* them⁶⁶. As Taiaiake Alfred (2005, p. 225) puts it, self-government and land claims settlements are ‘goals defined by the colonial state’ and, in seeking them, (anarchistic) indigenous politics are hampered by ‘a nasty case of metastasizing governmentalism’⁶⁷. A focus on place today means resisting a vision of free-floating agents whose independence is (as it must always be) granted by hierarchy. There is no need for a direct relation with land

⁶³ See note 231 in section 4.3.2, page 162, regarding property as care in non-Western philosophy.

⁶⁴ See also Benally (2021b, p. 42).

⁶⁵ See also Magón (1977, p. 62) and Yazzie (2021, p. 129).

⁶⁶ Some anarchists still seem to misunderstand this; see e.g. Barker (2021, 22:26–23:10).

⁶⁷ See also Coulthard (2014, p. 64).

when the market and the state can reform any location, the propaganda essentially goes — (compete to) amass money and it will not matter where you are: workers will adapt your whereabouts to your tastes, never mind what it does to them or the places where they may live (which you could even own, but where you are not)⁶⁸. In other words, the relationship between non-Western anarchistic cultures and “land” is not about independence via absolute self-sufficiency because it is not about hierarchical relations, not regarding other humans nor the land, for the latter is not “property” but ‘a living agent, not an individual but a web of relations in which Indigenous humans are already enmeshed’ (COHN, 2022). Against the ideals of “reservation”⁶⁹ retreat (upheld by the state, with any luck) and individual detachment (on the whims of market winds), they posit that *both* sedentary and nomadic lifestyles require deep ecological integration (including with other, surrounding individuals and groups — mutual aid, interdependence) to be truly sustainable, joyful, and voluntary⁷⁰.

An indigenous anarchism is an anarchism of place. This would seem impossible in a world that has taken upon itself the task of placing us nowhere. A world that places us nowhere universally. [...] An anarchism of place could look like living in one area for all of your life. It could look like living only in areas that are heavily wooded, that are near life-sustaining bodies of water, or in dry places. It could look like traveling through these areas. It could look like traveling every year as conditions, or desire, dictated. It could look like many things from the outside, but it would be choice dictated by the subjective experience of those living in place and not the exigency of economic or political priorities. (ARAGORN!, 2005, p. 7)

There are many ways in which Westerners affiliated with the anarchist tradition have mobilised diverse mutual aid to try to transform imbalanced relations. Radical unions, as well as the linkages between them, were meant to ‘surround conflicts with solidarity’^c, as an old slogan from fAu goes⁷¹ (KHALED; ROCHA; AUGUSTO, 2022, 1:03:52–1:04:00). Not only each union could help each worker rebalance their asymmetric relations with their boss, disputes or strikes could be coordinated across professions or borders, striving for further equilibrium among classes. In defeat, the persecuted had resources to flee and places they could go if the situation became unsustainable⁷². Complete success, on the other hand, would mean the end of class privilege; not unlike the indigenous peoples above, sharing responsibility but refusing to be

⁶⁸ See note 21 above, as well as the discussion on liberal nonconformity in section 6.1.2, around page 269.

⁶⁹ Which Benally (2021b, p. 46) called ‘open-air prison camps’. See the references in note 130 of section 4.2.2, on page 127.

⁷⁰ Concerning the case of the capitalist (or even postmodern) rosy view of not having “roots”, so to speak, which for the losers in the market means forced displacement, see William C. Anderson (2021, chap. 4).

⁷¹ See also Cuesta (2020, p. 104).

⁷² See e.g. Rodrigues (1999b, p. 94).

bulldozed. Work-based⁷³ direct action was “revolutionary gymnastics”; it enticed and prepared workers for the interdependent self-management anarchists envisioned (HARDMAN, 1983, p. 35; CUBERO, 2015[1988], p. 115–117; FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, p. 140; FINN, 2021, p. 119).

However, diversity is not just good *until* classes are destroyed, when equality is reached and humanity can become a single community (arguably a form of Marxism, if a heterodox one). As explored above, within anarchism diversity is a continued sustainer of equality, much more than communitarian unity, because community can also be invoked to suppress dissent. Feminism is of particular relevance here, as it critically examines the intermingling of care relations and power imbalances, not at all uncommon in other contexts⁷⁴ but particularly evident in the domestic sphere. Akin to people who have been denied direct access to sustenance to become “untethered” working force, with their subsequent efforts at unionism opposed (COULTHARD, 2014, p. 7–8), women have been oppressed as properties, first of the father, then of the husband. Patriarchy whitewashes this domination through moralities of care and community, demanding supreme allegiance to family, thus weakening the outside connections that have always been key for women to change their situations⁷⁵ (GOLDMAN, 2009[1910], chap. 11; FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, p. 256; NOVAIS *et al.*, 2021, p. 42–45).

In other words, anarchism entails a warning against relying on a single “tribe” or kind of relationship (let alone *person*). As seen earlier, even if mutual support is equal and enjoyable at any given moment, it might cease to be any of those things. Alienating individuals from other relations leaves them more vulnerable to being dominated within the one that is left, as there will be no one to turn to for support in case conflict cannot be “internally” dealt with in an egalitarian and satisfactory manner. Diversity must continue to be cultivated.

Consider for example *Mujeres Libres*, a group created during the Spanish Revolution by anarchist women who thought that male comrades were not sufficiently open toward gender equality⁷⁶ (FINN, 2021, p. 120–121). In this case, worker solidarity balanced out class struggle,

⁷³ And in social movements more generally, in fact; see e.g. FARJ (2008, chap. 7, p. 72).

⁷⁴ The capitalist as the “job creator”, the welfare state as an “opportunity giver”, etc.; see also Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 508–514).

⁷⁵ As men know well, as their ability to abuse, abandon, neglect, etc. without repercussion is based on the support and fulfilment they get from other settings. Unsurprisingly, when it gets easier for women to create and fortify alternative bonds, abusers tend to employ tactics to isolate them (JACOBSON; GOTTMAN, 1998, p. 151–158; STARK, 2012, p. 201; KARAKURT; SILVER, 2013, p. 804; WOODLOCK, 2017); see also the increase in cases of domestic violence during the covid-19 pandemic in Piquero *et al.* (2021) and Kourti *et al.* (2021). Legal scholar Beth Richie connects relational isolation and political domination in ways that echo Kropotkin’s work on incarceration as discussed in section 4.2.2: “prisons” – like abusive partners – “leave you walking on eggshells” (HOLMES, 2022). See also Richard Morgan (2021, p. 76).

⁷⁶ Tangentially, see also Golder (2021).

but unevenly so. When women were not able to find good mediation for their conflicts in these networks, they mobilised separate webs of material, intellectual, and emotional support so as to sort out disputes without recourse to sovereignty – without being the “dominating” subclass within the *workers’* movement nor betraying the revolution in exchange for concessions from powerful external actors⁷⁷. They wanted to ‘arrive at an authentic coincidence between male and female comrades; to live together, collaborate and not exclude one another; to aggregate energies toward common work’^{d,78} (MUJERES LIBRES, 2022[1938], p. 3).

An ideal of family can motivate someone to wrap this “relational resource”⁷⁹ in a bubble. Likewise, visions of how a community ought to live, even egalitarian ones, may drive a will for group independence, framing lack of diversity as an asset: ‘discard all that is not immediately useful for combat’; victory requires ‘total surrender for all sacrifices, unreserved giving of all we are and all we have’^e (VARGA, 2022[1937], p. 132). Many progressive movements required the utmost unity and loyalty, even uniformity, in the name of concerted, combined effort. Anarchism’s coming of age⁸⁰ involved disagreeing with them.

This was (for a long time, and still is⁸¹) a challenge; anarchists had to argue for the effectiveness of heterogeneous, decentralised initiative at the onset of an era of massive industrial warfare between bounded nations (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 226). ‘We are like an army at war’, wrote Malatesta (2014[1897]), and ‘depending on the terrain and the measures adopted by the enemy, we can fight in massive or in scattered formations’; anarchists should only be ‘ready to form up again into compact columns when necessary and feasible’⁸². This definitely implies that one is not wrong to think about unity as an asset (CICCARIELLO-MAHER, 2011, p. 34). As Amborn (2019, p. 156) says of deliberative processes in anarchic African peoples, their ‘striking [...] will to unity, to consensus’, is a ‘precondition for collective action’; José Oiticica, echoing Malatesta regarding anarchists “being on a great war”, commented that ‘all combatants “understand” each other to fight, and take on “commitments”, without which there cannot be united action’^f (FARJ,

⁷⁷ This is not just about ditching class emphasis in favour of (including) gender perspectives. Not only other themes (such as racial issues) could be similarly discussed – see e.g. Haider (2018, p. 24) – “trashing” in 1970s feminist circles provides an “inverted” example in the gender-class axis (FREEMAN, 1976).

⁷⁸ See also Peller (2016) for a similar event in a more contemporary setting.

⁷⁹ See the discussion about romantic affection in section 4.3.2 (around page 172).

⁸⁰ See sections 1.2 and 3.1, the latter also for the distance between an anti-theological stance and a “communitarian vision” – a “national will”, if you will – at the root of the demand for group independence.

⁸¹ For some examples, see Farrow (2002, p. 18), ASHANTI... (2006, 7:41–8:44), Franco (2007), Raekstad and Gradin (2020, p. 136–147), Richter, Khan, and Baker (2020, 1:03:26–1:03:45), and Ziegler (2022b).

⁸² See also Reclus (2002[1898], p. 90, 99) and Luigi Fabbri (2021[1921], p. 5), as well as John Crump (1996, p. 27), the latter describing how a split between anarchist communists and anarcho-syndicalists in 1920s Japan actually led to both groups *growing*.

2008, p. 13). The question is precisely how they go about *generating* such unity, and the fact that the end result, the object of such collective action, is not unification but the reorganisation of diversity. As Fabiano Bringel discusses, the point is to “unite” the struggles rather than “unify” them⁸³ (BRINGEL; SADDI, 2018, 15:41–15:56).

Unity can happen so long as it is not confused with uniformity. [...] When we [anarchists] speak of united action, we immediately understand that this is due to an urgency requiring collective effort, beyond what we can do on our own, so that this need [...] is met. On the other hand, more statist socialist traditions, when they speak of unity, [...] presuppose a single method, a single condition, and, above all, the subordination of the whole to a part. [...] Sometimes libertarians may seem arrogant, as if they do not want to “mingle”, but it’s not that. Mingling is needed; indeed, we are born within a diverse polity. What matters [...] is that unity is impossible when there’s subordination. This already appears in the debate between centralists and federalists in the [Paris] Commune.^{g,84} (SAMIS; CARLOS, 2021, 1:38:02-1:40:22)

Arguments about effectiveness thus mostly turn on means-ends coherence, as the very meaning of progressivism is disputed. This relates to anarchists challenging the use of militarism⁸⁵ and statehood as examples of success; to their preference for diverse interdependence among intersecting groups — open mutual aid as the foundation of these relations — over the notion that one’s city, country, or class, had to be an independent entity. Desiring a group’s self-sufficiency tends toward efforts to ensure its members’ energies are not “diverted” elsewhere (i.e. it alienates individuals from other networks, diminishing diversity). Plus, independence emphasises competition among groups just as it does among individuals: overcoming other groups’ wills is needed to avoid having one’s own group’s decisions conditioned by them. For anarchists, these are not desirable situations.

Even further, aiming for independence also leaves minoritarian progressive forces weak. Because they are attuned to the problems with inequalities, they might shrink from engaging in asymmetric relations. But the solidarity needed to get resources from webs of *equal* mutuality might not be attractive either, as they will have to employ their energy for others’ efforts, and every such arrangement (along with themselves and their own objectives, in the end) is much more changeable. The only other option for a group seeking independence would be closing

⁸³ See also Graeber (2009, p. 323–324), Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, p. 87, 152), and Cohn (2022), as well as Nelson’s (2021, chap. 4) reflection on the outcomes of this sort of “united” action: even victories will not ‘look the same to all the parties involved’, but that ‘does not mean anything went wrong’; just that ‘people are different from each other’.

⁸⁴ See the discussion in the introduction to the next section (around page 211), and also Alfred (2005, p. 112), Salles (2005, p. 120), Benally (2021b, p. 63–64), and Lowell (2023, 3:04–6:00).

⁸⁵ On the need for separating the soldier from the rest of civil society as part of the process of educating a soldier, see Felitte (2018).

in on itself, and here lies the weakness: ‘mutual aid and support cannot be limited to a small association’, wrote Kropotkin (2021[1902], p. 169); ‘they must spread to its surroundings, or else the surroundings will absorb the association’⁸⁶. As Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 98, 106) put it, ‘the usefulness of “self-determination” will be very limited as long [as] the state system and capitalism — including marxist [sic] state capitalism — are retained’.

This was the issue with medieval cities, which became conservative, complacent, and naive (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 62–63; KINNA, In press), or even “buccaneers”, who were in many ways incredibly progressive — abolished corporal punishments, held land in common, etc. (BEY, H., 2009[1985], p. 91–92) — and yet lived off of conflict with the rest of the world, which made them politically unsustainable⁸⁷. Contemporarily, one could cite the examples of Zapatista communities that are too small (LA ESCUELITA ZAPATISTA, 2013?[c], p. 75), the Oaxaca defeat (OLIVEIRA, 2011), or even radical criticism of liberal identity politics⁸⁸ (HAIDER, 2018). Even many anarchists inclined toward individualism recognised this overall logic, linking self-determination to interdependence (LIMA; QUELUZ, 2018, p. 11; LITTLE, 2023, p. 87–90), desiring ‘a situated autonomy, a freedom-in-connection’ (TRESCH, 2012, p. 285). De Cleyre visualised the good life as that of a small community, producing ‘very largely for its own needs, able to rely upon itself, and therefore able to be independent’, much like ‘its individual members’. However, she envisioned thousands of such small communities, as if recognising that collective agreements, coordinating solidarity among groups, were needed to enable this sort of “mutual independence”⁸⁹ (DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 27).

It is true that some anarchists have formed settlements that promised equality within their borders, as if the goal was independence after all. Such “intentional communities”, as they are usually called, might be of value (RECLUS, 2002[1898], p. 127; CUBERO, 2015[1993][b]; LEUENROTH, 2007b; LITTLE, 2023, p. 111–114); indeed, of the same value anarchists derive from other “islands” of conviviality in the crevices or at the borders of dominated territories (e.g. “infoshops”, worker-run or cooperative enterprises⁹⁰). Echoing again the theme of non-Western focus on place, it is important to find (literal) space where resistance can grow. Furthermore,

⁸⁶ See also Reclus (2016[1899], p. 84–88), Ward (1991b, p. 87), The Commoner (2020), Goodman (2010[1945][c], p. 101), and Ervin, Ervin, and Anderson (2021, 19:05–19:55). Anarchists also reflect on their shortcomings in terms of rejecting independence; see e.g. Anna K. (2020) and Ziegler (2023).

⁸⁷ See also Dagher-Margosian (2021). If pirates could inspire rebellion, their sustaining themselves through theft made them comparable to states; see e.g. Saïl (2021[1933]).

⁸⁸ See the discussion in section 5.2.2, around page 236.

⁸⁹ Not unlike the non-Western place-based resistance just seen above, in which the cultivation of multiple possibilities depends on interdependence. See also Azevedo (2014, p. 84).

⁹⁰ See e.g. Craig Clark (2021, 7:36–7:49) and Cultive Resistência (2022, chap. 8).

evasion from sovereignty goes even beyond the formation of specific territories; it becomes ‘a permanent facet of everyday politics’, as Neil Roberts analyses (GALDINO, 2020).

However, there is a difference between elusion as a transformative tactic and the wish to escape into general independence⁹¹. As Reis and Gomes (1996) discuss, Brazilian *quilombos* (communities of fugitive slaves) were actually a federation of initiatives among black, indigenous, and (poor, marginalised) white folks in constant attrition, but also exchange and negotiation, with colonisers. Libertarians always denounced the fundamental issues of “colonies” looking to build anarchy “from scratch” in a secluded location (FELICI, 1998; KINNA, 2016, p. 131–132; MORRIS, B., 2018, p. 140–141). Anarchists do not want ‘cozy alternatives in which [to] live untouched by outside social inequalities’ (RUSCHE, 2022, p. 30); do not wish ‘to live separately, while everyone else suffers’^{h,92} (A PLEBE, 1948). If “free spaces” are understood as a ‘central cause’ rather than as ‘an effect of our efforts’ (CRIMETHINC, 2020c), such communities’ attempts to sever imbalanced relations will do little in the way of promoting equality. Historically, old habits of thought they wished to develop away from still lingered, at least in the very ideal of independence itself, as well as in the myth of a social blank slate⁹³. If anything, the contemporary context in which anarchism grew into itself is precisely one in which such “untouched places” are less and less likely to be found anywhere⁹⁴.

The “outside agitator” is a well-known trope within the anarchist movement basically everywhere⁹⁵ (CRAIB, 2015; FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, p. 22); ‘those who dare challenge the legitimacy of the state’, writes William C. Anderson (2021, p. 126), will ‘be accused of colluding with foreign governments or betraying the country’. In Brazil, anarchism was called an “exotic flower”, brought into the country by European immigrants (SOUSA, 2009), but even in Portugal it was said to have come from outside, too (DUARTE, R. D. M., 2021, p. 4); in France (from whence came Proudhon) it had to relate to primitive thoughts unfit for a modern citizenry. By refusing

⁹¹ See also Le Guin (1993, p. 205–208) on “escapist literature” and Nelson (2021, chap. 2) on ‘making space’.

⁹² See also Kallin (2021, 13:11–13:31).

⁹³ I thank Margaret Killjoy for this last point; they talked about this on the “Anarchist Utopianism” panel at the 7th Anarchist Studies Network Conference on the 24th of August 2022. See also Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, p. 263), as well as Samudzi (2020, 4:55–7:10), for whom dealing with the consequences of the past instead of looking for a “blank slate” is part of what makes community bonds more meaningful; see more of her thoughts in section 4.2.2 (around page 128).

⁹⁴ In the end, those who tried to live “outside” European domination by cutting ties to their past contrast with the non-Westerners who, already “outside” these particular patterns, could have chosen to pursue complete separation. This is no longer possible, of course, even if the entire American continent were “reserved” for indigenous people (industrial pollution from the rest of the world would still impact climate globally). But the first modern Europeans to reach American coasts, for example, surely needed a lot of help; most would have died without native assistance (HENRICH, 2015, chap. 3). That is the point, though: if anarchistic indigenous populations had done that, they would not be very “anarchistic” in the first place.

⁹⁵ See also Richard Morgan (2021, p. 30) and, tangentially, Shelton (2023).

allegiance to states when obedience to law was increasingly identified with community⁹⁶, anarchists were portrayed (anywhere) as “not really from here”, in campaigns aiming to deny them rootedness in local tradition and the solidarity that often comes with it. With their connections severed, they lose access to resources that could aid their struggles against the parallel and more literal oppression. These campaigns’ successes show the importance of the argument for interdependence. Anarchists do want and need to find space to breathe, to practise their politics, to experiment with it and grow them wider. But unless they do it by an insistence in *belonging*, even if they still have to struggle to balance their enmeshment with others — which made, for example, the Spanish Revolution possible — they become easier targets for “extirpation” by oppressive agents; a restricted ‘set of human relations’ means there are not many people anarchists can ‘turn to under difficult circumstances’, which makes ‘alternative solutions[...] difficult or impossible’⁹⁷ (CUESTA, 2020, p. 112).

In sum, for anarchists diverse interdependence compensates for the issues with dependence, becoming the best political prospect. This should put to rest claims, often treated as self-evident but ‘empirically false’ (CLARK, S., 2007, p. 137), that anarchism requires ‘small and stable’, self-sufficient communities⁹⁸ (TAYLOR, M., 2000, p. 94 apud WILSON, M., 2011, p. 39).

The implication that decentralisation precludes mutual understanding and collective action in large populations and (or) territories is perhaps the most curious of the claims (RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, p. 155). For Moses Finley (1998, p. 14), the absence of a central power in ancient Greece contributed to the adoption of common modes of thinking and acting, something Bakunin (2007), for example, hoped to achieve by combatting the centralisation of power. Bayat (1997, p. 59) notes that capitalism and the state ‘reproduce people’s “traditional” relations as solutions to the problems that these institutions engender’; in other words, it is hierarchical settings that tend to produce variety of questionable utility, from national and ethnic stereotypes to industry standards⁹⁹. There is a great deal of evidence about large horizontally self-

⁹⁶ See section 1.2 above and section 5.2.1 below.

⁹⁷ See also Skoda and Troyano (2020, 9:32–9:48).

⁹⁸ See also Goodman (2010[1945][c]) and Robinson (1980, p. 28). I shall deal with Bookchin, specifically, in section 5.2.2.

⁹⁹ About the latter, see for example Apple’s historical stubbornness around the Lightning connector. About the first, I mean to point out situations in which people *feel forced* to reproduce a tradition; see e.g. Coulthard (2014, chap. 3) and Gago (2018[2014], p. 24–25). Variety is of “questionable utility” when it hinders equal and cooperative interchange and development; when it sabotages interoperability, when it divides to conquer. However — and this is something Bayat would not disagree with — tradition can also be a productive asset. As Amborn (2019, p. 152, 156) notes regarding the traditions of anarchic African cultures, they are ‘connected to the familiar, yet turning a critical eye to it’, and in so doing they ‘sensibly [bring] inherited cultural elements into contact with the modern’. In a sense, these peoples’ traditions can be understood as anarchistic precisely because, in an anti-theological fashion as discussed in section 3.1, they ‘are not dogma but rather

managed populations across history — or, perhaps more importantly, people who understood themselves as a group and were able to coordinate action but lived in fluid configurations (including smaller subdivisions) according to context (AMBORN, 2019, p. 56; BIRD *et al.*, 2019; GRAEBER; WENGROW, 2021, chap. 8; NICHOLAS; FEINMAN, 2022). Regardless, insofar as such a people recognise themselves as a “social unit”, anarchists in them would still push to forge interdependent relations with neighbouring groups as well.

Many if not most anarchists might recognise a certain “higher quality” of continued face-to-face interaction (WARD, 2011[1966], p. 48). In Rojava, for example, if a commune becomes too large it is eventually divided (EDITORIA DESCONTROL, 2016a, p. 122). This requires ‘a degree of economic decentralization’ (PRICE, W., 2012a, p. 319), but not that every “social unit” must produce literally all they could conceivably want (be entirely “self-sufficient”); this would probably be as wasteful as the ‘economic insanity’, denounced by de Cleyre (DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 27), of ‘dragging products up and down the world’¹⁰⁰. There is arguably a long-term trend, within anarchism, to move from a Promethean approach to socialism (“we can deliver to everyone, equally, what the market promises”) to a more ecological mindset, one increasingly influenced by decolonial engagement with non-Western philosophies (“trying to honour market promises is bonkers”). ‘One of the most important Natural Laws I’ve learned’¹⁰¹, says Basil, is ‘take what you need and leave the rest. Unfortunately, Capitalism, Corporatism, and Democracy don’t understand that concept: Capitalism says, “I want it all and I want it now”’¹⁰² (HILL; ANTLIF, 2021, p. 109). Maybe we should not *expect* to have constant access to “everything, all the time, everywhere”, to use Stuart Jeffries’ (2021) description of late capitalism; for everything to be ‘up for grabs, for sale at the right price, because there is nothing outside the market’¹⁰³. If production is bountiful and producers are not strained, surely trade of all sorts take place as groups help one another. But *guaranteeing* the ultimate unrestriction of being able to buy anything entails coercing everyone into creating this formal availability of all possibilities. Unequal yet credibly tangible, this would still (as it currently does) conjure self-blame *and* the hope that one will really one day reap rewards for playing by the rules.

thought models that may be construed in numerous ways’. As Coulthard (2014, p. 156) writes (in an North Amerindian context), embracing indigenous culture means engaging ‘the fluidity of [these] traditions, not the rigidity of colonialism’. This also allows us to re-read what 19th-century individualist anarchists meant by (their positive view of) “law”: a ‘shared conceptual understanding of social responsibility and individual rights’ which is ‘not codified’ (thus being, one may then presume, more malleable) (LITTLE, 2023).

¹⁰⁰ See also Crimethinc (2016c) on autonomy as “interdependence with leverage”.

¹⁰¹ See note 139 in section 4.2.2, page 130.

¹⁰² See also Tawinikay (2021[2018]).

¹⁰³ See also Ward (2011[1973], p. 260, 1991a, p. 77–79).

In other words, interdependence does not do away with dependence; with limitations, vulnerabilities, impairments¹⁰⁴. It rather means accepting, on one hand, that it will exist in some form, while on the other preventing a *kind* of dependence that precludes further development, alternatives, “re-federation”. Getting *all* of one’s food from “outside”, for one example, is a huge liability. There is also pre-revolutionary Rojava, which Spencer Potiker (2019, p. 87–88) describes as an ‘internal colony’ of Syria, forcefully kept in a situation of asymmetric dependence – it had oil, but no refineries or processing centres; it was fertile but only ‘limited crops’ were allowed to be grown and there were no ‘means to process them’¹⁰⁵. Other than approving of communalist systems of relative specialisation, in which groups ‘earning their living in different manners’ coexist in ‘symbiosis’ (MBAH; IGARIWEY, 1997, p. 29), anarchists work toward an ever-contextual coordination of production and distribution involving both place- and work-based federations¹⁰⁶ (MCKAY, 2018, p. 124; PAULINO, 2020; POMINI, 2021).

Ultimately, the whole ordeal about the “size” of a community dissolves once there is no concern for its general “self-sufficiency” or “stability” (in the sense of continuity over time). If a group must be independent, one will worry about the minimum number of individuals required to fulfil all its needs without external help (HOBSBAWN, 1990, p. 42). One will also likely ponder on the maximum amount of people that can fit in before variety creates too much division, which would then need to be contained via sovereignty – *so that* the group could keep existing as a single-willed entity¹⁰⁷. Consider that for Pettit (1997, p. 199 apud LAOGHAIRE, 2016, p. 8), secession might be necessary to secure non-domination. But not only ‘one cannot imagine any large nation-state of the kind advocated by Pettit actually adopting such a policy’¹⁰⁸ (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 120), it is hard to envision a country’s “working class” seceding (LAOGHAIRE, 2016, p. 8) – or women¹⁰⁹, for another example. Anarchists care much less about this because diverse interdependence is *supposed* to make borders (of all sorts) porous, favouring the transformation of what they demarcate into being¹¹⁰ (POTIKER, 2019,

¹⁰⁴ See the discussion in section 4.2.2 (around page 128) about anarchist structures not being about perfectly preventing conflict from emerging, as well as, by analogy, Fiscella (2015, p. 266).

¹⁰⁵ Potiker (2019, p. 87–88) adds that ‘workers councils recently decided to move away from monoculture by diversifying their crops, enhancing the sustainability of their insurrectionary project’. Contemporary anarchist critiques of imperialism tend to encompass deindustrialisation and bureaucratic economic predation; see e.g. Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 41–43) and Khaled and Rocha (2022).

¹⁰⁶ See also Ward’s (1991, p. 74–77) explainer on Kropotkin’s economics.

¹⁰⁷ For a directly related discussion, see Kapust (2018, chap. 5, esp. p. 179).

¹⁰⁸ This is immensely ironic, considering that Pettit’s theories supposedly influenced recent Spanish cabinets; in 2017, the Spanish state repressed Catalonia’s bid for independent statehood.

¹⁰⁹ See the discussion around page 144 in section 4.3.1.

¹¹⁰ See also Ince (2022, 19:48–20:36).

p. 83). In the context of grassroots activism, for example, Ziegler (2022b, p. 66) writes that variety for its own sake is not enough; ‘the group itself must be destabilised by its diversity’. Within anarchism, groups can come in and out of existence, move, intersect, reform, merge, federalise, secede, and divide, all according to agents’ contextual needs, and thus will be as large or far-reaching as people in and around them find it useful or convenient for them to be¹¹¹. Equality, as in all involved affecting the process of reorganising diversity, makes it less likely that any one’s particular “convenience” causes harm – or (and) more probable that people can survive it, resist it, get justice, and move on in re-established harmony.

Achieving anarchy is thus not a matter of seeking a condition of isolation where one can enact an utopian vision, but rather practising balance, mutual aid, and diversity – which are strengthened when more relationships are structured by this practice. Once a dense, varied network of interdependent relations takes root, it has its own inertial influence¹¹²; this is the “materialist” strategy for sustaining balance mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, part of the reason why anarchists do not suppose everyone must be an anarchist for anarchy to “work”¹¹³ (KINNA, 2016, p. 202). ‘It is not unanimous we seek to be’, writes Marquis Bey (2020, p. 10); ‘it is ensemblic, assemblic, a distinction that manifests in the proliferation of life for those who might queerly emerge’. It would of course be much worse if most people were, say, actual, militant fascists, but as long as there are enough agents counterbalancing aggressions and aggrandizements – as this general framework incentivises there to be – things should work out reasonably well (FABBRI, Luigi, 2021[1921], p. 5).

On the other hand, the importance of anarchistic positions (regardless of their minoritarian or majoritarian status) would be in consciously growing and sustaining the situation (FARJ, 2008, p. 73). This means not only achieving or maintaining equilibrium, but above all engaging the laborious process of building and cultivating connections among more and more people, entangling everyone in the largest possible number of networks of mutual aid. In the next section, I shall deal with how agents get to be, if not anarchists, at least spontaneously more inclined toward this labour, especially if they do not live in material circumstances that motivate them to do it.

¹¹¹ See e.g. Crump (1996, p. 29), and also Samis and Carlos (2021, 59:26–1:01:04).

¹¹² Although perhaps a weaker one than in hierarchical relations, one that requires more tending to: as Malatesta (2014[1922][e]) commented, ‘any authoritarian society survives through coercion’, but ‘the anarchist society must be founded upon consent freely given’. I shall return to this theme from section 6.1 onward.

¹¹³ Even *inside* anarchist there is not necessarily a push for unity; as Willian C. Anderson says, ‘if somebody’s not accepting [black anarchism] [...] I don’t think [...] that’s really a concern of mine to try to convince them otherwise’ (ERVIN; ERVIN; ANDERSON, 2021, 38:58–39:35). See also Armand and LYG (1957, p. 13).

5.2 SUBJECTIVITY

– Dear God... I'm halfway through [writing] Hamlet, and... Should he kill the uncle who murdered his father and married his mother?

– Depends on his species. [... For solitary animals it] is just a cost-benefit analysis [...] from the perspective of the individual. [... For eusocial animals,] from the perspective of the colony.

– Hamlet is people. People are a social species. We have strong tendencies both to selfishness and groupishness, [... and] frankly it's usually hard to tell whether we're being one or the other.

– In that case? He should probably just go nuts.

Zach Weinersmith ¹¹⁴

We are unavoidably and essentially social, temporal beings, created through our relations with others and also creating ourselves as we project ourselves into imagined futures and redefine the received past.

Kathy E. Ferguson ¹¹⁵

The feasibility of any political project depends on “what we are” as human beings, and the discrete nature of sensorial experience tempts us to believe that our psychic life is structured in an “egocentric” way, regardless of context or history¹¹⁶. Humans have to learn to see things from other perspectives; one’s own body’s, though, each one can take for granted (BOWLBY, 1982[1969], p. 370; BOOKCHIN, 1982, p. 97–98; CLARK, S., 2007, p. 57).

This may still be portrayed as a politically neutral narrative, since the priority of the individual ‘does not say that we are governed by self-interest, only that whatever interests we have must be the interests of some [individual] subject’¹¹⁷ (SANDEL, 1998, p. 12). Individuals, we are told, *may* be interested in the welfare “of others”, even prioritising it over “their own” (LINDENBERG, 2001, p. 640), as in experiences such as love, duty, or compassion¹¹⁸.

Recognising mutual dependence as central to human existence, however, as discussed in the previous section, changes things. To say that an interest must be an individual’s forces a determination regarding *whose* motivation it is. But the non-existence of genuine self-sufficiency implies the existence of drives that cannot be exclusively attributed either to me or to another.

¹¹⁴ Weinersmith, 2022.

¹¹⁵ Kathy E. Ferguson, 1984, p. 20.

¹¹⁶ This is evidently also a relevant philosophical position (FRANKS, 2012, p. 56–57; RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, p. 91); I am simply calling attention to the fact that one of the reasons why it is arguably commonsensical is its intuitive character.

¹¹⁷ Sandel is discussing Kant in this passage. See also Leopold (2019, p. 2.3) and Saul Newman (2019, p. 170).

¹¹⁸ Regarding love, see Nozick (1991), Kinna (2011, p. 57–58), John P. Clark (2013b, p. 78), and Lowell (2023, 1:19–1:36); more generally, see Bookchin (1982, p. 351), and more tangentially, Cordero (2015, p. 307).

Relationships constitute selves by sharing desires among the related entities, and creating new ones within them as a result of activities taking place due to their relation.

Take the will to eat, for instance. One seeks food due to certain biological processes within one's body; one needs it to survive. This seems like a perfect example for clearly self-sourced, self-benefiting desire. However, the "enteric flora" – which is to say, not the individual's own cells, strictly speaking – can affect appetite¹¹⁹. Plus, a lot of objects of culinary desire evolved to please senses in order to benefit other organisms¹²⁰. Even if these points were dismissed for being about non-human agency, there still are cravings or interdictions on nourishment that would not exist if not for cultural symbolism or social circumstances (communion wafer, gold-coated steaks; one culture's pet being another's meat). And while these may be said to only *condition* hunger rather than determine its emergence, there are still eating disorders, or marketing techniques that can elicit and increase food consumption¹²¹.

Beginning with relations is not less empirical; it is barely less intuitive, seeing as individual bodies are (originally and continually) the result of relationships. Retreating to embodied cognition ("every interest is *felt* by an individual") is of little help, saying nothing about *how* an interest is felt, interpreted¹²². Humans are social; the capacity to "connect" with others and be moved to action by this connection is deeply embedded in us (GOETZ; KELTNER; SIMON-THOMAS, 2010; CASPAR *et al.*, 2020). Appreciation of other perspectives is gained, and can be more or less developed, but is not optional; it often *defines* proper human maturity (BOWLBY, 1982[1969], p. 352–354; O'ROURKE, 1974, p. 180; GRAEBER, 2001, p. 63–64; SAHLINS, 2005, p. 22–23). Understanding the ordinariness of love, duty, or compassion in people's lives involves thinking of each person as (also) (part of) each other: the notion of contextual, transpersonal selves emerges as a crucial framework for understanding human subjectivity.

¹¹⁹ See Rhee, Pothoulakis, and Mayer (2009) and Alcock, Maley, and Aktipis (2014).

¹²⁰ A notable example of this in philosophic discourse bearing on the issue of subjectivity, albeit in a non-culinary context, is featured in Deleuze's discussion of "the wasp and the orchid" (ROFFE; STARK, 2015).

¹²¹ See, for example, Chebat and Michon (2003), Fedoroff, Polivy, and Peter Herman (2003), Cuda (2019[2010]), Morrin (2010), Berčík *et al.* (2016), Rathee and Rajain (2018), and Julia Sophia Bayer (2021).

¹²² Conceiving of human motivation as a matter of "interest", 'a word that originally meant "penalty for late payment on a loan"', is also noteworthy. Originally the term's appeal was partly in its 'mathematical' aura, which 'made it seem objective, even scientific'. However, its real origins are in theology, context in which it represented the 'insatiable desires for self-gratification' (a consequence of humans' eviction from paradise) in contrast with one's connection with, and love of, God, which 'leads us to benevolence toward our fellows' (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 331–332). This mythical notion became "logical" in a secular context, in the sense that desire was generally defined as selfish from the perspective of individual bodies. The linguistic conflation ensured that saying "the interest of another is my own" would ultimately sound like a paradox ("I profit from being exploited"), foreclosing reflection on the contingency of the conflation.

People are members of one another; they exist not in or for themselves, but in relationships of mutual being[... O]ne realizes oneself in and through these mutualities of being, the way “mother” and “child” or “father” and “child” become such through the reciprocal enactment of the bond which thus identifies them. And as the mother and father work on the child’s behalf, or as wife and husband in consideration of one another, the kinship other is *internally present as a cause of one’s own intentionality*. In this condition of mutuality of being [...] interests are no more confined to the satisfactions of the individual body than selves are to its boundaries.¹²³ (SAHLINS, 2005, p. 11–12, emphasis added)

As Judith Butler commented, ‘if I think of myself not just as this bounded individual but as fundamentally related to others, then I locate this self in those relations [...] that define and sustain me’ (GESSEN, 2020 apud LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 86-87). In communal settings one interprets another’s wants as one’s own, although this does not eliminate the possibility (nor predetermine the resolution) of conflict with other desires one also considers one’s own¹²⁴. The fact that from *other* perspectives the problem is in how one categorises the motivations pulling them in different directions (“how can they not see that they are being taken advantage of?”) shows how sorting “my” desires from those “of others” is far from unambiguous (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 37–41). No point of view is “proper” in the sense of inevitably prevailing.

Anarchists have always called attention to this. If exclusive accumulation of resources is associated with “success”, the interests of individuals are inherently mutually contradictory, but if people attain ‘the highest degree of security and of well-being’ through mutual aid, egoism *itself* ‘impels’ each person ‘towards solidarity’¹²⁵ (MALATESTA, 2014[1892][a]). ‘When we say:

¹²³ Transpersonal selfhood is often contrasted with transcendent selfhood, encompassing ahistorical theories such as the aforementioned individualism. The first kind is usually connected to “collectivism” and non-Western peoples – who tend to (more frequently) extend personhood beyond humans or animals; see Means (1991, p. 74 apud FISCELLA, 2015, p. 195), Aragorn! (2005, p. 7), and Bloco A (2021, 29:09–29:25). The second, in turn, is more often connected with individualism and “the West” (MINOGUE, 1995, p. 31–33; GRAEBER, 2001, p. 230–231, 261; GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 1, 29). However, this is both a wrong generalisation and a false dilemma (MURRAY, 1993; BATTAGLIA, 1995, p. 8–9; GRAEBER, 2001, p. 83–84, 2004, p. 26; MARTEL, 2011, p. 146; COULTHARD, 2014, p. 27–28; TAWINIKAY, 2021[2018]), as there are not two “standards” but *one* (STRATHERN, 1995, p. 107–108). As Charles Taylor assessed, intersubjectivity is an ‘uncontroversial’ theory nowadays (COULTHARD, 2014, p. 17). See also Falleiros (2017, p. 203).

¹²⁴ Such settings might even engender the notion that exclusively individual-self-oriented desires are not, in fact, one’s own motivations. Consider this passage by Amborn (2019, p. 149): ‘when I asked people from southern Ethiopian polycephalic societies forced to pay compensation whether they would have preferred to forgo it, or had complied only to avoid further trouble, they reacted with incomprehension; in the end, people had come together in mutual understanding – in consensus. The matter was done with, and the person himself fully integrated into the community; payment was therefore a matter of course’. Apart from the vicissitudes of ethnographic interviews, note that it is not that classically “selfish” desire does not *exist* within individuals in this case; they may simply be reframed in more or less explicitly political ways – it is what the colonisers, for example, or perhaps evil spirits, would want me to want. Also concerning this quote, see section 4.2.2 on the effectiveness of mediation hinging on there being consequences for wrongdoing.

¹²⁵ See the discussion on communism in section 4.3.2, around page 158. For more examples of anarchists discussing this topic, see Bookchin (1982, p. 366), Ward (1991b, p. 34), Honeywell (2012, p. 123–126), John P. Clark (2013b, p. 174), and Graeber (2018, p. 260).

“Let us treat others as we wish to be treated”, provoked Kropotkin (2007[1889], p. 43), ‘are we recommending selfishness or altruism?’¹²⁶. Even John Moore (2018, p. 55–58), departing from Stirnerite (egoist) philosophy, reaches the conclusion that the ‘polarity between self and other’ is an illusion introduced to ‘enhance profit maximisation and social control’ under regimes ‘based on separation and alienation’. As the Weelaunee Defense Society Outreach Committee¹²⁶ wrote to people all over the world regarding a local environmental struggle, ‘in order to win, the distance between “we” and “you” needs to melt away, and this struggle must become yours as much as it is ours’. Absolute selflessness is a “mirror image” of market logic (GRAEBER, 2011a, chap. 9, p. 242), and so the anarchist goal is not to have people act in exclusively altruistic ways but continually challenge the perceptions that produce these divisions. As ‘self and other are seen to be attached to and continuous with one another in important ways (even as they are separate and distinct in other ways)’ – in other words, if the motivations affecting me are confusing enough to make this internal classification not obvious – then one may conceive of relationships between individuals as ‘neither purely self-interested nor purely altruistic and self-sacrificing’ (FERGUSON, K. E., 1984, p. 25). They only become so through models of selfhood that are always imbued with specific rather than universal premises.

But these models are necessary, precisely because of this confusion. If each individual is a nexus of drives, so long as these are or may be conflicting, action expresses – it *requires* – a ranking of desires¹²⁷. This is how discourses on subjectivity come into play. Selfhood being a constant becoming, it does not exist apart from social ‘montage’ (GAGO, 2020[2010], p. xxiii), from ‘the collaborative practice of its figuration’¹²⁸ (BATTAGLIA, 1995, p. 2). Notions of identity, or “rhetorics of self-making” (BATTAGLIA, 1995, p. 1–3), relate to the incorporation and (or) prioritisation of some drives, as well as (or) the rejection and (or) downplaying of others. A particular ingredient of these notions is an idea of what *point of view* is *proper* to the human experience. This entrenches certain rankings of motivations further than the more specific concepts involved in identity, as it precedes, and thus conditions, the assessment of wants¹²⁹.

¹²⁶ Mass email sent on February 9th 2023. For context, anarchists are heavily involved in the mobilisation in defence of the Weelaunee Forest.

¹²⁷ This insight I took mostly from Acampora’s (2013, p. 159–160) reading of Nietzsche, although I eventually saw how a similar way of connecting desire and being can be teased out from the anarchist tradition; see e.g. Kropotkin (2019[1898], p. 4), Bakunin (1975, p. 19), Graeber (2001, p. 3, 2009, p. 525–526, 2015a), and Knowles (2002, p. 10). See also the discussion on powers, drives, and consciousness by Raekstad and Gradin (2020, chap. 3), as well as Lowell (2023, 6:55–7:18).

¹²⁸ See also Ritter (1980, p. 32), Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 1, 29), and Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 93–94).

¹²⁹ This is not exactly enough to properly differentiate between selfhood, personhood, subjectivity, identity, among other concepts – see e.g. Strathern (1995, p. 97) and Howarth (1999, p. 96). However, this is beyond the scope of this thesis. I shall blur the differences between these notions to an extent as I focus on the matter

In other words: part of the organisation of motivations required by human activity involves clarity of one's point of view. Having a perspective means that some of the drives one experiences (that one is able to "view") are felt as self-evident and necessary, while others are not categorised as the self's true desires but, logically enough, as the motivations "of others". Alien, secondary, possibly perceived as artificial, these motivations become literal afterthoughts; there is an asymmetry that makes it reasonable to expect the first to "win" in case of conflict. This asymmetry is *useful* for this very reason: to guide (internal) conflict resolution. But notice that this is not the same as common sense selfishness (i.e. from the point of view of the individual). Egoism and altruism do not have real meaning until one knows more about an ego; until interests are sorted as "one's own" or "others". Nationalism, for example, can be construed as the selfishness of the self-as-a-part-of-the-nation.

Arguing that one point of view is "natural" does not have to be seen as a conscious political manoeuvre. It can also be the result of defensiveness, as someone whose choices and identities are challenged seeks the most extreme form of validation imaginable ("*reality itself agrees with me*"). But political traditions can easily incorporate the fact that a diversity of types of point of view exists by simply advocating for their prescribed perspectives in more direct, pragmatic terms: as outlooks that *should* be adopted¹³⁰. Whether one or another rhetoric strategy is employed seems to partly depend on the context. In an egalitarian community 'it becomes easier to recognize "self" as manifest in relationship', writes Fiscella (2015, p. 249), and so an individualist would be hard pressed to convince others that we are actually atomised individuals. Regardless, so long as a discourse is successful in (re)orienting drives, how the case for it is made matters little for definitional purposes.

But if external forces impact us, and even our reflection on this impact is conditioned by them, are discourses ever successful? Does subjectivity matter at all, at least for action? Material and institutional settings certainly help shape what we want, and the link between wanting¹³¹ and being thus justifies the argument that our subjectivities are mostly determined by

at hand: how certain discourses effectively influence the way one's desires are ranked by affecting one's point of view. For example, I have much less to say about distorted self-images, the contrast between public personas and private behaviour, or identity *as* how others perceive someone.

¹³⁰ Classical liberalism might be differentiated from neoliberalism in that the first encourages the state to act less, so that individuals may act on their own (because that is what they *naturally* do), while the latter holds that an active role must be taken in *shaping* this notion of individuality. As Foucault (2008, p. 121) lectured, for neoliberals 'the market, or rather pure competition, [...] can only appear if it is produced[...] by an active governmentality'. See also Kotsko (2018, p. 3–6).

¹³¹ Or, rather, one's wills expressed in (as) action; see note 129 above, as well as laws creating a "will to obey" (in other words, shifting priorities) in Hobbesian theory in section 2.2 (page 40).

circumstances; that one's point of view is an effect of power relations (FOUCAULT, 1980[1976], p. 98; FERGUSON, K. E., 1984, p. xiii). As just mentioned, this is a dynamic anarchists can take advantage of; pushing for interdependence directly influences people's identities, since it means achieving conditions that drive people into some courses of action to the detriment of others. Rationalisation is a powerful phenomenon; what begins as "I had better do this" may turn into "I want this" and, by extension, "this is who I am". But this also happens with sovereignty (LA BOÉTIE, 1975[1563], p. 59, 69 apud INTRONA, 2021, p. 2). 'When our circumstances are increasingly bureaucratic', writes Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 20), self-creation ('through interaction with others') is 'debased'. To paraphrase Graeber (2001, p. 245), it is easy to understand why many think that the state ruling them is really an emanation of their desire to be members of the same unbroken nation, since, after all, they do keep paying their taxes; as the famous 1968 saying goes, 'act as you think or you'll end up thinking as you act'^{j,132} (BENÍTEZ, 2014, p. 19).

There are a few ways to recover the importance of subjectivity. For anarchists (though not exclusively¹³³), when the prioritisation of specific motivations is demanded, at least two drives are said to usually remain relevant: to be respected as responsible, as an agent who can make good decisions by oneself¹³⁴ (a wish that tutelage and command are at odds with), and to express a specific order of drives: to be an appropriate agent, however one's identity was conceived before coercion, or whatever form it takes in opposition to oppression.

Yearning for "recognition" and "integrity", in short, partly explains how *forceful* prioritisation of drives tends to generate resistance, as extensively noted by anarchists and non-anarchists alike (BAKUNIN, 2009[1871], p. 6; RAMABAI, 2016[1887], p. 149; KROPOTKIN, 2014[1900], p. 639; MALATESTA, 2014[1922][e]; BERKMAN, 1929, p. 183; BAKUNIN, 1964b, p. 145; SUCH-

¹³² Recall Arendt's crucial remark (in section 2.1, page 38) on the origins of the Will in an "imperative demanding voluntary submission"; see criticism of consent in hierarchical settings in section 4.2.1; notice that the 1968 saying parallels the discussion on servility in section 4.3.1, page 145. Finally, see also Vardoulakis (2016, p. xv) and Skoda and Troyano (2020, 2:10:10–2:11:34).

¹³³ See note 149 below.

¹³⁴ A "situated independence", so to speak; see the previous section. Notice that this is quite "materialistic", as evolutionary explanations for this drive can certainly be conjectured — see note 135 below. Finally, one could also talk about a will for "agency"; for the 'pleasure at being the cause' (a more general desire than to be seen by others as the cause of *good outcomes*). Such a want has 'powerful implications for understanding human motivation', and hence subjectivity. 'Children come to understand that they exist, that they are discrete entities separate from the world around them, largely by coming to understand that "they" are the thing which just caused something to happen'. This would certainly entail the capacity to affect a shared meaning of integrity and a related array of decisions available to agents, which connects this to a sort of liberty not too distant from the one I am procuring in this thesis. This connection did not go unnoticed by Karl Groos, who first theorised this in "the West" (GRAEBER, 2018, p. 98, 301). I shall discuss this further in chapter 6; see in particular the discussion around note 109 in section 6.2.

MAN, 1995, p. 594; NEWMAN, S., 2001, p. 87, 140–144; TYLER, 2001, p. 417–419; MILLER *et al.*, 2007; JUN, 2018, p. 54). “Forces” alone do not completely determine subjectivity because the latter influences what forces are exerted in the first place¹³⁵. Force (either “superior” or “equal”) might therefore not be enough to reach and (or) sustain a political prospect. This requires a discourse that intervenes in the organisation of motivations; not having one just means dealing with prevailing rhetorics, which might undermine one’s goal¹³⁶.

Defenders of sovereignty seem to know this all too well; hierarchy, as Bookchin (1982, p. 4) noted, ‘is not merely a social condition; it is also a state of consciousness’. Drawing on scholarship from Althusser to Fanon, Coulthard (2014, p. 16–17, 31–32) writes that, beyond capitalism (which partly rests on the recognition of people as ‘subjects of class rule’), the ‘maintenance of settler-state hegemony requires the production of [...] “colonized subjects”, of discourses of subjectivity that commit the colonised to the subject positions required for their continued domination¹³⁷.

On the other hand, what is specifically liberal, republican, or Marxist in identity discourses is a *universal* notion of a proper point of view. Despite the earlier discussion of patriarchy in ancient European republics¹³⁸ and how specific identities partially based on age and reproductive organs were mobilised as a control technology in modern settings (LIMA; QUELUZ, 2018, p. 3), these traditions’ prescriptions are something else altogether. Unlike speech that posits different essential subjectivities for each “kind of person” (e.g. explicit racism), they are progressive insofar as what they have to say about selfhood is supposed to apply to every human being¹³⁹, in each case sustaining specific political projects.

¹³⁵ Technically speaking, discourses are also “forces”: sound waves, ink, pixels (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 54). See also Prichard (2012, p. 100) on Proudhon’s sociology, as well as Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 18) on moments ‘when representations outrace reality’.

¹³⁶ Consider, for example, Lisa Kirschenbaum’s (2017, p. 78) study: ‘even as [Marxist] parties promoted an agenda of gender equality, communist cultural norms produced and maintained aggressively masculinist environments’, resulting in the reversal of many initial progressive measures concerning this issue in socialist states. See also DeLamotte (2004, p. 141–142) and Eric Laursen (2021, p. 216–217).

¹³⁷ See also La Escuelita Zapatista (2013?[c], p. 76). For an example from the field of disability studies, see Introna (2021, p. 4). Consider how a conformist environment can emerge in a progressive movement (feminism) from a uniform collective identity: ‘a single movement image or principle would be counterproductive and have women constantly comparing their lives with the image, monitoring life styles and their work to see if it was in compliance’ (FARROW, 2002, p. 18) (see note 77 in the previous section, page 194). Also note that different kinds of discourses can combine to support a more general system. Cavallero and Gago (2021, p. 47, emphasis removed), for instance, write that ‘finances and religion structure economies of obedience that complement one another’ [As finanças e a religião estruturam economias da obediência que se complementam].

¹³⁸ See section 2.2.

¹³⁹ This does not, however, completely assuage anarchist concerns that this general application might still set back feminist, anti-colonial or anti-racist struggles, for example, as shall be seen throughout this section (see in particular note 176 at the end of the next section).

Anarchists are also aware of the need for a discourse on subjectivity of their own: ‘freeing [one’s] mind won’t guarantee that the rest will follow’, write Raekstad and Gradin (2020, p. 51), but it is still ‘necessary to make the rest possible’. Not wanting liberation for only a subset of humans, this would be a universal perspective too (WILLEMS, 2016, p. 66). One can also think about this in terms of the “subject” component of models of legitimacy, as seen in section 4.2.1. Voluntary social change needs balance in order to not be a cover up for internalised coercion, as well as diversity and mutual aid so that the equilibrium is dynamic instead of stifling – now *who*, or rather *what kind of subject*, would legitimise that?

However, what they have to say differs substantially from their progressive siblings’ messages. And this from early on: Proudhon, for example, already rejected one-sided explanations to “what we are” as human beings, arguing that ‘the individual’s [character] and [that] of the group are emergent properties, superior to the sum of the relationship between the two, but nothing without both’. And instead of concluding that one subjective point of view *should* prevail, even if none naturally does, he took this complexity for an answer to what humans are. As a result, he opposed both those for whom ‘emergent associations’ should supersede “lower” units’ and those who claimed that ‘individuals are more normatively significant [...] because groups are only aggregates of individuals’. His alternative was the equal importance of any kind of agent (individual or collective): ‘the individual and the group are as inviolable as one another, and [...] neither groups nor individuals have the right to dominate the other, or one another’¹⁴⁰ (PRICHARD, 2012, p. 101). In an interesting metaphor, Mella (2018[1912]) writes that one should not ‘cut the knot’ – neglect how individuals are shaped by groups, nor suppose the first are to submit to the second – but ‘untie it’. One can see essentially the same reasoning in a manifesto by The Black Trowel Collective (2016), a present-day group of anarchism-inspired archaeologists, for whom ‘recognizing each other’s multivalent identities/positions/standpoints’ is directly related to building ‘equity between individuals, groups, cultures, and other cultural constructs’.

¹⁴⁰ See also Luigi Fabbri (2021[1921], p. 6), Mateus (2011, p. 23), and John P. Clark (2013b, p. 172–174). Concerning the support of “any kind of agent”, should not also the state, then, be allowed its agency? Anarchists might appeal to plasticity (to be discussed in section 6.2.2) or even the liberal “paradox of tolerance” to answer this question negatively: since the state is inherently about domination, it is unjust and should be combatted instead of allowed to express itself in action (BAKUNIN, 1975, p. 18; PRICHARD, 2012, p. 100). From an anti-theological angle, Rucker (2019[1933], p. 149) made another distinction: ‘every social unit is a natural formation’ based on ‘common needs and mutual agreement’. The state, doing nothing useful in particular except dominating, in contradiction to the principle of mutual agreement, is not *really* a “social unit” but an ‘artificial mechanism imposed [...] from above’.

Allowing the state to ‘supervene’ all other agents meant eroding that which gives political communities ‘dynamism’ (PRICHARD, 2012, p. 100–101). This was already discussed in the previous chapter, but it applies to individuals as well. If people’s integrity is linked to a specific order of drives, or to a need for a kind of motivation to always be prioritised, this would lead an agent to resist *any* change to who they are, to how their motivations are ranked, to the perspective from which these are ordered. ‘Resistance to facing and resolving problems’, writes Sarah Schulman (2016, introduction, chap. 5, emphasis removed), is linked to ‘a refusal to change how we see ourselves in order to be accountable’; voluntary social transformation requires taking on other points of view to use them as resources for finding out new ways to live together¹⁴¹. Theologically¹⁴² endorsing a structure of selfhood throws a wrench at precisely the mechanisms by which one does that, for the interpretation and (or) the proper ordering of impulses are already settled in advance of dialogue; in fact, they are set up to be *resistant* to dialogue (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 320). There would not be enough flexibility to creatively act on conflicts, because there would be no internal leeway to be moved to action by different concerns. In other words, if people and institutions are equally social processes in movement¹⁴³, hindering one’s disposition to change simultaneously does the same, if indirectly and (or) unintentionally, to the other’s. Furthermore, if the order of desires, or at least the most important subset, is (supposed to be) immutable, this will often mean the impossibility of actually expressing certain wants in action at all.

From the perspective of supporters of sovereignty, this is all as it should be, of course. While the scenario outlined above is not assured as a result of these discourses, it is their point, or at least how they logically influence agents. As Albert Meltzer (2014[1967], p. 16) commented with regard to ‘militarists’, even if they have not achieved a state of ‘perfect discipline’, they still ‘shaped society in its image’. How this works in the specific cases of liberal, republican, and Marxist discourses will be discussed in section 5.2.1.

Section 5.2.2, in turn, is about the consequences of not proposing an absolute point of view; of refusing to entertain the idea. ‘There is no [single] “self” to refer to’ in anarchism¹⁴⁴, writes Springer (2011, p. 532), and ‘an important element of anarchism, both historically and today’, as Kenyon Zimmer (2011, 0:37–0:55) sees it, is that it ‘thrives on diversity, not a sort of

¹⁴¹ See also Day-Woods (2021, p. 176): ‘change yourself to change your options’.

¹⁴² See section 3.1.

¹⁴³ Indeed, that “chicken and egg” quality to Proudhon’s theory can be sidestepped if one understands both elements to actually be one and the same, only in different moments in time, as in the figure of the thaumatrope — see the introduction to this chapter, around page 178.

¹⁴⁴ See also John P. Clark (2013b, p. 252) and Brown and Bender (2016, p. 137).

homogeneous universalism’. No discourse on subjectivity ‘should be prematurely cast as either inherently productive or repressive’; not ‘prior to an engaged consideration of the historical, political, and socioeconomic contexts and actors involved’ (COULTHARD, 2014, p. 103).

Rather than once and for all dissolving the difference between “my” desires and that “of others”, however, this would multiply parameters for affirming that kind of distinction. The position to not commit to a single point of view absolutely would seem to preclude judgment of identities according to an ideal model (would seem to mean “accepting people as they are”, as quoted in section 3.1; at the very least, not presuming anything)¹⁴⁵. But it can never do away with conflict. Anarchist politics can be quite demanding; it ‘is a beautiful path’, wrote Isabel Mesa Delgado, ‘but very rough’ (HEATH, 2014). “Having one’s way” while still maintaining equality might require a lot of effort and time, with the intended outcome being far from guaranteed to happen in its original form¹⁴⁶. There is a learning curve to connecting with others until creative, mutually satisfactory solutions to conflict are found; until then, and possibly after then as well, people will have to *endure the tension* of divergent self-expression within decision-making or reconciliation processes.

¹⁴⁵ See also Ibáñez (2014, p. 23). Some anarchists have approached this from a curious angle: any unity to the self being imaginary, it is only ever “the void” (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 97; MOORE, 2018, p. 55–56; MORRIS, B., 2020). In contrast with a Tucker (2009[1926], p. 25), for example, who postulated strict adherence to a code of conduct (and those who refused could be violated at will) – see also Bakunin (1975, p. 218) – accepting the other in their essential emptiness would mean to accept them ‘in their break, non-coincidence with themselves, and not in a positive fantasy about them’ (RESHE, 2022), which might be rephrased as accepting the expression of desires we had not acknowledged and subverting what had been the other’s identity so far. She continues: ‘if this fantasy is all that connects people, admitting that a person does not correspond to it’ feels like catastrophe; one must ‘cling’ to the fantasy to survive. Not demanding that people fit into a mould, then, would even help with honesty in deliberative or justice-seeking processes; notice how for Kropotkin (2014[1900], p. 639) in a freer society ‘even the unwillingness to be blamed shall disappear’, and one can read Camus’s notion that ‘freedom is the right not to lie’ [La libertad es el derecho a no mentir] from this particular angle (ROCA; ÁLVAREZ, 2008, p. 90) – see also Reginaldo, Moraes, and Reté (2021, 1:10:24–1:10:37). In any case, it could help with relations more generally: for Goldman (2018[1931], p. 255), her ‘disillusionments and disappointments’ made her ‘less dogmatic in [her] demands on people’. Embracing the self as void leads to forgiveness, not as ‘the ability to accept others in your heart’ but through seeing how insignificant oneself and others are (RESHE, 2022), which could help handle one’s own failures better, too. Looking for ways to ‘be gentle with ourselves when we realize we’ve been drawn to strategies of distraction or even domination’, Heckert (2012, p. 56) wonders if one can let go of the ‘compulsion to [...] make everything okay’, asking: ‘what if everything is already okay, even pain and shame?’. On the other hand, if pain and shame are really “okay” one wonders whether any action is necessary in face of misery or injustice, and so radicals drawn to this sort of language might use it not to “empty” the individual but to *complicate* it; not to forfeit the need for consequences to harm but to let go of fixed conflict resolution models. One must be able to ‘imagine oneself and others as integrated subjects in order to be able to produce beings that are in fact endlessly multiple’ (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 526); it is through engagement with many others and the identities this generates in us that we can avoid the feeling that we are anything essentially (i.e. it is thus that one produces this subjective groundlessness). Robinson’s (1980) exploration of incompleteness as the foundation of selfhood is perhaps a good example of this approach; see also Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 25–26).

¹⁴⁶ See the discussion on “doing what one wants” in section 4.3.2, around page 155.

The differences that inevitably emerge between us require that we practice coming into conflict without disintegrating ourselves or dividing from one another [...] so that our political movements may learn to articulate their goals under the pressure of each other without therefore exactly becoming each other.¹⁴⁷ (LOWELL, 2023, 7:19–8:15)

If all this hardship is interpreted as an external imposition — against not only currently existing identities but promises of “easier” (and universal, rational) guidelines for navigating social life — it is hard to see how it could last. Anarchist discourses on subjectivity, then, should help both get to the equality needed for subjective transformation not to mean domination *and* motivate people toward subjective transformation. They therefore relate proper human subjectivity to the dynamic multiplicity that comes from sociability¹⁴⁸ (PARSONS, 2010[1890], p. 3; LANDAUER, 1911, p. 11; GOLDMAN, 2009[1910], p. 23; BAKUNIN, 1975, p. 12–14; FERGUSON, K. E., 1984, p. 25; ZABALAZA ANARCHIST COMMUNIST FEDERATION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA, 2003; CLARK, S., 2007, p. 144; HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 124; GALANOPOULOS, 2017; GRAEBER, 2018, p. 214; JUN, 2018, p. 52–53).

Evidently, it is widely accepted that human beings ‘begin to atrophy — even to physically decay — if they are denied regular contact with other humans’ (GRAEBER, 2018, p. 115). But this is not the point. People can interact regularly with peers but do so at all times from a prescribed position that leaves little to no room for diversity, flexibility, change; they can imagine themselves ‘not as brought into being by [social relations], but by [...] relations with some abstract totality’, such as ‘law’ or ‘reason’ (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 14). Through sovereignty, writes Moore (2018, p. 57–58), ‘the multiplicity of the subject is denied and erased’. Sociability is fundamental to republican¹⁴⁹ and Marxist discourses on subjectivity, but as justification for the absolute priority of particular (collective) perspectives, not as the generative force that would *destabilise* such perceptions by continually (re)constructing agents as a multiplicity of viewpoints. ‘To associate (in love as in politics or in any other activity)’, as defined by Colson

¹⁴⁷ See the discussions in sections 4.2.2 (around page 128) and 5.1 (around page 194).

¹⁴⁸ The turn from “work” to “sociability” within socialism as humankind’s defining trait also relates to feminist critiques of typical Marxist conceptions of “work”. With humans “against” nature, activity is legitimised as work when it extracts or transforms hard matter; “industry” and “production” are at the core of this notion. However, if “maintenance” and “creative reappraisal” takes centre stage (not only of “stuff” but of *human relations*), such a rhetoric of self-making can be adopted alongside socialist concerns about the centrality of work. See Bhattacharya (2017), Graeber (2018), and Cavallero and Gago (2021, p. 51–52).

¹⁴⁹ See e.g. Brennan and Pettit (2007, p. 268–269). It is also important for many liberals as well; see e.g. Kapust (2018, chap. 4) on this theme in Adam Smith and Bernard Mandeville. In the liberal case, we might need one another to grow into who we are as individuals but the individual body as the “border” to each one’s subjectivity, so to speak, is presumed. One could be talking about sociability solely as a driver for some of an individual’s motivations, in the vein of recognition and integrity seen above. Also taking in consideration competition and inequality, a liberal approach to this sort of mutual dependence in a “moral” sense mirrors an unequal organisation of *material* mutual dependence as discussed in section 5.1.

(2019, p. 72), ‘is to agree to transform oneself within this association, it is to run the risk of becoming a different being’. ‘We’re undone by each other’, writes Butler (2004 apud NELSON, 2021, chap. 3), and ‘if we’re not, we’re missing something’¹⁵⁰. Anarchists therefore identify humanness not exactly with sociability as the process by which an individual’s drives are impacted by one’s relations (this would not be saying much of consequence), but more precisely with the shifting of perspectives that diverse interdependence entails, seen as growth, learning, development.

In other words, staying true to my principles while respecting commitments and sustaining equality is always hard, as conflicts test both my principles and my commitments, transforming them, and therefore me, in the process. If I hold a single, fixed idea of who I am, this prospect is *terrifying* (HOOKS, 2017[1994], p. 180). Changing who I am and what is instituted by my relations would amount to failing to be true to myself. I would feel corrupted, or dominated. This calls for a political structure that makes my perspective invulnerable. But if I am dynamically multiple, I feel whole through this process, rather than inadequate.

This goes beyond non-committal to a single point of view; it constitutes a specific perspective in itself, i.e. a *sui generis* way to differentiate between “my” desires and those “of others”. Since hierarchy and competition are linked to the prioritisation of a single perspective, it is *not* the desire of a dynamically multiple self to enact these forms of sociability; desires for sovereignty are not *really mine*, even if I *feel* them (SALLYDARITY, 2012, p. 44). Agents should (be able to) shift their subjective positions according to context because contexts provide the information needed to assess how to best reorder motivations so as to fight inequality and (further) enact interdependence. In the end, anarchists are after ‘a rhetoric of self-decolonization’ that could help anyone articulate their own lives ‘in terms of oppositional paradigms that would allow them to imagine radical change’ (DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 151).

Anarchist narratives on selfhood aim at convincing people that the dynamic by which diverse mutual aid is sustained is integral to who they are as human beings. It *can* be sustained “inertially”, as discussed at the close of the previous section, by the force of circumstances; plus, the evidence it provides that varied perspectives can coexist, and that individuals can transit through them, might lead people to reach anarchistic conclusions about selfhood on their own. Anarchist discourses do not have to be unanimously accepted, and they will almost certainly never be. Still, the stronger their sway, the more sustainable anarchy becomes.

¹⁵⁰ See also Malabou (2008, p. 71) and Ziegler (2023, 10:15–13:20).

5.2.1 Who should be unrestricted?

More than Yahweh's will and classical antiquity's rationality are needed to secure rule as an integral feature of selfhood. [...] Humanity] must also police itself internally by acquiring a self-regulating "reality principle"[...]. Only then can the ruled be brought into full complicity with their oppression and exploitation, forging within themselves the State that commands [...] by the power of the "inner voice"[...].

Murray Bookchin ¹⁵¹

Unless we examine inner psychic shackles, at the time we study outer, political structures and the relationship between the two, we will not succeed in creating a force to challenge our enemy; in fact, we will not even know the enemy.

Cathy Levine ¹⁵²

In this section, I examine the rhetorics of self-making most connected to liberalism, republicanism, and Marxism. Believing one is or ought to be above all the kind of being these discourses prescribe leads to prioritising desires congruent with each political project.

As mentioned in the previous section, these discourses can operate in multiple registers, some more “transcendent” than others, i.e. each may be presented as the true nature of things or simply as the most valuable choice. Yet this difference, as also seen above, might not mean much in practice; the arguments, however made, are for the absolute character of a subject position, and they help, along with interpretations of unrestriction, legitimise the imposition of specific political projects (as anarchists see it, the establishment of an imbalance of power). Conversely, as discussed in sections 1.1 and 2, these interpretations are themselves linked to material and institutional histories marked by sovereignty. So in exploring the ways certain rhetorics of self-making collaborate with the goals of specific traditions, I shall discuss both how a discourse helps install imbalance and how agents in already imbalanced settings may strategically turn to a discourse for their aims.

Liberalism places the individual as the privileged perspective from which to assess motivations. This relates to seeing communal bonds as ‘only so many potential constraints’ (KINNA, 2012a, p. 37–38); no wonder few individualists accept them as viable bases for political structures — on the contrary, they are often part of the mockery liberals make of socialist

¹⁵¹ Bookchin, 1982, p. 112–113.

¹⁵² Levine, 2002[1974], p. 65.

straw men¹⁵³. When altruistic behaviour is not read as self-interest in disguise (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 6, 9, 27–29), it is perplexingly sacrificial¹⁵⁴, even if spontaneous or joyful. Saying that individuals may exhibit altruistic behaviour while holding individualism as central to understanding themselves and others is like saying a loaded dice can yield results other than those it favours. They may, as it can, but people are *unwise* to bet on any of these outcomes.

One wonders how individuals come to consciously subscribe to such an analysis, seeing as it runs counter to “traditional” experiences of kinship, in which infants learn that they will be helped and supported no matter what¹⁵⁵ (SAHLINS, 2005, p. 11). Robinson (1980, p. 185), for example, considered that egoists in particular were “betrayed by intimacy”; ‘brutal men from brutal experience who, in turn, brutalized all life they contacted’. But it may be that care is provided “adequately” while being explicitly portrayed as a *sacrifice*, which would justify and incentivise certain responses to the parent-child bond (e.g. the first resenting the second, the latter feeling indebted to the former). ‘From Augustine to Freud the needs and dependencies of infants have been taken as evidence of their egoism’ (SAHLINS, 2005, p. 22–23), and given what is known about child development today this narrative should be acknowledged as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Seeing the child as selfish — which might correlate with responding to their dependency with evasion and resentment — contributes to shaping them into someone who sees connections with others as contingent and (or) inherently problematic¹⁵⁶.

Deep-rooted disbelief in the human capacity to see things from other perspectives thus seems to come from trauma. “Disappointing care” is indeed an accurate, if only euphemistic, description of the historical origin of individualist philosophies (in Eurasia, at least). These emerged together with the explosive expansion of impersonal markets into everyday community life via the “military-coinage-slavery” complexes briefly mentioned in section 4.1; they are historically ‘either a side effect of [...] military operations’ or direct, conscious creations of ruling elites¹⁵⁷ (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 8–9). These imbalanced networks of mutuality resulted in

¹⁵³ Which is not to say that they are being unfair in constructing such straw men; see Parkin (2011, p. 575).

¹⁵⁴ See Goldman (2018[1931], p. 159) on the (proudly) egoist Tucker, after she asked him for help getting Berkman pardoned for his attentat: ‘he was incapable of seeing that one might feel a wrong done to others more intensely than one done to oneself’.

¹⁵⁵ Marilyn Strathern (1995), however, warns of the risk here of projecting a “nostalgic” relational selfhood that ignores, for instance, the experiences of women within patriarchy.

¹⁵⁶ See the discussion on maternal practice in section 5.1. Regarding child development, I refer to the attachment paradigm, first developed in the “Attachment and Loss” series by John Bowlby (1982[1969], 1973, 1980).

¹⁵⁷ Parental neglect and abuse can often be a refraction of wider violences, such as poverty. And if others are not stepping in to provide the care parents can not, it might be because they, too, are being drained of their energies under threats of opprobrium, hunger, homelessness. While Bakunin (1975, p. 16–17) thought of solidarity as the cause of individuality, one could also think of the former’s lack as a factor in the development of individualism. As Carla Joy Bergman put it, children are not traumatised by being hurt, but for *being*

a new way of thinking about human motivation, a radical simplification of motives that made it possible to begin [...] imagining that [profit] is what people are really pursuing, in every aspect of existence, as if the violence of war or the impersonality of the marketplace has simply allowed them to drop the pretense that they ever cared about anything else. (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 239)

As discussed in section 5.1, feeling for whatever reason unable to count on others (to e.g. remain unrestricted in a sense one feels strongly about) might lead to seeking independence, which relies on imbalanced relations like the ones described above. One may also find oneself in the favoured side of an unequal situation, the kind that communities might (form to) challenge. In this second scenario, individualism helps produce imbalances more by motivating or justifying a refusal to help rather than due to direct aggression. But in both cases it is particularly useful for those who pursue independence that *others* also come around to this pursuit, insofar as it prevents the emergence of collective contestation, which could rebalance forces. ‘What actually snatches away freedom and renders enterprise impossible’, commented Malatesta (2014[1897]), ‘is the isolation that leaves one impotent’. Individualist rhetorics then may look like this: it is useless to ask for help; everyone only ever “watches their own bellybuttons”, as the Brazilian expression goes. Even if someone else cared, this generous disposition would still compete with stronger selfish desires; nothing would come of it. Or, in fact, something *worse* could come of it: communicating weakness (which is implied in seeking aid) would be like bleeding in a shark tank.

Moreover, the powerful may recognise as a peer the individual who validates their ethos by acting like they do; who adopts their individualistic perspective and helps with the perpetuation of their game by becoming a player themselves. By complaining, and demanding, but *as an individual*, one *may* at least acquire enough respect to satisfy some of one’s wants, or at least to not be attacked as intensely¹⁵⁸.

alone with the hurt (she said it on the “Go Forth and Multiply” panel at the 7th Anarchist Studies Network Conference on the 25th of August 2022). See also Broucek (1979), Graeber (2018, p. 99), Billingham and Irwin-Rogers (2021), Oliver (2021, 18:56–19:07), and Amin and Sharma (2023, 11:27–12:19).

¹⁵⁸ Charles Wade Mills (1998, p. 6–10) writes that, under modern racial domination, black people must fight for recognition as equals; however, as William C. Anderson (2021, chap. 2) discusses, that might mean assimilation into dominant political practices and self-understandings (this is addressed again in section 6.1.2). See also Denvir (2020, 13:48–14:14): a ‘common strategy the management of a company’ will use against workers who attempt to unionise, or even simply come together to make a collective complaint, is to say ‘it’s not that what you want is wrong, we just don’t like the way you’re trying to get it’. For a version of this about mediation through national institutions (instead of internationalist solidarity), see Pesotta (2010[1945], p. 167–168). See the discussion in section 4.2.2 (around page 124), as well as section 6.3.3.

The most transcendent forms of this rhetoric may lead to the conclusion that free action is actually impossible in social contexts. The individual body, detached¹⁵⁹ from everything and everybody it could also perceive itself to be, is understandably pitched *against* everyone else. It could not be any weaker, nor fail to realise its feebleness, in the presence of plural other egocentric bodies. Sociable inclinations are not just fickle but *suspect*: are they really what one wants, or what others *force* one to want without even needing to issue a threat? In his ethnography of militant decision-making processes, for example, Graeber (2009, p. 325) transcribes someone's feelings about solidarity, 'a freely chosen decision to defer to the motives or imperatives of others':

There have been times I've been at meetings and there's a proposal I didn't even like all that much, but over the course of the discussion, it became obvious that just about everyone else thought it was a really good idea. I found there's actually something kind of pleasurable in being able to just let go of that, realizing that what I think isn't even necessarily all that important, because I really respect these people, and trust them. [...] But, of course, it only feels good because I know it was *my* decision, that I could have blocked the proposal if I'd really wanted to. (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 305, emphasis in the original)

For staunch individualists, however, this is arguably delusional: this individual simply realised she was not going to have her way and, to save face, time, or both, skipped the oppression that would have inevitably ensued, going straight to its results¹⁶⁰. In other words, individualists may become as paranoid about their own altruism as they are cynical about that of others. The only hope they have left is that being egocentric, like (supposedly) their peers, will leave them better off than collective involvement (ROBINSON, 1980, p. 99–100).

Unchecked predation and unmet needs erode trust and solidarity, an erosion which establishes or deepens imbalances. But liberal institutions are not about untrammelled competition. As discussed in section 5.1, independence must be organised. Amidst conflict, agents can band together to help one another, or they can keep on fighting each on their own. Liberalism aims to brush the first option off the table and offer a third alternative, one that is safer (and less tiresome) for the powerful while benefiting the downtrodden (in comparison with the second scenario): constituting a sovereign force to watch over the exercise of the proper individual unrestrictions¹⁶¹. Equal under the law, agents still have to accept rules that favour the powerful¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ See the discussion in section 4.1, around page 97.

¹⁶⁰ Even though the militant is making a choice, from this perspective it could only be considered a "truly free" one under a superior force guaranteeing the militant's decision.

¹⁶¹ Rawlsian politics in a nutshell.

¹⁶² See section 4.2.1.

– but the dream of independence feels less ethereal with the alleged security offered for private property, or the periodic ability to try to change at least some state administrators; to even try to become one. Liberal law favours the powerful because it protects and encourages the competitive arenas these have already demonstrated proficiency in. But above all it promotes an individualistic culture: as Nikolas Rose (1999, p. 258 apud STRATHERN, 1995, p. 97) wrote about neoliberal individualism, ‘the self that is liberated’ as such ‘is obliged to live its life tied to the project of its own identity’.

The way individualism relates to sovereignty is one of the most common criticisms levelled against it among anarchists¹⁶³: ‘heal thyself of individuals’, advised Malatesta (2014[1892][b]). But while individualism favours sovereignty in general, the sovereign relations it fosters are not necessarily going to be very stable; it is a somewhat risky bet in terms of creating autonomous compliance. Going by individual self-care alone, those who feel oppressed can decide to throw their support behind another chief, who will perhaps treat them better, or to simply run away¹⁶⁴. This can even stimulate people’s imaginations, perhaps to the point of reigniting solidarity, challenging individualist premises, and with them the principle of sovereignty as a whole. After all, hierarchy may have historical and logical explanations but those are not the same as moral justifications for it. As the meaning of words such as equality, justice, and interest is interrogated, some might organise for alternative practical renditions of these concepts, forming connections that give rise to collective identities.

Lauren Leve [...] had been doing a project on a rural women’s literacy and empowerment campaign done by an international NGO, trying to expose all the liberal assumptions underlying the program – that it was really preparing people for microcredit and bourgeois aspirations. A few years later she came back and half the women who’d been through the program were Maoist guerillas. [...] If you draw people into your game, they might decide you’re cheating. (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 16)

Individualist doctrines were not the only kind to appear with coinage; there were also philosophers and prophets, often aligned with the historical equivalent of social movements, that preached individual selflessness (GRAEBER, 2011a, chap. 9). But, as mentioned earlier, this may simply mirror an individualist logic, for it keeps in place the notion of a single “correct”

¹⁶³ One should be careful, however, with Bookchin’s (2009[1995]) shoddy tirade against “lifestyle anarchism”; see John P. Clark (2013b, chap. 7), Kinna (2016, p. 42), and Little (2023, chap. I, VIII).

¹⁶⁴ As Gelderloos (2016, chap. VI) comments, the Great Wall of China and Hadrian’s Wall were ‘constructed at least as much to keep the empire’s citizens in as to keep the barbarians out’. See also Proudhon (2010[1840], p. 207–208) presciently complaining, in 1841, about the planned fortification of Paris, partly because he was worried that the forts would be used against the population.

form of selfhood. Oppressed individuals might come together in social networks that enable narrow and fixed forms of generosity and gratitude, which require enforcement for their sustainment as such. And since this sort of discourse *favoured* stable (though not necessarily personal) hierarchies, some elites could understandably benefit from it, too.

In the case of republicanism, the territorial community — “the city”, “the nation”, and the like — is a fundamental idea, since it is the certainty of sovereign reach that eliminates arbitrariness. This is still a universal discourse because each person is (supposed to be) above all else a member of *one* territorial community, not necessarily *the same* one. Only through sovereignty can a group act as one; only with this sort of agency can people ‘pursue an ideal such as non-domination in a wilful way’ (LAOGHAIRE, 2016, p. 10). Therefore, it is imperative that the group’s continuity and vitality is prioritised.

It is true that liberals reach a similar conclusion, since collective force must be supported to protect a minimum area of unrestriction. But there is a subtle yet crucial difference, well exemplified in the modern reinterpretation of the motto “an individual is only free in a free society”. While for republicans people should feel free as a result of their belonging to a group (that organise as a republic), the typical liberal position is that one’s territorial group must be unbounded *so that* individuals’ favoured unrestrictions are secured, and only *to that extent*. This difference has definitional consequences, as explored in section 2.3 (is law a necessary evil or the source of freedom?), but it also points to distinct predefined guideposts for conflict resolution that define the practical distance between the traditions, despite its many intersections. The idea that ‘the good of the *patria* must take precedence over merely private concerns’ blossomed in Rome, the arguable birthplace of the republican tradition¹⁶⁵: ‘sweet and fitting it is to die for one’s country’¹⁶⁶ (MINOGUE, 1995, p. 19, 23). In case circumstances do not allow individuals to act *as* individuals, it is more typical of liberals to recommend “refashioning the social contract” rather than neglecting other desires in order to uphold it (ROSSDALE, 2023, 8:32–9:28).

Republicanism is about deciding how to live together and then having the independence to secure the community’s ways in face of resistance (internal or external); not prosecuting

¹⁶⁵ Notice that Constant (2005[1819]) compared the individual-society relation in European modernity not to ancient Rome’s, but to Greek antiquity’s. Indeed, Plato is commonly pointed as the first in the European tradition to conceive of society as an organism, and of individuals’ behaviours *in function* of their roles within it (SIMON, 1960, p. 294). This, however, does not affect the substance of the argument at hand.

¹⁶⁶ The group’s interests should be put above even the life of one’s children, as the story of the Roman commander Titus Manlius Imperiosus seems to be designed to teach (LIVIUS, 2004, book VIII § 7). This extreme demand serves to press the point, but one should also note how often plebeians would agree to set aside economic petitions in the name of unity with elites against a foreign enemy. This rhetoric, of course, would be used basically everywhere in the world to curtail goodwill toward anarchists, as mentioned in section 5.1 above.

deviances would allow unwarranted, liberty-denying – arbitrary – interferences. The possibility of recourse is key, but one must appeal to the community itself, whose decision must be final¹⁶⁷. The less transcendent version of this rhetoric is simple: meaningful liberty requires this non-arbitrariness, and hence this sovereignty; one should be primarily moved to do whatever it takes to preserve this kind of institutional arrangement, to see that it functions well. Elites obviously value the laws that accommodate their superior position, and it would be useful for them that fellow citizens *want* to obey the law not because they are afraid of or sceptic about challenging its principles, but due to agreeing that this is in their best interest. But obedience and sovereignty could also emerge out of the most utopian equality, from the outgrowth of sincere and shared attachment to a group as the absolute source of meaning for its members' identities. To be able to follow the ideal, to actually prioritise the desires that relate to this particular communal experience without question or condition, the community in case ought to achieve independence.

But this weak version of the discourse faces an issue. If all must value each one's territorial community, which one is it? Why the city rather than the neighbourhood, why the nation instead of the valley or the island? The arbitrary boundaries of groups, the fact that one may belong to many of them at the same time, pose a challenge, especially when the history of territory formation is marked by military engagements. A more transcendent version of this discourse is then needed: not only one is *always* a community member first and foremost, regardless of context, but this community's boundaries are also out of question¹⁶⁸.

This is how this mirrors the transcendent individualism just seen above: it is fine to be selfish (as an individual) so long as the desire being pursued is lawful; if this is the case, that is probably exactly what the community is set up to do anyway. Other values may guide law and self-making, allowing for different kinds of individual pursuits; plus, again, things may change. If the group's governing body changes the law, the governed (regardless of whether they are a minority or the majority) must go along. There should be no part of the population that, feeling oppressed by current legislation, disregards it; their drives for equality have to be channelled into struggles for state structures to *include* them properly, and regardless of whether this happens or not, breaking the law is not justified. Individuals acting against the law, either selfishly or altruistically, are dangerous even if they physically endanger no specific

¹⁶⁷ Although as always the devil is in the details, such as, of course, who gets to represent the community. Additionally, see note 48 in section 5.1, page 187.

¹⁶⁸ Compare all of this worry about concentrating loyalty with the non-Western *deliberate* introduction of division within a territorial community as seen in section 5.1. See also Simpson (2014, p. 117–119).

body or thing, for they threaten an ideal of unity that creates the atmosphere of predictability every individual needs to be free. The sovereign's desire (representing — or creating — the will of the community, of the nation) is already each individual's *true* motivation. If one is not prioritising it as one acts, at least going along to keep the group from falling apart, one is confused, dominated, corrupted. This is supposed to help make individuals proudly comply with the law.

Republicans do not *need* to naturalise a collective perspective like this, and in all fairness many republicans' reflections on civil disobedience point to a much more nuanced take on prioritising a (territorial) collective self (SILVA, P. R. da, 2019). But these narratives just happen to be quite useful for republican projects. It is definitely not a coincidence that modern nation-states (products of regional bureaucracies and press-induced linguistic standardisation¹⁶⁹) spread myths about their origins and unique characters, reinforcing sentimental attachment to national symbols, with the goal of creating the impression that belonging is not really a matter of conscious, active choice¹⁷⁰ (ANDERSON, B., 2006; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 114, 158–159). 'The nation has become a surrogate religion', writes John Hutchinson (2005, p. 135), although it was not 'the cause' but 'the result' of the state, as Rucker (2019[1933], p. 149) remarked¹⁷¹. The enormous influence nationalism has had on social theory can be seen in how the very concept of "society" is often used today in reference to the notion of "nation-state" (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 66; PRICHARD, 2012, p. 97; SEGOVIA, 2019, p. 42; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 67).

This is not to say republicans always wind up being nationalists; not in a sense that the first would find pejorative. National independence does imply a need for empowering one's state and clearly defining who is a citizen and who is not, but this does not automatically lead to considering one's group essentially better than others, deserving to dominate or even assimilate them. For anarchists, a truly egalitarian collective identity means not only that no one is forcefully attached to the group, but also that no one feels the group's interests must

¹⁶⁹ In Claude Piron's analysis, the historical persecution of Esperanto, an invented language many anarchists have been enthusiastic about, is due to the 'subliminal fear' it provokes: it is 'seen as troublesome in a world where every people has its own language, and where this tool is passed on en masse from one's ancestors and no individual is entitled to violate it. It demonstrates that a language is not necessarily the gift of past centuries, but may result from simple convention. Taking as its criterion of correctness not conformity with authority, but effectiveness of communication, it changes the way of interrelating' (FIRTH, W., 2009[1998], p. 10).

¹⁷⁰ On political philosophers such as Kant thinking it 'a menace to the state' to think too hard on the origins of obligations, see Kinna (2019c, p. 134). See also Shūsui (2015[1901], p. 144) and de Laforcade and Shaffer (2015, p. 6).

¹⁷¹ See Graeber (2004, p. 54–57) on ethnogenesis: 'many of what we have come to think of as tribes, or nations, or ethnic groups were originally collective projects of some sort', and while some are 'egalitarian, others are about promoting a certain vision of authority or hierarchy'.

be prioritised at all times; that such prioritisation is not seen as a sign of integrity. If put into practice, such thoughts could significantly foil republican prospects.

Marx, in turn, took up Hegel's denial of the individual as the starting point of philosophy, but asserted that the fundamental dialectical relationship was the material one between humanity and nature, mediated by labour. Marxists encourage people to see themselves as human beings whose humanity is defined by rationality in opposition to the arbitrariness and randomness of "nature". The more one collaborates with efforts to "win" this conflict (to dominate, to establish human, rational sovereignty), the more one fulfils one's potential: the more one is *truly* oneself. That means people ought to prioritise their drives as humans defined by their capacity as workers. In-groupness and geographical rootedness matter less; all can be "converted", and movement helps do so¹⁷².

Once people share a certain idea of revolution, they can act in unison, self-sacrificing (as individuals) if needed, to achieve real liberty: 'it cannot properly be said that the person is the subject of freedom', as O'Rourke (1974, p. 45) writes; society (certainly not a nation-state but all human beings) 'becomes the subject'. But if the right to define the revolution's purpose and path — to say what this "society" subject truly wants — is withheld by a "vanguard"¹⁷³, we are in the presence of another hierarchical rhetoric of self-making: a specific notion of what human beings are and do that justifies sovereign power.

An argument can be made that this kind of rhetoric is always transcendent. Everyone is essentially a part of humankind regardless of how each person sees themselves. However, consciousness plays a role in the process of historical development that humanity goes through, and so a more contextual discourse emerges from the difference between people who have already understood their role and those who have not. Marxists can even point to how individuals' lives will be materially improved if they engage in anti-capitalist struggle, which is not just a strategy to get people involved in new relations so that they shift their perspectives, for selfishness collapses into altruism in the end (which is quite on-brand for socialists¹⁷⁴).

¹⁷² See section 1.2, page 27; more broadly, see Benedict Anderson (2006, chap. 4).

¹⁷³ See the discussion in section 2.4, around page 69.

¹⁷⁴ See e.g. anarchists' views on transcendent divisions between egoism and generosity in the previous section. Notice that, in the classic Marxist case, material improvement for every individual might accelerate the onset of crises that will require the destruction of capitalism, although Marxist eco-socialist discourse may differ: it is too dangerous to push the planet to the brink of our extinction, and one may rethink what it means for people's lives to be materially enriched so that their "selfish" desires will align with ecological needs. In any case, the distinction can never truly go away. Consider how Soviet philosophers disagreed on whether 'the final significance of individual existence lies' in 'serving the needs of the world process' or in 'the achievement of personal happiness' (O'ROURKE, 1974, p. 180).

In summary, lived sovereignty encourages people to adopt narrow narratives on selfhood, to see themselves above all as a specific kind of self, which amounts to absolutely prioritising some drives over others. At the same time, such stories tend to legitimise violence with the aim of avoiding that which would imply a “wrong” order of motivations, that is, a “corruption” of who people are (supposed to be) (WALL, 2021, p. 18). As Graeber (2011a, p. 111) remarked, this sort of “single-issue identity” is always ‘entangled in the logic of hierarchy’.

Rites of institution are perhaps the most visible form of this confluence between ideas and action. They contribute to discourses by ‘fostering a misrecognition of the arbitrary nature of the limit’ – e.g. between individuals, between nations – and legitimising it. But they are also useful for more contextual rhetorics of self-making, as they affect people’s subjectivity by signifying ‘to someone what [they are] and how [they] should conduct [themselves] as a consequence’. They ‘act on reality by acting on its representation’, on people’s identities in particular (BOURDIEU, 1991, p. 118–120).

An investiture [...] exercises a symbolic efficacy that is quite real in that it really transforms the person consecrated: first, because it transforms the representations others have of [them] and above all the behaviour they adopt towards [them] [...]; and second, because it simultaneously transforms *the representation that the invested person has of [themselves], and the behaviour [they feel] obliged to adopt in order to conform to that representation.* [...] To institute [...] is to impose a right to be that is an obligation of being so [...] It signifies to someone what [their] identity is, but in a way that both expresses it to [them] and imposes it on [them] by expressing it in front of everyone [...] and thus informing [them] in an authoritative manner of *what [they are] and what [they] must be.* (BOURDIEU, 1991, p. 119–122 emphases added)

Through liberal contractualism, people are told to see themselves as the lone wolves who would have agreed to create a specific kind of social environment. Although not as foundational as uppercase Social Contracts, elections serve a similar purpose (BENALLY, 2021b, p. 45). After all, they are only considered legitimate in liberal democracies if voters act as isolated agents, each one standing alone before the ballot box or voting machine. Discounting the manifold rituals around national symbols that nation-states tend to suffer on citizens, republicans might take advantage of other moments of individuals’ interactions with the state to instil in them the significance of being a part of the nation. Ceremonies in which politicians repackage work as the fruit of the state’s generosity¹⁷⁵ are particularly helpful for pressing the point that people’s lives are indeed entangled with the state, which hopefully (for republicans) affects desire toward

¹⁷⁵ And their own, personally, although skilled orators will know better than to sound boastful; their presence and leadership in the ritual might be enough for them to benefit from association.

its institutions. Marxists, in turn, think about how workers gain consciousness of their real interests by engaging in social struggle (RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, chap. 3). However, this engagement must culminate in possession of the one right analysis, shared with others who therefore also employ the one correct strategy. Only then can people be said to have achieved true class consciousness.

Importantly, as seen in section 4.1, seeking sovereignty does not result in a monolithic, pristine embodiment of any agent's intentions, but rather a complex compromise among agents, themselves conglomerates of drives that defy demands for coherence¹⁷⁶ (MICHEL, 2021[1890], p. 55; SAMIS; RAMOS, 2002, p. 216–218; HUTCHINSON, 2005, p. 135; STRAUMANN, 2016, p. 197–198; GRAEBER, 2018, p. 272–273; CUSICANQUI, 2020, p. 56–57). So instead of reading any status quo as if it meant the imposition of “an” identity, what is seen in practice is the reproduction of a system of identities reflecting a continually disputed balance of power. Jostling for supremacy within this system, despite the impossibility or even a contextual undesirability of achieving it, still makes sense¹⁷⁷. Each interpretation of unrestriction demands a clearly delineated subject to self-determine, to be unrestricted, and the defence of the right constitution reflects elaborations on the “normal” person, who “has got their priorities straight”, so to speak. The view from each of these traditions (on freedom, institutions, subjectivity) implies a predefined statist model of conflict resolution, of what desires are supposed to take precedence over others, by force if needed. They might never be fully realised as procedure or internalised as self-evident, but their enactment and growth can still bring benefits to certain agents, influencing arrangements to their advantage — or perhaps fulfilling a desire for “having integrity”, for “being true to one's self”, once what that means has already taken root.

¹⁷⁶ This opens the door for questioning if universal yet sovereignty-based discourses are not in practice too close for comfort to explicitly divisive rhetorics of self-making that create essential distinctions in terms of who we are (e.g. colonialist or racist discourses). This is because the superior power that enables the imposition of a universal discourse also creates different capabilities for punishing others *and* controlling information, which means some proponents of a universal discourse are simultaneously (more) able to punish those who fall short of the ideal *and* more easily conceal how they *themselves* fall short as well, creating an informational environment in which it is reasonable for the punished to conclude punishment is deserved. Universal discourses that are not backed by superior force can be more easily challenged; see note 232 in the next section, as well as Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 2).

¹⁷⁷ For one salient example, heavy criticism of so-called “identity politics” among liberals, republicans, or orthodox Marxists are explainable by a fear, or revulsion, of cherished collective identities based on criteria other than what each tradition condones. On the other hand, identity politics can also be understood as liberal if, rather than autonomous collective struggles, it means the “management” of individual rights based on personal characteristics (CICCARIELLO-MAHER, 2011; KHALED; ROCHA; BARROS, 2022, 1:00:15–1:08:05; ZIEGLER, 2022b, p. 70), possibly ‘freez[ing] the oppressed in a status of victimhood that requires protection from above’ (HAIDER, 2018, p. 100). I shall return to this issue in the next section and in section 6.1.2; tangentially, see section 4.2.1.

5.2.2 Anarchism and subjectivity

*My best friend converted to Islam the other day
She said "I've always been on the struggling side
On the opposite side of Bush: that's where I belong"
My best friend, she'd like to share this bread with me
And with you and with everybody else
Cause on the bread sharing side: that's where I belong*

Billie the Vision and the Dancers ¹⁷⁸

*In essence you're precisely the capacity to transit between
all that constitutes you. This is how liberty is exercised,
how subjective freedom is made effective,
how one structures oneself as an agent.
[... We must think of] each identity at the crossroads of all others,
so that we can escape an essence that must be protected
from corruption by the Other. ^k*

Douglas Rodrigues Barros ¹⁷⁹

'I was woven of many skeins, conflicting in shade and texture', wrote Goldman (2018[1931], p. 105, 126, *passim*). Throughout her life, repeatedly she was asked to 'forswear [her] interests and the [anarchist] movement [...] for love', and refused; conversely, many times she was told to do what was best for anarchism and not discuss sexuality nor practise "free love", but she stood her ground. She eulogised the mentor she had once literally whipped for slandering Berkman, enjoyed exchanging ideas with those who thought differently (even when she concluded she was wrong¹⁸⁰), and did not let disappointments prevent her from seeing the best in the people she shared paths with. From industrial action, conscription disobedience, and prisoner support campaigns to fundraising for Spanish revolutionaries as a sexagenarian and birth control advocacy, she prioritised different motivations over time as contexts changed around her, but always from a libertarian standpoint. Risking and relinquishing much to follow her passions at the same time as battling injustice, she never backed down from speaking up, and was only able to go as far as she did due to the relationships she cultivated through committed solidarity.

Her life was an archetypical example of the anarchist impulse to give expression to all of one's drives; in fact, it was probably crucial in *defining* this inclination as essential to anarchism. This tradition, then, does not feature a single subjective perspective to be prioritised absolutely. Instead, it supposes 'the infinite multiplicity and unending transformation of beings', resisting

¹⁷⁸ Kronkvist and Lindquist, 2008.

¹⁷⁹ Khaled, Rocha, and Barros, 2022, 21:07–22:55, 42:26–42:48.

¹⁸⁰ See also Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, chap. 5), although this was unfortunately not one of her epiphanies.

‘the unification and ordering of society under the banner of a central power or the myth of an essential community’ (DE LAFORCADE; SHAFFER, 2015, p. 7–8). To do so, people are asked to work against the imbalances within their networks of mutuality (which translates into the employment of multiple rhetorics of self-making) and to value the conversations and negotiations that connect us to others and change us.

Precisely because “us (or me) versus them” mindsets are endemic to hierarchical and thus imbalanced settings, anarchists are suspicious of them (CLARAMUNT, 2016[1909], p. 81; RODRIGUES, 1999b, p. 63–64; HECKERT, 2012, p. 51–52; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 186). We are all equal in terms of intrinsic worth and are deeply connected, this being a positive, desirable thing (CERRUTI, 2018[1927]). Discussing black anarchism, William C. Anderson (2022) writes that ‘we are all part of “the people”’, who are simply ‘the people themselves, not a rhetorical football’, and that ‘means moving away from and transcending all [...] oversimplified “either/or” sectarian binaries’¹⁸¹. ‘Frontiers means states’, wrote Acharya (2019[1948], p. 131), and since anarchists do not want the second, they do not approve of the first: ‘only undivided [humankind] exists for them’. As Robinson (1980, p. 205) argues via the anarchistic non-Western cultures he studies, ‘the will and the need to remain one with all’ entails an intentional circumvention of sovereignty.

This universal rhetoric is the simplest that anarchists support. It was at times marked by Eurocentric, positivistic, even Marxist assumptions¹⁸², but the anarchist tradition developed a lack of particularity about what it means to categorise one’s desires from this perspective. By embracing universal connection on these terms, anarchists did not mean to prescribe what that meant; only to value the multiplicity of sociability, the expansion of one’s entanglement with others, prioritising the desire to have “external” desires become “internal” and vice-versa. The principle of diversity shines through this yearning for an equality that is not sameness; for an account of altruism that does not weaponise it in support of hierarchical structures, but rather displays what Janicka (2023) calls ‘solidarity with singularity’. Unity might be humanity’s ‘great goal’ for Bakunin (1971[1867], p. 106), ‘but it becomes fatal, destructive of the intelligence, the dignity, the well-being of individuals and peoples’, when formed ‘by violent means or under the authority of any theological, metaphysical, political, or even economic idea’.

This discourse was manifested in the kinds of welcoming, boundless, internationalist revolutionary activity that anarchists have fostered (WALT; SCHMIDT, 2009a, p. 7). They

¹⁸¹ See also Ervin (2009[1993], p. 50).

¹⁸² See e.g. Leibner (2013[1994], p. 7) and Ibáñez (2014, p. 18).

tended to characterise their actions as universally emancipatory, not something they were doing only for themselves¹⁸³. ‘Under the Commune’, observed Kristin Ross (2015, chap. 1), ‘Paris wanted to be not the capital of France but an autonomous collective in a universal federation of peoples’¹⁸⁴. Today, we witness the same in Rojava: ‘we are struggling here, but also for the whole world’, women from the Women’s Protection Units (YPJ) told Janet Biehl (2014).

One form this impulse took among anarchistic non-Western peoples is family, or kinship, considered not in the narrow sense of “blood relations” (BOOKCHIN, 1982, p. 85–86), and certainly not within conservative or capitalist frameworks (BLACK ORCHID COLLECTIVE, 2018[2010]; SALLYDARITY, 2012), but as consequential affinity, as affection that entails deeper (and equal) mutuality¹⁸⁵. As Aragorn! (2005, p. 7) argued, ‘we are part of a family and we know ourselves through family’, and ‘an indigenous anarchism’ must recognise our belonging to ‘an extended family’ that, as mentioned above, involves all sorts of beings beyond human agents¹⁸⁶. If we are one with everybody, relating to others in a healthy manner would mean finding affinity; remembering that we are all already *related* (double meaning of the word intended) and thus must (re)create space for further intersubjectivity.

Sahlins (2005) thinks the kinship angle is recoverable from inside the Western tradition as well, especially in religious discourse. A lot of anarchists are openly hostile to religion¹⁸⁷,

¹⁸³ Even where nationalism was the main driver of engagement with anarchism; see e.g. Hwang (2016, p. 2). See the discussion at the end of section 4.2.2.

¹⁸⁴ See also Bakunin (2002).

¹⁸⁵ See Nordgren (2012[2006]), Brake (2012), Schulman (2016, chap. 7), David Brooks (2020), and Rhaina Cohen (2020) for how kinship can be, and has most often been, about affinity more than strict “biological” ties. Patterning social life this way would, as some of these sources comment and explicitly defend, (re)affirm friendship’s kinship-establishing properties. See also Cicero’s thoughts about equality as central to friendship: it was balance, which often had to be deliberately produced, that made a friendly relation capable of engendering virtue for the friends (KAPUST, 2018, p. 46–55).

¹⁸⁶ See note 123 of section 5.2 (on page 204), as well as the discussion in section 5.1 about non-Western social structures that allow for “adopting” a completely different family. Then there is the question of intergenerational identity; of ‘duties and obligations to [...] ancestors and to the future unborn generations’ (TSOSIE, 2012 apud FISCELLA, 2015, p. 268). This rhetoric may also be problematic – see the discussion on “maternal practice”, also in section 5.1 – but, importantly, it would be as wrong to generalise this for “non-Western cultures” – e.g. Robinson (1980, p. 196) and Garcia (2018, p. 145–149) – as it would be to forget how obsessed white, Western civilisation too can be with the “forefather” figure, for better or for worse. Ziegler (2022a) has also recently criticised the recent Western phenomenon of “deathbed environmental activism”. Finally, the matter of intergenerational subjectivity is not foreign to anarchism either; see e.g. Cordero (2015, p. 317–318).

¹⁸⁷ This is partly because, as mentioned in section 3.1, they trace lay hierarchical politics to theology. Ernesto Lorca (2003, p. 261, 388) accuses monotheistic religions in particular of having pioneered relations of ‘legal equality without real equality’, with dictated rites of institution – at times demarcating a territorial group (ROGERSON, 2003, p. 154) – that legitimised obedience through terror on one hand and rich rewards on the other – even Christianity, despite its considerable ascetic tendencies, on which see Lorca (2003, p. 156, 173, 176–177, 179, 271). There are, of course, important differences in the sense that liberal, republican, and Marxist rhetorics are about deliberation instead of revelation, public rather than godly affairs, even if historically the distinction between “God” and “reason” is thin, as mentioned in section 2.2, and Roman

but only anticlericalism (being against any exclusive right to interpret “divine” principles¹⁸⁸) is unanimous (KREBS, 1998, p. 106; CERRUTI, 2018[1934][b]; BONOMO, 2007, p. 351). ‘Religious socialists [...] demanded the kingdom of God to be realized in this world’, but the ‘law of God exclude[d] any other claims to absoluteness[, n]ot only by the representatives of God but also by the state’¹⁸⁹ (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 29). Tolstoy’s (2012[1908]) anarchism was famously tied to a Christian ideal, Jewish and Yiddish communities were particularly vibrant sections of early anarchist movements, and resonances can be found between anarchism and both Judaism and Islam (YÜCESOY, 2012; GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 29; ROTHMAN, 2021b,a; ABDOU, 2022). But this, of course, goes beyond Abrahamic religions. Cusicanqui speaks of her “tainted anarchism” insofar as it is spiritual rather than atheist (CRÍTICA..., 2018[2014], p. 20), and many anarchists have taken inspiration from Buddhism, especially its most anti-dogmatic, anti-violent currents¹⁹⁰ (KREBS, 1998, p. 27; MORRIS, B., 2020; ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 84–86; ARMIN, 2021; GRAEBER; WENGROW, 2021, p. 319–321). In other words, religiosity produces signifiers for common humanity that anarchists have found inspiring, even if, in stressing this element, anarchists were often considered heretics among some peers of faith¹⁹¹.

In a provocative study, Lagalisie (2019, p. 28, 73) explains that ‘anarchism has never been purely atheist except in name’, having developed instead ‘based on overlapping syncretic pagan cosmologies that behold the immanence of the divine’¹⁹². At the turn of the twentieth century, in particular, ‘it was possible to say, “Scratch a spiritualist, and you will find an anarchist[...]”’. This connects anarchists to systems of spirituality anthropologists¹⁹³ have broadly labelled “magic” (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 239–240). Unlike religion, with beings above us that we have not

republicanism, for example, was neither atheistic nor secular. One can still see parallels between religious doctrines of god-given rules and Roman constitutionalism via natural law, i.e. higher-order rules that must not be tampered with by officials or assemblies (STRAUMANN, 2016). Monotheism seems to relate to polytheism just as the modern state relates to “juridical pluralism” (ANDO, 2016). In any case, already by the 1960s the impression is that ‘anarchist hatred of religion has declined as the power of the church has declined’, and ‘most anarchists’ began to ‘oppose the discouragement of religion by force’ as much as ‘the revival of religion by force’ (WALTER, 2020[1969], p. 10). See also Bakunin (1975, p. 18), Rodrigues (1999c, p. 106), and Rogério Nascimento (2002, p. 101).

¹⁸⁸ Tangentially, see Borck and Clark (2021).

¹⁸⁹ See also Rodrigues (1999b, p. 16) and Graeber (2007, p. 21).

¹⁹⁰ See also Nelson (2021, chap. 2) on Buddhism in connection with the apparent “paradox” discussed in section 4.2.2 (around page 125).

¹⁹¹ Somewhat tangentially, see Lagalisie (2019) and Kinna (2020a).

¹⁹² This is yet another bridge between anarchism and many anarchistic non-Western cultures. As indigenous anarchist Aragorn! (2005, p. 7) wrote, ‘it is impossible to understand oneself or one another outside of the spirit. It is the mystery that should remain outside of language that is what we all share together and that sharing is living’. Even more directly, when one lives under domination, the “cosmvision” one has to share is struggle itself (REGINALDO; MORAES; RETÉ, 2021, 1:09:11–1:13:35). See also Knowles (2002).

¹⁹³ I reference the technicality of the terms because I do not mean for the distinction below, between magic and religion, to mean anything pejorative about either of them.

created, magic is about ‘humans actively shaping the world, conscious of what they are doing as they do so’¹⁹⁴. This difference is relevant because it means that the values one holds dear — such as balance, diversity, mutual aid — are not to be read as determinations they have no say on, but rather things one must take responsibility for, constantly producing and re-examining; they will not exist unless they are instituted by human action, and nothing supernatural says they *should* exist¹⁹⁵ (MALATESTA, 2016, p. 81).

This means that we can act unto each other as divine siblings where there is balance, which does not come “naturally” or by the grace of God; where there is not, *we* must establish it. Without this caution regarding the “universal siblinghood” they themselves enjoyed envisioning (RECLUS, 2013[1894], p. 120–121), anarchists could end up reinforcing sovereignty (DE CLEYRE, 2009[1893], p. 5; FABBRI, Luigi, 2021[1921], p. 4; ZIEGLER, 2023, 3:49–3:55). As Franks (2012, p. 62) writes, one of the defining features of anarchism is ‘a fluid concept of the self in which one’s identity is inherently linked to socio-historical contexts and relationships’. So to endorse a disposition to take on oppressors’ perspectives because of a fixed, a-historical reading of human solidarity and sociability would reproduce the kind of inequality that already makes it hard to see things from more perspectives and prioritise other motivations¹⁹⁶. If ‘social justice’ is to be the ‘mainspring of [...] social activity’ (KINNA, 2020b, p. 11), *anti-universalistic*, factional positions must therefore be adopted; ‘fights against the current order that claims universal consent and legitimacy’ (NEWMAN, S., 2012, p. 44) in order to establish meaningful equality.

¹⁹⁴ Which helps explain the hostility of European monotheism toward magic, including witch hunts, ‘directed specifically at poor women’ to enforce ‘private property, wage work, and the transformation of women into (re)producers of labor’ (LAGALISSE, 2019, p. 36). To be transparent about the way I am using Lagalisse’s work, she is quite ambivalent about how anarchists have dealt with occultism, with magic being disavowed by them, too, over time (‘a hundred years’ after the “scratch a spiritualist” saying above, Lagalisse (2019, p. 73) laments, ‘the tables have been turned’). Non-materialistic points of view seemed to be too close to conjuring conveniently imperceptible equality, or “beyond human comprehension” justice, to distract from actual oppression. But this meant that occultism developed within progressive traditions, anarchism included, in Lagalisse’s view, as a certain masculinist appropriation of creative power. In summary, I am pointing out that anarchists used to be (more) open to a universalistic language of spirituality that relates to a notion of magic, while she is (correctly, in my estimation) concerned about what the abandonment of the latter means for the movement: a “selling out” of mostly women and non-Western peoples in exchange for “respectability” in a political arena dominated by sovereignty. See also Cohn (2022).

¹⁹⁵ For anarchists, of course, *no* human institution exists independently of efforts for their establishment and maintenance — even if, as shall be discussed in section 6.1, different institutions influence the “reliability” of said efforts to different extents. In any case, as this denaturalises oppressive patterns, it is a point they make in multiple contexts; see e.g. Landauer’s (2019[1910], p. 2) notable saying about the nature of the state, or Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, *passim*) on bureaucracy, as well as Graeber (2015b, p. 88–90), for whom this is a “leftist” point more generally.

¹⁹⁶ Another reason why anarchists do not support that sort of “relatability” is that it is often not mutual. See Graeber (2014), as well as Heckert (2012) for an indirect counterpoint of sorts; in any case, see the discussions on targets of anarchist propaganda in sections 3.1 and 6.2.1.

A materialist, socialist background explains the attention paid to economic factions. Eliminating exploitation would provide the conditions for people to be benevolent to one another as universalistic sensibilities preached¹⁹⁷. As discussed above, economic oppression may foster discontent, but propaganda offering a unique *perspective* on suffering is key. To organise against the alienation of work, it would help if workers saw themselves as part of a class and prioritised the drives for its well-being.

However, anarchists disagree with Marxists over what such a perspective implies¹⁹⁸. If there is something more essential about work, as is the Marxist philosophical contention, *human* liberation demands that class demands (or of the party which represents them) be put above others: ‘labor’s emancipation means at the same time the redemption of the whole of society, and that is why some people speak of labor’s “historic mission” to bring about the better day’¹⁹⁹ (BERKMAN, 1929, p. 207). This essentialism, or even the “strategic” injunction that ‘class trump every other identity’ (KIRSCHENBAUM, 2017, p. 76), implies that other imbalances of power would be much less relevant than anarchists usually deem them to be (BONOMO, 2007, p. 410; SHANNON; ROGUE, 2009; CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 61; CORDERO, 2015, p. 304; ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 100–101), or that they could be resolved *by* solving economic inequality, which anarchists also tend to find ‘utterly wrong’ (KROPOTKIN, 2014[1895], p. 429 apud KINNA, 2016, p. 110).

Workers are also parents who are concerned about the future of their children, men and women who are concerned about their dignity, autonomy, and growth as human beings, neighbors who are concerned about their community, and empathetic people who were concerned with social justice, civic rights, and freedom. [...] they have every reason to be concerned about ecological problems, the rights of minorities and women, [...] and the growth of the centralized state – problems that are not specific to a particular class and that cannot be resolved within the walls of factories. [...] Anarchists should] help workers become fully conscious not only of their concerns [as] an economic class but of the broadly human concerns of the potential citizens of a free and ecological society.²⁰⁰ (BOOKCHIN, 2011[1992], p. 17–18)

Class divisions are crucial, but making class identity absolute entails de-emphasising drives to fight domination in other kinds of relations, which makes it harder for these imbalances

¹⁹⁷ Consider how anarchists trace most violent crime to poverty and hierarchy (PARSONS, 2010[1890], p. 2; MALATESTA, 2014[1922][h]; DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 135–136; GOLDMAN, 2018[1931], p. 93–94).

¹⁹⁸ See Hardman (1983, p. 75–79), Fidelli (2007), and Kinna (2019b, p. 150–156) on disagreements between anarchists and Marxists on definitions of class.

¹⁹⁹ Notice how Berkman (1929, p. 207, emphasis added) portrays this as a ‘false and misleading conception, essentially a *religious*, metaphysical sentiment’.

²⁰⁰ See also Rodrigues (1999c, p. 159), Samanta Colhado Mendes (2010, p. 45), Skoda and Troyano (2020, 2:10:10–2:10:51), and Kallin (2021, 17:51–18:46).

to be addressed (SPRINGER, 2014, p. 251, 258; AZEVEDO, 2014, p. 85–87). Citing ‘the example of Russia’, Luigi Fabbri (2004[1927]) denies that ‘the aim of anarchism is exclusively workerist’, or that ‘the triumph of the working class should necessarily lead to Anarchy’²⁰¹. Picking up on the similarities between the discourses on subjectivity within the unrestriction paradigm, Landauer wrote about how they can be a part of, as mentioned in the previous section, a larger structural compromise around the principle of sovereignty, and how this could damage other movements of resistance and change. For him,

Marx’s invocation of class [...] was designed to impose a single, uniform pattern of life on diverse communities. [...] It left no place for diversity within the proletariat, let alone across the mass of the oppressed. Dragooned into adjunct unions of political parties, workers would be exhorted to sacrifice self-interest to the proletarian good, taking up revolution but breeding conformity. For regardless of the revolutionary status that Marxism bestowed upon them, in official unions workers had more reason to maintain and manipulate the system for their own ends than they had in destroying it.²⁰² (KINNA, 2019b, p. 154–155)

Anarchists feel similarly with respect to national, territorial identities. Nationalities are not a ‘principle’, as they do not ‘have the power of universality’; they are an ‘exclusionist tendency’ separating people from one another (BAKUNIN, 1971[1867], p. 106), ‘an abstract concept used by elites to pattern communities by means of violence’²⁰³ (KINNA, 2020b, p. 11). As Walt and Schmidt (2009a, p. 310) argue, anarchists ‘celebrated the diversity of cultures and nationalities’ but refused to uncritically defend particular ones, as well as ‘the notion that cultures were monolithic or unchanging, [...] that certain rights are alien to their cultures and therefore unimportant or objectionable’. Anarchists, then, reject the premise that people ought to fight above all to be free as part of a nation. As Landauer lambasted Marxist class struggle above, he was in fact comparing it to appeals to the nation: *both* imposed unity and limited solidarity, to the detriment of other imbalances that should also be addressed²⁰⁴.

²⁰¹ See also Malatesta (2014[1922][c]), for whom there is no reason ‘for turning the poor man into a fetish just because he is poor; neither it is a reason for encouraging him to believe that he is intrinsically superior, [...] that he can] do wrong to the others as the others did wrong to him. The tyranny of callous hands (which in practice is still the tyranny of few who no longer have callous hands, even if they had once), would not be less tough and wicked, and would not bear less lasting evils than the tyranny of gloved hands’.

²⁰² See also Rodrigues (1999b, p. 243) and Samis and Ramos (2002, p. 216–218). All of this relates to the notion that ‘interest’ is always conservative’, as Malatesta (2014[1922][g]) wrote; see note 122 in section 5.2, as well as Rodrigues (1999b, p. 50) and Bonomo (2007, p. 346). However, he continues, ‘that does not mean that interest, even though it be short-term or petty or personal, is worthless, and that the revolutionary can and should live by ideals alone. In order to be able and willing to improve, one must exist; in order to progress, one needs to conserve and consolidate the progress already achieved’.

²⁰³ See also Milton (1964, p. 71) and Rodrigues (1999b, p. 62–63).

²⁰⁴ See also Bakunin (1975, p. 208) and Kinna (2020b, p. 10).

However, territory is an extremely important affair in terms of how people organise their lives and thus relate to one another²⁰⁵. In contrast with Marxists (as discussed in section 2.3.3), anarchists do consider it relevant for a “people”²⁰⁶ to constitute a separate identity; to become an “agent” in their own right, with motivations that should be taken into consideration. This is what a nation is: not a homogeneous agglomeration of people in a linguistic or phenotypic sense, not even ‘a union of economic interests’, but a ‘common inheritance of traditions, of hopes and regrets, of common aspirations and common conceptions’ distinct from surrounding ones and particular to a place (KROPOTKIN, 2019[1885][a], p. 2 apud KINNA, 2016, p. 94). Even if not “a principle”, nationality is a ‘natural fact’, having (just like individuality) ‘an incontestable right to a free existence and development’²⁰⁷ (BAKUNIN, 1971[1867], p. 106).

It is when an imbalance is established between nations that anarchists tend to endorse factional rhetorics of self-making in this axis. ‘Anarchists support national liberation movements’, Ervin (2009[1993], p. 41) explains, ‘to the degree that they struggle against a colonial or imperialist power’, and this was ‘such a priority’ that support was given even if said movements were not anarchistic²⁰⁸ (EVREN, 2012, p. 306). “Local self-determination” means that *one* relation (between locals and foreigners) becomes more balanced²⁰⁹, and it was thus worthwhile even if, as published in a US-based anarchist journal in the 1950s, ‘one struggle is over only to give birth to a new one’ (C. W., 1957, p. 6).

If we were to say to a citizen of Ghana [... that they] had merely changed masters, [they] would reply “So much the worse for anarchism if it elevates theories above observable fact.” Because [...] “it is better to be able to manage your own affairs, or mismanage them, than not to be free to manage or mismanage your own affairs”[...]. (C. W., 1957, p. 6)

²⁰⁵ See the discussion on “indigenous sovereignty” in section 5.1, around page 190, as well as Benedict Anderson (2006, chap. 4).

²⁰⁶ Unlike more conservative, traditionalist ideologies, there is hardly any concern with “what ‘a people’ is” in the progressive traditions considered in this thesis. As Knudsen (2020, p. 33, 219) puts it, this seems unnecessary, for ‘once the demand for political freedom has been made as a call for “self-determination”, the political “self” is in some sense already there, constituted by this call and regardless of the claimants’ intragroup (national, “ethnic” or otherwise) qualities’. Such discourses might be, as noted above, *useful* for republicans, but are not necessary. See also last section’s note 171 on page 221.

²⁰⁷ See also Reclus (2013[1898], p. 142), Bakunin (2002), and Kinna (2020b, p. 13).

²⁰⁸ See also Goldman (2018[1931], p. 382), Corrêa (2012b, p. 114), Porter (2019), William C. Anderson (2021, p. 91), and Ricardo Diogo Mainsel Duarte (2021, p. 190). Consider as well the case of Coomaraswamy, whose nationalism was ‘based on the rejection of Empire’ and was “inseparable” from internationalism’, for it was basically a celebration of diversity against ‘artificial cosmopolitanism’ (KINNA, 2020b, p. 7). On the other hand, there was (DAMIER; LIMANOV, 2017), and still is – see section 4.2 (around page 103) for a very brief mention of anarchist positions on the currently unfolding war in Ukraine – conflict around this issue within the anarchist tradition (GORDON, U., 2017). Finally, see section 5.1 (around page 197) on the frequent portrayal of anarchists as “outside agitators”.

²⁰⁹ And this *can* be connected to other struggles as well; see e.g. Kinna (2016, p. 83).

Territorial identities are thus not inherently problematic; only if they are organised as a state. This is for two reasons. First, because a nation would actually be *maintaining* a historic colonial dynamic rather than challenging it (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 122). C. W. (1957, p. 9) felt it was tragic²¹⁰ for ‘the new nations’ to shape their institutions ‘by the same assumptions which lie behind the political systems of their former masters’: ‘centralised state, the party system, and all the second-hand regalia of political power’, regardless of whether the aim was ‘socialism or “free enterprise”’. ‘Rather than looking back to traditional methods of social organization or trying to envision new ones’, writes Eric Laursen (2021, p. 85), postcolonial societies ‘(re)created some version of the state system that the colonizing power had fastened on them’. ‘The worst remaining aspects of indiginous [sic] social systems are exploited because they are useful politically, and the best aspects of tribalism are destroyed’ (C. W., 1957, p. 9). Even peoples that managed to ‘avoid dismemberment and colonization [...] remodeled themselves in the image of the modern State as their elites sought to guarantee [...] a seat at the table the Europeans were setting’²¹¹ (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 85).

Secondly, moreover, anarchists reject any equation between statehood and substantive equality. The (re)institution of the principle of sovereignty means creating, maintaining, or affecting imbalances on other levels. ‘The bourgeoisie love their country only’ as long as it ‘safeguards their economic, political, and social privileges’; they are ‘patriots of the State’ and actually ‘furious enemies of the masses’ (BAKUNIN, 1971[1870][a], p. 185–186). For Acharya (2019[1950]), nothing had changed under the postcolonial Indian republic ‘except the skin and dress’, for ‘a new set of masters had replaced the colonial masters but workers were still exploited and had no real freedom’ (LAURSEN, O. B., 2020, 13:23–13:34).

But these “other levels” can even be territorial ones as well. As he praised nationalities, Bakunin (2002, emphasis in the original) called for them to ‘liberate themselves from the domination of *the state*’²¹². On one hand, the state system seems to generate war, as states must be ready to become invaders (WALT; SCHMIDT, 2009a, p. 63). On the other, nationalism, or nationality as the narrative of subjectivity historically propped by nation-states, ‘denies the liberty of provinces and the true autonomy of communes’ (BAKUNIN, 1971[1867], p. 106). What is needed is an equilibrium between basic territorial units of deliberation and decision (neighbourhood, commune, etc.) in the context of broader (regional, “international”) interaction.

²¹⁰ See Fanon (2005[1961], p. 54 apud COULTHARD, 2014, p. 47) on ‘the curse of [national] independence’.

²¹¹ See also Ervin (2009[1993], p. 41), Samuel Clark (2007, p. 79), and William C. Anderson (2021, p. 176).

²¹² See also de Laforcade and Shaffer (2015, p. 8–9).

Bookchin specifically emphasised these “basic” territorial units, opposing them to the necessarily imperial dynamics of larger territories, which hampered face-to-face democratic procedures²¹³ (HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 127). This is not entirely at odds with the anarchist tradition, concerned as it is with institutions that prevent higher federative levels from becoming an imposing force. Mandated, recallable delegates and limits on their attributions, for instance, are strategies for “scaling up” horizontal decision-making from the bottom up, or from the periphery to the centre, so as to allow a large number of people to discuss collective action in non-dominating ways (PRICE, W., 2012a, p. 319–320). Bookchin did not see any contradiction between this focus on the “localness” of decision-making and a more universal subjectivity: ‘people in general [...] were to become citizens of a community’, but they would not be ‘occupied with resolving [...] separate particularistic conflicting interests’; rather, they would work on ‘a shared general human body of concerns’ (BOOKCHIN, 2011[1992], p. 16–17).

However, Bookchin’s readiness to see local politics as inherently desirable attracted criticism by other anarchists. On John P. Clark’s (2013, p. 259) account, the city appears in Bookchin’s texts as less important than family and friends, but even otherwise his ‘case for the greater “immediacy” of the city does not stand up to a careful analysis of the actual experience of contemporary city-dwellers’; the ‘municipality’ is attributed an exclusive ‘role in social life that is in fact shared by a variety of institutions and spheres of existence’. In any case, anarchists have long argued that oppressors can be close by or far away²¹⁴ (AMILCAR, 2018[1934], p. 187), and that ‘there is not a conclusively larger amount of freedom in a limited association than in a larger one’ (ARMAND; LYG, 1957, p. 12). Anarchists did not ‘wish merely for a territorial decentralization, leaving the principle of government intact’, and so anarchism should not be mistaken for ‘cantonal or communal government’²¹⁵ (MALATESTA, 2014[1892][a]).

In the end, Bookchin’s rhetorics of self-making became nearly indistinguishable from those of republicans. It is not surprising, then, that he broke with the anarchist tradition later in life due to several polemics, such as his defence of participation in municipal governments (in the United States) as a viable libertarian strategy. This was consistent with his focus on the local territory as inherently liberating, but as it reinforced the principle of sovereignty it was

²¹³ See also Woodcock (2007).

²¹⁴ Attention has also been called to how the smallest of groups, such as nuclear families, can be just as oppressive as distant overlords, if not *more* (RECLUS, 2013[1905][b], p. 189; HOOKS, 2017[1994], p. 43–44; KORNEGGER, 2002, p. 26; MCBRIDE, 2011, p. 162; ACKELSBERG, 2012, p. 20; SCHULMAN, 2016, chap. 7; RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, p. 90). This is clearly connected to the theme of isolationism and independence as discussed in section 5.1; to the mirage of “the local” as a place of safety one can retreat to.

²¹⁵ See also Sindicato Único del Ramo del Transporte de Barcelona (1936).

indeed incompatible with anarchism (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 266). For anarchists, all territory-based groups are just federations, with nothing essential about them: anarchist organisation would mean the ‘federation of individuals into communes, of communes into provinces, of the provinces into nations, and, finally, of the nations into [...] the entire world eventually’ (BAKUNIN, 1971[1867], p. 104–105). There needs to be more than ideological goodwill to avoid parochialism, that is, to have a community be “occupied with shared general human concerns”. This needs to be *institutionalised*, and the institutions which correspond to a self that is not “absorbed into the tribe” are mechanisms that open each territorial unit’s decision-making processes to the direct action of agents other than the unit itself²¹⁶.

And this, for anarchists, goes far beyond other territorial units or workplace associations. Racist dynamics might be present or emerge in these spaces to justify oppression (ROBINSON, 2000; GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 350–351, 374–375; GROSFUGUEL, 2012, p. 98–99; FISCCELLA, 2015, p. 201; HAIDER, 2018, p. 87–88; POTIKER, 2019, p. 88; GATO, 2020; CAVALLERO; GAGO, 2021, p. 82–84); even if racial categories are inventions, they have real effects²¹⁷ and might require specific networks of solidarity to be overcome. For racial equality to be possible, writes Ciccariello-Maher (2011, p. 23–24) in a polemic against the class-centrism of the authors of *Black Flame*²¹⁸, ‘it is not sufficient to merely hold hands and state such equality as a fact’; surely no anarchist would ‘advocate such a course of action when it comes to the bosses’. Using the example of the anarchist movement in early 20th century Peru, Steven Hirsch (2015, p. 265–267) writes that anarchists not only recognised ‘race as a social fact’ but deployed ‘a transgressive discourse that challenged the immorality and oppressive social and cultural practices that formed part of the dominant racial order’; this has only become more crucial for anarchists over time. By hindering racial minorities’ autonomous organisation, one would make race-based oppression, which can manifest itself within all kinds of associations, during all kinds of struggles, more resilient. The same could be said about contemporary²¹⁹ dynamics of gender and sexuality, also engendered along with white male waged masses (LUGONES, 2007; BLACK ORCHID COLLECTIVE, 2018[2010]; SALLYDARITY, 2012; BOTTICI, 2019; BROOKS, D., 2020).

²¹⁶ See section 6.3.2.

²¹⁷ On racial “colour-blindness”, see Frost (2020[1968]), King Jr. (2010, p. 95), Olson (2012), and Fiscella (2015, p. 177–178).

²¹⁸ This work was discussed in chapter 1. On class-centrism and race, see also Haider (2018, p. 50). Any other kinds of “centrism” could be denounced here, in fact; for example, Nutter (2002, p. 92) writes that ‘the rhetoric of “sisterhood” in the feminist movement ‘meant that class and race[...] were in danger of being buried under the “all girls together” mentality’. So again this is the object of anarchist criticism: the absolute centring of points of view, leaving other imbalances behind.

²¹⁹ See also Beard (2017, chap. 1).

Many anarchist women, notes Laura Cordero (2015, p. 318), felt that while they were ‘struggling for a community of equals’, they also ‘had something particular to say’ – and their concerns would not necessarily be considered if people focused solely on e.g. matters of class²²⁰.

Radical leftists²²¹ often speak of the risk of replacing ‘a politics of issues’ with a form of identity politics (HECKERT, 2018, p. 114); with identifying with the features by which one is oppressed in a ‘self-colonizing trajectory’ that reinforces the arbitrary divides one is trying to overcome²²² (BUTLER, 1997, p. 104 apud HAIDER, 2018, p. 60). This could perpetuate ‘the fallacy of coherent communities’ (EANELLI, 2011, p. 421) and, ultimately, turn any prospect of equality into (at best) a dream of static interdependence, a system of “equal but separate” individuals and groups with ‘no confusion of roles, no blurred identities’ (WOLIN, 1960, p. 33 apud ROBINSON, 1980, p. 36). Although these concerns are reasonable, some criticisms of “identity politics” fall prey to wanting a “politics of issues” that predetermines the point of view from which something is accounted for as an issue. ‘People often won’t, and shouldn’t, join a movement that’s not truly meeting their needs’, reflects William C. Anderson (2021, p. 31); ‘that’s what exploitation and manipulation look like’. Even this is a tad hasty – anarchists encourage ongoing reflection on what it is one needs. Yet conflict might be needed to create better relations by spurring a *collective* such self-reflection, the dialogue and mutual understanding that leads to the transformation of subjectivity. If one prioritises a point of view absolutely, which is linked to independence as an end goal²²³, these conflicts are threats. Anarchists do not support this logic any more than they do Marxist or republican rhetorics of self-making, and the interdependence they seek to build and subjectively encourage means a refusal to militate for *one* set of concerns *above all* (RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, p. 145–148) – which is not just

²²⁰ See also Knapp, Flach, and Ayboga (2016, p. 64). The case of the abolitionist Susan B. Anthony also offers a powerful example. She ‘was the only known feminist at the time [of abolition in the United States] that refused to buy the liberals’ proposal’, insisting that ‘both struggles could be run simultaneously and if they didn’t women would be forgotten after the war’. As Farrow (2002, p. 16) concludes, ‘she was right. When the 14th Amendment was introduced in Congress after the war, not only were women omitted, they were specifically excluded. For the first time the word “male” was written into the Constitution making it clear that when it referred to a person that was the equivalent to male person’.

²²¹ Except for the orthodox Marxists mentioned in note 177 on page 224 of the previous section.

²²² In the case of gender being arbitrary despite sexual differentiation, beyond literature discussing different gender *roles* one also finds cultures in which there was not even ‘a name to oppose men and women before colonialism’, and which therefore, as Chiara Bottici (2019) concludes based on Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmi’s work, ‘simply did not do gender’. On the other hand, what anarchists usually want out of their struggles when it comes to gender is not necessarily social or physical androgyny but circumstances in which ‘everyone’s experiences and sense of identity [are] incorporated into an idea of what gender means’, eschewing ‘coercive gender assignment’ (SALLYDARITY, 2012, p. 43). Similarly, the overcoming of racism or national borders does not mean physical or territorial features cannot serve as points of affinity among people; see e.g. Ince (2022, 19:48–20:36).

²²³ See e.g. William C. Anderson (2021, chap. 5) on black nationalism in the United States.

supposed to avoid “identitarian” excesses but also, and perhaps more importantly, “privileged stubbornness” within movements.

It is not even the case that it is important not to prioritise one perspective absolutely for the sake of addressing other inequalities too. For anarchists, no single form of inequality can be dealt with unless other kinds are also tackled (RECLUS, 2002[1898], p. 24; RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, p. 106–108). For instance: if racism leads to denials of solidarity (ERVIN, 2009[1993], p. 13), to refused attributions of responsibility to the racialised, this would create crucial inequalities, including economic ones (and all of these, as argued in section 4.3.2, would over time seem to “justify” sovereignty). For another example, if men and women “were made” economically equal, but traditional gender roles and monogamous heterosexuality was still construed as “natural” and (or) the only truly righteous way of being and relating, barriers would still be placed between people in terms of solidarity and stricter limits on the sharing of responsibility (COULTHARD, 2014, p. 157; BOTTICI, 2019; CAPETILLO, 2020; CAVALLERO; GAGO, 2021, p. 45; GOLDER, 2021); in other words, control of sexuality is tied to control of work (historically women’s in particular) (DELAMOTTE, 2004, p. 109). The 2006 Oaxaca Commune, for instance, was undermined by patriarchal patterns (PELLER, 2016, p. 74–76), and as Silvia Federici remarked, ‘the power men have won over women was paid for with becoming a slave to capitalism’¹ (ESPARZA, 2018). Haider (2018, p. 56) reaches a similar conclusion regarding race: ‘in exchange for white-skin privilege, [...] Euro-American workers [...] fundamentally degraded their own conditions of existence’; as Ignatiev (2016[1969], p. 290 apud HAIDER, 2018, p. 48–49) reflected, to say ‘white-skin privilege is in the interests of white workers is equivalent to suggesting that swallowing the worm with the hook in it is in the interests of the fish’. Note that, with contemporary Western gender, ‘aspects of femininity’ were also ‘a distinguishing mark’ of both class and race (SALLYDARITY, 2012, p. 39–41). In other words, for anarchists it is not just that a hyperfocus on one imbalance would leave others unaddressed; the very inequality whose “resolution” is prioritised will not be combatted efficiently.

These discussions coalesced, over the second half of the 20th century, around the term “intersectionality” (RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, p. 103–106). There is variation to be found within the anarchist tradition on how exactly diverse structural inequalities relate to one another, but one certainly finds a bid to undo all ‘biases underpinning domination’ through mutual aid²²⁴ (KINNA, 2019b, p. 157–164). In prescribing connections between communities

²²⁴ See also Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, p. 261), Kinna (2012c, p. 6), Shannon (2012, p. 279), Shannon, Nocella II, and Asimakopoulou (2012, p. 13, 15), Lazar (2018, p. 162–163), and Kinna and Prichard (2019, p. 231–232).

fighting specific oppressions, Antliff (2012) mobilises the notions of ‘groundless solidarity’ and ‘endless responsibility’: the first refers to ‘consensual intercommunity negotiation that does not privilege any particular identity [as] foundational’; the second, to ‘an enduring commitment to anti-authoritarian values within and between communities’. Anarchism can work with all these egalitarian rhetorics of self-making, but does not, *as a tradition*, choose any specific one as more important. In the end, as anarchists writing for *A Plebe* (1948, p. 36) put it, ‘the anarchist does not separate one’s own cause from that of one’s comrades’^m.

While the examples above map onto movements related to historical forms of oppression, any collective desire matters enough to not be suppressed – not a priori – by other demands, and if a group is not being heard, anarchists would find rhetorics of self-making that elevated their concerns worthy as well. I am referring to collective agents that might be deemed less “political” at first glance. Envisioning what specific political groups would exist before and after an anarchist revolution, the Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria (2020[1945], p. 6), for example, mentioned not only the usual suspects – industrial and peasant workers, communes, women – but also youth collectives, temperance activists, Esperantists, and ‘other cultural organizations’. ‘The challenge represented by the adoption of a [different] lifestyle’, writes Ibáñez (2014, p. 22), ‘constitutes a form of struggle which corrodes’ any current situation’s ‘pretension to ideological hegemony’. Evidently as well, families and friends (apart from the use of these symbols in universalistic discourse, but as stand-ins for more general groups based on intimacy and affinity²²⁵) would continue to be significant components to individuals’ identities, forming cross-cutting networks of mutuality that help engender dynamic interdependence and enriching people’s inner lives.

Finally, if the rhetorics considered so far are all linked to collective experiences, individuals may be driven in ways that do not easily relate to relational contexts; by “unmediated forces” which ‘resist socialization’²²⁶ (MCBRIDE, 2011, p. 162). There is no general reason, other than the preordained prioritisation of other motivations, why these drives could not be granted equal dignity during decision-making processes. After all, as seen with Proudhon’s thoughts on ‘the equal importance of any kind of agent’, group interests should not outright bulldoze individuals’ concerns; Rocker (2009[1938], p. 9) goes as far as to say that anarchism ‘has in

²²⁵ ‘Contrary to what one might believe’, notes Colson (2019, p. 36), ‘libertarian affinity is not of an ideological nature’.

²²⁶ See also Strathern (1995, p. 100) and Samanta Colhado Mendes (2010, p. 178). One may also hold that there is no such thing as a completely personal drive, and yet think that the practical impossibility to trace its social origins implies it should be treated as if there were.

common with Liberalism the idea that the happiness and prosperity of the individual must be the standard of all social matters'²²⁷.

Anarchists think it is important to devote energies to collective organising so as to rebalance relations, but the suppression of individuality can motivate discourses that encourage (or, perhaps, explain) resistance from an individualistic perspective. Seeing as this relates to demands for each individual to be allowed the expression of idiosyncrasies, to be afforded the specific accommodations they need to develop, this seems to apply particularly well to matters of sexuality²²⁸ (KINNA, 2011, p. 48) and gender expression, as well as to questions of disability and neurodiversity (INTRONA, 2021, p. 5–7). But there is no reason why this rhetoric could not apply more widely within an anarchist framework.

Someone's "uniqueness" can be thought of as residing in the combination of the particular relations one has had, and currently has, with others and the environment. 'There is no real living and fruitful I', wrote Charlotte Wilson (1886, p. 3), 'apart from Thou and You', and as Graeber (2006, p. 75) suggested, each individual can be understood as 'the internalized accretion of their relations'²²⁹. Instead of a more liberal focus on what could be construed as "self-sourced" or own-body-oriented motivations, cherishing individuality would involve embracing the process of tending to this matrix of relations: 'not a struggle for separation but a struggle against it' (BOOKCHIN, 1982, p. 339 apud HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 127), since 'individuality is contrast, speciality, distinction, difference, and not separateness'²³⁰ (WILSON, C., 1886, p. 3). Politically, this can be phrased as the distance between defending state-protected individual rights on one side and, on the other, carving through and within webs of interdependence a "niche" — demanding not only that one's unique way to belong and interact be afforded, but that this very affordability remains open in the future (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 174).

While this backpedals from the matter of personal, "unmediated" forces, this distinction ultimately matters little. What begins as a claim to be individually oppressed can be interpreted, reflected, and further processed by others in many ways, to the point of igniting the intersubjective process by which new relations are forged, affecting more people's motivations. Any drive may seem idiosyncratic before individuals discover the links between one another, discoveries from which affinities can grow. In the end, as with the discussion on intersectionality above,

²²⁷ See also Salles (2005, p. 57).

²²⁸ See also Nelson (2021, chap. 2) on this theme as it relates to freedom from a feminist standpoint.

²²⁹ Tangentially, see also Garcia (2018, p. 164–166).

²³⁰ See also William Reichert (1969, p. 143), who writes that when anarchists speak of freedom, they have in mind 'the problem of retaining one's identity in a world in which individuality becomes progressively more difficult to maintain'.

anarchists' egalitarian efforts hinge on the universalistic rhetoric explored at the beginning of this section. 'Universality does not exist in the abstract', writes Haider (2018, p. 100); 'it is created and recreated in the act of insurgency' that demands emancipation for everyone by saying 'no one will be enslaved'. If one can see other individuals not as separate entities, whose interests could never truly be mine, but as people who are already related to me *somehow*, mutual understanding, and possibly all kinds of subjective and objective change, can take place.

Someone may have their non-binary gender expression acknowledged as a unique way of being, but everyone else who feels not necessarily the same but similarly (in that they do not fit neatly into one of two genders) may form networks around identities such as "non-binary", "trans" more generally, or "[gender]queer". Even further, a black cis man may not "identify" with a white trans woman's struggles, but can make an effort to understand them and act in solidarity. As Sallydarity (2012, p. 44) notes, choosing 'what will be done or not done to or with our bodies ties together many people's struggles', and this transcends the sharing of the minutely same experiences or concerns. For Little (2023, p. 202), a strength of individualist anarchists, de Cleyre in particular, was trying to account 'for the multitude of individualities', searching for ways that these could 'struggle together for radical social change'. And, of course, this could lead to all sorts of conclusions in terms of what this change should be. For Walt and Schmidt (2009a, p. 6), summarising the anarchist point about the infrastructure of solidarity behind the organisation of diversity, only 'common ownership, self-management, democratic planning from below, and production for need, not profit[...] makes individual freedom possible'.

In summary, when anarchists argue for the interpretation of desires from certain points of view, they want to create or activate specific networks of solidarity that will ultimately lead to equilibrium between groups through balance among individuals. And these perspectives have historically included that of humankind, of the underclass, of the racialised and the gendered, of communities of place and interest, *and* of "the individual". Anarchists did not trade off 'labour organization' against 'radical autonomy, creative expression and experimentation with alternative ways of living'. They were 'a-tuned to the idea of multiple sites of struggle' and 'involved in a diverse range of actions and campaigns', including for 'sexual liberation, contraception, prisoner rights, secular education', and 'against conscription, jingoism, colonialism, nationalism and militarism' (KINNA, 2012b, p. 21). There was a refusal, *as a tradition*, to defend a single foundational subjectivity: 'every people, like every individual, are perforce what they

are and have the incontestable right to be themselves’, but they should not be ‘obsessed’ by what they currently are²³¹ (BAKUNIN, 1971[1873], p. 341, emphasis added). As Relgis put it:

Be human and *as multilateral as possible* — but, above all strive to militate daily. And you may say to no matter whom, no matter when: I have risen above my own individuality, with its bad legacies; I have risen above the class my work placed me in; I have risen above the state whose laws humiliated, oppressed, and instigated me to rebel; I have risen above the nation in which I happened to be born — and above the society that speculates with all my needs and all my acts.ⁿ (RODRIGUES, 1999b, p. 66, emphasis added)

This is therefore the anarchist rhetoric of self-making: one is more in tune with one’s “authentic self” when one is able to, shifting priority onto different relations over time, express the multiplicity of one’s desires more fully²³². This sort of dynamically diverse agent is the kind of subject logically most prone to appreciating the value of balance, of weaving oneself into intersecting webs of interdependence, because sovereignty, as seen in the previous section, relates to fixed priorities²³³, even if one is on the favoured side of an imbalanced relation. As hinted at in the previous chapter, equality sets up conditions for anyone to more easily rework what identities mean or surpass them altogether, opening space to experiment with and organise around the multifarious desires affecting them²³⁴. Speaking of an anti-colonial sensibility, Verónica Gago (2020[2010], p. xiv–xv, emphasis in the original) defends a radicalisation of difference, ‘*in, with, and against* the subaltern’ — in other words, thinking about how one is dominated, how others are, and how to overcome this condition, in order to truly value diversity.

Historically, socialist groups spent a huge amount of time instilling in people the identity of being a worker and what that meant, what kind of interest they

²³¹ Bakunin (1971[1873], p. 341) continues: ‘the less preoccupied they are with themselves and the more they are imbued by the general idea of humanity, the more life-giving, the more purposeful, and the more profound becomes the feeling of nationality and that of individuality’.

²³² For examples concerning queer pride, see Berry (2004), Heckert (2018, p. 109), and CAB (2020, 37:55–38:42). I would also like to address a potential issue of ableism with this discourse. For some people, the number of social ties, their intermittency, or even the frequency of social contact itself can constitute a mental health hazard (and not due to any identifiable trauma that could characterise the situation as temporary). But this rhetoric’s aspirational outline of sociability is supposed to encourage people to value diversity precisely to allow for better accommodation of differences, which include different dispositions toward participation in multiple groups to begin with.

²³³ Of course people change their identities over time for various reasons, but the point of sovereignty is for the *priorities* to remain unchanged, and with them many other elements of one’s self — including the wider patterns that relate to the categories used to structure social relations.

²³⁴ Which seems to lead right where Heckert (2018, p. 114) would want to go: toward a politics that, while full of conflict, ‘will not necessarily be oppositional’ nor ‘exclusive’, allowing for ‘mass efforts of people who are involved because of the interests and their passions instead of their categories’. Still, a political life completely devoted to “issues” can become technocratic if e.g. the attribution of responsibility is not *itself* an issue, or at least potentially so. I shall soon return to this when briefly discussing the question of “protagonism” below.

had in virtue of being workers. [...] But in doing that they weren't reifying the notion of being a worker, because [...] when capitalism is abolished the worker as [...] someone who has] nothing to sell but their labour power [...] in exchange for wage, that category is abolished[...]. But during that struggle it's important that workers develop a sense of themselves as an oppressed class in order to emancipate themselves, and [...] likewise it's important for] women or people of color or queers to develop notions of themselves as these categories but in a way that drives towards the abolition of the oppressive social structures which reproduce these categories.²³⁵ (RICHTER; KHAN; BAKER, 2020, 56:32–58:45)

One must therefore create or more highly prioritise networks of mutuality that serve to balance out unequal forces, challenging current patterns of domination (FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, p. 57; HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 122). Egalitarian, rebellious mutual aid is required: solidarity against inequality in spite of current norms (including what point of view people are supposed to see things from in virtue of “what they are”). According to Ibáñez (2014, p. 21), anarchists aim, ‘today as in the past’, to produce ‘a political subjectivity that is radically rebellious to the society in which we live, to the commodity values that constitute it and the relations of exploitation and domination that ground it’. In other words, if injustice and (or) domination are to emerge from or be supported by usual and obedient behaviour, anarchist rhetorics are efficacious if they get agents “unstuck” from habitual motivations, acting directly against hierarchy, disobeying as seen fit. ‘True freedom can only come after equality is established’, determines Ciccariello-Maher (2011, p. 24), ‘in a consistent way across different spheres’, such as ‘race, nationalism, gender’, among many others. But there is something to be said about the process of establishing equality itself; it is not only *after* equality is reached that subjective transformation will take place. The drives that this discourse aims at prioritising *directly* lead to expressing diverse orders of motivations over time, seeing as one ends up shifting one’s priorities, depending on the context, to counter imbalances. Every struggle has its own necessity, but every particular one, from an anarchist perspective, ‘generate[s] and feed[s] other struggles’. Thus the various discourses explored in this section: not subscribing to any one absolutely relates to the strategic need to nurture the possibility of changing perspectives, privileging different relations as most needed in each context.

However, this does not lead to concocting an order of drives that perfectly represents someone and mobilises all of their resources toward equality in all social scenarios; ‘the perfectly empowered revolutionary subject with perfect politics does not exist’ (ZIEGLER, 2022a). Even as categories are altered and belongings change as people adapt and combine disparate concerns,

²³⁵ See also Raekstad and Gradin (2020, p. 148–150) and Baker (2021b).

this is a continued process whose results will ignite conflict anew, requiring further adjustment and transformation. The problem (seen in section 4.2.2) of discerning “original violence” and ascertaining a situation’s balance makes it hard to know how to *best* employ one’s forces toward equality. Interdependence serves to relieve the pressure on each particular individual to be “perfect” in this way. One does not need to do everything (even because one *cannot* do everything) because others will step up. One fights for an equality that enable others to check one’s own standards²³⁶, welcoming the check as the onset of a transformative process rather than seeing it as a threat to be obeyed or thwarted — otherwise there is neither balance nor the experience of being a dynamically multiple human being.

As The Black Trowel Collective (2016) write, each person is not the product of ‘one simple form of identity [...], nor even one very complex form’; people are, instead, ‘created, and continually recreated, by the constant intersection, erasure, and addition of these many different aspects of themselves’. This open-ended process within each body and among individuals (GAGO, 2020[2010], p. xxii) thus parallels the openness of anarchist decision-making or mediation (justice-seeking) processes. Anarchists defend an emphasis on ecosystem over species, becoming over being, relation and activity over solipsism and entity; a conception of identity not in the ‘macho’, logocentric form of ‘territory’, but as a practice that ‘weaves the fabric of the intercultural’ by ‘seducing the “other” and establishing pacts of reciprocity and coexistence among different groups’²³⁷ (CUSICANQUI, 2020, p. 68). In other words, to think about who we are as human beings from an anarchist lens is not to dwell on our coherence but to cultivate our potential in connection with others.

Pointedly, how this plays out in practice will depend on each agent’s position and history. Feminism will call for different activism from women, men, or non-binary people

²³⁶ See section 4.3.1.

²³⁷ While this is a stirring formulation, I cannot help but feel ambivalent about it. On one hand, acknowledging the historical identification of practices as “male” and “female” serves to both note that some have been valued in detriment of others (in connection with patriarchal contexts) (NUTTER, 2002, p. 94; CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 104; GRAEBER, 2018, p. 60–61, 101–102; GRAEBER; WENGROW, 2021, p. 553) and to produce a “counter-theory” of sorts by balancing the scales back — i.e. defending that “female” practices are actually better and should be widely adopted (FARROW, 2002, p. 19; KORNEGGER, 2002, p. 27; LEVINE, 2002[1974], p. 64; GRAEBER, 2009, p. 334; CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 248; MENDES, S. C., 2021b, p. 182–183). On the other hand, this seems to further entrench the notion that these practices are *essentially* gendered, reinforcing gender roles (SALLYDARITY, 2012, p. 43–44; COULTHARD, 2014, p. 158; KIRSCHENBAUM, 2017, p. 77; THISTLE WRITING COLLECTIVE, 2021) in ways that potentially imply that men could *not* actually learn from women’s practises, or that women could not enact domination (SALLYDARITY, 2012, p. 44), and that perhaps make it more difficult to consider a complementarity between allegedly “male” practices — say, the kind of force involved in disputes to (re)establish balance, dealt with in chapter 4 — and allegedly “female” ones — such as the mutual aid examined in this chapter and the more diverse, fluid conception of identity seen in the formulation in question. See also Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 25–26, 160–161).

(KIRSCHENBAUM, 2017, p. 77–81), and will be further adapted to other contextual issues; decolonisation entails one thing in the colony and something else for empire-dwellers. Asking not for ‘unflinching, uncritical support’ but respect for ‘the historical context [they] are in’ and what they do to ‘pull [themselves] from under the boots of oppression’, the Zapatistas tell activists from the affluent North they ‘should be looking at [their] own struggles in [their] own country and seeing the commonalties we have between us’²³⁸ (A ZAPATISTA..., 2019[2002]).

“Protagonism” is particularly relevant. Working ‘in partnership with members of the oppressed group’ rather than “on behalf” of them roots alliances – or complicity (LAZAR, 2018, p. 165) – in the needs of those most directly harmed (KROPOTKIN, 2009[1880][a], p. 13; MALATESTA, 2014[1922][c]; FISCELLA, 2015, p. 268; SAMIS, 2018, p. 147–148; GRIGOLIN, 2021, p. 164–165). Therefore, while the networks of solidarity any single factional discourse aims at strengthening are those among “fellow sufferers”, others can still support their struggles: ‘mutual solidarity’, muses Ziegler (2022a), ‘means that people divided by power relations are empowered in asymmetrical ways by working together’²³⁹. However, it would make no sense for the latter to have superior sway in what a movement does; after all, if the point is to build equality, as discussed in section 4.3.2, balance in terms of exercising leadership is crucial²⁴⁰.

Another concern is for solidarity not to be confused with mere charity (ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 179; CULTIVE RESISTÊNCIA, 2022, p. 139). For anarchists, immediately needed assistance²⁴¹ ought to be complemented with strategies to more consistently balance resources and, as just mentioned, responsibility. As Bakunin (1964, p. 91 apud KNOWLES, 2002, p. 16–17) wrote, to struggle against one’s ‘inner slavery’ one needs the social order to change; without wider-ranging transformation there is no true subjective dynamism (FABBRI, Luigi, 2021[1921], p. 4), only ‘masks people wear and discard at will’ (JEFFRIES, 2021, chap. 1), markers of distinction markets are happy to capitalise on²⁴² (CICCARIELLO-MAHER, 2011, p. 33).

²³⁸ See also Ole Birk Laursen (2020, 4:47–4:59).

²³⁹ More recently, the anthropologist Falleiros (2021, 52:26–55:33) critically discussed Kropotkin’s notion of mutual aid, saying that, while it is more easily found among equals, this creates challenges for the anarchist project to use it to undo imbalances. In his view, mutual aid should not be theorised without incorporating a notion of conflict, which *I may* have groped toward doing in this thesis. See section 6.2.

²⁴⁰ I should clarify that this is not only about freedom for anarchists, nor is it about aid etiquette or vanity; it is also about *pragmatism*. As Crimethinc (2020b) comment when analysing anarchists’ response to the 1884 cholera outbreak in Naples, ‘the best aid programs’, in terms of actual outcomes, ‘are the ones initiated by those in need, enabling them to define for themselves what their needs and priorities are’.

²⁴¹ Which, of course, would be misguided to neglect; speeches and protests that do not address urgent issues sound just as hollow, if not more, for those at critical risk. On “reconciling charity with political resistance” and “radical hospitality”, see Newman, V. (2015, p. 2 apud ZIEGLER, 2022b, p. 57) and Ziegler (2023).

²⁴² See note 11 in the introduction to chapter 4, on page 93. Notice that this is not just a matter of individual subjectivities but collective agents as well: as Cusicanqui (2020, p. 56–57) puts it, discourses of multiculturalism in Latin America often ‘obscure and renew the effective practices of colonization’.

This is another way to refer to the “thaumatropic” relation between subjectivity and social structure, discussed in the introduction to this chapter²⁴³ and hinted at several times in this section. If sovereignty-based social structures reinforce sovereignty-based subjectivities which reinforce sovereignty-based social structures, so on and so forth (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 51–52), anarchist social structures relate similarly to anarchist subjectivities²⁴⁴. Changing the rules that affect us, changing our relations, repositions others “within us”; that is, it means reconsidering how strongly they constitute and shape the order of our drives. The reverse is also true. Recognising the self as transpersonal does not contradict understanding social relations as products of individual activity. Both must be true at the same time if one wants to avoid reducing agents to either mere outcomes of external forces (which leaves us unable to ‘account for the creative powers of individual and collective agency’) or ‘taken-for-granted, unchanging, and atomistic individuals or grand transcendental Subjects, theorised in complete abstraction from [...] how they are shaped by [their] contexts’ (RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, p. 55). To transform society, people must be changed; to transform people, society must be changed (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][b] apud ACKELSBERG, 2012, p. 10).

In the end, it might seem that for anarchists whenever someone “stands to lose” from egalitarian social transformation, one must work against oneself — “check one’s privilege”, perhaps; “make sacrifices” — for the sake of others. But just as anti-colonial militancy should not start ‘from a place of white guilt’ so that people do not ‘get swept up in [their] own settler redemption story’ (TAWINIKAY, 2021[2018]) — the kind of thing that leads to charity, paternalistic dominance, the selfless agent who actually competes for status as the most generous of all²⁴⁵ — what this rhetoric does is precisely incite action for the sake of the agent themselves. Discussing recommendations for neurotypical anarchists on how to interact with neurodivergent comrades, for one example, Maxx Crow (2017, p. 4) first recalls that ‘autistic and neurodivergent people should be leading the conversations about autism, neurodiversity, and their lives’ (the “protagonism” just discussed above), and then, crucially, asks militants to ‘be prepared to change for the benefit of everyone[...], including yourself’.

It matters much to me what all [others] are, for however independent I may seem, or may believe myself to be, [...] I am] the product of those who are the least among [all]. If these are ignorant, miserable, or enslaved, my existence is limited by their ignorance, misery, or slavery. [...] I, who wish to be free, cannot

²⁴³ Around page 178.

²⁴⁴ See section 6.1. Tangentially, see also Kropotkin (2009[1880][b], p. 3).

²⁴⁵ Tangentially, see Bonomo (2007, p. 354).

be so, because around me are [people] who do not yet desire freedom[...].
(BAKUNIN, 1947[1867], p. 20–21 apud MALATESTA, 2014[1892][a])

As an anarchist, I act for substantive equality in the interest of others because *I (also) am the others*, and so this is in *my* best interest. Reinterpreting — recognising — their drives as most truly my own makes them spontaneous, organic to who I am. The more we manage to structure our lives by equal mutual dependence, the more likely this recognition becomes; even further, the more confident I feel about changing my priorities, giving expression to other desires affecting me, experimenting with different forms of relating to people, and as a result (at least within the framework of subjectivity discussed thus far) *changing* myself. The intriguing side of this anarchist discourse is that, by doing this, I am *most* myself.

5.3 MEANS AND ENDS

The function of anarchism is not so much to prophesy a future of freedom, but to prepare it. If all anarchism consisted in was the distant vision of a society without a state, or in the affirmation of individual rights, or in a purely spiritual question, [...] there would be no need for an anarchist political and social movement.

Luigi Fabbri ²⁴⁶

“When people first came to our house a few years ago to ask if our family would like to participate in the communes, I threw stones at them to keep them away,” laughs Bushra, a young woman from Tirbespiye, Rojava. [...] Before, she had never been allowed to leave her home and used to cover her entire body except her eyes. “Now I actively shape my own community,” she says with a proud and radiant smile.

Dilar Dirik ²⁴⁷

Since the anarchist movement’s inception, its challenge has been going from a prevalence of hierarchical relations in any given context to the “successful instantiation”, as Baker (2019, 5:02) remarked, of horizontal forms of organisation on a broader scale — to experiencing anarchy as a broadly shared norm, not as a militant exception²⁴⁸.

Anarchism ‘proposes a practice of social transformation and reorganization based on non-dominating mutual aid’ (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 53). But if society were thoroughly ordained by

²⁴⁶ Luigi Fabbri, 2021[1921], p. 3–4. See also Reclus (2013[1894], p. 121).

²⁴⁷ Dirik, 2016, p. 33.

²⁴⁸ One should not mistake what is described in this paragraph for a *statist judgment* of what anarchist success would look like (e.g. “a closed territory where anarchists are in power”) (GRAEBER, 2004, p. 38–39).

sovereignty, there would seemingly be no basis for such a practice²⁴⁹. For anarchists, however, just as anarchy could never be complete, neither can anarchic experiences be totally extirpated from daily interpersonal interactions on many levels (RECLUS, 2013[1894], p. 128–129; FERGUSON, K. E., 1984, p. 18–19; CLARK, S., 2007, p. 59–60; WHITE; WILLIAMS, 2012; IBÁÑEZ, 2014, p. 7). As Kropotkin (2000[1910], p. 3) wrote, part of the reason why anarchists do not consider anarchy a ‘utopia’ (‘constructed on [...] a few desiderata [...] taken as postulates’) is because they focus on ‘tendencies that are at work already’. Practising anarchism, developing anarchy, would be about not only recovering past practices against current oppression²⁵⁰ but also tending to present-day alternatives: as Springer (2014, p. 254) posits, mutual aid ‘is not a hypothetical model for how society might be shaped’, but something that ‘is already happening’²⁵¹.

Anarchists do not ignore that this places them in conflict with hierarchy-supporting forces. Revolution looms large, as effective challenges to the ‘monopoly for the regulation [...] of political life’ (KINNA, 2016, p. 106) are likely to be resisted by ‘the masters and their mercenaries’ (PICQUERAY, 2019, preface), requiring ‘the breaking of state [...] discipline’²⁵² (FABBRI, Luigi, 2021[1921], p. 2). Yet most anarchists combined the notions of “evolution” and “revolution” in their account of social change²⁵³; ‘when the old structures[...] become insufficient, life moves to find expression in a new form’, i.e. ‘a revolution takes place’^{o,254} (RECLUS, 2002[1898], p. 27). In Spain, for example, anarchists had ‘for decades [...] been forming in militants a habit of [...] taking initiative’ and of not waiting ‘for directives from above’, never giving them ‘a dogma or a safe uniform line of action’; this ‘gradually matured’ revolutionary aspirations, which came to a head with Franco’s assault (LEVAL, 1958, p. 8). Furthermore, anarchists talked about “social revolution”, distinct from bursts of political or military activity that did not change social structures deeply and widely. As de Laforcade and Shaffer (2015, p. 7–8) explain, anarchists did not focus on overthrowing the state as much as on an ‘ongoing revolutionary transformation of social relations from below’²⁵⁵. Building on Landauer’s (2019[1910], p. 2) aforementioned

²⁴⁹ See e.g. Graeber’s (2001, p. 30) criticism of Marxist critical theorists.

²⁵⁰ See e.g. Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 49–51).

²⁵¹ In a sense, anarchists subvert Sheldon Wolin’s “tending” and “intending” dichotomy (KAPUST, 2018, p. 173–174): they both innovate *by* “tending” (especially when it comes to processes of transformative justice) and “intend” federally, i.e. without centralisation and homogeneity.

²⁵² See also Reclus (2002[1898], p. 78) and Goldman (2009[1910], p. 29).

²⁵³ But in Reclus’s (2002[1898], p. 29) case, at least, ‘revolutions are not necessarily a progress, just as evolutions are not always oriented toward justice’ [revoluções não são necessariamente um progresso, assim como as evoluções nem sempre são orientadas para a justiça]; also compare Gaston Leval’s Spanish history (up next in this paragraph) to Marxist strategy in note 18 of section 3.1, page 79.

²⁵⁴ See also Kropotkin (2009[1880][b], p. 1).

²⁵⁵ Despite the post-anarchist tirade against so-called “classical” anarchism — properly rebuked by e.g. Cohn and Wilbur (2003) and Kinna (2016); I have written about this elsewhere (SILVA, P. R. da, 2018) — earlier

view of the state as ‘a certain way of people relating to one another’ (such that its destruction entails ‘creating new [forms of] social relationships’), John P. Clark (2013b, p. 86–87) comments that this sensibility is supposed to prevent the ‘fetishism of the heroic Act’, the ‘masculinist myth’²⁵⁶ of a single moment of spectacular superior force that would solve all problems. ‘People often assign a certain cinematic quality to conflict, war, and revolution’, writes William C. Anderson (2021, p. 120), but ‘fantasizing about our fight happening in some heroic future leaves us disorganized and with little sense of agency in the present’²⁵⁷. As Kornegger (2002, p. 29) puts it, social change is ‘a long-term process[...] in which we unlearn passivity’, involving ‘the formation of mental and physical (concrete) alternatives’ to ‘the present system’. ‘Whether armed resistance will be necessary at some point’, she concludes, ‘is open to debate’.

This is often described as prefigurative direct action. Although the word “prefiguration” is relatively new, its “spirit” — ‘the deliberate experimental implementation of desired future social relations and practices in the here-and-now’ — was arguably a feature of anarchist organising since the movement’s emergence²⁵⁸. It describes the coherence between means and ends that, as seen in section 1.2, is central to anarchism. ‘All-round human emancipation’ goes beyond overthrowing institutions (as in revolutionary moments); it also relates to ‘generating [...] the real powers, drives, and consciousness required for replacing them with genuinely free[...] forms of life’²⁵⁹ (RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, p. 10, 18–28, 36, 56).

anarchists were possibly more focused on revolutionary action due to believing there had already been enough “prior evolution” to warrant it (SCHUBERT, J., 1966, p. 225; BONOMO, 2007, p. 119). Having scaled back these rhetorics (KINNA, 2016, p. 36) might signal mere pessimism rather than a shift in the tradition’s tenets. However, it is still reasonable to say that anarchist perspectives have become (through the influence of feminism in particular) more a-tuned to the importance of more diffuse struggles for the quality of on-the-ground relations vis-a-vis the strength of grandiose symbols or party politics spectacle.

²⁵⁶ See note 237 in section 5.2.2 above, as well as Barker (2021, 19:53–20:43) on how this is still an issue today.

²⁵⁷ See also Alfred (2005, p. 58) and Springer (2014, p. 262).

²⁵⁸ There is some controversy about the concept of prefiguration in the anarchist tradition. Before the late 20th century, anarchists often referred to the “negative” idea of “rejecting the master’s tools”: one should not try to wield state power if the goal is for the state to not exist at all. Today, prefiguration more often means ‘the building of a new world in the heart of the old’. Prioritising ‘the display of anarchist social relations’, however, can create problems, such as ‘purist and unforgiving’ behaviour, treating everyone equally in spite of inequalities (both themes explored a few times so far in this thesis), or refusing to consider allegedly violent or antidemocratic methods in struggle (KINNA, 2012d, p. 317–319). Regarding this last point, as discussed in section 4.2, anarchism is not about ending violence or conflict forever, but about handling them *better*. There is thus no absolute contradiction in forcefully resisting imbalances both now *and* in a more peaceful future. For Goodman (1977[1946] apud WARD, 1991b, p. 115), the force anarchists use to fight for liberty ‘is no different in kind from what it will be in a free society’ — where, as McKay (2014, p. 76) put it, freedom will always have ‘to be defended’ from ‘antisocial (or “criminal”) acts’. ‘We shall resist with force’, wrote Malatesta (2015b, p. 47), ‘whoever would wish by force, to retain or regain the means to impose [their] will’. See also Cornell (2016, p. 284), Vasileva (2022), and Hines (2023).

²⁵⁹ Which, they continue, ‘are best developed by movements and organisations that address a number of different forms of unfreedom[...] — including patriarchy, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and more’ (RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, p. 56).

Prefigurative politics means being committed to the idea that if we want to replace certain structures with other very different ones, then we need to reflect some aspect(s) of that future structure in the movements and organisations we develop to bring it about. [...] Revolution can be conceptualised as a process of creating and developing ongoing mass organisations and movements which fight for reforms in the present and aim to replace capitalism and the state[...]. As such organisations grow, develop, [struggle and win reforms], they change the powers, drives, and consciousness of their members individually and collectively[...], making it possible for them to replace capitalism and the state.²⁶⁰ (RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, p. 57–58)

But if ends are as inextricable from means as anarchists contend, everyone is prefigurative in a minimal sense. Liberals, republicans, and Marxists organise hierarchically because their goals involve hierarchical relations. The claim that *only* anarchists are prefigurative, that they alone care for the coherence between means and ends, usually emerges when someone says they agree with anarchist prospects but approve of sovereignty-based tactics to achieve them²⁶¹. In this case, goals do not differentiate anarchism from the rest of the progressive traditions (which share this adjective precisely because they can agree about generic aims) so much as *methods*.

Many believe that anarchy consists only in the [...] ideal affirmation of a society without government, to be established in the future, but without connection with current reality[...]. Thus, while awaiting anarchy, yesterday they advised us to provisionally vote in the elections, as today they propose us to accept provisionally the so-called proletarian [...] dictatorship. [...] What distinguishes us[...] from other parties is [...] an anarchist methodology; inasmuch as we think that the path to take[...] is the path of freedom.²⁶² (FABBRI, Luigi, 2021[1921], p. 3)

For anarchists, this is a path leading to egalitarian disobedience and, as a consequence, to the unravelling of certain social patterns — such as that of property:

The [Marxist] entrusts the direction of social life to a few, and it would result in the exploitation and oppression of the masses by that few. The [liberal] trusts to the free initiative of individuals, and proclaims, if not the abolition, the reduction of government. However, as it respects private property, and is founded on [...] competition, its liberty is only [...] the license of those

²⁶⁰ For a counterpoint, however, see Ziegler (2022a): ‘the more power I have, the less invested I am in social change. The more I become radicalized, the less power I have to change anything’ — see also Graeber (2009, p. 245). She does not propose this as an “iron law” but rather as a trend to be bucked with the sort of rebellious egalitarian mutual aid described in the previous section. In this sense, the quote by Raekstad and Gradin still makes sense, so long as it is interpreted as referring to networks of intersecting groups rather than independence-seeking, coherent sects: as Ziegler puts it, ‘the revolutionary subject is always a relationship’.

²⁶¹ There is also the case of agreeing with anarchist principles but thinking they should be used to engineer a static social order, which for anarchists is necessarily an exemplar of the first kind of disagreement (i.e. this person’s goals are hierarchical; assuming they are candid, they just do not know that yet).

²⁶² See also Editora Descontrol (2016b, p. 179–180), Lemos and Oliveira (2020, 18:03–18:23), and Mechoso (2021, 10:34–11:12).

who have, to oppress and exploit the weak who have nothing. [...] Anarchists present a new method; the free initiative of all and free agreement, when, after the revolutionary abolition of private property, every one will have equal power to dispose of social wealth. (MALATESTA, 2014[1892][a])

Defenders of sovereign structures would likely see this as a violent endeavour — historically they certainly have²⁶³. Revolution, bloody and world-as-we-know-it-ending, would seem to be the method anarchists allude to and which would hence set them apart from other progressives. But, as just seen above, this is not the case. Anarchists might decry “evolutionists” who jeopardise progress by rejecting the role played by revolutionary moments in the process of social change²⁶⁴ (RECLUS, 2002[1898], *passim*, esp. chap. 1); however, this is also an *internal* conflict, as pacifist anarchists, for example, often take this position.

It is therefore something else that serves as the key difference between methods, encompassing both the rejection by anarchists of “mere” revolutionary violence as well as of some non-revolutionary methods for achieving social change (“vote in the elections”) (WARD, 1991b, p. 63). Indeed, one must consider a difference that relates not only to different tactics but to the traditions’ divergent premises and prospects, since *not all* liberals, republicans, or Marxists actually say they want the same future that anarchists envision.

What anarchists affirm is direct action; as Malatesta (2014[1894]) determined, ‘it would not be an anarchist revolution’ if people did not actively participate in its construction, waiting instead for ‘their instructions’. ‘To build a free society’, write Ehrlich *et al.* (1979, p. 3–4), ‘it is necessary that people learn the habits of freedom in the process of building’. For anarchists, when “revolutionary heroes”, or parliaments and state bureaucracies, make decisions about and (or) act on problems on behalf of others, those others do not develop (or do so to a lesser degree) the “powers, drives, and consciousness” that establish meaningful agency. What they develop instead is a subjective attachment to representations and machinations that define freedom as specific unrestrictions that one can secure in exchange for obedience. For many anarchists, in fact, domination is not an *evil* done by “enchanters of the masses”²⁶⁵, but a symptom of these

²⁶³ Somewhat tangentially, see hooks (2017[1994], p. 49).

²⁶⁴ See also the comment on episodes of “popular violence” in the beginning of section 4.2.2.

²⁶⁵ Anarchists certainly have decried individuals’ decisions to reinforce current patterns to their own exclusive individual benefit and in detriment of others. This concerns moral philosophy, but also rhetorics, in the sense of focusing on specific figures as more central nexuses of domination. As Eric Hoffer (1951, § 65) famously opined, ‘mass movements can rise and spread without belief in a God, but never without belief in a devil’. However, especially considering the discussion in section 4.3.1, it is much more common to find within anarchist literature arguments *against* this focus, for it avoids discussing what is for them the *real* issue (the social patterns enabling these individuals to do the particularly bad things they have done). Malatesta (2014[1922][c]), for example, ‘always sought to demonstrate that the social wrongs do not depend on the

masses' own organisational failures (TOLSTOY, 1894, p. 167; RODRIGUES, 1999c, p. 116–119; SPRINGER, 2014, p. 252–253) – something not to be expected of any “race”, nationality or number of individuals²⁶⁶ but to be understood as an outcome of historical conditions that can be acted upon. Setting aside for a second oppressions and injustices that tend to make up the “historical conditions” for most incapacities in collective self-organisation, Percival and Paul Goodman (1960, p. 10) spoke about the need for a ‘defense against planners’, the best one being ‘to become informed about the plan [...] existent and operating in our lives; and to learn to take the initiative in proposing or supporting reasoned changes’.

Definitions of freedom are vital for these discussions: for supporters of sovereignty, as discussed throughout this thesis but especially in chapter 2, even if people are made to obey and reproduce specific relational patterns, they produce liberty by leading to the maintenance of the relevant sort of unrestrictions. To some extent such circumstances *are* liberty. Within liberalism, generally speaking, once protection for a “minimum area” of individual rights is in place, freedom has been established. Similarly, Pettit (1998, p. 87) comments from a republican viewpoint that liberty is ‘enjoyed in the presence of [certain] institutions’, existing ‘prior to any potential offenders actually coming to be inhibited’; in other words, there is not ‘any temporal or causal gulf between civic institutions and the freedom of citizens’ (PETTIT, 1997, p. 81 apud LAOGHAIRE, 2016, p. 5). Civic republicans and Marxists do more frequently emphasise active participation, but their endorsement of sovereignty inevitably entails a focus on how to best enforce the production of the desired circumstances – even if these are, indeed, individuals’ dispositions to take part in the official proceedings that are supposed to constitute the will of the free subject (the city, the nation, workers, humanity).

wickedness of one master or the other, one governor or the other, but rather on masters and governments as institutions’, and hence people should not merely change ‘individual rulers’ but ‘demolish the principle itself by which’ some dominate – see also Kropotkin (2021[1902], p. 171). This is also a more prefigurative argument, considering restorative or transformative mediation practices that look beyond the “offending individual” for reconciliation, as discussed in section 4.2.2. Finally, anarchists have at times also morally condemned the oppressed – see e.g. Bonomo (2007, p. 354–376) and Nieuwenhuis (2022[1901?], p. 45–46) – although this is often linked to a more individualistic anarchism that, along with this attitude, has lost ground within the tradition over time.

²⁶⁶ Proper of an elitist worldview is this idea that the masses could not ever know how to organise without guidance from above. See also Malatesta (2014[1922][i]) on achieving “progress” through a revolutionary takeover of the state: ‘they aspire to seizing the power[...] and transforming society their way, through a new legislation[...] but they hesitate to make a revolution[...]; they are not sure of the acquiescence, even passive, of the majority, they do not have sufficient military force to have their orders carried out over the whole territory, they lack devoted people with skills in all the countless branches of social activity... Therefore they are always forced to postpone action, until they are almost reluctantly pushed to the government by the popular uprising. However, once in power, they would like to stay there indefinitely, therefore they try to slow down, divert, stop the revolution that raised them’.

The heart of the matter is that unrestriction is a state of being (or, perhaps, *not* being), that can be passively granted. An obstacle can be removed; a shackle, broken; an enemy, subdued — but the subject of these passive voice sentences remains inconsequential to their meaning. To become (more) unrestricted is something that can be done *to* someone, without them doing anything. This is not *always* the case, and of course some republicans and most Marxists, perhaps even some liberals, would deem this form of freedom unreliable (hence their reach into the realm of subjectivity as discussed in section 5.2 above). But still this is technically at the core of these traditions’ notions of liberty, and it shows the minute they admit bureaucratic forms of organisation as freedom-producing, reinforcing a paradigm in which people are to *remain* free by virtue of what is done to them (even if they should *become* free by installing such bureaucracies once).

If anarchists admitted this as well, their concept of liberty could be accommodated within the unrestriction paradigm. But, as Raekstad and Gradin (2020, p. 27) write, freedom for anarchists ‘is more than a collection of formal regulations to be implemented’²⁶⁷. Surely there are institutions to be built; patterns of interaction to be reinforced and fostered. However, their point is not that, once these are enacted, freedom is necessarily present. These institutions, patterns, circumstances are preferred because of the way they self-efface²⁶⁸; the way they allow for a coordination of practices that do not make it harder for people to change what was instituted — who they are and how they relate to one another — but rather reinforce this very agency. ‘The free play of all the interested parties’ results in a structure, but it is an ‘always adjustable result’ (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][d]); most importantly, this anarchy compels agents to “do it themselves” (PRICHARD, 2012, p. 104): the *subjective feeling* of liberty is not the “passive release” of not being constrained, but the agency one finds within a profound involvement with others.

Prefiguration is this ‘process of socialized (self-)creation’ (INTRONA, 2021, p. 6), which implies a very *active* role for anyone employing this method for achieving social change. This is everywhere within the anarchist tradition: just as the emancipation of women can never be given (DE CLEYRE, 2004[1891], p. 249; GRIGOLIN, 2021, p. 164–165), no government can “give” indigenous peoples their freedom (COULTHARD, 2014, p. 38) or impose communal land tenure (MBAH; IGARIWEY, 1997, p. 47–48, 77–78), and the idea of ‘*giving* the workers control’ in

²⁶⁷ For a comment on similar views from a non-Western perspective, see also Skoda and Troyano (2020, 2:18:53–2:20:02).

²⁶⁸ See sections section 6.3.1 and section 6.3.3.

industrial settings is a ‘fallacy’²⁶⁹ (CHRISTIE, 2021[1964], p. 23). ‘Gifts from the State and gifts from the bosses are poisoned fruit that carry within them the seeds of slavery’ (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][n]); the charitable donors of liberty, even if such donation were possible, would still ‘conserve the beautiful role that does not belong to them’, and ‘public recognition could lift them again to their usurped place’. Therefore, ‘the oppressed must rise on their own’^{p.270} (RECLUS, 2002[1898], p. 79).

This leads to a crucial yet subtle difference directly related to the last section’s conclusion: by insisting on rhetorics of self-making that get people to conceive of egalitarian rebellious mutual aid as self-emancipatory rather than self-sacrificing, anarchists are implicitly working with a notion of freedom²⁷¹ according to which it does not make sense to speak of freeing *another*. As Reclus (2002[1898], p. 51) put it, ‘it is [...] up to us to free ourselves, [...] and we remain in solidarity with all those who are wronged and suffer, everywhere in the world’^q. Of course one can break a slave’s chain, but unless this takes place in a larger process of forging relations of interdependence, one may be merely rearranging said slave’s unilateral dependence, finding for them a place within a certain vision of the good life that compels one to entrench oneself in the role of the “grand liberator”. One might then compete with others to accrue hierarchical power as this “benevolent” figure, this “positive fantasy”²⁷² about oneself, even fighting the very people one “liberated”, protecting one’s reasons for doing whatever one did against their judgment: “I know what is best for them”.

As discussed in section 4.3.2, there is a place for leadership, as the function of someone ‘who initiates action, dragging dispositions out of inertia’²⁷³ — but the leader should act as one does among anarchistic non-Western peoples as per the description by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1986, p. 300–301 apud FAUSTO, 2014, p. 194): ‘no one tells anyone else what to do, only suggests what one will do oneself’^r. This was, in a sense, written about “an anarchy” already in place; in terms of social *transformation* toward such a scenario, ‘active minorities’ must work on

²⁶⁹ See also Mintz (2013[1970], p. 312).

²⁷⁰ See also Springer (2011, p. 536).

²⁷¹ And a universal one as well; for Haider (2018, p. 100), universality ‘insists that emancipation is self-emancipation’. See also Kinna (2020b, p. 7).

²⁷² See note 145 of section 5.2, on page 211. See also Tristán and Virgílio (2018) and Barker (2021, 7:59–8:59).

²⁷³ See also Ward (1991b, p. 147). Not only there is a place for leadership, but the section in question discusses the *equality* of political proficiency. Just as others lacking it can result in domination, anarchists are basically saying that proper freedom, when desired, leads one to wanting others to develop these powers (up to equality) — said differently, to want freedom is to not want to be the man in Marina Abramović’s “Rest Energy” installation. For many reasons: wanting oneself to be stopped in one’s tracks to avoid holding a freedom-reducing superior position, for example, or because this passivity could generate resentful quiet discontent, enabling demagogues to build worse relational patterns.

connecting with other struggles to build momentum against the logic of hierarchy²⁷⁴. This does not mean that ‘the minority does not have the same right to revolt’ (FABBRI, Luigi, 2021[1921], p. 6); they would be, after all, working on freeing themselves. In their rebellious practice, they would in many senses show ‘a practical application’ of their principles, which is for Kropotkin (1998, p. 45) ‘the only possible means of convincing most people of their applicability, showing at once their advantages and their possible defects’²⁷⁵. But this is not the same as wanting to direct others so as to support new relational patterns. The rebellious minority, writes Luigi Fabbri (2021[1921], p. 6), ‘having overcome the first obstacle’, either leaves the masses ‘to organize in their own way’ or replaces ‘one form of domination and privilege for another’. It does not make sense for anarchists to “free others” but it makes sense to take initiative in transforming relations so as to make them more equal, diverse, and cooperative toward justice.

The epigraph to this section provides a striking example from Rojava: the revolutionaries did not come to forcefully root Bushra out of her (arguably oppressive) tradition in order to free *her*, even though part of their revolution meant preventing traditions such as that one from ruling over them. They came to *invite* her to build communes with them, risking the transformation of their own selves as this participation was deeply egalitarian, because they understood they needed to build bridges so that *their own* freedom grew stronger.

The anarchy to be instantiated by this prefigurative direct action is not an endpoint, but a constant beginning (just as people can see themselves as “becomings” rather than “beings”). Prefiguration never stops; it can only be boosted by these institutions that energise people’s agencies or hampered by sovereignty. Anarchists thus propose a theory of social change

that [does] not seek to free anyone at all but [is] focused on how each of us, as individuals and members of communities, must free ourselves, in an effort that cannot be expected to terminate in a final event of revolution²⁷⁶ (DAY, 2005, p. 127 apud ANTLIFF, 2012, p. 76–77)

For anarchists, the security of freedom, if anything, is in knowing that people can always change their relations and be changed by this process. In the following chapter, I conceptualise this in more precise terms.

²⁷⁴ ‘Whenever we asked activists in Rojava what the best form of solidarity would be, the most common answer we got was “Build a strong revolutionary movement in your own country” (KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, p. 256–257). This is another twist on the discussion about “charity” from section 5.2.2 above.

²⁷⁵ See also Knapp, Flach, and Ayboga (2016, p. 80).

²⁷⁶ See also Honeywell (2012, p. 125).

6 ANARCHIST FREEDOM

We gave a lesson to the world. We showed that you can live communally, sharing everything there is. That you can educate people in freedom and without punishing our children, that it is possible to appreciate nature and acquire culture.

Concha Liaño ¹

Anarchist pedagogy aims at [...] creating new forms of human relations, freer ones. [...] So we have to start creating these spaces through this education of freedom, [...] inside our homes, at work, at school, anywhere [...], looking to diminish these oppressions, [...] starting to self-affirm, to be helpful. Then you can create concepts and patterns of behaviour in a real sense of equality, mutual respect, solidarity, mutual aid. Because otherwise, [...] we are always going to stimulate people to compete, to see who finishes first, [...] who's stronger, to exploit and step over others. ^a

Jaime Cubero ²



ANARCHISTS' PREMISES AND PROSPECTS indicate that they cannot possibly root their ideas about liberty on unrestriction, even if they use “commonsensical” tropes to discuss them.

To say, for example, that anarchist freedom means being in control, having true autonomy, or being “unrestricted from sovereignty itself” does not address the divergences seen in this thesis thus far. While “giving oneself one’s rules” (autonomy) seems better than living by others’ rules, the dichotomy comes from the needless assumption of an exclusive and clearly bounded source of rules³. To work outside this zero-sum game is not “being unrestrained by sovereignty”, a formulation that ‘clouds rather than clarifies’ (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 232) by embedding assumptions that undermine anarchist premises. As seen in chapter 2, to be unrestrained from anything in a non-accidental (and sociopolitical) sense implies sovereign force; for anarchists, focusing on the first distracts from the second⁴ (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 182–183; KINNA, 2016, p. 146). Even the institutions anarchists deem more conducive to liberty should not be imposed, for their point is to overcome sovereign enforcement.

¹ Marín, 2005, p. 245–246.

² ESCOLAS..., 2021[1995], 15:50–17:03.

³ See section 6.3.3, as well as Graeber (2009, p. 266).

⁴ Money is an example (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 84–85) often used among liberals as a metaphor for freedom – see e.g. Ian Carter (1999, p. 35–36). See also Cavallero and Gago (2021, p. 36).

In some respects, portions of this chapter might feel like ground being retreaded. However, it is important to thread some of the previous themes together in order to argue that freedom in the anarchist tradition of political thought should be understood as “non-dominating latitude for nonconformity”. The following section deals with the notions of conformity and nonconformity. In section 6.2, the properties of anarchist liberty are analysed, and in the final section of this chapter I shall discuss how anarchist sociability is supposed to cultivate freedom.

6.1 NONCONFORMITY

Beyond the ideal, there is always the ideal.

Ricardo Mella ⁵

*I don't want no rule or anything[...]
 Already got weight to carry, hurting my back
 And I won't tie my own hands myself
 What turns the old into the new
 Shall be the blessed fruit of the people
 And the only form that can be norm[...]
 Is to never go where masters steer
 To always disobey, to never revere ^b*

Belchior ⁶

Progressive movements spring from the perception that things are bad but can be made better by human effort. Universalistic, they tend to take a more systemic view of issues, criticising supposed solutions that basically mean ‘changing everything so that everything remains the same’ (CUSICANQUI, 2020, p. 57). For a few examples: kings and queens come and go, but the underlying monarchical arrangement is the issue. We may be governed by monarchs or representatives, but their reach into the private realm is the relevant concern. Regardless of the policies pursued by bourgeois governments, what really matters is the way productive forces are organised.

It is not the case that progressives criticise *any* change that does not by itself transform a relational pattern. When Frederick Douglass (2009[1845], p. 70–79) battled his overseer, rekindling his spirit, it would be strange to deem his act “conformist” for not single-handedly ending chattel slavery across a continent⁷. Differences can be established between acts (such

⁵ Mella, 2018[1913](a).

⁶ Belchior, 1976b.

⁷ See also Reclus (2002[1898], p. 24–25).

as Douglass's) that challenge or contradict a pattern and those that further cement it⁸. By quitting as an employee to become an employer, for example, one reproduces the employer-employee model of interaction; as Gago (2020[2010], p. xv) put it, one would be inverting the hierarchy 'without touching the dualism'. For Anthony Giddens (1984, p. 20), relations are always transformative, and relational patterns (what he terms 'structures') would be the 'rules that govern' what transformations are 'admissible'^c. Graeber (2001, p. 259), in turn, refers to Terence Turner⁹ and Piaget to understand structures as the 'principles that regulate a system of transformations'¹⁰. In this sense, conformity is defined as the reproduction of relational patterns, of social structures, regardless if it happens by untroubled continuity, cosmetic rearrangements, or the performance of "admissible" transformations that actually entrench the reproduced logic.

Seeing all conformity as negative is arguably how postmodern thinkers attribute radicality to their ideas (KINNA, 2011, p. 56–57; MOORE, 2018, p. 60–63). But relentless nonconformity cannot deliver what it might promise, for it ends up constituting a warlike pattern in itself, "danger" being the only constant element in the "random" relationships it prefigures (GRAEBER, 2001, p. x–xi, 89, 98, 2007, p. 154; MORRIS, B., 2018, p. 197). General human sociability seems to imply a "baseline level" of conformity: there is always *a* pattern, and not conforming to something means, given enough time, conforming with *something else*¹¹. We not only are path dependent beings (PIERSON, 2004; RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, p. 21) but actually enjoy the consistency of social patterns (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 14). For progressives, neither conformity nor nonconformity are inherently desirable or condemnable. Conformity to criticised patterns is decried, but progressivism is not about constant nonconformity; it is about conformity with "good" institutions and nonconformity toward "bad" ones¹².

This includes anarchists, who do not condemn conformity in itself. "Militant success", for example, does not prompt nonconformity with the successful practises in question merely for the sake of nonconformity. As Michael Albert (2012, p. 331) writes, 'institutional insights that move us toward effective strategic choices need to be shared and built upon, rather than each actor having to start over repeatedly as if no one had traveled similar ground before'¹³.

⁸ See also Alfred (2005, p. 57) and Ziegler (2022b, p. 65).

⁹ It is not entirely clear if Graeber is citing *Terence* Turner or *Victor* Turner; I have made a contextually informed guess — see esp. Graeber (2001, p. 62).

¹⁰ See also Graeber (2001, p. 248–250).

¹¹ For anarchist reflections on this, see Kropotkin (2019[1903], p. 23) and Hamilton (2012, *passim*, esp. p. 33–34).

¹² Tangentially, see Rodrigues (1999c, p. 116).

¹³ See section 6.3.2, as well as e.g. Khatib, Killjoy, and McGuire (2012), *Cultive Resistência* (2022, chap. 2, 3), and Kinna *et al.* (2023).

While attacking specific institutions (like the state), anarchists understand institutions *in general* as ‘a complex of norms, rules and decision making procedures[...] that are shaped by and shape behaviour’ (PRICHARD, 2019, p. 82), a definition that encompasses “capitalism”, but also anarchic ways of living together. Relational patterns, institutions, structures, even “society” (CLARK, S., 2007, p. 50; RAEKSTAD; GRADIN, 2020, p. 54), would all refer to the same basic social dynamic humans could never do away with. ‘The need for organization in social life – even the synonymy between organization and society’, commented Malatesta (2014[1897]), is ‘self-evident’; for Amedeo Bertolo (2021[1983], p. 5), the ‘production of norms’ is ‘the central, founding operation of [...] “humanity” itself’. ‘To be an anarchist is to be creating the rules with the others at every moment, not just being against the system of rule’, wrote Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 17); ‘otherwise you’re just rebellious’, which is not enough: while the rebelliousness discussed in section 5.2.2 was of the *egalitarian* kind, not all rebellious acts are always so, as nonconformity can be employed to construct dominating social patterns¹⁴ (GELDERLOOS, 2016, chap. V). ‘Anarchists tend to see empowerment as the key to social change’, write Kinna and Prichard (2019, p. 223), but ‘empowerment without constitutional provision is normatively stunted’; being ‘empowered, autonomous or independent’, Prichard (2019, p. 84) stresses, ‘cannot be consistent groundings for an anarchist social theory of freedom in the absence of institutionalisation’. To help pattern a common life with others is essential for the trust needed to sustain diverse equality via mutual aid¹⁵. Otherwise, one might end

¹⁴ A Stirnerite individualist, Malatesta (2014[1922][f]) wrote, ‘can be a rebel, because [they are] being oppressed and [they fight] to become an oppressor, as other nobler rebels fight to destroy any kind of oppression; but [they] sure cannot be anarchist’ (see the next note). Moreover, stricter notions of personhood, for example, can prompt “conservative rebellion” (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 60); see the use of “self-defence” to reinforce a hierarchical status quo as seen in section 4.2, as well as Jappe (2013, p. 39–40), William C. Anderson (2021, p. 33), and Rossdale (2023).

¹⁵ This was, for example, part of what was problematic about Tucker’s social theory: to think the trust that “money” relies on to function could be based on Stirnerite assent (an individualistic framework in which no one really makes promises regarding any boundary whatsoever) (KINNA; HARPER, 2020, p. 75–76). Max Stirner is more distanced from the anarchist tradition than it appears at first, his connection with it having first been established by “canon-builders”. Some of what he’s written has positively provoked many anarchists, as it resonates with some libertarian positions (FEITEN, 2013, p. 122–127; KINNA; HARPER, 2020, p. 71–74); he was even praised by the Marxist Georgi Plechanov for proposing a form of class struggle (FEITEN, 2013, p. 123) (in a derisive comment, Rodrigues (1999b, p. 83) wrote that Engels had also praised him ‘before Marx told him to be oppositional’ [antes de Marx mandá-lo ser contra]). However, his flavour of individualism, arguably leading straight to sovereignty, is at odds with anarchist tenets (KINNA; HARPER, 2020, p. 75–76). He died before anarchism referred to a self-consciously defined political movement, whose first adherents barely interacted with him or commented on his ideas; he never called himself an anarchist, and was initially labelled as such by Marx and Engels in a text published only in 1932 – he is arguably more a forerunner of post-structuralism than an anarchist. Malatesta (2014[1922][f]) warned against the conflation of Stirnerite and anarchist aims: ‘how can one call [oneself] anarchist [...] when claiming] that [one] would oppress the others for the satisfaction of [one’s] Ego, without any scruple or limit, other than that drawn by his own strength? [...] That person] is a would-be [...] tyrant, who is unable to accomplish [their] dreams

up believing oneself personally ‘capable of dispensing with tutelage, but becom[ing] anxious when one’s neighbour is responsible for themselves’^d (GRAVE, 2000, p. 14–15).

On the other hand, unlike progressives who define freedom as a kind of unrestriction (and can thus deduce what institutions must be enforced so that it is provided), anarchists do not think there is *one* ascertainable “good” pattern people should conform to. ‘Given the social construction of our individuality, as well as society itself’, writes Prichard (2019, p. 76), ‘we are all of necessity beholden to one another and therefore have an equal right to stipulate the terms of our social relationships’. In that sense, anarchists want *all* to be satisfied. They would thus not see as “unfree” those who decided to reproduce a diverse network of healthily interdependent relations with one another, if no one complained or had reason to conceal complaints¹⁶. People are ‘to a great extent creatures of habit, and grow to love associations’, wrote Parsons (2010[1890], p. 4); ‘under reasonably good conditions’ they ‘would remain’ where they started if they wished. However, the perpetuity of reasonably good conditions, be them external or internal to the subject, is certainly not to be expected; ‘we don’t have to worry about the boredom of utopia’, wrote Ward (2011[1973], p. 255), because ‘we shan’t get there’. People are not going to be all satisfied forever¹⁷ — if a person does not wish to remain where they started, continued Parsons, ‘who has any natural right to force [them] into relations distasteful to [them]?’ — and for anarchists that could not be pursued through the enforcement of a single social model anyway. Anarchists’ universal impulse is therefore given expression by, on one hand, minimising the capacity of some to prevent others from provoking deeper change (balance of forces), and on the other, engendering in all agents the conclusion that satisfaction does not uniquely depend on current forms of being and relating (diversity and mutual aid; internal and external resources that ease transition into different relational patterns)¹⁸.

Even if nonconformity always contains conformity in a sense, the opposite is not true: there is an asymmetry between the concepts. Nonconformity tends to increase the overall *diversity* of patterns, and while one can never really “close the door” on conformity through

of dominion and wealth by [their] own strength[... and approaches] anarchists to exploit their moral and material solidarity’. See also Reclus (2013[1894], p. 125) and Luigi Fabbri (2009[1907?]).

¹⁶ See note 145 in section 5.2, page 211, as well as Graeber (2009, p. 325–326).

¹⁷ The arc begins to close on the question posed in section 3.2 (page 87).

¹⁸ This relates to Bakunin’s dual view of liberty, which ‘implies, on one hand, the guarantee that all individuals find conditions for [development]; on the other, the guarantee that no individual or collective can impose their laws and will on others’ [°] (CORRÊA, 2019, p. 363). “Development” for anarchists can be interpreted to mean deeper, social transformation in the direction of contemplating current complaints, overcoming problems, solving conflicts — which at the same time is often directed by and contemplates an individual’s wish to enhance their faculties. For Rucker (2009[1938], p. 12), for example, liberty is ‘the vital concrete possibility’ to fully develop ‘powers, capacities, and talents’ *and* ‘turn them to social account’.

nonconformity, an orientation toward the first shuts out the second as it takes place. Nonconformity does not define freedom for anarchists as it arguably does for postmodern thinkers, but it is still important, never becoming obsolete as a “tool”: there is no single way of being, relating, organising, certainly not a perfect one, and so it will always be wanted in one’s toolbox. Not having this tool (to stay with the metaphor), to have very little access to it, to not be good at using it, is certainly a practical liability¹⁹ (BAKUNIN, 1975, p. 37). However, it also entails a largely predictable, machine-like existence, no matter how safe and (or) pleasurable. It implies the debility of what is most significant about one’s agency: not that one acts, but that it matters. To clamp down on this ability to deeply transform relational patterns – and *oneself* in tandem, as seen in section 5.2 – is to diminish a fundamental form of human creativity: ‘anarchist “freedom-equality”’, argues Jun (2009, p. 511 apud INTRONA, 2021, p. 5), is about ‘the immanent processes of change, development, and becoming’ that constitute ‘human life’²⁰. Therefore, how much an institution actually encourages nonconformity, even with itself, even if it ends up not happening at all – how much *latitude for nonconformity* it affords – is the crucial link between anarchism and nonconformity.

This argument furnishes the anarchist response to fatalists, according to whom the openness to difference and change that anarchists desire, a certain nonchalance about whoever one may end up becoming, is out of reach: as W. H. Auden (1948, p. 123) sang, ‘we would rather be ruined than changed’. We had better find the best social structures to stick to, a fatalist might say, because “change” is unappealing (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 21, 27). It can be painful to (self-)examine and transform: when discussing the need to challenge ‘attachments to the oppressive colonial myths and symbols that we have come to know as our culture’, for instance, Alfred (2005, p. 33) admits to ‘asking people to wander into dangerous territory’, for ‘disentangling from these attachments can also feel like being banished, in a way’.

For anarchists, fatalism may be at least partially explained by availability bias. Change in response to needs often goes unremarked, especially when socially expected; stubbornness that generates failure, frustration, even suffering, is a tragedy to be immortalised in song. More importantly, this salience is influenced by the cultural, economic, and political factors that play a role in diminishing or intensifying the pressure to conform²¹ (BERKMAN, 1929, p. 184;

¹⁹ See section 6.3.3 for both a discussion on whether anarchist liberty has instrumental or intrinsic value for anarchists and the theme (connected to the next sentence in the paragraph) of failure in complex systems.

²⁰ See also Berkman (1929, p. 176, 185).

²¹ Classic psychology studies argued for a “tendency” for people to forfeit personal judgment before majorities or authority figures without taking these factors into much consideration (HASLAM *et al.*, 2014; GRIGGS, 2016; HASLAM; REICHE, 2018; MCLEOD, 2023).

FISCELLA, 2015, p. 55–57); more pressure, in turn, results in more conformity, which then unsurprisingly generates more continuity-centred stories.

In sum, different contexts produce different kinds of conformity; different levels of the pressure to conform that is arguably innate to any social structure. The next section deals with anarchist depictions of sovereignty as an inherently conformist principle; section 6.1.2 is about how anarchists claim radical progressivism — against statist progressives — by approving of relational patterns that increase non-dominating latitude for nonconformity.

6.1.1 Sovereignty inherently conformist

*When they don't want to change the conditions that produce them,
solitary people eternally suffer the same pains. It would be good if
humanity's nest were finally built on a firm branch. It would be good
to change the foundation, rather than waste time rearranging hay.^f*

Louise Michel ²²

— *Can't you see? You had a family, a job, a home.
But, no, that wasn't enough! You wanted to be something else.
Far beyond what was in your reach. You threw it all away
to [protest by] chain[ing] yourself to a fence.
— But[...] how can anyone evolve in life chained to conformism?^g*

Darwin and José Hilário, in *O palhaço está em greve* ²³

Anarchists locate coercive hierarchies behind the ‘compulsion — moral and legal — to be and act [...] according to precedent and rule’²⁴ (BERKMAN, 1929, p. 183). But sovereignty does not affect decisions only when conformity is indistinguishable from obedience. Choice may be rigged by forcing the maintenance of specific circumstances, such as property arrangements and tax collection bureaucracies. ‘If we ask all the workers [...] what has made them choose the position in which they are living’, wrote Tolstoy (2019[1900], p. 33), they will reply that they either have ‘no land on which they could and wished to live and work’ or that the taxes demanded of them could only be paid ‘by selling their labour’; Kropotkin (2014[1883][a], p. 269–282) likewise considers that standing armies, taxes, and private property dominate people into conformity²⁵. Sovereign coercion may deter, but also detour, channelling energies toward the paths it leaves open or makes (however purposefully) more convenient. This involves

²² Michel, 2021[1890], p. 30.

²³ Marco Túlio Costa, 2014, p. 80.

²⁴ See also Robinson (1980, p. 99–100).

²⁵ See also England (2015, p. 245).

the employment of communication²⁶ to legitimise violence or at least render its operation intelligible. On one hand, fear produces docile responses to forms of oppression, such as hunger amidst food surpluses:

We [...] political subjects ruled by the state may not choose to cross the fence. We may instead go to the food pantry or NGO[...]; sign up for food stamps, follow its rules, and buy only what the state is graciously allowing us to eat; [...] try and survive the social war by internalizing and normalizing the only options for satiety that we are given. [...] We accept as routine, an everyday part of political life, that we cannot just squat on agribusiness land and grow food or take it from grocery store shelves without violent consequences[... We are trained] to accept these conditions and carefully allocated solutions to the problems these conditions perpetuate. (KASS, 2022, 11:34–13:14)

On the other hand, this inspiration of awe is seductive. For Tolstoy (2019[1900], p. 33), a third motivation for the workers' choices is 'the more luxurious habits' they are offered²⁷; for Kropotkin (2014[1883][a], p. 269-282), Reclus (2013[1894], p. 121–122), and Ferdinand Nieuwenhuis (2022[1901?], p. 44–45) there was also the education system, the church, the press; more contemporarily, anarchists have discussed the role of corporate media in general (GOODMAN, 1961; KINNA, 2019b, p. 264). In every case, anarchists are calling attention to sovereign regulation of the infrastructure more ostensibly related to the circulation of information and stories, as well as the more dispersed effects of social and economic inequalities — e.g. centre-periphery and urban-rural relations, and the fact that powerful people will “organically” have a louder megaphone by virtue of the power they wield.

All of this entails, for anarchists, conformity of the “public opinion” kind, in which acting the same or in ways that reproduce the same patterns comes from thinking alike. Just as in the observation above that anarchists do not condemn an event of conformity in itself, they likewise do not think the existence of majoritarian opinions is an issue. The question is that in imbalanced circumstances there is a higher probability that elite viewpoints and priorities are magnified, reshaping even popular culture to establish a particularly conformist kind of “common sense”²⁸ (HERMAN; CHOMSKY, 2010[1988]; SCOTT, J. C., 1990, p. 73-74; HOOKS,

²⁶ See the discussion about how anarchists see “propaganda” in section 3.1, around page 79.

²⁷ See the case of Madagascar around page 274 below.

²⁸ Some non-anarchist analyses of popular culture further press this point. For Anthony Oliver Scott (2022), Hollywood movies have always tended to focus on ‘the heroic, essential work of law enforcement; [...] the centrality of revenge to any serious conception of justice; [...] individual striving as the answer to most social problems[... They have been] in love with guns, suspicious of democracy, ambivalent about feminism, squeamish about divorce, allergic to abortion, all over the place on matters of sexuality and very nervous about anything to do with race. [...] The dominant narrative forms, tending toward happy or redemptive endings — or, more recently, toward a horizon of endless sequels — are fundamentally affirmative of the way things are’ (on “redemption”, see note 38 below). This harks back to older literary patterns, which ascended

2017[1994], p. 44–45; RODRIGUES, 1999c, p. 191; KINNA, 2019b, p. 226). But beyond journalism and art, commercial advertisement is also political (BOOKCHIN, 1982, p. 70; WAGNER, 1995); ‘to sell goods’, wrote Roland Marchand (1986, p. 20), advertisers ‘must sell life’, and the life they sell is one in which consumption under capitalism²⁹ is the best strategy for solving problems. Of course, it is also the case that problems are *created* in the first place so that solutions can be sold. Women have historically been particularly affected by being drenched in images of success and beauty associated with barely conceivable (often white) thinness (SHANNON, 2012, p. 286). It does not matter that the pictures are manipulated; their dissemination relays the message that, from the point of view of elites, one ought to be thin³⁰. In this sense, commercial advertisement is a form of peer pressure from powerful “peers”, working like Hollywood movies as described by Anthony Oliver Scott (2022): ‘an elaborate mythos [...] that [doesn’t] need to be believed to be effective’³¹.

For anarchists, people’s interests are not static — not for the better, not for the worse³² — but informed by the power dynamics that shape their prospects; the State specifically, Eric Laursen (2021, p. 22) writes, is created by human beings but ‘also [moulds] and directs them, limits and places guardrails on their aspirations and ambitions such that they conform to and support its objectives’. That the sovereign is an individual (the king) or a system (the republic) matters little *in terms of the way*³³ people become more deeply entangled in its mechanisms and

with the growing dominance of unrestriction-based concepts of liberty, as Gato (2017, emphasis added) also remarks when making similar comments on Brazilian *novelas* (popular daily television dramas): ‘First of all: property[... , especially one] disputed by two generations. [...] The insistence and the *repetition of this formula* tends to reinforce certain schemes of perception in the consumer the TV tries to produce [...] to please the advertisers of consumer goods’ [Em primeiro lugar: a propriedade[... , especialmente uma] entre duas gerações. [...] a insistência e *repetição dessa fórmula*[...] tende a reforçar certos esquemas de percepção no espectador consumidor que a TV intenta produzir [...] para atender seus anunciantes de bens consumo.]. He also comments on racial themes within these plots, whose reproduction audiovisual media more generally has a great deal of responsibility in aiding: in the United States, writes Isabel Wilkerson (2020 apud LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 113), dominant racial groups ‘are surrounded by images of themselves, from cereal commercials to sitcoms, as deserving, hardworking and superior’.

²⁹ Combined (at best) with elections under liberal democracy, which means basically the same principle; see e.g. Schumpeter (2003[1942]) — and tangentially, Ward (2011[1977], p. 190). See also Eric Laursen (2021, p. 185–186): ‘the tools the State has developed to manipulate public opinion [...] are closely related to those the private sector uses in marketing and advertising: the two have cross-pollinated for many years’. In terms of what is about to be discussed next in this paragraph — forging problems to offer solutions — there is also a possible analogue in politics; consider stereotypes meant to articulate the images of an external “monster”, the protection against which requires supporting hierarchical structures (NEOCLEOUS, 2021).

³⁰ I have discussed this elsewhere; see Kinna and Silva (2023).

³¹ See note ?? above, as well as Graeber (2015b, p. 27), for whom in bureaucracies career advancement tends to be based not on merit, and not even ‘necessarily on being someone’s cousin; above all, it’s based on a willingness to play along with the fiction that career advancement is based on merit, even though everyone knows this not to be true’.

³² This, of course, relates to the discussion on anarchism and human nature in the introduction to chapter 5.

³³ See the discussion in section 4.3.1 about how anarchists think about non-domination less in terms of autocracy *versus* bureaucracy and more within a framework of command-obedience, or sovereignty, *versus* balance.

outcomes, “conservatively” (“I do not want to be fired”, or “I want to keep employing people to work for me”) or “progressively” (“I want to be rich one day”, or “I want to be even richer”): they acquire, as Eric Laursen (2021, p. 27) puts it, a ‘perceived stake in [the sovereign’s] success’, even if what that stake is varies wildly for each agent³⁴. As Goldman (2020, p. 4) reported, many Marxists abandoned the communist aims they claimed to defend when they were brought about through direct expropriation because ‘peaceful aspirants for political jobs’ could not ‘approve such conduct’³⁵.

However, a higher level of conformity does not come about solely through ramping up fear or increasing artificial opportunism (TOLSTOY, 1894, p. 318–322). As discussed in section 5.2, the successful enforcement of a relational pattern shapes not only people’s prospects but also their perspectives, their subjectivities. This was already noted in section 2.4³⁶ regarding inequality of forces, or in section 4.3.2 concerning disparities in knowledge and responsibility, and it is something one can experience in relatively small-scale contexts:

Convert one young person into a sort of superintendent and director to [their] junior, and you will see [them] immediately start up into a species of formalist and pedant. [They are] watching the conduct of another; that other has no such employment. He is immersed in foresight and care; the other is jocund and careless, and has no thought of tomorrow. [... They grow] hourly more estranged to the [... sentiment] of equality, and inevitably [contract] some of the vices that distinguish the master from the slave. (GODWIN, 1797 apud WARD, 1991b, p. 18)

Once more, this dynamic affects the oppressed as much as the upper classes. By the time of the Russian revolution, for example, anti-patriarchal sentiments among Marxists were soon “flexed” to fit into predefined forms of struggle, not out of cynicism as Goldman might have inferred, but of a genuine engagement with a strategy for human emancipation:

the ‘proletarian woman’ had a ‘duty... to join the men of her class in the struggle for a thorough-going transformation of society’. In that class struggle, women might have different ‘instincts’ than men. Nelson [a male communist militant] implicitly supported difference, but also and importantly choice. Yeager [his wife] ‘consciously’ decided that the best way to serve the movement was to set aside her political activism in order to help her husband. (KIRSCHENBAUM, 2017, p. 77)

³⁴ Indeed, one’s “base level” of unrestrictedness may be “recalibrated”, in the sense that one comes to expect, to think fair and tied to one’s standing, the things one is left by sovereign force unimpeded to do. The end result is that structural changes that would bring about more equality are seen as threats to one’s most basic liberties. See note 32 (section 2.3.1, page 48) and the discussion at the end of the introduction to section 4.2.

³⁵ See Gori’s (2000[1894], p. 41) quote at the end of section 2.3.3 and also Ward (2011[1946], p. 65–66).

³⁶ Around page 69.

For anarchists, the twentieth century was marked by a growing habit of ‘personal identification with a homogenous mass that resulted from the administration of society as a whole, in large numbers, and in uniform ways’ (HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 129). This mass of consumers and (or) (worker-)citizens is then funnelled into a utilitarian pluralism of roles that cemented ‘loyalty to the State or at least our acquiescence’, exploiting fears that ‘without the State’ one ‘would have no identity’ (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 65–66). Even when upward social mobility³⁷ takes place, the mobile individual has obvious reasons for upholding the relational patterns that validate their (new) standing³⁸. Eric Laursen (2021, p. 124–125, 146) discusses the recruitment of people from marginal ethnicities into the “core identity” linked to a national state (e.g. whites, the Chinese Han), as well as the fact that ‘white, middle-class women’ who ‘make it to the top’ are rarely ‘interested in changing the culture to make it less masculine, or else are unable to do so without undermining the position they have achieved among their male colleagues’³⁹. For yet another example, throughout history it was not uncommon for former slaves to not denounce slavery *as an institution*, adopting ‘the rules and standards of the society’ surrounding them to recover the “honour” this very society’s institutions deprived them of⁴⁰ (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 167). To be given self-worth within a collective context, writes Hunter (2019, p. 110, 244–245), means ‘it will be incredibly difficult to challenge’ prevailing relational patterns. Learning to behave “properly”, being ‘rewarded both materially and, in some ways, psychologically’ for it, generates a pride that entails proving oneself as ‘a useful member of society willing to reproduce its [unjust, unequal] dynamics’⁴¹; as Saul Newman (2012, p. 47–48) puts it, anarchists

³⁷ Understood here as individual movement between social classes; not collective transformation, the abolition of classes, and the like. See note 260 in section 5.3, page 249.

³⁸ Psychology scholar Dan McAdams (2013) has notoriously explored the “redemptive self”, as in a self-understanding based on narratives of challenges overcome – in contrast with e.g. stories of acceptance (MCADAMS; LOGAN; REISCHER, 2022). As a cultural phenomenon, especially in relation to the notion of “post-traumatic growth”, these narratives might evolve into the ‘problematic’ ideas, as Jayawickreme and Infurna (2023) point out, ‘that personal growth and resilience are typical outcomes of adversity’. Evidence is dubious on whether they are, but as ‘not everyone will grow in the same way and at the same speed’, such a narrative might undermine the continuity and robustness of ‘the help and social support’ that ‘actually play a big role in determining whether people do, in fact, grow’ after trauma. Finally, it communicates that ‘suffering is good in the long run, and people who have experienced trauma are stronger than those who haven’t’. In other words, this is often employed as an individualistic rhetoric of self-making that makes injustice positive; even, in fact, indispensable. Also note that “redemption”, as a word, has economic roots (think “redeem a coupon”) (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 80–85), having been translated into the moral realm (in “the West”, at least) as a biblical theme (‘all pain and suffering will ultimately lead to freedom’) (JAYAWICKREME; INFURNA, 2023).

³⁹ See also Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 184–185).

⁴⁰ See also Coulthard (2014, p. 113–114).

⁴¹ See note 255 of section 5.3 on page 247: it is arguably an encounter with the prevalence of such subjectivity that discourages anarchists from seeking “revolution” in certain contexts. Also on discourses of non-violence among anarchists used to ‘claim the higher moral ground’, Crimethinc (2012) note that ‘in a hierarchical society’, gaining such higher ground ‘often reinforces hierarchy itself’.

deem tackling ‘our own subjective attachment to power, our own voluntary servitude to the power that subordinates us’, a key challenge to liberation.

As discussed in section 4.2.1, the voluntary character of some of the conformist acts matters less than the conditions rigging the options until volition is (at least statistically) controlled. ‘The supreme exercise of power’, ponders Uri Gordon (2006, p. 143), is to ‘secure [others’] compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires’ — and yet, as discussed in section 4.3.1, no specific person or conspiratorial group has to be directly in control of other people’s thoughts for everyone’s thoughts to be kept “under control”. This is not a matter of “false consciousness”, a mostly Marxist concept so long as it implies a *true* one to be achieved, which casts current subjectivities as the relevant restrictions whose elimination represent a yardstick for emancipation. As Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 178–179) explained regarding feminist critiques of this notion, ‘there seem to be many different forms of “false” consciousness, but no one form of “true” consciousness’; and while ‘all consciousness is social’, ‘not all social situations are the same’. ‘Instead of judging the content of consciousness’, one could more productively ‘judge its context’ in ways that do not ‘eliminate the problem of judgment’ but ‘redirect the inquiry’: is consciousness developed ‘where connections with others are rooted in equality, not domination; or is it shaped by institutionalized links with others that express and enforce the values/interests/knowledge of the powerful?’⁴².

For anarchists, to live in accordance with the logic of sovereignty, no matter the level one occupies⁴³ in any given hierarchy, is to live with an impersonal tendency toward the permanence, the repetition, of current relational patterns (even if they were recently established). And more than that being incidental to the individuals and groups who happen to be elevated, or really all concerned — as if good intentions could prevent sovereign power from being wielded so as to induce conformity — this is intrinsic to the operation of sovereignty as a relational logic. Superior force ‘turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing’⁴⁴ (WEIL, 1965, p. 6), allowing for ‘simple and schematic’ relationships⁴⁵ (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 67–69), meaning life — its routines as well as its “admissible transformations” — becomes more and more “automatic”, less permeable to creative action and the sustenance of complex relationships⁴⁶.

⁴² See section 6.3.1, and also James C. Scott (1990, p. 73–82).

⁴³ An interesting example is the creation of central banks, beginning with England’s in 1694, as even *kings* now had to pay interest on loans (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 49, chapter 11).

⁴⁴ See note 217 in section 4.3.2, page 159.

⁴⁵ This was already mentioned in section 2.4 above, when sovereign force was presented as a way to not have to take other perspectives into account. See also Novais *et al.* (2021, p. 23).

⁴⁶ One of the most striking examples might be in Maruyama (2022[1946], p. 185).

In pretty much any other way in which you might try to influence another's actions, you must at least have some idea about who you think they are, who they think you are, what they might want out of the situation, their aversions and proclivities, and so forth. Hit them over the head hard enough, and all of this becomes irrelevant. [...] the effects one can have by disabling or killing someone are very limited. But they are real enough — and critically, it is possible to know in advance exactly what they are going to be. (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 68)

There are potentially infinite ways humans can organise their affairs according to the also endless variation in individuals and their contexts. Actively deciding among these possibilities for common benefit, especially considering how inequalities constantly emerge out of the complex dynamics of human social life⁴⁷, requires ingenuity and social skills, as well as openness to change and adjustment. Violence can help avoid all this hard work when there is 'an overwhelming advantage' from one side, as 'two parties [...] in a relatively equal contest' still 'have good reason to try to get inside each other's heads'⁴⁸ (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 68–69). Even being on the weaker or historically losing side — perhaps seeing concessions and a place within a hierarchical web as justice and essence — is easier, even if not exactly comfortable or entirely safe (ALFRED, 2005, p. 92). Thus by seeking to secure independence and unrestricted sovereignty, one seeks a "simpler" way to relate, becoming more 'passive' by not exercising 'imagination and creativity', or doing so (if one ever manages to operate beyond a 'stimulus-response circuit'), only 'in the narrow field marked by an official truth'⁴⁹ (NASCIMENTO, R., 2002, p. 101). 'We live in a time of engineers and soldiers', wrote Reclus (2002[1898], p. 49), for whom the keyword is 'Alignment!'^h. One holds on to a script of separation and competition, avoiding the unknowns of deep transformation (of social structures and of the self); conforms and becomes a factor toward conformity for others — in Nascimento's witty turn of phrase, becomes 'not a militant but a limitant'ⁱ. For typical conformists,

seeing as there are rich and poor[...], lords and servants[...], those with a right mind had better take the side of the rich and the lords[...].! If they were

⁴⁷ See also Wilbur (2020[2016], p. 4–5) in the context of education: 'each time we are confronted with an imbalance of expertise and the opening to authoritarian relations, the logical anarchist response would be to work, on our own responsibility, to cultivate greater, more widespread knowledge and skill, rather than accommodating ourselves to the imbalance'.

⁴⁸ See also Graeber (2007, p. 381). It must be said, however, following Amborn (2019, p. 14), that rules still are important for offering 'an orientation for negotiations, so that each person is not required to know everything about the others'. In avoiding a postmodern critique of just *any* set of rules, anarchists want to build trust, which 'all true association presupposes' (COLSON, 2019, p. 72); however, this is not done only through up-to-date and extensive knowledge of the other — which does not scale well — but also through more abstract mechanisms for peaceful coexistence that structure this intention in more manageable "rituals"; in simpler, aforementioned terms, it is important for anarchists to "constitutionalise" (KINNA *et al.*, 2023). See sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 below.

⁴⁹ See also Heckert (2013, p. 518).

born under a good star, which prevented them from struggling, [...] what would they complain about? [...] The selfish whose cradle society did not furnish with riches from the beginning [...] can at least hope to climb up the ladder [...] by good luck or even great effort in service of the powerful. [...] Far from seeking justice for all, privilege for oneself is enough.^j (RECLUS, 2002[1898], p. 22-23)

Importantly, for liberals, republicans, and Marxists (as discussed in chapter 2) conformity, as the saying goes, is not a bug but a feature. Adherence to a fixed idea of liberty (related to a fixed idea of subjectivity) engenders the push for a form of sovereignty that can effectively induce conformity with the “best” pattern – competition among individuals, uniform law within territorially bounded groups, humans *qua* workers controlling nature, etc. Conformity increases *by design*, and things come full circle in a “thaumatropic” sense⁵⁰ as sovereignty implies conformism not only because of its effects but because of the impulse behind its very establishment. Even if a liberal, republican, or state socialist constitution is achieved by a revolution, this ‘act of nonconformity is carried out to immediately demonstrate an absolute conformity (with that which is to come, because it was already advertised as the future one must come to)’^k (OVEJA NEGRA, 2021, emphasis removed).

6.1.2 Disputing progressiveness

The communities that anarchists build are the positive institutional embodiment of the negative principle of anarchy.

Alex Prichard ⁵¹

Zapatismo is nothing, it does not exist. It only serves as a bridge, to cross from one side, to the other.

Klee Benally ⁵²

For anarchists, a distinction can therefore be drawn between institutions that make it easier for nonconformity to happen and those that induce conformity. They understand sovereignty to be the logic common to the latter, categorising sovereign arrangements as inherently conformist.

As progressives, however, liberals, republicans, and Marxists tend to favour changes that would benefit the currently disenfranchised or disadvantaged; they simply believe, as seen in

⁵⁰ See the introduction to chapter 5, around page 178.

⁵¹ Prichard, 2019, p. 71.

⁵² Benally, 2021b, p. 53–54.

section 5.3, that they must be brought about through conformity to the sovereign arrangements that represent the resolution of the problem each tradition identifies as central⁵³. For a Marxist, for instance, after a successful revolution (as they understand the term) there would be no more deeper, systemic issue to complain about — no more *domination* — and thus no reason to say the system’s “admissible transformations” are broken or insufficient⁵⁴. Similar things, of course, have been said of many contexts by republicans and liberals⁵⁵. Injustices do not excuse insubordination, solutions must be found within the current structure⁵⁶; ‘bypassing the established channels and breaking the law is akin to attacking freedom, community, and dialogue themselves’ (CRIMETHINC, 2008). Additionally, the more certain sovereignty-related patterns are naturalised — *obviously* some are going to give orders, and others, obey, even if in turns; *obviously* people will behave as individual competitors, etc. (NASCIMENTO, R., 2002, p. 101–102) — the less the practices needed to establish and maintain such patterns may be registered as choices at all.

Thus anarchists’ rocky relations with other progressives, whom the first deem not as bad as elitists or fascists (according to a progressive moral compass). Their ‘hatred of despotic institutions’ was to be celebrated, thought Kropotkin (KINNA, 2016, p. 122), and for Reclus (2002[1898], p. 24) ‘the sincerity of their thought and conduct places them above criticism: we declare them our siblings’. And yet anarchists *do* criticise what they see as conservative and (or) authoritarian holdovers besmirching these other traditions’ progressive credentials, pointing out ‘the narrowness of the struggle in which they are cornered and how, by the [...] special anger against a single abuse, they give the impression of considering all other inequities just’¹.

⁵³ But the whole framing is also telling: the problem of the oppressed is not the ways in which they are deprived of the agency to e.g. create “franchises” of their own. They will be liberated once they adequately conform, like everyone else; that should be the aim of anyone charitable enough to fight for *their* freedom. See also Graeber (2009, p. 260–261) on liberal concepts of alienation.

⁵⁴ Although the issue in this case is whether the nation would be the unit of analysis — see e.g. note 169 in section 4.3.1, page 142 — or the entire world.

⁵⁵ For an interesting example, see hooks (2017[1994], p. 166).

⁵⁶ Bureaucracy, writes Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 20), rests on the assumption that ‘there is a “single best solution” (or at least a managerially defined resolution) to organizational problems [...] and so] it cannot recognize the legitimacy of conflict’ — that is, the kind of conflict that would destabilise the sovereign bureaucracy’s prerogative to arbitrate all disputes — ‘seeing it as a temporary aberration to be dealt with through elaborated administrative techniques’; see e.g. Alfred (2005, p. 111). This is true even in the case of a tradition such as liberalism, full of ‘anxious moves to downplay or discredit’ rebellion that run alongside ‘heroic account[s] of its own founding revolutions’, as Chris Rosedale (2023, 9:37–10:04) explores: ‘rebellion must be permitted but carefully managed’. He also brings up ‘theoretical work on civil disobedience’, often carried out by liberals and republicans, commenting that it seeks ‘to determine the precise conditions and conduct whereby rebellion could be tolerated and, naturally, what reprisals rebels should gladly accept’. I have written about civil disobedience elsewhere; see Peterson Roberto da Silva (2019). See also Hunter (2019, p. 237–238).

Liberals in particular would take issue with the notion that their favoured institutions induce conformity. Guarding against collective reach into the private realm is supposed to leave individuals less restrained to think for themselves, and thereafter act on these thoughts to (should they conclude this is beneficial) stray from present patterns. Foregrounding anarchist rebuttals to liberal protestations is therefore important to highlight the conditions anarchists think are truly enabling of nonconformity, exploring the reasons why anarchists remain unfazed by statist progressives' claims that enforcing specific structures would aid progressive change — seeing as even the most “nonconformist” among the latter fail to convince the first.

The first hurdle in the liberal argument is that markets — often used by liberals as ideal types for systems that provide liberty to individuals, as discussed in section 2.3.1 — do not necessarily yield more diversity. If not direct concentration, the quest for “efficiency” (SHANNON, 2012, p. 285; CORRÊA, 2019, p. 399–400) leads to more uniformity in production⁵⁷. Despite the existence of over 7,000 known edible plants and fungi, for example, ‘just 15 [crops] contribute to 90% of humanity’s energy intake, and more than four billion people rely on just rice, maize and wheat’⁵⁸ (ANTONELLI *et al.*, 2020, p. 27–28). Even worse, a sizeable contributing factor to this situation is meat production, which worsens global warming. The variety that does come from this dietary “monotony” is made of “ultraprocessed” foods, which are not nearly as healthy as other categories of food (ABRAMOVAY, 2020). Kirkpatrick Sale (1980, p. 403 apud FERGUSON, K. E., 1984, p. 207-208) described this productive conformity thus: ‘whole nations given over to a single crop, cities to a single industry, farms to a single culture, factories to a single product, people to a single job, jobs to a single motion, motion to a single purpose’. Even where one would suppose creativity is most required, the “cultural industry”, mainstream diversity diminishes over time, arguably *because* it has become an “industry”; as with food, people’s tastes do not just naturally become similar over time.

As Coomaraswamy (1909, p. 64, 81–82 apud KINNA, 2020b, p. 8) commented in the early 20th century, liberal economics allowed for the ‘sacred individual liberty’ to ‘undermine the trade of [one’s] fellows’ on the basis of ‘cheapness not [...] excellence’; this turned the ‘communal cultivation’ of more diverse ‘forest lands’ by locals, with their craft economies, into ‘tea and rubber estates’ whose owners clamoured for taxes ‘to induct the villager to work for them at [...] rates profitable [...] to the canny shareholder away in England and Scotland’. Economic, social, and political dynamics are intertwined, as ‘the imperative to assimilate all difference’ appears

⁵⁷ Tangentially, see also Graeber’s (2015, p. 8–9) “iron law of liberalism”.

⁵⁸ Importantly, see also James C. Scott (2017) and Mayshary, Moav, and Pascali (2020).

as ‘an inherent feature of liberal democracy’ (ALFRED, 2005, p. 154–155); the same tendency for “things” is therefore witnessed when it comes to “kinds of human relations” (MANDER, 1992, p. 135–136). For the Black Flag Group (2021[1968], p. 29), rather than nonconformity, liberalism is about individuals fighting for more unrestriction ‘within the structure of society’ that they find themselves in – fighting for more *of the same* unrestriction, one could add. This encourages disconnected actions that, in aggregate, reinforce current patterns. ‘Millions of individual decisions’ can lead to ‘enslavement’ to individualism, something ‘millions of individual choices’ cannot liberate people from, only restate (WARD, 1991a, p. 109–110). The conformist tendency that liberalism creates is precisely to interact with others as an individual market agent, judging everything for its worth within the value system of the powerful (FERGUSON, K. E., 1984, p. 56–57; GRAEBER, 2011a, chap. 9; NEWMAN, S., 2019, p. 157). As Reclus wrote about the late-19th-century United States, ‘the population[...] distributes itself entirely according to the laws of economics’, leading to ‘widespread destruction’ as ‘all feelings merge more and more with pecuniary interests’ (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 84). ‘In America everything is BUSINESS’, wrote Magón (1977, p. 84), which ‘is fatal to [...] truthfulness’; commercialism, turned into ‘the country’s God, is the condition of mutual and slavish dependence’. Ward (1991a, p. 95) would later note, about Britain, that ‘market values have been imported into areas of life where, a century ago, it was thought that the battle for free access had been won’. State agents might be disempowered to do many things (directly⁵⁹) under this model, but they are certainly called to protect the regimentation of life afforded to each property holder in their dominion.

Today, gender and sexuality are often invoked as topics in which evidence that this provides for nonconformity can be found: the market does not care what one’s genitalia is, or who one has sex with, so long as one is a “functional” economic agent. However, employers have historically cared about issues such as the opportunity costs of maternity leave, while in different contexts gender inequality may make women more employable due to being more easily exploited (SILVA, P., 2017); moreover, if customers care about the sexuality of people serving them, or companies’ policies on the matter, usually so will employers⁶⁰. This can happen even with a majority of non-bigoted individuals in a relevant region: as Crawford Macpherson (1977, p. 87) noted about electoral contexts, markets do not answer to demands but to *effective* demands, the ones with ‘purchasing power to back them’.

⁵⁹ See note 131 in section 4.2.2, page 127.

⁶⁰ See e.g. Black Orchid Collective (2018[2010]) and CAB (2020, 39:15–40:00).

Justice in this case is often portrayed as the state stepping in to make competition fairer. Apart from how this reinforces the “market competitor” perspective (requiring, moreover, the progressive governments that unfair competition tends to inhibit), each claimant before the justice-dispensing sovereign further attaches to the latter the “beautiful role” mentioned in section 5.3 and entrenches oneself into minority categories that double as beacons for market segmentation⁶¹ (BUTLER, 2002; ACKELSBURG, 2012, p. 12; HAIDER, 2018, p. 17–18; KHALED; ROCHA; BARROS, 2022, 1:00:14–1:08:06). Domination, notes Gelderloos (2016, chap. II), ‘flows from an original categorical enclosure’. Stabilisation of deviant behaviour or subaltern difference as identity, followed by compensation policies for those able and willing to conform to the larger framework⁶², allows for co-opting a few “representative” individuals into power structures (POLESE, 2020, p. 187), reinforcing the message that nonconformity *is* allowed — but only for “winners”; only on the basis of property⁶³ (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 89).

As already mentioned in section 5.2 regarding liberal identity politics, this is a far cry from the overcoming of issues by building bridges of mutual recognition and solidarity among people. ‘We should not be seeking to learn from one another the best ways to individually navigate the capitalist system’, writes Hunter (2019, p. 246), but ‘learning about one another’s experiences so that we may better work collectively to create new ways of existing’. Self-understandings that could be much more fluid (experimenting with changing desires by relying on cooperation to transform the terms and compositions of relations) are turned into the heaviest of anchors for one’s interactions, potentially isolating even individuals who share identity markers, tethering one’s hopes for progress to the permanence of state and capital institutions, which are all about the hierarchy and competition that reproduce oppression. The structure that protects enclosures and secures the market dynamics within which the marginalised are exploited promises to improve the lot of some of them in exchange for allegiance to the same structure, basically reaching into “the private realm” through a backdoor (GOODMAN, 1961). Liberalism can rely on individuals coming to their own conclusions once the conditions are properly engineered:

⁶¹ Here commercial advertisement as politics reaches its peak significance as not only political identities are targeted qua consumer groups but companies strive to turn the act of consuming their products or services into a meaningful identity *in itself*; see Lair, Sullivan, and Cheney (2005), Arvidsson (2006), Wu (2016), Andjelic (2020), and Mull (2021).

⁶² See also Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 129–131), as well as Schulman (2016, chap. 4) on ‘homonationalism’.

⁶³ Especially in a broader sense of the word (see note 24 in section 4.1, page 96). Tangentially, see May Picqueray (2019, chap. 5) on singing an anarchist hymn in front of communist leaders as a foreign visitor in the early Soviet Union: ‘Trotsky [was grinning, and] he called out to me: “See, comrade May? There is still freedom in Russia, since you were able to sing about anarchy in the Kremlin...” To which I responded: “Freedom for those who accept, who adapt, but as for the rest, it’s off to the Butyrki [Moscow’s prison]’. See also James C. Scott (1990, p. 82–83), hooks (2017[1994], p. 241–242), and Rodrigues (1999b, p. 76).

the state being unsurmountable, will the majority not think obedience is preferable? Would they think to “participate” in it – to try to wield its force against others – were it not, as a sovereign bureaucratic edifice, available for that in the first place? Less liable for thought crimes, do the majority source their ideas from the elites who manipulate art, journalism, often even science, to propel awareness of the way they think problems should be solved? Do money hoarders tend to make credit available for genuinely dissident ideas to make more of an impact on material reality? Praising nonconformity – but defining it as changes to a leader board; at best changing the rules by following them first – is convenient for those whom the present rules favour, even if not explicitly or personally (e.g. by simply favouring who is already winning); conformity is basically guaranteed (BAKUNIN, 2008, p. 98 apud CORRÊA, 2019, p. 401). The market may be appeased enough to “not care” about certain things that do not threaten it. Tolerating an oppressed or otherwise disadvantaged agent’s actions – especially thoughts – might be less a sign of freedom than of the fact that said thoughts and actions are, in the end, conformist (HOOKS, 2017[1994], p. 110–111; RODRIGUES, 1999c, p. 191).

There often is, then, with liberalism, a ‘forgetfulness about all that which drives us to an apparent “desire”^m (FERNÁNDEZ, 2017); a selective amnesia about the preceding historical context that has set things, that has set *us*, up for ‘the freedom to choose what was always the same’, as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno put it⁶⁴ (JEFFRIES, 2021, chap. 9). There is nothing in the liberal notion of liberty that implies or actively promotes true ‘value pluralism’, writes John P. Clark (2013b, p. 88); people may adhere to a dominant system of values that is nonpluralistic, incorporate it into ‘the structure of social practice’, and ‘reward conformity’ to it. Conformity would then result from what people were set up to want; to leave individual choice less constrained becomes ‘the very mode by which we are governed, the threshold upon which our actions are “conducted”⁶⁵ (NEWMAN, S., 2019, p. 157). One then sees as emancipatory, for a couple of examples, the impulse to “maximise achievement” by which ‘excess work and performance escalate into auto-exploitation’⁶⁶ (HAN, 2015, p. 11), or the hegemony of the car, made ‘a necessity’ once everywhere becomes ‘tarmaced and polluted’ (AUFHEBEN, 2005[1994]). For Coulthard (2014, p. 156, emphases in the original), the neocolonial ‘externally imposed

⁶⁴ See also Graeber (2018, p. 165).

⁶⁵ Contrast with the notion that unrestriction ‘upsets [distributional] patterns’ because these require interference (NOZICK, 1974, p. 160–161 apud CARTER, I., 1999, p. 69–70); if our lives are inherently, deeply interconnected, pursuing certain forms of unrestriction is an act that interferes with the lives of others by helping create a *distributional pattern of its own*. Somewhat tangentially, see also Gibson (2019).

⁶⁶ See the discussion in section 2.1, around page 38, as well as Hamilton (2012, p. 35), and Abilio (2019) specifically on “subordinate self-management” [autogereciamento subordinado].

field of maneuver’, strung on Indigenous peoples like ‘a new chain’, demonstrates how liberal domination works ‘*through* rather than entirely *against* [liberal] freedom’.

A control is not a discipline. In making freeways, for example, you don’t enclose people but instead multiply the means of control. I am not saying that this is the freeway’s exclusive purpose, but that people can drive infinitely and “freely” without being at all confined yet while still being perfectly controlled⁶⁷ (DELEUZE, 1998, p. 18)

However, coercive hierarchies are still at the root of liberal dynamics⁶⁸. Property holders (of at least their own selves⁶⁹) enter competitions of savviness for transactions and contracts, seemingly satisfying desires without coercion, each having voluntarily accepted the terms of their agreements. But it is not enough that no penalty exists for entering a market. When others refuse to participate they are not only unfree themselves; the killjoys are restricting those who want to pattern their lives according to market mechanisms. Apart from the need to protect property against the commons, historically the increasing “marketification” of geographical areas and domains of life is desperately sought to, for example, stave off the overproduction and labour crises this logic often engenders⁷⁰. In other words, the structures socialising people to aspire to a bourgeois life may use carrots, but are founded and maintained by sticks as well.

Graeber (2011a, p. 50–51) provides the example of France’s implementation of the market system in Madagascar upon the latter’s conquest by the former. The conquering general ‘print[ed] money and then demand[ed] that everyone in [Madagascar] give some of that money back to him’⁷¹. This tax was described as ‘the “educational” or “moralizing tax”’, being designed ‘to teach the natives the value of work’. Due to the effects of supply and demand on seasonal farming and other complexities, farmers fell into debt and their prospects were even further shaped by colonial dynamics; however, the project was more than ‘a cynical scheme to squeeze

⁶⁷ See also Oveja Negra (2021) (‘conformism[...] has to install itself quietly on both sides of a fine line that aims at separating that which makes us appear nonconformist [...] from that which converts us into conformed beings’ [el conformismo[...] tiene que instalarse sigilosamente a ambos lados de una fina línea que disimula separar aquello que nos hace aparecer inconformes [...] de aquello que nos convierte en conformados.]), as well as Lewis Mumford (1956 apud WARD, 1991a, p.14), who noted that ‘at the wheel of [their] car the most down-trodden conformist still has a slight sense of release’.

⁶⁸ This holds true regarding cars; see Ward (1991a), Norton (2007), Matthew Wilson (2011, p. 117–119), and Yeoman (2021, 10:30–11:26). More generally, see Malatesta (2014[1892][a]), for whom liberals ‘cannot attack those repressive functions which form the essence of government’, and in fact under Liberalism ‘the repressive power of government must always increase’.

⁶⁹ As Graeber (2011a, p. 205–207) argued, those who claim that we “own” our bodies, even our rights, ‘have been mainly interested in asserting that we should be [unrestricted] to give them away, or even to sell them’; see the historical relation between liberalism and slavery (LOSURDO, 2011; FISCELLA, 2015, p. 153; WALL, 2021, p. 25; MORRIS, B., 2018, p. 43).

⁷⁰ It is also noteworthy that the advertisement industry itself was another way to do so.

⁷¹ See also Tolstoy (2019[1900], p. 33).

cheap labor out of the peasantry’: the colonial government was quite explicit, ‘in their own internal policy documents’, about ‘the need to make sure that peasants had at least some money of their own left over’ so that they ‘became accustomed to [...] minor luxuries’⁷². This development of ‘new tastes, habits, and expectations’ was supposed to ‘lay the foundations of a consumer demand that would endure long after the conquerors had left’.

In sum, agents must definitely be influenced in their actions by fear of punishment, lest they get to thinking they can disrupt the smooth functioning of markets (the having of property, the flowing of commodities, the accruing of profit; the coming-onto-their-own of the individual subject), even if by simply not supporting them, seeking alternatives. ‘While giving the capitalist any degree of free scope’ to amass wealth at the expense of others, wrote Kropotkin (2019[1903], p. 29), states have ‘NOWHERE and NEVER [...] afforded the laborers the opportunity “to do as they pleased”’⁷³.

For anarchists, the failure of even liberalism to incentivise nonconformity (or yield equality) indicts the notion that sovereignty could be used as advertised by statist progressives. Once people go down such a path, they become less able to meaningfully choose whether they should *continue* to conform. As Kinna and Prichard (2019, p. 229–230) discussed about liberal structures, for anarchists these compel ‘all social classes’, including ‘the bourgeoisie and state functionaries’, making them all slaves to their logic. Moreover, legitimising sovereignty in one context socialises us generally for simpler, schematic relationships based on command and obedience: from obeying ‘father to teacher to boss to God’, children learn to ‘become a full-fledged automaton’ (KORNEGGER, 2002, p. 26). This tends to “contaminate” other relations (NASCIMENTO, R., 2002, p. 93); as seen in the introduction to section 4.3 and in section 5.2.2, ‘what one sees on a large scale parallels what one sees on a small scale’, and so e.g. ‘the authority that prevails in government corresponds to that which holds sway in families’⁷⁴ (RECLUS, 2013[1905][b], p. 189). Similarly, one relational realm (“political”, “moral”, “economic”) cannot really be walled off from others, as if conformity could be demanded only in one instance without consequences for the others; when discussing ‘economic, political or spiritual privilege’,

⁷² Considering similar colonial experiences all over the world, one of them are – to some, crucially – alcohol (TOLSTOY, 1894, p.259–260; NIEUWENHUIS, 2022[1901?], p. 45; LEIBNER, 2013[1994], p. 12–13; FELÍCIO, 2020). See also Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 40), Coulthard (2014, p. 13), Knoll (2018[2007], p. 4–5), Denvir (2020, 1:04:12–1:04:24), and Cavallero and Gago (2021, p. 85–86). Tangentially, see also Laoghaire (2016, p. 9).

⁷³ See also Bloco A (2021, 38:06–38:19).

⁷⁴ Something already mentioned in section 2.2 with regard to the origins of the Greek *polis* and Rome. Notice also the discussion on intimate sources of individualism at the beginning of section 5.2.1, or of the “incompetent approaches to self-assertion” alluded to section 4.2.2; see also Ward (1991b, p. 37).

for example, the Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria (2020[1945], p. 3) warned that ‘if you keep one form of power, it will inevitably lead to the re-establishment of the other two’. There is nothing extraordinary about such “contamination”. Being excused out of creative respect for others gives a taste of, and helps legitimise, a hierarchical relational logic – which, being harder to change, creates a fixed point that conditions action around it.

Anarchists often call attention to how agents in the state-capital complex impose hierarchies in contexts with different power topologies to better assimilate the latter into their own projects (NUTTER, 2002, p. 92; GRAEBER, 2013b, chap. 1, 4); as Gelderloos (2016, chap. I) writes, ‘hierarchical societies are easier to control, and hierarchies cannot defend themselves from more powerful hierarchies’⁷⁵. The European modern state has basically become a “worldwide monoculture” (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 26, 84–86) alongside capitalism; they tend to

“go big” or, in business parlance, to “scale”: to centralize, to eliminate competition, to expand exponentially, to promote a social and cultural uniformity determined from the top. For capital, the objective is to create markets that are as large and uniform as possible, since this makes them more predictable and easier to extract maximum profits from. For the State, this makes them easier to govern and tax.⁷⁶ (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 111–112)

Therefore anarchists not only disagree on what social patterns are good or on definitions of domination (as examined in section 4.3), but also think sovereignty is counterproductive; not only ‘punishment, policemen, judges, hunger and wages have never been and never will be a part of progress’, but ‘progress is achieved’, if at all, ‘in spite of and not because of these instruments’⁷⁷ (KROPOTKIN, 2014[1883][b], p. 199). By inducing conformity in manifold contexts, the all-encompassing fixed point of sovereignty makes it harder for meaningful change to occur, easier for it to be resisted and rolled back, even more *probable* that it is (GELDERLOOS, 2016, chap. XIII). As William C. Anderson (2021, p. 174) writes, reforms can be ‘fleeting and hollow’, as reformists pay ‘dwindling attention to how, or whether’, ‘a new law’ or ‘new governance’ has ‘fundamentally changed people’s lives’. Reclus (2002[1898], p. 25) asked fellow anarchists to ‘salute’ those fighting bravely and sincerely for specific reforms, but to aim higher: ‘let us be like them in our own field of battle, which is much wider, encompassing the whole world!’ⁿ. ‘The entire social scheme is wrong’, proclaimed Berkman (1929, p. 207), whom Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 29) and William C. Anderson (2021, p. 3–6) respectively echo: to

⁷⁵ See also Alfred (2005, p. 180) and Nowell (2020).

⁷⁶ See also Marx (1996[1885]), Selmo Nascimento da Silva (2014, p. 42), Salverda (2015), Casado (2017), and Kass (2022); tangentially, see Shannon, Nocella II, and Asimakopoulos (2012, p. 16) and Gelderloos (2016, chap. VIII).

⁷⁷ See also Tolstoy (1894, p. 261).

confront sovereignty ‘only on its own terms [...] is to forfeit the struggle’; to compromise with it, ‘to rearrange the terms of a perpetual crisis’.

Of course, “the entire social scheme” is not going to change all at once, which means “revolutions” will always take the shape of reforms, as some things are transformed while others remain the same. ‘A free society cannot be the substitution of a “new order” for the old order’, explained Goodman (1977[1946] apud WARD, 1991b, p. 115); ‘it is the extension of spheres of free action until they make up the most of social life’.

I am not an advocate of the “all or nothing” theory. [...] This is just a slogan [...] that can serve[...] as an incentive to a fight without quarter against every kind of oppressors and exploiters. However, if taken literally, it is plain nonsense. I believe that one must take all that can be taken, whether much or little: do whatever is possible today, while always fighting to make possible what today seems impossible.⁷⁸ (MALATESTA, 2014[1924])

‘There is no simple formula for distinguishing reforms that make further change possible from those that do not’, Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 194) ponders, ‘but some broad [...] distinctions can be made’; for anarchists, one should look into the logic of actions, the forms of organisation used, and whether new, more anarchic principles can find more expression in social structure if success is achieved (WARD, 2011[1973], p. 261). By an “entire social scheme” anarchists do not mean literally everything about every relation between each pair of people but the relational principles employed for procuring development. From this perspective, each statist reformist effort, isolated by the need to accept larger encompassing structures⁷⁹, compares unfavourably with radical, solidarity-based, intersectional tactics – as discussed in sections 4.2.2, 5.1, and 5.2.2, respectively – that support the continual push for universal and balanced (yet diverse) well-being from below (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][m]; LEEDS SOLIDARITY FEDERATION, 2020; ERVIN; ERVIN; ANDERSON, 2021, 12:40–13:30). Anarchists reconsider what counts as “changing everything so that everything remains the same” not to discount reforms as undesirable but to focus on truly emancipatory nonconformity: not purist, sectarian, definitive events, but action, like Douglass’s mentioned above, that prefigures more equal, interdependent, and diverse relations; defiant nonconformity *against conformism itself*⁸⁰.

To this end, Nieuwenhuis (2022[1901?], p. 45 apud SCHUBERT, J., 1966, p. 225) suggests ‘undermining all authority, each in [their] own way, wherever [they] can’, and even though this

⁷⁸ See also James C. Scott (1990, p. 77-78).

⁷⁹ See also Schulman (2016, chap. 3) (and, related to this extra reference, the discussion on domestic violence legislation at the end of section 4.2.1), as well as Alfred (2005, p. 104) on the link between Christianity and statist reformism.

⁸⁰ Somewhat tangentially, see James C. Scott (1990, p. 91–92).

resistance might have ‘little effect if it does not occur on a large scale’, setting up large-scale resistance demands that one begins on a small scale⁸¹. And contrary to what the repeated references to Douglass might imply, this is not necessarily a debate about the use of physical force to injure others. North American indigenous activists, for example, often ask anarchist would-be allies to ‘stop prioritising [violent] action and fetishizing the front lines’, as in the context of centuries of ‘settler colonial invasion [...] front lines are everywhere’⁸² (BARKER, 2021, 26:18–26:35). The debate is also, and perhaps *mostly*, about ‘imaginative direct action solutions to immediate, close at hand, problems of daily life’ (SCHUBERT, J., 1966, p. 228); about, as David Wieck (1962 apud YEOMAN, 2021, 19:04–19:56) put it, the institution of direct action, the ‘habit’ of being free and ‘prepared to live responsibly in a free society’ – which makes this not about isolated individual acts either. Since confrontation is expected, even if not the physical kind, solidarity is key for nonconformity to take place as a path to conflict resolution. ‘If the intervention is scary’, notes ASHANTI... (2006, 36:34–36:46), ‘figure out how to do it in community [...] so that even though [it’s] scary you’ll take the step anyhow, and you’ll see that it gets easier, just like learning to swim’. ‘We are called on [...] to defy fear, and to act in spite of the many frightening forces that keep us caged inside our present reality’, writes Alfred (2005, p. 150). ‘Just this moment, just this issue, is not likely to be the one occasion when we all come of age’, continued Wieck; ‘All true. The question is: when will we begin?’.

On multiple occasions [Marxists] dismissed the anarchists for being too hasty, their grand ideals squandered by a petulant desire for “all or nothing, now!”. [...] The anarchist conception of revolutionary timing is immediate in a practical sense. Start now, in your daily life, in your workplace, without waiting for the savior of the grand revolution, a merciful state, or the teleological crisis of capital [...]. But it is not immediate in an ideological sense. Capitalism, racism, patriarchy, the state, and so on [...] can not] be shrugged off in one grandiose sweep[...]. What are we to make of [a claim] that the anarchist aim [...] is laudable but this cannot be achieved overnight? Find me a sober anarchist who thinks it can! (KALLIN, 2021, 9:02–10:43)

From the point of view of statehood, only those able to efficiently sustain coercive hierarchies are allowed to be constituent powers⁸³; ‘all states view stateless populations as potential property, and deny their fundamental right to exist’ (GELDERLOOS, 2016, chap. I). Supporters of sovereignty are ‘unable to conceive of society without the whip’, that is, ‘wages or hunger, [...] judges or policemen, [...] punishment in one form or another’; they can

⁸¹ See also Kropotkin (1998, p. 87).

⁸² See also Alfred (2005, *passim*, esp. chap. 1).

⁸³ A dynamic discussed in section 4.2.1 above, and one that mirrors the just mentioned “convenient” liberal invitation into the market as an acceptable way to change market logic itself.

only, at best, change or soften ‘the form of the whip’⁸⁴ (KROPOTKIN, 2014[1883][b], p. 199). Democratic republicanism, as Hoye (2021, p. 276) analyses, calls elites ‘into account’ but ‘leave[s] the institutions of elite power in place’; it can use “the whip” to respond to ‘flagrantly corrupt elitism’ but, by not transcending “whip sociability”, it does not eliminate ‘elite domination’, particularly the ‘modern corporate’ kind involved in keeping the hegemony of market dynamics in place. However, as Buber theorised, ‘complex and pluralistic’ social structures are always broken down by the inducement of conformity that the principle of sovereignty represents – regardless of whether it is an “individualistic” or a “collectivist” doctrine that is enforced (WARD, 1991b, p. 81).

For anarchists, then, revolutions must be about dissolving hierarchical relations, not creating ‘new ones formed from the margins’ (VOLCANO, 2012, p. 30), which would basically mean replacing ‘one privileged group with another’⁸⁵ (CHAEHO, 2020[1923], p. 1). Associations must go beyond the pattern of command and obedience, contesting not only ‘the arrangements or decisions’ issued from sovereign networks but also ‘the principles on which the decisions are based’ (KINNA, 2019c, p. 16). As phrased by the Senegalese anarchists who exalted traditional Balanta politics (with no ‘dominant classes, nor exploitative bosses, and based on direct democracy, not imposed from the top’), anarchists do not ‘want to take power, but fight tirelessly[...] against all powers wicked by essence’⁸⁶ (RODRIGUES, 1999c, p. 231). It is ‘necessary for all to understand’ that a human being ‘is not made either to be an executioner or to be executed [...] so that on one side we refuse to torture and on the other to be tortured’⁸⁶ (MICHEL, 1901, p. 13–14). Otherwise, things just ‘change names’ while the ‘grinding mill is as heavy as before’, to quote Michel (2021[1890], p. 36–37) again; the mill ‘we ought to break so that no one can use it again to grind the masses’^p. Anarchists do not want history to continue to be ‘an alternation between oppression and rebellion, at the expense of real progress, and in the long term to the disadvantage of everybody’; this requires the ‘disappearance of every distinction between vanquished and conquerors’⁸⁷ (MALATESTA, 2015b, p. 49).

This creative overcoming of sovereignty is crucial to basically every anarchist analysis, from the umpteen comments on the Russian Revolution (WARD, 2011[1988], p. 13–14) and views on 15th-century Florence (KROPOTKIN, 2021[1902], p. 171) to realisations about the aims

⁸⁴ And, to return to propaganda as discussed in the previous section, elites ‘manage the words we hear and the images we see to ensure that we remain afraid’ (ALFRED, 2005, p. 120). See also Goldman (2018[1933]).

⁸⁵ See also D’Andrea (2016[1932], p. 29), Pfeil (2020, p. 152), Crimethinc (2020c), and Galián (2020, p. 9).

⁸⁶ See also Knapp, Flach, and Ayboga (2016, p. 102).

⁸⁷ See also Richard Morgan (2021, p. 126).

and means of the feminist (ALDERSON, 2023; FARROW, 2002, p. 18; KORNEGGER, 2002, p. 26) and anti-colonial movements: as Alfred (2005, p. 157) writes, ‘between the beginning of this century and the beginning of the last, people’s clothes may have changed, their names may be different, but the games they play are the same’. This applies to economic relations: as Bookchin (2011[1992], p. 15) put it, ‘the struggle of workers with capitalists’ can easily become about ‘contractual differences, not social differences’⁸⁸. Graeber (2018, p. 106), for example, notes that when workers began to demand more “free time” in the context of clock-regulated factory shifts – with many workers forbidden from bringing their own timepieces as owners ‘regularly played fast and loose with the factory clock’ – they ‘subtly reinforc[ed] the idea that when a worker was “on the clock,” his time truly did belong to the person who had bought it’, which ‘would have seemed perverse and outrageous to their great-grandparents, as, indeed, to most people who have ever lived’. Iwasa Sakutarô’s “mountain bandits” analogy, which ‘became famous among [early-20th-century] Japanese anarchists’, shows that their proposed solution was not simply to switch places either: ‘if the bandit chief (equivalent to the capitalists) was ousted and replaced by one or more of his henchmen (equivalent to the conventional labour movement)’, this represented a change in ‘pecking order’, but not in ‘the exploitative nature of society’⁸⁹ (CRUMP, 1996, p. 25). However, this point can just as easily apply to issues of morality, customs, bodily autonomy. Anarchists question the patriarchal prostitute-housewife or degenerate-decent dichotomy that not only has historically served to punish women who long for alternative relations in urban landscapes (LAURENTIIS, 2021, p. 11), but still induces conformity today. Mainstream queer organisations, for example, often shy away from critically questioning whether they want in on ‘the institution of marriage, a social contract that explicitly limits the ways in which [one] can organize [one’s] erotic and emotional lives’⁹⁰ (CONRAD, 2012, p. 18). It applies to inter-ethnic relations as well, as ‘decolonization will become a reality only’ when indigenous peoples ‘consciously reject the colonial postures of weak submission, victimry, and raging violence’ (ALFRED, 2005, p. 20, 101, 128–131); in other words, undoing colonialism entails going beyond collaborating with colonial powers or becoming oneself a new version of such power⁹¹

⁸⁸ See also Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 69–73) and Yeoman (2021, 6:52–7:35).

⁸⁹ See also Ward (1991a, p. 90).

⁹⁰ See also Ashbaugh (1976, p. 201) and Schulman (2016, chap. 7).

⁹¹ See also Coulthard (2014, p. 159) and, connecting the reproduction of sovereignty to the reproduction of cycles of trauma, see also Schulman (2016, *passim*, esp. chap. 5, 8).

To return to the crucial bifurcation at the core of this discussion: there is always going to be conformity, but different contexts produce different kinds of conformity, different pressures to conform. Any group, even (currently) radical ones, ‘may try to squelch other possibilities within its members in order to contain them within a definition’, wrote Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p.197); but if ‘no individual or subgroup [...] possesses the permanent institutionalized power to enforce particular definitions’, then ‘the group is more open to processes of redefinition that can allow and even encourage change’. The consequences of sovereignty as an organisational principle are drastically dissimilar to those of the mutual influence that is integral to human sociability (MALATESTA, 2014[1892][a]; TOLSTOY, 1990, p. 98). The freer a culture, the more it ‘experiences a perpetual renewal of the formative urge, and out of that comes an ever growing diversity of creative activity’ (ROCKER, 2009[1938], p. 13); for anarchists, freer cultures are those that, unlike sovereignty-based constitutions, make it more likely for discontent and creativity to culminate in mutually beneficial transformation.

Freer cultures do not entail fitting into an “anarchist mould”; as Wayne Price (2012a, p. 316) notes, anarchists doubt ‘every region [...] will choose the same version of libertarian socialist society’. The ‘imitation’ Nieuwenhuis (2022[1901?], p. 45) desired was that of bravery; Kropotkin (2009[1880][b], p. 3), in being glad that ‘courage, devotion, the spirit of sacrifice’ were ‘contagious’, basically described conformity to horizontal conflict resolution practices that proved themselves worthy of becoming contagious (CRIMETHINC, 2020c). The sort of patterns and habits anarchists would like to see adopted far and wide would amount to diversity-inducing conditions that make it less likely for agents to think that conformity to specific shapes, to this or to that role and (or) pattern, is necessary in case of conflict; conditions that inspire and support the social creativity of reforming interactions for common benefit.

Anarchy, then, shall be ‘like a field of experimentation for all human seeds, for all human natures’⁹² (GRUPO DE ESTUDIOS JOSÉ DOMINGO GÓMEZ ROJAS, 2017, p. 135). To Malatesta, ‘probably every possible form of possession and utilization of the means of production and all ways of distribution of produce will be tried out at the same time’, being combined and modified ‘in various ways’ until ‘experience’ indicates what is more suitable — so long as ‘the constitution and consolidation of new privilege’ is prevented⁹² (PRICE, W., 2012a, p. 316–317). People might make tokens out of their promises, circulating them as local money as they have done for ages (GRAEBER, 2011a), and may devote themselves to belonging somewhere or advancing

⁹² On economic experimentation, see the end of the discussion on equality of resources in section 4.3.2 (around page 164).

certain specific ideals — even cyclically, seasonally⁹³ (GRAEBER; WENGROW, 2021, chap. 3), and not only as ‘small fraternal group[s]’ (ARMAND; LYG, 1957, p. 12) — but there would be avenues for more readily transforming the corresponding social schemes, as well as practicable exit options. The result does not have to be the continuity of group identities and affiliations; fission and the formation of (overlapping or discrete) alternative groupings may happen as well. Freedom, writes Graeber (2001, p. 221, 2009, p. 330), ‘is not the absence of commitments or entanglements’ but ‘[deciding] for oneself to which projects or communities one wishes to commit’, choosing ‘what sort of obligations one wishes to enter into, and with whom’. And this also means, as mentioned in the previous chapters, that more resilient forms of interdependence can allow precisely for the sort of competition, even submission, that some may derive pleasure from (BAKUNIN, 1975, p. 216–217; WARD, 1991b, p.123; GRAEBER, 2018, p. 133–134, 287; NELSON, 2021, chap. 2). A security net of mutual aid, which could simultaneously be read as the self-assertion of others for the sake of their own [anarchist] freedom, as discussed in section 5.3, would prevent these forms of competition or imbalance from becoming foundational and thus undermining a fundamental disposition for enabling diverse lifestyles and relational patterns.

But it should be stressed that these *are* patterns, involving expectations, norms, rules (MALATESTA, 1995, p. 107–108). The illusion of doing without them, as seen above, only leads to the institutionalisation of predation via the weakening of trust⁹⁴. Rejecting sovereignty — ‘artificial, privileged, legal, Official influence’ — does not mean transcending the actions and reactions that, considering all this diversity, certainly function as restrictions at any given time: ‘all that lives only does so under the supreme condition of interfering[...] with the lives of others’^{r,95} (BAKUNIN, 1975, p. 18). ‘We’re against the law-authority, not the law-understanding, the law-order’, wrote F (1946) for the Rio de Janeiro-based periodical *Ação Direta*; anarchists ‘don’t want the law that arrests, the law that tyrannises, the law that tortures and dictates’, but want ‘to be free and work in a free society that will have its [...] organisation’^s. Freedom, as Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 14) theorised, ‘is the tension between the play and the rules it generates’, between creativity and the norms that spring from it⁹⁶.

In a sense, one could say about restrictions what Ritter (1980, p. 32) writes about censure: they support individuality ‘by providing a rich store of the thoughts and feelings that are the

⁹³ See also Chris Knight (2021) for what is, despite the overall tone of the text, a supplement to the main citation concerning seasonal societal shifts.

⁹⁴ See also Malatesta (2014[1897]), Freeman (1972), and Uri Gordon (2006, p. 179–186).

⁹⁵ See also Kropotkin (2000[1910], p. 3).

⁹⁶ See section 3.2, as well as Mintz (2013[1970], p. 38–40), Castoriadis (2006, p. 158, 164), and Graeber (2015b, p. 192, 199–200).

materials from which the self develops'. Facing limits from others is to 'encounter ideas and emotions with a vividness that [people] would miss in isolation', ideas and emotions that are 'a mental treasure which they can draw on to enrich their personalities'. However, restrictions are also, of course, directly connected to a balance-establishing function. Discussing those who, 'for whatever reason, have a tendency to [...] trespass against the persons of others', Malatesta (2014[1922][h]) writes that 'society has no right to punish them; it does, though, have the right to defend itself from them'. De Cleyre also advocated 'defense, but not organization of animosity to pursue the offender after' (LITTLE, 2023, p. 204), and today Ervin (2009[1993], p. 36–37) writes that 'we should mobilize to restrain offenders', but realise that 'only the community' can deal with the issue effectively by means of 'schools, hospitals, [...] above all social equality, public welfare and liberty'; the offender 'should not be punished', nor labelled in ways that make them 'forever feel an outcast and never change'.

In this anarchists echo the North American Wendat, who 'liked to pretend [they] had no laws at all, but by that [they] meant punitive law' – they, like 'many indigenous American social orders', had 'agreements' accounting for varying degrees of interdependence (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, p. 64). Such historical scenarios are a reminder that, while the previous paragraph could be read as indicating that "somewhere out there" an optimal model for dealing with aggression exists, in reality each situation is unique. People have different enmeshments and proclivities, and anarchists do not mean to flatten them, producing featureless individuals ready to shape-shift into whatever; neither do they, by the same token, picture freedom as an infinitely expandable blank canvas⁹⁷. As in all arts, there is no creativity without limitations, boundaries – restrictions; all of people's different commitments, preferences, and values are the materials communities work with in mediating conflicts. Mediation and (of) responsibility replace "schematic" sovereign governance, and even when institutions stay as they are the goal is for this to be the result of shared, intersubjective direct action, not because bureaucratic violence structures it so (RODRIGUES, 1999c, p. 234).

In other words, to understand how anarchists conceptualise freedom it is of very little utility to ask something like "who should be unrestricted to do what?". Anarchist liberty is not *rooted* in unrestriction; it 'cannot be confused with *LICENCE*, and much less turn someone into an automaton in its name!^t (RODRIGUES, 1999a, p. 219). As Cello (1948, p. 42) aptly put it, the task for anarchists is 'endearing people not to liberties, but to liberty, which is not the same

⁹⁷ See section 6.2.2.

thing^u. Of course anarchic ways of organisation involve setting up (un)restrictions. Rights, for example, argued Buber, ‘are simply part of a matrix of regulatory tools that social groups use to structure their relations’; they were never a ‘master’s tool’ (KINNA, 2019c, p. 146–147). At any rate, what should or should not be restricted depends on the context of what people currently require and what is needed for there to be (more) equilibrium, mutual aid, and diversity going forward⁹⁸. ‘What is transformative in one context might be stifling in another, and doing anarchism is about affirming actions and increasing each other’s capacity to act and change things’ (VASILEVA, 2022, 16:17–16:27). In no case is a rule or custom, a right or a duty, absolute, not in the sense that it justifies permanent safeguarding by sovereign force. They are left open to be challenged by the next conflict, to be provoked by new changes and imbalances, resulting in innovative arrangements not imposed from above but constructed from below⁹⁹.

As mentioned above, even if this anarchist *modus operandi* of courage and diversity satisfied all, giving everyone a reason to “conform” to it, this would clearly constitute a different kind of conformity. Sovereignty reinforces what *is*, entrenching the metaphorical “muscle memory” of our relations. The key observation here is that even “great transformations” from one kind of sovereign constitution to another — what republicans, liberals, and Marxists would certainly see as humongous changes — are also made more difficult in function of the conformity any kind of sovereign constitution promotes. In contrast, anarchist institutions are those that make it easier for different patterns to emerge and coexist; for the *current* majoritarian or more widespread model to be transformed or left behind somehow. One could only talk about a tendency toward conformity in this case by pointing out that sovereignty-(re)installing nonconformity would be harder to achieve. Hence why Kropotkin (2014[1900], p. 640), for example, posited that ‘communism may be authoritarian (in which case the community will soon decay) or it may be Anarchist’, the latter ‘existing only as long as the associates wish to remain together, imposing nothing on anybody, being anxious rather to defend, enlarge, extend in all directions the liberty of the individual’. Institutions modelled on hierarchy, however, ‘cannot be this’: they, as in authoritarian communism, will pressure downward for permanence of what is in place, dragging all relations around it into conformity. They exploit the future, in Malatesta’s (2014[1892]) language, ‘between one revolution and another, to the profit of those who have been the victors of the moment’.

⁹⁸ See section 7.3.

⁹⁹ On the ethics of this position, see Alfred (2005, p. 54) and Vasileva (2022).

In the end, anarchist definitions reframe human sociability as a matter of conformist or libertarian tendencies, ‘the power of one’ being ‘the measure of the weakness of the other’¹⁰⁰ (WARD, 1991b, p. 90). This division being based on the asymmetry between conformity and non-conformity seen in the beginning of this section, it refers to a dichotomy between institutions that reinforce the status quo by reducing everyone’s agency, and those that make it easier for themselves to be changed into others – but not *into the first kind*¹⁰¹ – by increasing everyone’s agency. For anarchists, there is no incoherence in this last proviso, responsible for adding the “non-dominating” qualifier to “latitude for nonconformity”: accepting this conversion from libertarian to conformist patterns as part of libertarian values would entail *not* valuing latitude for nonconformity in the first place.

Non-dominating latitude for nonconformity is therefore what really matters for anarchists, what they are aiming for when they describe what it would mean to be free(r), despite the way they may use words like “liberty” and “freedom”. Instead of seeking conformity for the sake of a specific ideal of unrestriction, anarchists organise to find ways to make compatible the practical manifestations of different values¹⁰², making it easier for people to transit among the plural relational patterns that might embody them and (or) create new ones altogether.

¹⁰⁰ See also Gelderloos (2016, chap. 1) and Öcalan (2017, p. 141–142).

¹⁰¹ What works among people would also presumably be important between humans and (the rest of) nature, in the sense of a myriad of inter-species ecological interactions that would preclude forms of “development” that, as we see happening right now, risk ecosystem equilibrium to the point of threatening people’s futures; I shall return to this in section 6.3.1.

¹⁰² See Uri Gordon (2006, p. 102) on domination as a ‘disvalue’.

6.2 REDEFINING LIBERTY

Individual choices collectively imposed [...] allow for certain groups to enjoy pleasure, satisfaction, and... I was going to say “freedom”, but should say power... While others do not. ^v

Adriano Skoda ¹⁰³

There are not many joys in human life equal to the joy of the sudden birth of a generalization, illuminating the mind after a long period of patient research.

Piotr Kropotkin ¹⁰⁴

This new understanding allows anarchist claims about liberty to be reframed. Kropotkin (2014[1900], p. 1041–1042), for example, once wrote of freedom as ‘the possibility of action without being influenced in those actions by the fear of punishment by society (bodily constraint, the threat of hunger or even censure, except when it comes from a friend)’¹⁰⁵; Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 18) would later talk about ‘the freedom to go elsewhere’, ‘the freedom to ignore commands’, and the ‘freedom to reshuffle the social order entirely’.

Definition such as these that seem at first to be rooted in unrestriction gain new contours as the lack of punishment and the ability to disobey are read as lack of sovereignty. For Kinna (2016, p. 193), the liberty Kropotkin had in mind was ‘the ability to change social norms by resistance, using the principle of freedom from slavery as the benchmark for wilful action’. Similarly, there could be no *sovereign* structure built on an opening to its own undoing. The friendship exception to censure and the concern with society rather than government hint at interdependence and intersubjectivity as requirements for effective social coordination. Liberty culminates in something that is not individual but ‘inscribed in the social’; not merely satisfying desires, but ‘a creative and innovative praxis, which opens new fields and possibilities as it develops’^w (FERNÁNDEZ, 2017, emphasis removed).

Relative to those two examples, non-dominating latitude for nonconformity emerges as a more direct way of defining anarchist freedom, bypassing this need for reinterpretation, redirecting focus away from the questions that unrestriction begs and toward more interesting ones. How does one know how easy it is to change relational patterns in ways that do not foster domination?

¹⁰³ Skoda and Troyano, 2020, 1:57:10–1:57:27.

¹⁰⁴ Kropotkin, 2009[1899], p. 112.

¹⁰⁵ Compare with Aristotle in Kapust (2018, p. 37).

Studying the past could provide answers. What happened to people who recently demanded change? Were they murdered *en masse*, as in the Paris Commune? Attacked, persecuted, expelled? Asked to present their complaints formally, then ignored after doing so, while everything remained the same? Or did people actually listen, recognise the protestors' points, and took part in common efforts to ameliorate the situation? The past can also be articulated more readily with the present circumstances more likely to be in the minds of those musing on the health of their liberty. If people have not been complaining much, are they satisfied, or tired, scared, jaded? Have others' even worse conditions convinced a considerable amount of toilers that it is better to accept the little they have than to stoop even lower? Is there the impression that, in contrast with justice and collective progress, only individual (even if only criminal) success is likely? If I wanted to participate in transforming social structures, do I have access to resources to do so? Is there social support for it or is it illegal and (or) frowned upon? Do I know how to do it, do I feel comfortable initiating and (or) leading this process, can I imagine myself becoming something else through it? Can I even see inequity and suffering and be moved to act in favour of transformation, and how easy would it be to stand still (and force others to do the same) in face of egalitarian rebelliousness?

Insofar as supporters of sovereignty contend with such questions in ways that favour nonconformity, their premises work against their intentions as concentrated power is made the major social agent, with everyone else becoming 'the major social patient' (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 118). If it is recognised that "the price of freedom is vigilance", there is an outsourcing of such "care" for liberty that turns it into bureaucracy, into policing, while people become the passive recipient of the fruits of conformity to the policed system. Of course anyone can exercise more "agency" again (SCOTT, J. C., 1990, p. 73-82); anarchism certainly relies on the possibility. But the idea of doing so while conforming to a hierarchical paradigm, the notion that e.g. republics can enable sufficient "contestation", reaffirms the eventual sedimentation of passivity as an end goal. 'A crucial issue is the meaning of "possibility" in the proposal that there be "the permanent possibility" of effective contestation', Clark proceeds. Anarchists ask 'what the actual chances are that the people, given its character as a habitual nonagent, can occasionally assume agency and mount a "sustainable" challenge'.

Freedom for anarchists is not about whether relational patterns change or not, even if it is reasonable to expect that they do as a consequence of a high degree of liberty — and logical to say freedom does require nonconformity *with the* conformism of the hierarchical structures

that exist: ‘if you never raise your voice and hand against authority’, Day-Woods (2021, p. 66) warns, ‘you become its voice and hand’¹⁰⁶. *Agency* helps succinctly describe this liberty¹⁰⁷ (HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 134); after all, rules that are easier to change are harder to maintain. There is therefore less inertia¹⁰⁸ in freer relations; people need to act even to conform.

Agency might be discussed as the difference between ‘people who initiate things and act for themselves and people for whom things just happen’ (WARD, 1982[1973], p. 72 apud HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 125); it is in realising that one’s world would not exist if one did not make it as it is¹⁰⁹. ‘It is disconcerting to feel that reality is being shaped around one without one’s input’, notes Uri Gordon (2006, p. 188), ‘and in a process hidden from one’s view’, and freedom is, in contrast, about maintaining my activities and relations by my commitments, which I feel supported to change if I want to. Against the ‘irresponsibility’ (HECKERT, 2012, p. 119) of unrestriction-based liberty, it often meaning ‘freedom from mutual obligation’¹¹⁰ (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 176–177), more agency still means more responsibility — only anarchists strive for an equal, shared sense of it. I do not experience the “passive release” of unrestriction but the power to (re)make the world while not being the *only* one (re)making it. I am not shielded from the power of others, I am not excused from living in the world they also make. Nonetheless this power “sets me free” as I act collectively, not being expected to do everything on my own. As hooks (1994, p. 248 apud FISCELLA, 2015, p. 249) wrote, community (as in mutual aid, interdependence) means ‘we do not have to change by ourselves’. Others affect me, and even if I want to radically change my commitments, I will still rely on social relations to make this work. I need to be entangled in others to experience this type of freedom.

¹⁰⁶ See also Gelderloos (2016, chap. XIII).

¹⁰⁷ I am aware of but disagree with how John P. Clark (2013b, p. 64-77) theorises agency, hence my choice not to cite him on this. I find his Hegel-inspired approach too reliant on unity between community and individual (in contrast with diversity, contradiction, movement, change) and on a language of unrestriction that I see as self-defeating in the context of anarchist premises and prospects, as extensively explored above.

¹⁰⁸ See note 112 at the end of section 5.1.

¹⁰⁹ A slightly more “epic” version of Giddens’s (1984, p. 11) observations. This calls back to agency as a human drive as explored in note 134 of section 5.2; the joy not only of “being the cause” but knowing that one ‘might just as easily not have done’ what one did — which Groos called ‘the feeling of freedom’ (GRAEBER, 2018, p. 98, 244, 301). See also Cubero (2015[1993][a], p. 59).

¹¹⁰ See also Crimethinc (2020c) on not having to ‘deal with the consequences of the ways [one treats] others’ being ‘precisely the opposite of the accountability [anarchists] aspire to’.

6.2.1 A (quantitative) property of relations

Freest is the one who has the most agreements with one's peers. ^x

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon ¹¹¹

— *Hello there! You're so little! What's your name?*

— *Freedom.*

(Silent stares)

— *Did you come to your stupid conclusion already?*

Everyone thinks the same god damn thing when they meet me. ^y

Mafalda and Freedom, in “Mafalda Comics” ¹¹²

The first thing about anarchist liberty is its “relationality”. ‘Freedom is a product of interaction between people’, McKay (2018, p. 121) writes; ‘it is how we associate which determines whether we are free or not’. Discussing anarchafeminism, Kornegger (2002, p. 29) emphasises that ‘liberation is not an insular experience’, and so ‘there are no individual “liberated women”’.

The importance of equality for freedom is enough reason to suppose that the latter is a property of relations; someone requires *another* to be equal to. Most importantly, however, this also means that liberty is damaged for all related agents in an imbalanced relationship (it makes no sense to say that e.g. one element of a relation is equal while only the other, related one is unequal). Anarchist liberty does not map onto the stronger pole of an asymmetric relationship; freedom is diminished for both sides of a social “inequation”.

That the (more) restricted are less free than otherwise is not a controversial claim. What is particular to anarchism, as elaborated in section 6.1, is that the (more) unrestricted are also less free than otherwise¹¹³. From Alexandr Herzen’s statement that one is a slave when — indeed, *because* — one is a master (WARD, 1991b, p. 61) to Oscar Wilde (2000[1897], p. 848 apud KINNA, 2016, p. 192) writing that ‘authority is as destructive of those who exercise it as it is to those on whom it is exercised’¹¹⁴, anarchists have always pointed out how freedom is unrelated to privilege in a hierarchical system. This was the case on any scale: a man acting as a master within the household ‘is still a slave, since he is a tyrant’¹¹⁵ (RECLUS, 2013[1905][b],

¹¹¹ Roca and Álvarez, 2008, p. 90.

¹¹² Quino, 1993, p. 373.

¹¹³ One *does* find glimpses of this in other traditions; see, for example, how in Roman sources tyrants had less “freedom of intercourse” with others (KAPUST, 2018, chap. 1). And yet this could still mean a trade off, and few elites seemed to care much whether slavery affected their intercourse with enslaved human beings. Finally, republicanism solves the detrimental effects of hierarchical relations by dealing with arbitrariness, which, as already discussed in section 4.3.1, is not enough for anarchists.

¹¹⁴ See also Reclus (2002[1898], p. 47-48).

¹¹⁵ See also Mintz (2013[1970], p. 28).

p. 188); discussing how ‘royalty, fame, and celebrity to some degree dictate power’, William C. Anderson (2021, p. 40) writes that ‘they are not liberation and can never bring freedom’.

The more powerful act as they do, continue to be what they currently are, to maintain their “good” situation, which they tend to want, this very desire having been produced within slanted relations. As ‘The Burmese democratic movement leader’ Aung San Suu Kyi put it, ‘it is not power that corrupts but fear’; not only do ‘the ones subject to power fear the scourge’ of superior force, but ‘the holder of power fears losing it’¹¹⁶ (ALFRED, 2005, p. 120). Obstacles are removed in the path of doing so many more things, and yet, the majority of these paths become immediately less enticing, so that it really only makes sense choosing a few or one of them¹¹⁷. Even further, one’s subjectivity is trimmed until one can hardly see any other path as valid but the one that reproduces current patterns. When someone becomes hierarchically superior, wrote George Orwell (1962, p. 95–96 apud SCOTT, J. C., 1990, p. 11) notoriously, it is their own freedom they destroy: ‘it is the condition of [their] rule that [they] shall spend [their] life in trying to impress’ others; they wear a mask and their face ‘grows to fit it’.

It is not that someone is less free for merely not wanting to change a good situation; the issue is the perspectives involved in considering a situation any good, the kind of relations they construct. Rather than asking whether the agent wants to change, a better question could be if one is able and willing to stop other agents from changing relational patterns. Conforming to structures that will enhance or protect shared agency is one thing; to commit to maintaining conflict activates dynamics – largely subjective ones, in the case of the more powerful – that will reinforce current patterns. “Superior” agents will not want to change the relations they were constituted by, either by direct interest or because their subjectivities will have been shaped by the concentration of power. Not wanting to transform structures when one is unrestricted to do so does not mean one is as free to do it regardless; it makes nonconformity harder. Not wanting to change a relation makes its pattern harder to change; not wanting to change a pattern so that it is less hierarchical – or, if it is already quite balanced, so that it is differently arranged *but still* in equilibrium – implies a diminished freedom.

It should be noted that progressives generally might shrink from defending that the higher rungs of hierarchies provide (more) freedom. As discussed in section 4.3.1, egalitarianism more

¹¹⁶ To complement the discussion in note 113 above, republicanism does focus a lot on fear – but on the specific fear of the unknown punishment to come, the arbitrary measure by someone who is in a position to be arbitrary. Anarchists in turn concentrate on the fear of punishment made certain by conformity to the systems that mete it out – even if, of course, they do not counter it by enacting relational patterns that would allow for arbitrary punishment. Tangentially, see also Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 160–161).

¹¹⁷ Tangentially, see Graeber (2011a, p. 170–171).

often leads to a defence of “slaveless mastership” for all. Yet this again shows the differences in approach. In statist frameworks, the point is to structure relations so as to be able to say “I am obeying myself”. While anarchists might employ the language of “self-government” as they call for (situated) independence against (unilateral, unequal, general) dependence, or in reference to voluntary, communal, bottom-up organisation, the problem is with obedience — even to “my self”. This is because this self might be a dogmatically projected ideal that will not let me, or others, transform relational patterns. To obey myself, I must understand what it is that this self commands, and fight not to be led astray — otherness becomes the obstacle, the restriction, the unfreedom. As Falleiros (2017, p. 203, emphasis in the original) writes based on A’uwẽ-Xavante cosmology, ‘*desiring oneself*’ may be ‘the “*bad desire*”, split between the “desire for power” and the “desire to submit”’. A ‘desire for freedom’, in contrast, ‘demands that the nature of the subject never be determined, not each individual, not all collectively’^z.

Anarchist freedom *names* that which is lost in the conformist relations that others might see as liberating: action reflecting the potential of my meeting the Other; the shared responsibility for making the best of such encounter; the mutual production of the rules rather than merely playing by the current ones to win. There is a loneliness to the solipsism¹¹⁸ that marks unrestriction-based liberty. While statist progressives might complain that the prize for conforming is not equally or justly distributed, anarchists (even if recognising “distributive” issues) claim that, all things considered, ‘even the prize is bad’ (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 525).

But if the powerful are also robbed of freedom, why do anarchists not ally with *them* to remake relational patterns? The answer might seem obvious at first. Either because they were convinced that health and security, or “abundance and pleasure” (MICHEL, 2021[1890], p. 33), cannot be afforded to all, are only meaningful when exclusive, or due to subjective attachment to hierarchical differences, elites have a stake in maintaining the status quo. They have many reasons to not listen to anarchists, to disagree with them (even on how to define freedom, indeed), to never reach anarchist conclusions by themselves; they also have the means to ignore or even repress radicals (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 263–264). That is why libertarians direct their propaganda to ‘the vast body of workers who had no stake’ in mainstream social organisation, which apart from industrial labourers also included ‘poor writers and artists, doctors’, soldiers, and even ‘bums, vagabonds, [...] or habitual criminals’ (KINNA, 2019b, p. 154).

¹¹⁸ See also Fiscella (2015, p. 396) and Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 14). Tangentially, see Schulman (2016, chap. 7) discuss families that enable shunning and further harm of outsiders — both those doing it from a place of supremacy and those coming from trauma — as systems that ‘produce new adults who don’t know how to be responsible and to problem-solve’.

On one hand, this answer is too simple. While consequences are not the same — e.g. a colonised transgressor ‘risks a beating’ while imperialist masters often risk ‘only ridicule’ (SCOTT, J. C., 1990, p. 11) — it is not so clear that the higher someone is in a hierarchical ladder the better they have it in life. Researching the “psychology of inequality”, Elizabeth Kolbert (2018) reports that ‘in a society where economic gains are concentrated at the top [...] there are no real winners and a multitude of losers’. S. V. Subramanian and Ichiro Kawachi (2006, p. 149) even suggest that income inequality in particular works like ‘social pollution’ in the sense that it appears to affect the health of every group exposed to it ‘in a similar manner’ — in fact, it may be even *more* harmful for ‘more advantaged groups’¹¹⁹. So elites can be appealed to; the sense that they have “advantages” can be deconstructed (GOLDMAN, 2018[1933]). Furthermore, they can also be affected by a moral argument against inequality (KROPOTKIN, 2009[1880][a], p. 13); the existence of the statist progressive frameworks anarchists find misguided attests as much¹²⁰. Indeed, a few classic figures of the anarchist movement (like Kropotkin, or Ba Jin) came from a privileged background, and as Graeber (2009, p. 252–253) sees it, revolutionary opportunities are often built by interclass alliances, especially ‘downwardly mobile elements of the professional classes and upwardly mobile children of the working class’¹²¹. Since anarchists, as seen in section 5.2.2, are also concerned with universal human connection, they may find occasion to rhetorically engage it to good effect. ‘We yell with the privileged [...] so that they understand the iniquity of the things that protect them’, explained Michel (2021[1890], p. 31–32); ‘with the dispossessed, we yell for them to revolt’^{aa}.

On the other hand, consequences are *really* not the same along the continuum of classes or ranks of the hierarchical systems anarchists have historically analysed and attacked. The urgency in the problems faced by the downtrodden is more likely to lead to movements for more balance, diversity, and mutual aid (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][c]).

¹¹⁹ On a larger scale, see also Walt and Schmidt (2009a, p. 313) on how ‘imperialism has many negative consequences for the working classes of dominant countries’.

¹²⁰ Still, anarchists criticise such frameworks precisely because they can lead to proclaiming equality on the basis of fixed abstract standards to avoid dealing with real inequalities *through* a moral argument. Inviting the powerful to help radical struggles might thus prove counterproductive, in the sense that they might use their power to change the framing of the struggle: the Black Orchid Collective (2018[2010]), for example, criticise the use of the ‘defanged term’ “classism” instead of “class struggle”, for it means ‘an attempt to raise the consciousness of the rich, to be NICE, FRIENDLY, SENSITIVE to their poorer brethren’, the latter becoming ‘the rich man’s burden, not an agent for change in [their] own right’. In other words, as seen in section 5.2.2, “protagonism” is a practical issue. As Schulman (2016, conclusion, emphases added) writes, ‘it is the person who is suffering who wants things to *get* better, while the person who is repressing their own conflicts’ — such as supporting the inequalities one knows to be immoral for fear of losing advantages — ‘usually wants to [...] merely] *feel* better’. Hence her focus on the oppressed: ‘it is the person with HIV, the Palestinian, the object of group shunning, who wants to talk, to be heard, and thereby to transform’.

¹²¹ See also Nutter (2002, p. 92) and Graeber (2009, p. 245–246) on “the middle class”.

I might well be writing for the so-called “rich” who, planting their existence in the arid soil of living off their neighbours, condemn themselves to hopeless poverty in essentials and rob themselves of the true poetry of life. [...] such a class might well call for sympathy, if we had any sympathy to waste. We have not. [...] Whether the rich are to blame, or whether they are the victims of circumstances, we do not care to ask. [...] Let the rich make their own lives hell, if they choose[...]. They shall not continue to make ours as bad, or worse, if we can help it.¹²² (MAGÓN, 1977, p. 48)

More generally and fundamentally, as explored in sections 3.1 and 5.3, the world anarchists desire to bring about is not one in which the oppressed try to convince elites to change, enduring deprivation and exploitation until the second’s hearts are finally touched; consequently, the first should not be pursuing such a method.

Anarchists’ supposition that it is possible to interfere with seemingly self-reinforcing conformist dynamics, that ‘freedom is within everybody’s reach and can be exercised in a number of ways that are not mutually exclusive’ (BOTTICI, 2019), implies that agency may be reduced but never eliminated¹²³. Indeed, whether conscious anarchist interventions are successful or not may be immaterial to this point: as Giddens (1984, p. 8–9) explains, actions have ‘unintended consequences’, and ‘may systematically feed back to be the unacknowledged conditions of further acts’; moreover, people’s agency ‘refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place’. The fact that it is always possible to “make a difference” is enough to characterise human agency.

From this it can be concluded that no one is ever absolutely unfree. On the other hand, it clearly matters *how free* someone is; realistically, the harder it is to not conform, the more often an agent can be expected to fall in line – to be, in fact, less of an agent; they may act, decide on something, but not “make a difference” (or do so to a much more limited extent).

In this sense, anarchists do not deal with agency (as freedom) as a boolean category, but rather as a quantitative property – one reason why “non-dominating latitude for nonconformity” is still a better description of anarchist liberty than simply “agency”. Freedom is quantitative, even if it is hard to imagine how it could be precisely *quantified*. Still, agents can analyse their relations to ascertain how easy it would be to not conform to certain patterns, comparing their situation to others – either hypothetical ones concerning different institutions, or those of other people. ‘The concept of a free society might be an abstraction’, said Ward, ‘but that of a freer society is not’ (OLIVER, 2021, 15:45–15:52). Liberty exists as a probabilistic framework¹²⁴,

¹²² See also Reclus (2016[1901], p. 57).

¹²³ Somewhat tangentially, see also Graeber (2001, p. 52–53).

¹²⁴ Tangentially, see also Zuboff (2019, p. 78).

with continually updated estimates based on history and sociological analysis. One could talk about more “closed” or “open” relations (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 220), about different degrees of ‘(dialectically unfolding) freedom’ (MCLAUGHLIN, 2002, p. 30), or about social orders being ‘more or less law-governed, more or less hierarchical and more or less colonizing’ — in sum, ‘more or less anarchist’¹²⁵ (KINNA, 2019b, p. 112–113).

As already discussed in sections 5.1 and 6.1.2, to equate “more anarchist” relations with freer ones does not mean that the related people are or should be all anarchists. As Kinna (2019b, p. 259) writes, libertarians look for ‘co-operators not converts’, and Corrêa (2012b, p. 74) notes that, in practice, ‘popular movements in which anarchists took part and (or) were hegemonic included thousands of militants who never identified with anarchism’^{ab}. Anarchists spread their beliefs ‘not to “take over” people’, Ervin (2009[1993], p. 19) explains, ‘but to let them know how they can better organize themselves to fight tyranny and obtain freedom’. Kinna (2019b, p. 259) uses a term by Émile Armand — “anarchisation” — to refer to the act of ‘finding opportunities to introduce non-anarchists to alternative practices’¹²⁶. To anarchise is not to assimilate the Other into sameness but to make the relation more anarchist, freer, and this conflation of labels parallels what other progressive traditions do:

We’re familiar with the idea of liberalising something, [...] of republicanising something, [...] of feminising something. [...] Liberalising] would be directed towards equalising rights, or making rights equally operable for people... Feminising is to do with overcoming patriarchal constraints[...] and republicanising is to [...] ensure that the government’s decisions or the constitution is organised so that there can be no singular dominating voice and the interests of the public are tracked by those who make the decisions. [...] Anarchising something points at [moving] our politics towards a more collaborative, more co-operative [...] engagement with each other. But in order to do that you have to attend to the balances of power that actually make that co-operation currently difficult or impossible. (KINNA; LITTLE; BIGGER, 2022, 1:11:48–1:13:34)

In summary, “measures” of anarchist freedom are ascertained by the way relations are organised, and these are quantities in the “imprecise” sense that relationships can be more or less free, equally impacting all the related agents in terms of how free these are. For anarchists, it is transforming conditions and relational patterns (toward more balance, diversity, and mutual aid), not dictating what people ought to think or how they should feel about what they want, that increases freedom.

¹²⁵ See also Corrêa (2012a, p. 119) and Finn (2021, p. 17–18).

¹²⁶ See also Jepps (2020) and Kinna, Little, and Bigger (2022, 1:13:48–1:14:15). Samis (2018, p. 228) even suggests this is a reason for anarchists’ success in becoming the hegemonic socialist ideology in the First Brazilian Republic (1889–1930).

6.2.2 Complexity and plasticity

*If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time.
But if you have come because your liberation is
bound up with mine, then let us work together.*

Lilla Watson ¹²⁷

*Freedom for everybody and in everything, with the only limit of
the equal freedom for others; which does not mean — it is almost
ridiculous to have to point this out — that we recognise, and wish to
respect, the “freedom” to exploit, to oppress, to command,
which is oppression and certainly not freedom.*

Errico Malatesta ¹²⁸

Our actions reverberate through the web of our relations. Dealing with one conflict might spark new ones elsewhere. As people influence, affect, restrict each other, they “transmit” power. Sovereignty means agents can be mobilised to disrupt diverse interdependent relationships; but through the latter, as discussed in sections 5.1, 5.2.2, and 6.1.2, others can be counted on to help force an aggressor’s hand into a fresh pattern (i.e. avoiding conformity); one that all parties can live with.

As a result, the freedom one experiences within a relation is not separated from that experienced in other relations; one’s liberty can only be assessed in one’s broader context. Cooperatives, for example, might be egalitarian forms of production, with a lot of “internal” latitude for nonconformity, but if they are inserted within a profit-based, market system, there will be severe limitations to what decisions can be made, and they will be themselves a factor in the reproduction of many other patterns (whose transformation will require organised action *outside* the scope of cooperative labour) (CHRISTIE, 2021[1964]; WALT; SCHMIDT, 2009a, p. 84; SHANNON, 2012; PRICE, W., 2014a; HIRSCH, 2015, p. 263; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 209).

At the same time, a few circumstances — like physical seclusion, even if temporary, or secrecy (GORDON, U., 2006, p. 191–195) — can limit the effects hierarchical patterns have on non-hierarchical relations¹²⁹. Economically exploited groups might find ways to live on their own terms privately while observing exploiters’ norms publicly (as was historically the case of slave workers on plantations)¹³⁰. The complexity is in how different contexts condition the

¹²⁷ Lazar, 2018, p. 165.

¹²⁸ Malatesta, 2015a, p. 44, emphasis in the original. See also Reclus (2016[1901], p. 57).

¹²⁹ But conversely, of course, also the influence of nonconformists on conformism, as discussed in section 5.1.

¹³⁰ James C. Scott (1990) discusses this dynamic using the concepts of “public transcripts” and “hidden transcripts”.

influence that some relational patterns have on others, even if separation still does not occur; in the example just given, certainly mainstream norms also affect the marginal ones, at the very least in their need for remaining marginalised.

All of this makes it hard to tell with certainty how free one really is at any given moment. Misinformation and wrong impressions can play a role in erroneous assessments of people's dispositions to help or of institutions' ability to productively handle contestation¹³¹. As mentioned above, cultivating an accurate understanding of the past is important; there must be actual evidence of social transformation in practice. A discourse that "everything is up for debate" when nothing is ever debated might be just a myth concealing real fears of divergence. However, as also seen earlier, surfacing conflict in the present is key. Either because practising alternatives breaks with inertia and produces evidence for their feasibility and compatibility (as mentioned in section 5.3), or because by leading one experiences how welcoming and forgiving the environment is for different leaders, leadership styles, and values (as discussed in that section too but also in section 4.3.2), stressors on current structures create data points that enable more detailed analysis of all this complexity; they probe how free the institutions affecting someone *really* are.

It is because liberty in one relation can only be assessed with respect to many other relations (that also form contexts conditioning the freedom experienced within a relation) that anarchists do not take processes such as "liberalising", "republicanising", and perhaps "collectively rationalising" patterns to necessarily mean an increase in liberty. They certainly *can* represent such an enhancement; as alluded to in sections 4.1 and 6.1.2, liberal, republican, and Marxist concerns are not seen by anarchists as entirely unhelpful. Just as wage slavery is better than the chattel kind¹³², anarchists recognise that 'elitist and hierarchical' (KINNA, 2019b, p. 226) "rule of law" representative government offers more freedom than autocracies; at the same time, they fight alongside Marxists for a socialist reappraisal of productive settings (BAKUNIN, 1971[1867], p. 144; MALATESTA, 2004[1924]; ROCKER, 2009[1938], p. 51; VENTURA, 2000, p. 101–116; BONOMO, 2007, p. 128; WALT; SCHMIDT, 2009a, p. 53). In all cases, however, anarchists see these contributions as partial; they are 'abstractions' that must be assessed from a pragmatic perspective¹³³: certain unrestrictions might contribute to latitude for nonconformity at times, but in other cases they might do the opposite – and in any case, even more than

¹³¹ See section 6.3.1.

¹³² See the discussion in section 4.3.1, around page 147.

¹³³ Tangentially, see also Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 353–354).

the rights and taboos themselves, there is the question of how their establishment is pursued (KINNA, 2016, p. 88, 122). As these processes entrench the enforcement of specific unrestrictions and justify sovereign relations, they can often lead to conformity in detriment of the combat of domination, hampering efforts to achieve higher levels of anarchist freedom (MALATESTA, 2015b, p. 48).

This assessment of liberty within one relation as dependent on a myriad of other ones is showcased, not only in the rejection of the processes just mentioned (liberalising, republicanising, etc.) when they reinforce one form of domination while combatting another, but also in the continued – and most importantly *consistent* – self-criticism that marked the transformation of the movement, and thus the tradition, via the enlargement of its agenda (as mentioned in sections 1.3 and 2.5). In other words, if Proudhon was a misogynist, or Bakunin a racist, their own theories were turned against them in order to actualise anarchist principles (CORDERO, 2015, p. 311–312; KINNA, 2016, p. 113; EVANS, 2020; BAKER, 2021a); something similar can be said about queer rights and disability issues (ACKELSBERG, 2012; INTRONA, 2021).

The complexity of freedom as non-dominating latitude for nonconformity means that there is no *a priori* determination as to what institutional course of action should be taken within a relation; moreover, when a path is eventually charted, it must take into consideration imbalances and monocultures in other relational contexts as well. This is why for Bakunin (1975, p. 26) one cannot think of a “reduced liberty” concerning one kind of interaction without also thinking that it reduces one’s freedom generally – or, really, with respect to one relationship as if it did not affect all other relationships (SPRINGER, 2011, p. 554). Likewise, this is why anarchists do not see the freedom of each agent as opposed to one another, as *limiting* one another, but as co-constitutive of one another:

I am truly free only when all human beings [...] are equally free. The freedom of [others], far from negating or limiting my freedom, is, on the contrary, its necessary premise and confirmation. It is the slavery of [others] that sets up a barrier to my freedom [...]. My personal freedom, confirmed by the liberty of all, extends to infinity. (BAKUNIN, 1971[1871][a], p. 237–238)

I [...] consider liberty] not the official ‘Liberty’, licensed, measured and regulated by the State, a falsehood representing the privileges of a few resting on the slavery of everybody else; not the individual liberty, selfish, mean, and fictitious advanced by [...] bourgeois Liberalism[...]. No, I mean [...] that liberty of each individual which, far from halting as at a boundary before the liberty of others, finds there its confirmation and its extension to infinity: [...] liberty by solidarity, liberty in equality; liberty triumphing over brute force and the principle of authority which was never anything but the idealized expression of that force[...]. (BAKUNIN, 1990[1872], p. 17–18 apud WHITE; SPRINGER; SOUZA, 2016, p. 6–7)

As discussed in section 6.1, however, discussing freedom within this framework does not mean that all nonconforming acts are conducive to increasing latitude for nonconformity. Drawing from the work of Richard Day (2005, p. 186), for example, Allan Antliff (2012, p. 77) mentions how anarchist currents within contemporary feminist, postcolonial and queer communities are ‘at the same time changeable and open to *anything but* the emergence of apparatuses of division, capture and exploitation’. The freedom of anarchists in any future anarchy, theorises Albert (2012, p. 328), ‘should not include [permission] to own slaves or [...] to hire wage slaves, as but two of countless conditions anarchism should obviously rule out’. If relational patterns are not left at least as egalitarian, cooperative, and diverse as before, one concentrates power, sets hierarchies up; erodes one’s future ability to not conform. Liberty is diminished.

A concept that has recently gained traction within libertarian theory and might help describe this feature of anarchist freedom is “plasticity”¹³⁴. The term was made notable by Catherine Malabou (2008, p. 6, 12–13), who criticises “flexibility” (‘to receive a form or impression, to be able to fold oneself’) as a supposed mark of human subjectivity, because it implies that people are characterised by their ability ‘to adapt to everything, to be ready for all adjustments’ — or, put differently, ‘to be docile’. Instead, she proposes a recovery of the idea of plasticity, which means an ‘agency of disobedience to every constituted form, a refusal to submit to a model’.

Flexibility can be quite conformist, seeing as how that is what superior forces demand of those subject to them (FERGUSON, K. E., 1984, p. 106–107). In adapting to the requirements of sovereign power relations — even if these have been recently established, as discussed in section 6.1.1 — one reinforces the conformist logic of sovereignty. But humans do not just always adapt; we also have the ability to “explode”, to resist, to take an unforeseen turn that makes a difference (HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 124). There is no contradiction between wanting to increase the “changeability” of structures and defending the continuity of certain agreements. Although restrictions can be freedom-reducing, those operating within an environment of balance, diversity, and mutual aid may help prevent the emergence or consolidation of sovereignty, enhancing a relationship’s freedom by making it transformable but also form-giving, a source of healing and innovation in face of conflict. As discussed toward the end of section 6.1.2, what

¹³⁴ Given the deep interconnection between subjectivity and politics explored in section 5.2, it is unsurprising that the concept is helpful even if its original context is “brain matter” and selfhood. On such a context, at any rate, see also Ward (1982[1973], p. 51).

is wanted is not indiscriminate pliability, an approval of relations becoming anything (even authoritarian or exploitative), but plasticity, the capacity to both take new shape but also give shape; respectful self-assertion (and in that, self-(re)construction) that protects and enhances this very creative power.

To summarise: it is not agents who are free, but their relations; people are free by virtue of their relationships. As a consequence, every agent within a network is simultaneously and equally affected in terms of the freedom enjoyed *as a result of* participating in said relationship; dominators and dominated alike are less free by virtue of there being domination. Moreover, if one can speak of being more or less free, one is talking about a quantitative quality.

However, this does not mean that it is experienced as a mathematical addition of the freedom had in one's relations. A relation's structural effects can be augmented, softened, or even negated, depending on circumstances, which are also the effect of the way relationships affect one another in complex ways. This means the freedom of each agent is always in some sense connected to the liberty of all related (even if indirectly) ones. Finally, the non-dominating proviso is necessary to further interpret what it means, in practice, to maximise liberty as latitude for nonconformity: discriminating between changes according to whether the resulting scenario will remain at least as open for nonconformity as before.

If what an agent wants to do creates or entrenches inequalities that would entail domination, and they are stopped or unsupported in their efforts, anarchists will not agree that their liberty was diminished, since their success would in fact mean a less free relation, and therefore less freedom — for everyone, including the agent in question. Of course, whatever force was used to prevent this situation is far from enough to safeguard liberty. In fact, it is the mark of a conflict that still requires resolution. For anarchists, freedom is truly protected in this example if, after this domination-establishing (or -inducing) act is prevented, this agent and their constituting communities act to assess the issue and organise better to satisfy the identified unmet need (in a way that *also* will not install or deepen oppressive imbalances). This would be a desirable transformation (social and probably subjective too) that current procedures would be judged as good for facilitating, and as inadequate for stifling.

6.3 EXPERIENCING FREEDOM

*I wish I knew how it would feel to be free [...]
 I wish you could know what it means to be me
 Then you'd see and agree
 That [everyone] should be free
 I wish I could give all I'm longing to give
 I wish I could live like I'm longing to live
 I wish I could do all the things that I can do
 And though I'm way overdue, I'd be starting anew*

Nina Simone ¹³⁵

*It even happened that one night there were only two of us in the trench [...]. We had the unbelievable luck not to be attacked that night. As we went back and forth [...] he said to me as we met:
 "What impression do you have of the life we're leading?"
 "The impression of seeing a river bank before us that we have to reach," I said.
 "I have the impression of reading a picture book," he answered.*

Louise Michel ¹³⁶

One aspect of feeling free in the sense just discussed is actually transforming relational patterns (only not in ways that sabotage the changeability of the structures). But another element of experiencing liberty is more about one's situation: about agency in the sense discussed in the introduction to section 6.2, about living — and thus repeating, reproducing — relational patterns characterised by high levels of non-dominating latitude for nonconformity. The weaker the purchase of structures premised on sovereignty, the freer one's actions feel, even if they are not particularly innovative. The regularities that build trust do not rely on the suppression of their potential for deep transformation, and so they are ever more expressive of each agent's free subjectivity: as White, Springer, and Souza (2016, p. 9) write, 'anarchists insist on [... building] meaning and identity through [...] direct interventions in the everyday'.

The next section deals with social awareness as one aspect of this freedom, and how anarchists approach it with an eye toward empowering people as agents without giving in to frameworks of control. This leads to preferences in terms of relational patterns, which shall be discussed in section 6.3.2. Whether liberty thus conceived is a good in itself or something of instrumental value within the anarchist tradition is addressed in section 6.3.3.

¹³⁵ Simone, 1967.

¹³⁶ Michel, 2012[1886], p. 2.

6.3.1 Agency instead of control

To know [...] is to make room for freedom.^{ac}

Jaime Cubero¹³⁷

[an anarchist position] requires that we submit to the turbulence of powerlessness[...], surrender our compulsion towards control. So we sacrifice our old selves in order to be changed [...] and we surrender to the power of the new. What we find in return is the power of self-actualization and co-creation.

Charlotte Lowell¹³⁸

On February 29th 1897, Tolstoy (1917, p. 133–134) wrote on his diary (after noting that in the previous day he had ‘written nothing’ and ‘worked badly’) that ‘consciousness is freedom’; when we act freely we know ‘we might have acted otherwise’, for we were conscious of the action. ‘The very basis of life is freedom and consciousness — a freedom-consciousness’, he added, before a conclusion between parentheses, which probably signal a defeated sigh: ‘it seemed to me clearer when I was thinking’.

Although this is too reductive¹³⁹ to represent anarchist liberty, it is not entirely unrelated. Unfreedom is linked to the automatism of behaviour unable to impact its own patterns; to being less able to act on *the logic by which* one decides to act. Not only one’s actions under very unfree conditions become less distinguishable from those of an unconscious object (machines that produce outputs based on inputs also “act”), but understanding is nearly¹⁴⁰ a *sine qua non* for non-dominating nonconforming activity. ‘If I were not conscious of dusting’ — the chore Tolstoy (1917, p. 133–134) had just performed when this occurred to him — ‘I would not have the choice of dusting or not dusting’. This, again, is too simple, but scales well into liberty as a property of relations. Unawareness, not of individual physical actions only but of mutual dependencies and intersubjective arrangements, does not hamper the unaware agent’s freedom alone. Leading to irresponsibility, both as in doing harm and in not being disposed to care for others, it feeds back into the loop of separation and ignorance, diminishing non-dominating latitude for nonconformity across the web of one’s relationships.

¹³⁷ Cubero, 2015[1994](a), p. 72.

¹³⁸ Lowell, 2023, 15:35–16:03.

¹³⁹ Possibly due to the religious tones of Tolstoy’s views, which make his anarchism very particular. In any case, read carefully, this journal entry seems to imply a more substantive account of freedom.

¹⁴⁰ I am opening an exception for the unintentional consequences Giddens (1984) speaks of (see section 6.2.1).

Social unawareness will always be part of the human experience. Although Graeber (2001, p. 64) defended the Piagetian notion that human development means appreciating distinct perspectives¹⁴¹, he recognised that humans are ‘notoriously incapable’ of being ‘continually aware of how [...] each member of a group of people working on some common project would see what was going on’ – and evidently, ‘the more complex the social situation, the more difficult such imaginative feats become’¹⁴². Bakunin’s (1975, p. 45) warning that ‘one must recognise the limits of science’, that ‘it is not the whole, only a part, for life is the whole’^{ad,143}, is turned inward by Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 197): ‘we never completely coincide with ourselves’, and so ‘a certain primary alienation is an irrevocable dimension of human life’. Graeber (2001, p. 51–52, 61) further noted that people usually describe things – including social dynamics and their own feelings – as “realities” precisely because they cannot completely understand or control them, ‘but nonetheless can’t just wish them away’:

The logical level on which one is operating is always at least one level higher than that which one can explain or understand[...]. In fact, one could argue this must necessarily be the case, since (explanation itself being a form of action) in order to explain or understand one’s actions fully, one has to generate a more sophisticated (“stronger,” more encompassing) level of operations, whose principles, in turn, one would not be fully able to explain; and in order to explain that one, yet another; and so on without end. (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 62)

Luckily one does not need to gain “full” understanding to enjoy freedom; ‘if we had to learn about living’ to be able to live, joked Isaac Puente (2014[1933], p. 10) when discussing revolutionary initiative, ‘we would never finish learning’, and thus would never live. If social unawareness is linked to conformity, something similar to what was discussed in the introduction to section 6.1 regarding the latter must also apply to the former: relationship, community, sociability more generally, involve familiarisation¹⁴⁴, an increasing taken-for-grantedness, that relaxes our attention – being “conscious” all the time, constantly “alert”, could be described as a state of anxiety most people would be comfortable classifying as pathological. However, none of this means giving up on higher comprehension altogether; ‘we begin by deciding to act’, continued Puente (2014[1933], p. 10), ‘and by acting one learns’^{ae}. Likewise, the kinds of relations anarchists seek to foster – in a sense, then, the *kinds of unawareness* – are precisely those which most encourage the expansion of consciousness and exploration of alternatives according to agents’ developmental requirements, going against an understandable drift toward

¹⁴¹ See the discussion in section 5.2, around page 203.

¹⁴² See also Woods *et al.* (1994, p. 210) on Perrowian complexity.

¹⁴³ See also Knowles (2002), as well as Graeber (2001, p. 53) on critical realism.

¹⁴⁴ See Christoyannopoulos (2020b, p. 109, 113, 153) on “defamiliarisation” in Tolstoyan theory.

a certain automation of social interactions. If sufficiently stable senses of self and of the world are not forged to provide a wider non-dominating latitude for nonconformity, they become ends in themselves, driving ever duller conformity.

To be clear: no progressive tradition (perhaps no intellectual tradition at all) advocates for *less* awareness. The issue is in how they approach it. Real life complexity prevents us from understanding our relations completely, but a simplified, enforceable ideal model does not. Pixelating our mutualities and inducing conformity are twin operations: states are secretive and manipulative for the sake of (among other things) propping up heroic narratives about themselves (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 133); stifling anarchic initiatives also starves attention toward them. Modern division of labour, for another example, produces a form of knowledge *as* it mystifies the nature of value¹⁴⁵: ‘if one understands the logic of the system, one can understand enough to know why, say, a given product has the value that it does’ (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 64–65, 250). The models tell people what they ought to be aware of: of their individual lives each; the sacrifices made by honourable troops protecting “our way of life”; the universal march toward the overcoming of the current contradiction between productive forces and relations of production. These are rarely seen by their proponents as *partial* understandings; they are more often presented as the only correct principles, rationally justifying the imposition of a uniform pattern over a diverse political topology (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 2, 29). Once sovereign, these systems produce exactly the kind of evidence they need to argue for how their perspectives are “realist”, as in a *longue durée* self-fulfilling prophecy.

However, such a limited consciousness leaves behind a great deal of complexity that resists hegemony (WARD, 1982[1973], p. 45), which, as just argued above, is bound to lead to separation and irresponsibility. The simpler it is believed that people and relations are or should be, the more attempts at recognising and respectfully interacting with actual diversity are seen as an authoritarian imposition of needless complication. Simplicity not only imagined but enforced by direct and indirect sovereign mechanisms does create ontological “security”, but one based on material inequalities and on ignorance not only of complexity, but of ignorance itself¹⁴⁶. Progressive proposals are met with hurt backlash, with exertion of conformist pressure from multiple agents in many contexts as changes tend to impact several relations at the same time. This frequently materialises as a demand for the bureaucratic procedures that uphold

¹⁴⁵ See also Fiscella (2015, p. 250, 256).

¹⁴⁶ This is why narratives of the mystical, monstrous Other tend to emerge (HOOKS, 2017[1994], p. 49; GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 69–71; SCHULMAN, 2016, chap. 5).

the “simple” schemes to be respected¹⁴⁷ (RECLUS, 2013[1894], p. 123–124). Instead of direct, experimental, collective interventions to mediate conflict and accommodating for diversity by innovating relational patterns, people are supposed to rely on e.g. electoral campaigns so that an entire population aggregately chooses a legislature (and its counterweights in other branches of power) that implements a legislative framework that dictates that certain bureaucracies (administrators, judges and police, etc.) must act so that certain things happen in certain ways. From a conformist point of view, thinking about social problems in anarchist ways

is risky[...] confuses administrative divisions[...] and overrides] the usual procedures[...]. A direct solution [...] disturbs too many fixed arrangements. [...] the simpler and more easily effected the ideas [anarchists] suggest [...] the more they are really impractical[...]. If we recommend an old-fashioned straightforward procedure, we seem to be asking that a foreign or “advance-guard” way of life be imposed.¹⁴⁸ (GOODMAN, 1961)

Irresponsibility, as not feeling responsible for the consequences of one’s actions on an Other’s well being, is thus a lack of disposition toward new arrangements that would be (relatively) mutually beneficial. This unwillingness for, a de-prioritisation of, egalitarian, rebellious mutual aid means a conformist attitude; it entails conformity with that which will continue to harm others. Literal segregation and distance¹⁴⁹ reinforce ignorance of harm being done, but even when one is made aware of it, the integrity of one’s sense of self and of the world can be protected by the displacement of responsibility onto a larger, eternally elusive, ultimately unachievable ideal: each individual obeys a law which was only ever made in accordance with another law (e.g. in respect of electors’ wishes, who were themselves already law- and status-quo-bound as they elected lawmakers). Commenting on producers who justified mass media programming by saying they gave people ‘what they want’ and that ‘radio and TV had little effect on “basic moral values”’, Goodman (1961) asked whether they really ought not to feel responsible ‘for the sheer quantity of messages and objects with which they swamp the public, for the pre-emption of space and resources, for the monopolistic exclusion of alternatives’, and especially for the ‘disastrous moral effect’ of making moral choice ‘inarticulate and irrelevant’.

Those who consider obeying the law more important than abiding by one’s conscience always try to frame themselves as the responsible ones, but the essence of that attitude is the desire to evade responsibility. Society, as represented – however badly – by its entrenched institutions, is responsible for decreeing right and wrong; all one must do is [...] comply, arguing for a

¹⁴⁷ Tangentially, see Rugai (2010).

¹⁴⁸ See also Eric Laursen (2021, p. 206–208).

¹⁴⁹ See note 21 at the beginning of section 5.1.

change when the results are not to one's taste but never stepping out of line.¹⁵⁰ (CRIMETHINC, 2008)

What is gained at the end of the day, and how this can be justified by statist progressives for the sake of freedom, is *control*. By asserting dominance to simplify reality — to ‘create markets that are as large and uniform as possible’, for example, as quoted in section 6.1.2 — one not only deals with unawareness by creating the Procrustean illusion of complete consciousness, but engineers a social environment in which relevant unrestrictions are guaranteed. This of course is not about *visible* control by actual human beings; continued inequalities would immediately create too much personal arbitrariness (and responsibility) for this to be sustainable. The point is for there to be generalised “slaveless mastership”; for things to be kept *under control*, as put in section 6.1.1, but not *really* be controlled by anyone in particular. The individual, the territorial group, or humanity is ultimately in control, something a meat and bones human being may experience by fitting their consciousness into the proper frame — and, of course, prioritising the associated drives so as to act in ways that ensure the continuity of the entire system.

For anarchists, then, conformism drives unawareness but a purposefully limited consciousness is also a factor in making structures harder to transform in non-dominating ways. If it is no wonder that education is crucial (MINTZ, 2013[1970], p. 32; AMARAL, 2021), it is also understandable that it is not enough by itself (OITICICA, 1983[1925], p. 61–64; SAMIS, 2018, p. 177). Spreading information and skills is Sisyphean when this is not done in opposition to the structures that hinder freedom by (re)concentrating knowledge and by obscuring social awareness, making it so that people tend to know less about each other and *care* less about how they relate to one another (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 255). In fact, new data and techniques¹⁵¹ might well be employed by both oppressors and the oppressed¹⁵² in conformist ways — such is the mainstream education of hierarchical societies, as commented by Cubero in the epigraph that opens this chapter: to use instruction and expertise for conquest. ‘To “educate” in the accustomed style’, wrote Goodman (1961), ‘only worsens the disease’.

Education, continued Goodman (1961), must ‘cut through habits’ — especially that of ‘saying “nothing can be done” and withdrawing into conformity’ — by proving, as seen in

¹⁵⁰ See also Reclus (2013[1894], p. 131) and Tolstoy (1894, p. 322–323).

¹⁵¹ “New” as in recently acquired, but one could also reflect (as in section 4.3.2) on the *production* of data and technology driven by an impulse to control behaviour from above rather than to promote understanding and mediation. This could also apply to knowledge meant to educate about the way society currently functions that ends up overwhelming consciences with its hegemony; on that, see note 249 of section 5.3 on page 247. See also Mintz (2013[1970], p. 119), Graeber (2009, p. 328), and Cultive Resistência (2022, p. 140).

¹⁵² As Paulo Freire spoke, ‘when education is not liberating’ — and by this he also meant the context around the educational process — ‘the dream of the oppressed is to become the oppressor’ (BRABO, 2021).

section 5.3, ‘that direct solutions are feasible’. It should be integrated into the politics of finding common ground and acting directly on it: mutual, liberating knowledge is produced there at the moment the subjects and their bonds themselves are (re)shaped; there where the “mind” and the “beating heart” of a network of individuals and groups – conscience and materiality, thought and execution – are not isolated from one another (ROCKER, 2009[1938], p. 40; HOOKS, 2017[1994], p. 97–98; CRIMETHINC, 2017, p. 151; KINNA, 2019b, p. 108). This parallels the argument, discussed in section 3.1, that for anarchists conceptual order is empirically supported by struggle; that knowledge and theorising are collective phenomena rooted in action. The kind of awareness one has of one’s social context depends on prevailing structures and the logic of one’s actions toward them. Instituting anarchist direct action¹⁵³, which is opposed to the framework of the self-obeying citizenry as to that of the mind-obeying body, creates awareness as it enables the diversely interdependent dialogue and activity that combines shared learning, decision, execution, and evaluation. In productive as well as in educational settings (indeed a collapse of one into the other), arrangements must be made so that everyone simultaneously exercises and develops manual, intellectual, and (self-)managerial powers.

Balance, diversity, and mutual aid are thought of as creating the best conditions for a deeper understanding of the patterns making up one’s life, for better education to take place. An environment with a high non-dominating latitude for nonconformity would in all likelihood involve more relatively unprecedented or unpredictable actions and patterns. In a free(r) social landscape ‘no one involved could possibly know what the total system in question actually consists of’, which structurally furthers the aim of expanding awareness: ‘one becomes self-conscious[...] when one does not know precisely what to do’ (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 96, 250). Similarly, Arianna Introna (2021, p. 5) comments that non-ableist social structures strengthen prefiguration by allowing ‘those moments when we are disoriented by disability’ to become ‘opportunities to unlearn, learn anew, and grow’ instead of annoyances, even threats, that standardisation should iron out.

Furthermore, these are the conditions that make it harder for anyone to simply enforce conformity through bureaucracy. If complexity is adequately recognised and respected, even incentivised, the educational-political efforts needed to both understand it and deal with it for mutual benefit would not necessarily be *easier*, but they would arguably be much *simpler*¹⁵⁴ (CULTIVE RESISTÊNCIA, 2022, p. 57). Pointedly, Goodman (1961) noted that ‘disintegrating

¹⁵³ I have written about direct action elsewhere; see Peterson Roberto da Silva (2018, p. 193–203, 2019).

¹⁵⁴ See note 48 above in section 6.1.1.

communities and confronting isolated persons with the overwhelming processes of the whole society', causing massive conformist pressures in favour of those the status quo already satisfies, deprives people 'of manageable associations that can be experimented with'¹⁵⁵.

Solicit [people's] view in the mass, and they will return stupid, fickle and violent answers; solicit their views as members of definite groups with real solidarity and a distinctive character, and their answers will be responsible and wise. Expose them to the political "language" of mass democracy, which represents "the people" as unitary and undivided and minorities as traitors, and they will give birth to tyranny; expose them to the political language of federalism, in which the people figures as a diversified aggregate of real associations, and they will resist tyranny to the end. (HYAMS, 1979 apud WARD, 2011[1992], p. 287)

Even though experiments must be negotiated with yet other communities and intersecting groups¹⁵⁶, balanced and cooperative decentralisation favours more straightforward processes for understanding our mutualities so as to act on them in nonconformist ways. Additionally, as discussed in section 5.1¹⁵⁷, decentralised social formations are perfectly able to come up with inclusive standardisation and employ it in ways that favour diversity and creativity: regulating mechanisms used to mediate divergences toward some form of conviviality. These forms of "educational direct action", however, are not aimed at maximising *control* (SKODA; TROYANO, 2020, 1:56:44–1:57:04).

Especially due to their shared socialist roots, Marxists likely offer the best point of comparison with anarchism in terms of how different progressive traditions go from a similar diagnosis of a problem — separation, ignorance, irresponsibility — to distinct solutions. Marxists famously work with the concept of alienation. By being alienated — separated — from the products of their labour, then the process of labour, then other individuals, people are ultimately estranged from their own human essence¹⁵⁸. Incomplete and even wrong knowledge, induced by dominating structures, begets false consciousness, and as a result action from a subjective perspective that is not truly one's own.

Anarchists certainly pay attention to the phenomena described by this concept; they can agree with most of their contours insofar as they represent a socialist critique of separation between individuals and among peoples, ignorance of mutual dependencies, and irresponsibility regarding collective or foreign processes. But the Marxist solution is to, by means of the

¹⁵⁵ See also Bookchin (1971, p. 167 apud HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 127).

¹⁵⁶ See the next section.

¹⁵⁷ See the discussion around note 99 on page 198.

¹⁵⁸ See Frazer-Carroll (2023, introduction) for a political discussion of mental health issues; according to Lisa Fannen, for example, capitalist alienation should be described as a "dissociative state" in itself.

singularly correct analytical method, acquire a full understanding of social reality, opening the door to accessing the right subjectivity. Then people call into being an overarching emancipatory collective agent that, once in charge of internal and external nature, once in control of everything, means no one is (significantly, at least) alienated any longer.

As explored in section 5.2, however, if anarchists speak of estrangement from human nature, they talk about alienation from a dynamic multiplicity of perspectives. De-alienation would entail engendering equally intersubjective agents, people who see themselves as “multiple becomings” made one of each other, without demands of adherence to particular configurations of such mutual constitution¹⁵⁹. Control is relinquished partly because there is no clearly bounded subject *to be* in control¹⁶⁰; “correct knowledge” would at best mean making a reasonable effort to grasp relevant interdependences, which as a principle casts control as harmful phantasy. To know (and control) everything would mean (striving for) sovereign mechanisms. Anarchists want agency instead, something that is heightened when diffused throughout the web of one’s relations. As just noted in section 6.2, “my” freedom is bound to the liberty of others.

Experiencing (more) freedom thus requires that, even when conformity takes place, it could (more) easily not have done so, not only because *I* could have done something about it but because *others also could*. While balance may help avoid *dominating* nonconformity, at least in the short term, diversity and mutual aid are needed to alleviate the pains of accepting that one’s life will eventually be changed in ways that are not completely under one’s control — especially so that people can creatively avert the competitive dynamics that could emerge from such anguish. Libertarian communities are those that, as Nelson (2021, chap. 2) writes, make

¹⁵⁹ See the discussion on false consciousness in section 6.1.1 above (around page 266).

¹⁶⁰ To be, in effect, thoroughly unrestricted (see note 27 of section 2.3 on page 46). The Marxist Hal Draper (1969 apud PRICE, W., 2017[2000], p. 9) once commented that ‘the only [person] who can enjoy [...] “freedom” unlimited by society is a despot’. Although this is true, from an anarchist perspective it is a function of unlimited unrestricted, not to be critiqued only when it is configured in individualist doctrines. It is also interesting that, once one considers a feminist, care-centred theory of work (see note 148 of section 5.2 on page 212), along with non-Western perspectives (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 37–41), Marxist alienation seems somewhat *odd*. The caring labour provided by parents and teachers is not “alienating”, not in the same sense of capitalist domination, just because they do not control the product of their efforts (effectively, an educated child that is to become an adult) or even, arguably, this entire “productive process” (other people also get to influence the child, and later, the adult). Endorsing this mindset in industrial settings is not much more appropriate. Having *a say* on how one’s work is structured and what is done to its end results, knowing the social context of one’s professional actions so as to avoid domination, guaranteeing that further transformation remains open — this is all one thing; gaining a right to *control* what happens is something else altogether, especially because the first example might involve yet other people who could also want to have a say in all of this. Of course the theoretical sleight of hand is to say that it is not each individual labourer or regional union or professional class who is in control, but the working class as a whole (and, eventually, humankind). But then one goes back to the despotism of this abstraction over local decisions: once “humanity” decides how industrial products are to be distributed, is giving a product to somebody else, individually or factionally breaking with the original distributive plan, *alienating* by default?

space for growth in ways that respect ‘the heterogeneity and autonomy of others, and allows for indeterminate, uncontrollable outcomes, excruciating as that may sometimes be’. Hence why one can speak, as in the beginning of this section, of anarchists seeking to foster “kinds of unawareness”; a degree of ignorance (and lack of control) – even irrationality (ROBINSON, 1980, p. 58–59; HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 131) – is less grudgingly accepted than welcomed, because it means that I do not (attempt to) control either nature or the Other but *participate* in their flows, *act together* with them. Thus the importance of mutual aid, of ecological niches, of getting used to lead *and* rebel so that balance is sought and kept; of going past mistakes to guide toward repair, reconciliation, a justice that is not about legitimising trauma response – sentences that work as well for relations among humans as for relations among all beings. ‘Equality, universal harmony’, cried out Michel (2021[1890], p. 83, emphasis added): ‘for humans and for *everything that exists*’^{af}.

Speaking of situated, liberating knowledge¹⁶¹, Reclus’s geography, for example, looked ‘beyond the project of planetary domination’, attempting to ‘restore humanity to its rightful place within, rather than above, nature’ (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 16). The “freedom-in-connection” mentioned in section 5.1 also meant connection with the other-than-human (LIMA; QUELUZ, 2018, p. 11). For most if not all anarchists historically, the relationship between self and Other is deeply connected to the relation between humanity and nature (which is, of course, a given for anarchistic non-Western cultures). For Bookchin (2011[1992], p. 17) the ‘harmonization of human with human’ parallels ‘the harmonization of humanity with the natural world’; as he wrote elsewhere, this is the libertarian alternative to both a ‘humility to the dicta of “natural law”’ and conquering nature, an enterprise ‘that may very well entail the subjugation of human by human in a shared project to ultimately “liberate” all of humanity from the compulsion of “natural necessity[”]’ (BOOKCHIN, 2011, p. 3). ‘I’d rather live [...] according to nature, this gigantic system of which I am a small particle’, wrote Antônio Fernandes Mendes (1980), because ‘great centralisations brought no balance or harmony to the human species’^{ag}. But equilibrium with nature is about more than what happens among humans. Continually developing “productive forces”, at least in the sense of pushing the boundaries of human abilities to refashion nature on a whim, establishes freedom-lessening imbalances within this very human-nature relation. Along with and often learning from non-Western traditions, anarchists question if “development” is about obtaining a higher rate of transformation and transportation

¹⁶¹ See also Day-Woods (2021, p. 42).

of matter per measure of energy, or if it is rather about a dialogue with non-human agencies, perceiving what it is that other species and natural processes demand so that equilibrium can be reached with them¹⁶². This would not even be particularly innovative, given that Neolithic ecology was seemingly already

little concerned with taming wild nature or squeezing as many calories as possible from a handful of seed grasses. [...] Instead of fixed fields, [Neolithic botanists] exploited alluvial soils on the margins of lakes and springs, which shifted location from year to year. Instead of hewing wood, tilling fields and carrying water, they found ways of “persuading” nature to do much of this labour for them. There was not a science of domination and classification, but one of bending and coaxing, nurturing and cajoling, or even tricking the forces of nature, to increase the likelihood of securing a favourable outcome.¹⁶³ (GRAEBER; WENGROW, 2021, p. 238–239)

Interpreting “balance” in the context of large-scale natural phenomena requires more careful consideration. There’s no “equality of forces” between humankind and the sun; what would it mean to be in balance with earthquakes or hurricanes? One could perhaps learn about their regularities, adapt, even take advantage of them. This obviously involves human relations: the bond between ancient Egyptians and the Nile would not be the same if it were “illegal” for riverside populations to migrate from one season to another. On the other hand, controlling sublime nature may at times be actually feasible — the Nile is full of dams today, and no longer floods — but not necessarily desirable in social terms.

In the end, humanity and nature are one and the same; ‘there is no clean separation’, only ‘a thick morass of endless entanglements’ (SPRINGER, 2018, p. 3). One should thus be careful about dividing them. As Goldman and Baginski (1906, p. 1–3) put it, a religious nature-society divide, the ‘dreary doctrine’ that the Earth held nothing for humans but ‘temptation to degrade [themselves]’, led to ‘material and intellectual slavery’. For Bookchin (1982, p. 43) it was the other way around: ‘the notion that man is destined to dominate nature’ is far from ‘a universal feature of human culture’, and it would have actually *emerged from* ‘the increasing domination of human by human’. In any case, domination of nature coincides with domination of people (BRACONS, 2006, p. 100 apud LIMA; QUELUZ, 2018, p. 6), and not accidentally; as González (2021, p. 93–94) argues, ‘police and fossil fuels are inseparable’, as the first helps ‘secure an order of nature that is always conducive to ceaseless capital accumulation’¹⁶⁴. So with few

¹⁶² See the discussion on development in section 4.3.2 (around page 161) and on a “Promethean approach to socialism” at the end of section 5.1.

¹⁶³ See also Brian Morris (2020).

¹⁶⁴ See also Bookchin (1989, p. 32 apud MCLAUGHLIN, 2002, p. 169), Crimethinc (2008), James C. Scott (2017), and Mayshary, Moav, and Pascali (2020).

exceptions¹⁶⁵, anarchists saw humankind in contiguity with nature, not in opposition to it. As Wilbert and White (2011, p. xxviii) write about Ward's thought, it is important to listen to, encourage, and develop 'people's material and "embodied knowledge" of their environments'; if we are and have always been one with nature, 'the central question [...] is not whether we should transform or produce nature but how and with what consequences'.

If for Kropotkin (2019[1903], p. 21–22) humans are 'as much a phenomenon of nature as is the growth of a flower or the evolution of social life amongst the ants and bees'¹⁶⁶ — which does not offend too many ears today but was a braver claim in context — Reclus went further by characterising humanity as 'nature becoming self-conscious' (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 3). Bookchin's (2011, p. 11) social ecology rooted 'the cultural in the natural', with the effect of denying 'the notion that culture alone is the realm of freedom'. To combat unawareness regarding such connections also enhances liberty.

If you were a body of water, would you protect yourself? If you knew that your water body was connected to every other water body — human and non-human? Because you are part of the water cycle[...] You are a body of water — surrounded by land, a human estuary, like the estuaries of our planet where fresh water meets the sea. [...] the land is your skin. [...] However, our language enforces a false separation. Humans are nature. Which need to be re-categorized as moving bodies of water — much like estuaries. Why? Because our language gives us our place in the world. In the way we organize it and protect it.¹⁶⁷ (KEITH, 2010 apud FISCELLA, 2015, p. 272)

In short, unawareness is harmful to freedom, but education and consciousness-raising is liberating when it is linked to meaningful, direct involvement with others, not when it enables controlling relational patterns. The question is what institutional forms anarchists have historically discussed and implemented toward consolidating this kind of liberty.

¹⁶⁵ See e.g. some off-kilter sentences in Malatesta (2014[1892][a], 2014[1922][e]). This language appears in anarchist works less and less over time, especially as anarchism becomes a more consolidated socialist tradition in opposition to Marxism.

¹⁶⁶ See Peter Singer on the Marxist animal-human separation: 'the grounds for [the claim that] there is a qualitative distinction between human and non-human animals [...] is highly dubious[...]. Saying that [humans], unlike any other animal, [produce their] own means of subsistence, that [they] alone [are] a proper economic agent, is biological nonsense: "fungus-growing ants, for example, grow and eat specialized fungi that would not have existed without their activity"' (MCLAUGHLIN, 2002, p. 251). See also Birch, Schnell, and Clayton (2020) and Pedrosa (2021, p. 10).

¹⁶⁷ See also Gumbs (2020).

6.3.2 Institutions and individuals

At the protests [...] I saw normally excluded groups — people of color, women, and queers — participate actively in every aspect of the mobilization[...] and although people had differences, they were seen as good and beneficial. It was new for me, after my experience in the Panthers, to be in a situation where people [...] truly embraced the attempt to work out our sometimes conflicting interests. This gave me some ideas about how anarchism can be applied.

Ashanti Alston ¹⁶⁸

You cannot buy the Revolution. You cannot make the Revolution. You can only be the Revolution. It is in your spirit, or it is nowhere.

Shevek, in *The Dispossessed* ¹⁶⁹

Anarchists organise for both short-term confrontation and longer-term popular empowerment, to the point of liberating territory so as to experience freedom more consistently than under the shadow of sovereignty. Historically, there is radical direct action establishing progressive labour and reproductive rights, improving gender equality, or supporting criminalised defiance of tyranny; endeavours providing material and educational resources for building and mobilising communities, from libertarian print culture, Modern Schools, and squatting collectives to Occupy movements, Food Not Bombs, and riseup.net tools; there are the Mexican and Spanish Revolutions, the *Makhnovshchina*, the Korean People's Association in Manchuria.

The organisational resemblances among the initiatives above, referring to certain practices (some of which were already discussed in other sections), allows for an analysis of activism that, even when less firmly linked to the anarchist movement or tradition, nonetheless employs similar tactics and moves toward compatible goals; anarchists support them and learn from them as meaningful attempts at widening freedom (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 215–216). One could talk about traditional practises and decolonial resistance by anarchistic non-Western cultures; rural expropriation; environmental or animal liberation militancy; the organisational structure and ethos of free software projects; contemporary, multi-ethnic struggles in the Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (also known as Rojava).

Most anarchist organisational principles and practices could be fairly summarised as “decentralised federalism with imperative representation”. People participate in relations ac-

¹⁶⁸ Alston, 2007[2003], p. 5.

¹⁶⁹ Le Guin, 2006[1974], chap. 9. Tangentially, see also Tolstoy (1894, p. 368).

ording to their needs and interests, retain the ability to reshape their affiliation, and scale up the coordination of activities in ways that prevent and (or) erode concentration of power (CUBERO, 2015[1991][b], p. 46; CULTIVE RESISTÊNCIA, 2022, p. 57).

For Proudhon, one of the earliest codifiers of libertarian federative principles, federalism institutionalises ‘the complex diversity’ of social life ‘without constraining the autonomy of groups or individuals to realign or change in whichever direction they choose’ (PRICHARD, 2012, p. 103). It does not mean ‘a confederation of states’ or ‘a world federal government’ but ‘a basic principle of human organisation’¹⁷⁰ (WARD, 2011[1988], p. 19). Differently from the ascending rings of a territorially sovereign representative system, it stands for the relationship between intersecting or overlapping associations – economic, social, cultural – that negotiate differences through deliberation (KROPOTKIN, 2019[1885][b], p. 60–61; KORNEGGER, 2002, p. 22; CORRÊA, 2012b, p. 119; CORRÊA; SILVA, 2015, p. 112; KINNA, 2016, p. 89; FELIPE, 2018, p. 79). A federation does not necessarily mean that a balance of power already exists among its members. As Prichard (2012, p. 103) again writes, an anarchistic federation is ‘a pact’ or ‘agreement between unequals for equitable ends’. To federalise is to perceive inequality but not let it constitute or pattern a relation, organising to overcome it instead.

What this all means for each organisation is that it should be ‘functional and temporary’, with ‘large-scale functions’ being ‘broken down’ until they can be organised by small groups that would then be linked ‘in a federal manner’¹⁷¹ (WARD, 2011[1966], p. 48). However, associations for food production serve a continuous need; so do places where people can have appendectomies. These tend not to be temporary unless one supports ultra-individualist scenarios or naturalises the patterns of yet other associations and their roles in the daily reproduction of life (such as families). Likewise, relatives, friends, neighbours and the like can be called to mediate all sorts of conflicts; insofar as people ‘using one another as resources’ go, communities do not have a single “function” (GOODMAN, 1961); their creative reappropriation for other purposes is seemingly a basic fact of human sociability (CLARK, S., 2007, p. 59–60).

A more generous reading of these features is that institutions should not be judged by their longevity, and they ought to be constantly and critically examined in light of their effects¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ See also Ricardo Rugai (2010) on how organisational differences are not merely a “juridical” matter.

¹⁷¹ This is about efficacy: if associations primarily strive to survive, they are going to leave issues unresolved so that their existence remains justified or, in the case of less “utilitarian” relations, hamper the development of individuals. As with any other tradition, however, anarchists’ premises and prospects (concerning e.g. “development”) shape their definitions of efficacy. See also Proudhon (2010[1840], p. 207–208), Rocker (2009[1938], p. 41–42), Goodman (2010[1945][c], p. 100), and Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 128–136).

¹⁷² On any agent, not just a predetermined set (e.g. “citizens”).

(their function), such that their transformation or dissolution is treated as a legitimate course of action, even a form of conflict resolution itself in some cases (BRAY, 2018, p. 105). More non-dominating latitude for nonconformity is wanted so that nobody *has* to accept oppressive or exploitative practices within a *specific* association — a farming co-operative or a hospital, but also a family, a city, a country, an activist group. An institution would be temporary, then, not in the sense that it must have an expiration date, but that it should not be conceptualised as necessarily permanent and (or) immutable.

The complication is that simply *proclaiming* a structure's changeability and perishability, even periodically discussing its "mission statement" and deliberating on whether it should continue operations, does not necessarily reach into the *conditions* that might make its permanence the only sensible choice. If one's livelihoods (a material issue) and (or) status (a more cultural matter) depend on it, with no clear alternative in sight, one will obviously tend to cling to it. That is the point of complex interdependence and dynamically multiple subjectivities: family ties might offer the chance of rebelling at work, and professional solidarity may help deal with domestic woes — in any case one does not despair about personal integrity. But to have such an effect, these conditions must be dependable, which might mean the structures that correspond to them will be deemed functional *precisely* when they withstand contingencies in generating reasonably concerted agreement (especially among a massive amount of agents).

This dilemma¹⁷³ sparked "classic" debates among anarchists. For platformists, preserving these conditions entailed 'the insistence that [...] "specific organizational duties" [...] be rigorously performed', as well as the condemnation and rejection of 'operating off one's own bat' (KINNA, 2019b, p. 194). For the anarchists historically called "antiorganisationalists", these conditions were better reached and maintained by exclusively forming networks of small "affinity groups", rejecting large, and especially formal, organisations (BOOKCHIN, 1982, p. 344; CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 190; BAKER, 2023, chap. 6). However, 'a network is an organisation, as is a local cell'; the dynamic just described is not triggered only by a specific number of people or by any level of "formality", and so these organisational forms are not inherently immune to it¹⁷⁴ (WALT; SCHMIDT, 2009a, p. 240). 'Organization does not have to stifle spontaneity or follow hierarchical patterns', wrote Kornegger (2002, p. 28), remarking that successful feminist groups adopted formal procedures such as 'the rotation of tasks and chair-persons, sharing of all skills, equal access to information and resources, non-monopolized decision-making, and

¹⁷³ See also Nelson's (2021, chap. 2) use of the concept of the *koan* to discuss something like it.

¹⁷⁴ See also Freeman (1972).

time slots for discussion of group dynamics'. Moreover, as hinted at in section 6.1 above, one can talk about *culture* as organisation, which is fitting in terms of the higher-level institutions in question, especially because it can refer to informal spaces of socialisation that people rarely associate with "politics". It can refer to the set of unspoken or explicit expectations (norms) around 'interactions, intellectual inquiry, morality, and aesthetics' (SHAFFER, 2015, p. 158), as well as of 'proverbs, short tales, allegories, or historical lore' (AMBORN, 2019, p. 138), that structures relations and social activities, influencing what people do and providing resources for them to act meaningfully in the first place¹⁷⁵.

Therefore, anarchism cannot be said to oppose organisation (SPRINGER, 2014, p. 252–253), which is simply, as Parker *et al.* (2017, p. 538, 543) write, 'politics made durable'¹⁷⁶. This the "antiorganisationalist" anarchists are also in favour of doing; in the end, their definition of "organisation" only creates unnecessary 'semantic quibbles'¹⁷⁷ (MALATESTA, 2014[1897]). As Malatesta (2014[1890] apud BAKER, 2023, chap. 6) complained elsewhere, antiorganisationalists 'rack their brains to come up with names to take the place of organization' while in reality organising themselves. Anarchist organisation is about the structures employed to not only deliberate on differences and generate agreements, but also collectively examine the function of any relational pattern, assessing whether continuity and consensus on any given "level" are or would be enhancing freedom, or actually entrenching inequalities and intransigence.

For two or few individuals that would be called "conversation"; for more, "direct democracy". During the Spanish Revolution, 'all inhabitants[...] took part in the discussion and decisions'; in some collectives even 'the "individualists" (non-collective members) had equal rights in the Assembly' (PRINCIPLES... , 1958, p. 7). Anarchist assemblies also involve particular rules – or, rather, certain concerns that may be dealt with through specific rules, such as some of the formal procedures just mentioned as having been adopted by many feminist groups¹⁷⁸.

The larger the number of people, the more they tend to benefit from breaking deliberation down into more manageable chunks, which either means thematic committees or the creation of different "conversational levels" through representation. In both cases imperative delegation is called for. When it comes to committees, they are responsible to the people on the associational level they affect (e.g. the commune, the city), participation in them is not limited, and they do

¹⁷⁵ See the discussion about restrictions as resources in section 6.1.2, around page 282, as well as Ward (1982[1973], chap. 4) and Matthew Wilson (2011, p. 94).

¹⁷⁶ See also Leval (1958, p. 8–9) and Olson (1997, p. 464).

¹⁷⁷ See also Bonomo (2007, p. 397).

¹⁷⁸ Contrast with e.g. Iza Salles (2005, p. 118–119).

not have authority to impose themselves against resistance¹⁷⁹. Concerning individual delegates, they are empowered to transmit positions and intentions “upwards” but *not* to decide for the represented below; a delegate serves as a spokesperson ‘rather than someone who makes laws and enforces acceptance of them’¹⁸⁰ (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][e]).

In Rojava, any kind of committee must include a certain percentage of women (EDITORIA DESCONTROL, 2016a, p. 122–123; KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, p. 69–70); there are also regularly scheduled discussions of (often mandatory) criticism and self-criticism of leadership (KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, p. 131, 173, 183). A usual feature of anarchistic representation is that ‘leaders do not receive extra benefits or live more extravagant lives for their role and work in the community’ (MINTZ, 2013[1970], p. 34–35; IAF, 2020[2009]) – although one can also think of the Clastrean bargain as an alternative. In any case, delegates were as recallable during the Spanish Revolution as they are today in Rojava (PRINCIPLES..., 1958, p. 7; DOLGOFF, 2012[1974]; EDITORA DESCONTROL, 2016a, p. 124; KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, p. 88); among the Zapatistas, the rotating members of the federalist system they call “good government” [buen gobierno] can be ousted for not acting as determined in assemblies (IAF, 2020[2009]). Every tentative agreement concocted by representatives must be ratified in lower-level processes, and in case they are not, new higher-level conversations must be had.

Still, the number of assembled people (in general assemblies or committees) does not determine whether the criterion for making decisions is majoritarian or consensus-based. Even with majoritarianism, however, room can be made for effective dissent, and enough information can be conveyed to allow groups to act in ways that respect others’ requirements without waiting for any formal approval (ERVIN, 2009[1993], p. 54; CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 186).

Majority voting (specific thresholds vary) is often justified because consensus would be inefficient for being time-consuming and for giving ‘great power to isolated agents’ to block proposals; this would especially be the case for ‘large-scale decisions’ in which speed is a concern^{ah,181} (FARJ, 2008, p. 38). ‘In many cases, the minority[...] should defer to the majority’, wrote Malatesta (2014[1922][e]), and ‘not just [on] matters of small consequence, but

¹⁷⁹ The Zapatistas also make the point that committees are created to coordinate matters by theme, but this coordination involves precisely the input of other committees and, ultimately, everyone affected: ‘for example if there is an issue of justice, well it is not just the [committee] that coordinates matters of justice is going to fix it, as other working groups intervene to solve it’ [por ejemplo si llega un problema de justicia, pues no solamente el que coordina los asuntos de justicia lo va a resolver, sino intervienen las demás áreas de trabajo para solucionar ese asunto] (LA ESCUELITA ZAPATISTA, 2013?[a], p. 16).

¹⁸⁰ See also Corrêa (2012b, p. 119).

¹⁸¹ See also Graeber (2009, p. 312) and Baker (2022a, p. 12).

also, indeed especially, matters of vital importance to the collective economy’. However, some anarchists feel majority voting *only* applies in the circumstances just described as more clearly demanding it, being ‘at best a necessary evil’ (CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 186). For the Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria (2020[1945], p. 6–7), decisions in anarchist organisations ‘are made unanimously’, but within ‘mass economic organizations’, where unity ‘is absolutely indispensable’, decisions are made ‘by majority vote and are binding’. Even then, in case of ‘profound disagreement’, the minority may not have to ‘apply a general decision’ — effective dissent — ‘on condition that it does not prevent the execution of such a decision’¹⁸².

As seen above, whether unity or dissension is dominating or non-dominating is for anarchists always a contextual judgment. What is clear, however, is that, since sovereign enforcement is (and should remain) unavailable, ‘persuasion should always be sought’ (FEDERATION OF ANARCHIST COMMUNISTS OF BULGARIA, 2020[1945], p. 6). ‘We want minorities to defer voluntarily whenever necessity and the feeling of solidarity require it’, wrote Malatesta (2014[1922][e]). As Uri Gordon (2006, p. 178) puts it, explaining all the loopholes in place for effective dissent, without enforcement ‘decision becomes a fuzzy concept and can as easily be seen as a matter of consultation and arrangement’. As moral pressure on minorities can quickly turn into installing inequalities on webs of mutuality, it is often explicitly guarded against (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 318). Not having recourse to sovereignty means that even majority voting would have to be founded on consensus; it means, in other words, that

we must find mutually satisfying resolutions or else suffer the consequences of ongoing strife. This is an incentive to take all parties’ needs and perceptions seriously, to develop skills with which to defuse tensions and reconcile rivals. It isn’t necessary to get everyone to agree, but we have to find ways to differ that do not produce hierarchies, oppression, or pointless antagonism.¹⁸³ (CRIMETHINC, 2016c)

In defence of consensus processes, it could be argued that the disgruntled find ways to sabotage execution of what was decided even in bureaucratically enforced organisations, let alone in those which are not. Shared enthusiasm in following the norms or pursuing the goals once they are *finally* set tends to compensate the time taken to generate wider agreement¹⁸⁴ (SAGI, 2015; CULTIVE RESISTÊNCIA, 2022, p. 316). Hijacking the process by blocking a proposal¹⁸⁵ means ‘things can get ugly’, as one can ‘throw the group into havoc

¹⁸² See also Editora Descontrol (2016a, p. 125).

¹⁸³ See also Falleiros (2017, p. 204).

¹⁸⁴ On “sabotage”, see Graeber (2013a, p. 8) and, more tangentially, Bayat (1997, p. 58–59). See also La Escuelita Zapatista (2013?[b], p. 7) on the process of forbidding alcohol in Zapatista territory.

¹⁸⁵ See the discussion in section 5.2.1, around page 216.

at any point’, but it can be crucial for the process itself as it ensures that the association’s ‘fundamental principles’ are easier to safeguard, as well as that no one’s input goes unheard or gets dismissed without engagement¹⁸⁶. It is ‘not to be done lightly’, but for that very reason induces responsibility in individuals and faith among them: ‘it’s a little like handing everyone who walks into the room a hand grenade, just to show you trust them not to use it’ (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 310, 330–331). At any rate, in most consensus processes people ought to explain their reasons for blocking, even gather support from at least another agent before bringing it up. Blocking tends to be respected when it concerns an organisation’s function (the “fundamental principles” behind it); otherwise it tends to be dismissed by recourse to qualified majorities (GRAEBER, 2013a, p. 8).

More importantly, consensus is indeed a *process*. ‘Proposals are worked and reworked, scotched or reinvented, until one ends up with something everyone can live with’, wrote Graeber (2004, p. 85). ‘Coming to a decision is just the final step’, and if the ‘spirit’ of the procedure is respected, ‘the exact form of that final step’ (e.g. majority voting) ‘is not all-important’. However, consensus is not ‘just’, not even ‘primarily’, a ‘way of coming to a decision’; it is not the ‘most efficient’ way, even if it is ‘most likely to produce the wisest decision’. It is rather a patterning of relations so as to emphasise ‘mutual respect and creativity’, to ensure ‘no one is able to impose their will on others and that all voices can be heard’ – so much so that at times ‘it might be better not to reach a decision at all’¹⁸⁷ (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 303–304, 318). Consensus is the basis for most decision-making processes in Rojava¹⁸⁸ (EDITORA DESCONTROL, 2016a, p. 121; KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, chap. 9) as well as among Zapatista communities, which hold meetings ‘with the whole community on important issues and decisions’ so that people discuss something ‘until the issue is resolved or until people feel they have been heard and are ready to end’ (IAF, 2020[2009]).

This pattern enables each one to understand not only one another but oneself. Harkening back to the discussion in section 5.2, in the process of finding out what each one is willing to do (or is refusing to do), one works through what each one *is* (or “is becoming”), and how people can self-organise differently in response to the way people’s drives are (being) ordered.

¹⁸⁶ Tangentially, see also La Escuelita Zapatista (2013?[a], p. 22).

¹⁸⁷ See also Cultive Resistência (2022, p. 67–68).

¹⁸⁸ With the exception of military endeavours, but even then leaders are elected, constantly and frequently rotate, and are subjected to critique from subordinates as mentioned above; ‘commanders do not have special privileges, live with the soldiers and are not exempt from maintenance jobs, such as digging trenches’ [Os comandantes não têm privilégios especiais, convivem com os demais milicianos e não estão isentos dos trabalhos de manutenção, como cavar trincheiras.] (EDITORA DESCONTROL, 2016c, p. 141).

This is a way to put in practice the “universal” drive to value all individuals, but is not just about each person *as* an individual: people also have the opportunity to express motivations they bring from other relations, shedding light on any possible collective imbalance implicit in particular courses of action (e.g. racist decisions being contested although the racialised are a minority, or even a single person). ‘In the real world’, notes John P. Clark (2013b, p. 187), ‘an anarchist who finds it necessary to reject the will of the majority is much more likely to base that rejection on the good of the community than on the sovereignty of the ego’.

Consensus, John P. Clark (2013b, p. 186) continues, ‘is based on recognition of the fallibility of majorities and of the dangers of social pressure and conformist impulses’. The first point relates to limited consciousness as explored in the previous section; a proposal might become majoritarian precisely because it acquires such a level of non-specificity that, if implemented, would do harm by neglecting real-life complexity; minorities must be able to prevent such bulldozing, influencing a plan of action so as to make it work for them as well. Graeber (2009, p. 305) postulated that majority voting — or at least its underlying competitive perspective — structurally harms this process by setting an incentive to make an opponent’s idea look bad, to make their arguments ‘seem stupider than they really are’. In consensus, since the opponent can just block a one-sided proposal, ‘the incentive is to always look for the best or smartest part of other people’s arguments’; everyone is encouraged to ‘come up with a compromise, or synthesis’. In consensus processes, John P. Clark (2013b, p. 187) complements, ‘it will sometimes be necessary to continue dialogue when it might have been cut off by majority vote’. Indeed, for anarchists there is a risk people might not even ‘try to express [their] opinion, as [they] know [they] will have no chance to put it into practice’; people are ‘driven into apathy’ by homogeneity, the ‘ultimate imperative of any [majoritarian] procedure’, causing the loss of ‘human intelligence and sensibility’, of ‘the complexity and diversity of human needs and desires’ (CRIMETHINC, 2016a). Reaching a consensual solution, John P. Clark (2013b, p. 187) clarifies, ‘in no way implies that differences in outlook will completely disappear’ or be made ‘less likely to occur’; in fact, ‘the respect for diversity’ inherent to the process should instead ‘encourage and reinforce such multiplicity’.

This actually *improves* the odds of a minority going along with a majority; of the “final step” being “not all-important”. A social environment experienced as pleasurable and fair, with peers genuinely interested in one’s viewpoints and contributions, making efforts¹⁸⁹ to accommodate

¹⁸⁹ For Graeber (2009, p. 93, 287–288, 312), consensus ‘operates on a kind of institutionalized generosity of spirit’ in the sense that it is ‘a matter of basic principle’ that one ‘can’t question a person’s motivations’ — only

and include, leads to caring for one's peers and the principles that constitute the institution that binds all together. Solidarity becomes an effect of prioritising the group's motivations because the group works well when it comes to respecting diversity. Conversely, too stubborn a demand for unity creates institutional vulnerability: hierarchical organisations might co-opt agents who are constantly asked to give up their needs and desires, promising individual or factional satisfaction in exchange for weakening anarchistic structures¹⁹⁰. Of course anarchists could argue this is short-sighted and self-defeating; a story as old as colonialism and capitalism, at least¹⁹¹. However, if one is not socialised by *evidence* of social creativity in favour of diversity, one is asked for self-sacrificing loyalty in exchange for hypocritical utopian hope – to choose the “lesser evil” – which is bound to minimise the differences between alternatives¹⁹². At the very least, agents might break up in ways that erode the higher-level conditions that promoted freedom in their closer, lower-level relations; in other words, this leaves people more vulnerable to the emergence of sovereign dynamics regardless of external meddling.

The federative and consensus-building practises of anarchistic non-Western institutions is a huge reason why anarchists are inspired by them. Discussing traditional Métis culture, Tawinikay (2021[2018]) speaks of ‘decision making as a participatory process, based on consensus’, with groups meeting through delegates every spring to ‘negotiate territories, form new agreements, and redistribute resources’. In traditional communalist African societies, write Mbah and Igariwey (1997, p. 29–30), people ‘reached major decisions through consensus, not by voting’; leadership ‘developed on the basis of family and kinship ties’ mostly around the factor

‘their reasoning’. This points to this acceptance not being a collateral effect of any structural formality, but something that must be actively produced by people's conscious efforts: ‘it is [every]one's responsibility to give [others] the benefit of the doubt for honesty and good intentions’.

¹⁹⁰ The Crimethinc collective (2008) makes vital points on this issue when discussing “snitching”: ‘there is no surefire formula for determining who will turn informant and who won't’, but historically ‘the movements with the least snitching have been the ones most firmly grounded in longstanding communities. [... Most] North American radicals from predominantly white demographics [...] are involved in defiance of their families and social circles rather than because of them[, and so] it takes a powerful sense of right and wrong to resist selling out. [...] Healthy relationships are the backbone of such communities[...], as] unaddressed conflicts and resentments, unbalanced power dynamics, and lack of trust have been the Achilles heel of countless groups’.

¹⁹¹ The grassroots anarchist theatre scene in early-20th-century Brazil was full of such class-struggle cautionary tales (VARGAS, 2009; LOPES, 2022), which would later feature in the progressive professional scene, one of the most famous ones possibly being the 1958 play *Eles não usam black-tie* [They Don't Wear Black Tie], by Gianfrancesco Guarnieri.

¹⁹² For anarchists, a major issue of continually conforming to a system that can only offer a “lesser evil” is that since the system continues to produce “evil”, there can always be a worse scenario that pushes into not only resignation but *support* for an option that is worse still than what was the lesser evil last time there was a choice. As Dominique Misein (2021, p. 4) neatly puts it, ‘by dint of making calculations to weigh between evil and evil, a day could come when one places one's very own life on the scale: better to croak right now than to continue to languish on this earth. It must be this thought that puts the weapon in the hand of the suicide. Because one plugs one's nose in order to vote for the benefit of power, one ends up no longer breathing’.

of age, but even if ‘Elders presided at meetings and at the settlement of disputes’, they hardly did so ‘in the sense of superiors; their position did not confer the far-reaching sociopolitical authority associated with the modern state system, or with feudal states’.

Amborn (2019, p. 141, 158, 160–161) gives a thorough account of many anarchic African cultures’ decision-making procedures and mediation processes. ‘Proceedings can last for days, weeks, or even months, with interruptions’; a ‘quick trial by majority rule or decree is impossible’, as ‘no voting procedure exists that would allow one group to defeat another’. Indeed, he notes that ‘if consensus appears out of reach, the moderator may break off discussion, but not at his own whim; instead, he must justify his action’¹⁹³, and ‘the assembly must agree with the disruption’. He adds that consensus is ‘more than a compromise between conflicting interests for the sake of which discrepancies are set aside’, for ‘well-considered insights, assessed through argumentation, are required’. Particularly remarkable is his observation that ‘time is set aside for careful reflection to avoid the pressure to conform’. One may ‘sacrifice one’s own point of view in favor of comprehensively grounded considerations’, but this is facilitated by a justified feeling that all parties’ viewpoints ‘regarding a suggested plan for future action or conviviality [have] received adequate consideration’. The difference between “unanimous voting” and the principles of consensus is shown clearly in the following, also ethnographic observation among the Malagasy notion of “agreement”, which goes

well beyond that implied by the English word, since it is not limited to assent to some specific proposition, but can refer to a more general state of concord. When [people meet] to resolve a dispute [... they] are always saying “I won’t agree unless...” [...] — even though they haven’t been asked to agree to anything. What it means is that the speaker is dissatisfied with something, and wants everyone to know [they are] not to be considered in a state of accord with [their] fellows until the cause of [their] dissatisfaction has been addressed. The aim of deliberation was to reach a conclusion that everyone could agree with. (GRAEBER, 2007, p. 70)

Regardless of the decision-making method employed, libertarian organisation is also fundamentally about *decentralisation* (LANDAUER, 2010[1895], p. 2; KROPOTKIN, 2000[1910], p. 4; FERGUSON, K. E., 1984, p. 206; GORDON, U., 2006, p. 171; SHANNON, 2012, p. 285; CLARK, J. P., 2013b, p. 186, 271; LA ESCUELITA ZAPATISTA, 2013?[a], p. 15; CULTIVE RESISTÊNCIA, 2022, p. 57). ‘Questions about process’, as researched by Uri Gordon (2006, p. 166–167), ‘include asking whether something needs to get “decided on” at all, and if so, by whom and in what kind of setting’. As Graeber (2013a, p. 9) wrote, the notion that ‘it’s crucial to get approval

¹⁹³ I am not positive in this passage the mediator’s gender is important to his depiction of circumstances or not, so I have not “gender-neutralised” this quote as I have done with others in this thesis.

from everyone about everything’ is ‘stifling and absurd’¹⁹⁴; indeed, ‘consensus only works if working groups or collectives don’t feel they need to seek constant approval from the larger group’, and ‘if initiative arises from below’ even to request wider discussion on things that concerns everyone¹⁹⁵. ‘The very unwieldiness of consensus meetings’, he adds, is supposed to discourage people ‘from taking trivial issues’ to a large forum¹⁹⁶.

Furthermore, as seen in the previous section, thinking and acting must be closely knitted — hence the relevance of discussing the *setting* of discussions (MINTZ, 2013[1970], p. 205; PRICE, W., 2012a, p. 317). To have working groups waiting for external directives and mindlessly obeying them is to not only devalue local autonomy and knowledge, responsibility, and trust, but also to conform to a command-obedience pattern¹⁹⁷ (CRIMETHINC, 2016d). ‘By choosing not to participate, or to do so only passively, in certain social decision-making processes (which is very different from being excluded from them)’, Bertolo (2021[1983], p. 8) pondered, ‘an individual is able to take a full part in those which interest [them] most’; that one’s life will be affected, even strongly conditioned at times, by the activities of others — hopefully in a good sense, although mistakes are also part of our relations — does not, as *also* seen in the previous section, necessarily mean one is being dominated. The ease with which one can enter committees, contest them from the outside and disobey, improves the odds of preventing any specific group from getting away with setting imbalances (GRAEBER *et al.*, 2020, chap. 24). Decentralisation means allowing for ‘different, even conflicting, decisions’ at ‘different points’ in a network, encouraging ‘a multiplicity of decision-making spaces pervading all moments of life’ (GELDERLOOS, 2016, chap. 1):

Why is the formalized, masculine space of an assembly more legitimate than the common kitchen[...]? Why is it more legitimate than the hundred clusters of small conversations and debates that take place [...] on a small scale, allowing people to express themselves more intimately and more fully? Even if we participate in every formal decision, are these the same decisions we would arrive at in spaces of comfort, spaces of life rather than of politics? Is it possible

¹⁹⁴ See also Rugai (2010).

¹⁹⁵ As the Weelaunee Defense Society Outreach Committee put it, ‘climate change and ecocide are happening to all of us. [...] The preservation of a habitable earth requires we all fight for individual places. There are no “outside agitators” on planet earth. Each of us everywhere has a stake in the prevention of the destruction of a forest anywhere’ (for context see section 5.2, around note note 126 on page 205).

¹⁹⁶ See also John P. Clark (2013b, p. 272) and Crimethinc (2016a).

¹⁹⁷ Responding to Marxist arguments for keeping not only the wage system but wage differences during the Spanish Revolution, Mintz (2013[1970], p. 112) writes that ‘the real issue is not the worker’s incentive but [their] power’; quoting Nelson P. Valdés, he posits that ‘low productivity, absenteeism from work and so-called indiscipline are not the outcomes of a lack of consciousness[...], but the direct consequences of [distributing] social benefits but not [...] power. Since the workers do not make the decisions, they feel no responsibility. Just as before, they receive their orders from on high’. See the discussion on productivity and efficiency in section 4.3.2 (around page 159).

that our formal selves become a [...] manipulation produced during a few boring hours of meetings that is used to control us during all the other moments of our lives?¹⁹⁸ (CRIMETHINC, 2016b)

The issue, again, is that working together on these premises requires actually agreeing to do it¹⁹⁹ — and the dilemma is reached once more. For some anarchists, it is perilous to consider these premises as requiring an assembly’s “stamp of approval”, since that can imply the same institution can also revoke that stamp (CRIMETHINC, 2016c, 2017, p. 151–152, 155–156). On the other hand, to not participate in such a space can be interpreted by federated fellows as a spiteful refusal to engage, especially in contexts in which unity is understood as paramount (e.g. to ward off statist aggression²⁰⁰) (KINNA, 2012d, p. 317). Even without a “clear and present danger”, however, refusing to participate in what amounts to dialogue and deliberation can defang libertarian activity, allowing conformism to creep in, even if by omission. And as already discussed in section 4.3.2²⁰¹, those who find ways to fulfil institutional goals regardless of the disengaged might acquire imbalanced power.

In the end, despite the *risk* of taking “official spaces” ‘more seriously’ than warranted (CRIMETHINC, 2016b), this is only a risk, not a foregone conclusion, especially if the point of attending assemblies and being careful about their structure is to create space for continually and critically assessing the worth of current associations and their constitutions. Anarchists can congregate not to create ‘governing bodies’ but to foster ‘spaces of encounter’, occasions ‘without prescriptive authority, in which people might exchange influence and ideas, forming fluid constellations around shared goals to take action’ (CRIMETHINC, 2016c, emphasis removed):

congresses of an anarchist organisation, though suffering as representative bodies from [...] imperfections, are free from any kind of authoritarianism, because they do not [...] impose their own resolutions on others. They serve to

¹⁹⁸ On this latter point, see the discussion about “obeying one’s self” in section 6.2.1 (around page 290.). See also Levine (2002[1974], p. 66), Uri Gordon (2006, p. 196–197), Springer (2011, p. 537–538), Crimethinc (2016d, 2017, p. 149, 163), and Gelderloos (2016, chap. 1), as well as Kinna, Prichard, and Swann (2016) on how Occupy Wall Street’s “Spokes Council” served as ‘a constitutional check and balance on the General Assemblies’. Tangentially, see also Cochrane and Monaghan (2012, p. 125).

¹⁹⁹ For Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 16), ‘there’s always at least two levels of a real-life game: the level governed by rules, and the level where you are negotiating what exactly those rules are to begin with’. In that sense, anarchists want to influence this “meta” level, so as to refuse to accept the rules emerging from a contest between imbalanced powers. In a situation structurally marked by inequalities, indeed, it is ‘impolite to talk about this’, as ‘rules are established indirectly’ (see also note 204 below).

²⁰⁰ On Marxist aggression against the communes during the Spanish Revolution, see PRINCIPLES... (1958, p. 8–9), Valls (2005, chap. 1, 3, 10), and Solomon (2015). Tangentially, see Knapp, Flach, and Ayboga (2016, p. 111–114).

²⁰¹ See the discussion on “meritocratic sensibilities” around page 169.

maintain and increase personal relationships[...], to coordinate and encourage programmatic studies[...], to acquaint all on the situation in the various regions and the action most urgently needed in each; to formulate the various opinions current among the anarchists and draw up some kind of statistics from them — and their decisions are not obligatory rules but suggestions, recommendations, proposals to be submitted to all involved, and do not become binding and enforceable except on those who accept them, and for as long as they accept them.²⁰² (MALATESTA, 2014[1927])

In all these debates, context illuminates the paths forward not only in the sense of immediate circumstances — if ‘the cops are corning right at you’, or ‘when there are a lot of working people who just don’t have the time for long meetings’ — but also in the sense of identity, and thus history. Consensus might be helpful when a group is ‘seeking commonality’, that is, ‘trying to see’ if there can be ‘some sort of common ground’ (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 304–305), which is itself sought so that people can do more together than if they were fragmented²⁰³ (RECLUS, 2016[1886], p. 45; WARD, 1982[1973], p. 49; ERVIN, 2009[1993], p. 24). However, when more solid commonality is *already* established, and in institutions explicitly formed for contention against dominating agents, people are more likely to benefit from majoritarian voting; a solution “everyone can live with” might even be one that does not go far enough²⁰⁴. Common ground and its attending structural mutual aid is also pursued so that people can disagree productively; so that the deeply recognised value of sticking together encourages boldness in disagreement. As already discussed at the beginning of and throughout chapter 4, ‘conflict is inescapable’, but ‘there may be some ascertainable level of “creative conflict”’, at which organisations can be built to ‘maximize the nurturance of people, their creativity and

²⁰² The sharing of information in these spaces should not be underestimated as a remedy to the issues with decentralised work, such as the “mirroring” effect according to the so-called Conway’s law of division of labour; see Pelton (2023).

²⁰³ See section 5.1.

²⁰⁴ There is much to be discussed here about the interface between prefigurative — see note 258 of section 5.3 on page 248 — consensus-based processes and (typically white middle class) respectability politics. As Graeber (2009, p. 332–333) noted, ‘the style of comportment expected’ at consensus-favouring militant meetings he took part in ‘was informed by[...] certain very white, middle-class understandings of sociality: the need to suppress unseemly emotions, particularly contentious or angry ones, the emphasis on keeping up the appearance of mutual civility, or of appearances more generally, while at the same time avoiding dramatic, performative gestures’. There was, he reflected, ‘a fine line between creating a “safe” environment for women and playing the stereotypical role of the gracious upper-middle-class hostess, who is expected to perform the endless work of smoothing over differences, and maintain a constant agreeable façade so as to keep the business of sociality running effectively’. In an interesting parallel, one could turn to Stokely Carmichael (2007[1969]) on ‘the biggest problem with the white liberal in America, and perhaps the liberal around the world’: their ‘primary task is to stop confrontation, stop conflicts, not to redress grievances, but to stop confrontation’; the liberal, he explained, ‘assumes a priori that a confrontation is not going to solve the problem’. There is a risk, then, that consensus processes may enable those obsessed with respectability politics (e.g. “blocking” black bloc tactics) even if, of course, the latter never needed such enabling to do damage — see e.g. Little (2023, p. 112–113, 186–188). See also hooks (2017[1994], p. 238–239), Black Orchid Collective (2018[2010]), Graeber *et al.* (2020, chap. 16), and Thistle Writing Collective (2021); tangentially, see also CRÍTICA... (2018[2014], p. 30).

autonomy’ (EHRlich *et al.*, 1979, p. 4). As Goodman (1961) wrote, the conflicts caused by ‘throw[ing] people together as they are — and how else do we have them?’ — are ‘a golden opportunity’, but only if ‘the give-and-take can continue, if contact can be maintained’²⁰⁵.

At the end of the day, the crucial issue is not discerning dominating nonconformity from the non-dominating kind — when unity is being demanded or secession is being planned — *only* to know what person, group, procedure, or institution to support. After all, this could turn into building structurally *superior* repressive action to deal with the “monstrous” other. As seen at the end of section 6.2.2, more than preventing domination from emerging within a majorly equal, cooperative and diverse network, people must be willing to help find and implement creative nonconformities that address the source of dominating or domination-supporting impulses.

To the extent that a social pattern helps agents organise toward this goal, it would be good to keep conforming to it: for anarchists, however, no single institutional apparatus or set of cultural norms can abstractly do so (KINNA; PRICHARD, 2019, p. 235); liberty does not require all to be anarchists, following (much less obeying) a homogeneous model. There are several organisational armatures (and intertwined material conditions) that could, *in (historical) context*, favour the protection or augmentation of freedom (MINTZ, 2013[1970], p. 128). Even within a framework of consensus, the result of deliberation can very well be that ‘many ways [of doing things] can coexist’ (EHRlich *et al.*, 1979, p. 15). Different analyses, concerns, and values can lead to ‘conflicting organizational requirements’ (CORNELL, 2016, p. 285), and it is these contradictions that give the anarchist tradition much of its dynamism. Importantly, anarchists want to never become ‘so enamored’ of a particular form of organisation that they ‘can be induced to countenance injustice in its name’ (CRIMETHINC, 2016e). Mutual critique helps militants sharpen their judgment of the adequacy of each alternative for their own context.

Judgment must encompass “content” as much as “form”; a racist rule or project arrived at by means of consensus process is still freedom-reducing (IBÁÑEZ, 2014, p. 16; BRAY, 2018, p. 105). Content and form are not entirely detachable from one another; however, rules and agreements can usually be interpreted according to sovereignty-seeking interests. Any essentialist identification between one specific way of organising and “freedom itself” can be turned into justification for the enforcement of a fixed model (SOUCHY, 2007, p. 20). As Magda Egoumenides (2014, p. 10) wrote, institutions ‘need to be tested continually on the basis of the

²⁰⁵ Historically, see Mintz (2013[1970], p. 41, 115).

problems they create'. When an agent denounces a relational pattern and states the need to reform it, liberty is in peril if the conversation is entirely shut down in the name of preserving it, even if the original claim is misguided (BAKUNIN, 1975, p. 216). Conversation, deliberation, mutual support in favour of consciousness-raising and finding creative solutions that respect balance and diversity: for anarchists, this is key and must take place. As Michael Bonavia (1985 apud WARD, 1991a, p. 59) put it, 'most organisations can be made to work if they are well understood and there is a spirit of cooperation. If the latter is absent, even the theoretically ideal organisation will not work'²⁰⁶.

In tandem with thinking about how their relations are patterned, anarchists then necessarily care about individuals: about their development into people who are more likely to make freedom-enhancing judgment calls and help one another in case of failure. In other words, if free individuals can only exist where our needs are met by mutual aid, 'true cooperative labor and true community can only exist where individuals are free' (LANDAUER, 2010[1895], p. 1). The alternative is the formation of individuals who 'report to work, fight in wars, [and] suppress [...] all non-conformists vulnerable to suppression'²⁰⁷ (LEVINE, 2002[1974], p. 65). The 'development of self-thinking individuals', as Parsons (2010[1890], p. 2) wrote, is therefore crucial²⁰⁸: 'no one can determine for us when a strategy of liberation has flipped into a form of entrapment'²⁰⁹ (NELSON, 2021, chap. 3).

Indeed, it is only in this context – and understanding that the development of “the individual” also means its increasing intersubjective “porosity” as described in section 5.2 – that one can appreciate what Kropotkin meant by his approval of “individual sovereignty”²¹⁰ (KINNA, 2016, p. 69, 190). He was not talking about the right of any individual to commit violence with impunity, but rather recognising (as perhaps a corollary to the anarchist anti-theological premise²¹¹) that anarchists must ultimately rely on the judgments of individuals²¹². Kropotkin's phrasing might seem strong, but is not exactly uncommon in the tradition. Despite the importance of collective identities, it would be strange if anarchists were so driven to defend what they do in the name of entities that do not have the same qualitative subjective experience as individuals; that of sadness, joy, anger, love. 'Society has no motive that does not issue from

²⁰⁶ See also Malatesta (2014[1922][j]).

²⁰⁷ See also Robinson (1980, p. 5) and Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 157).

²⁰⁸ See also Mintz (2013[1970], p. 32).

²⁰⁹ See also Crimethinc (2017, p. 157–158).

²¹⁰ See also Grupo de Estudios José Domingo Gómez Rojas (2017, p. 27).

²¹¹ See section 3.1.

²¹² See also Berkman (1929, p. 253–254) and Egoumenides (2014, p. 32–34).

its individual members, no end that does not centre in them, no mind that is not theirs'²¹³, wrote Charlotte Wilson (1886, p. 3). 'The development of the self' is 'at the core of freedom' for anarchists (HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 127), for trust must be had 'in the competence of the individual to make the best moral and effective decision for [them] and [their] community, an ability that increases with the level of social equality' (RUSCHE, 2022, p. 26).

This, of course, relates to the thaumatropic relationship between subjectivity and social structure discussed throughout chapter 5²¹⁴. Some anarchists emphasise one of the "still images" of the dynamic anarchist prospects: people 'can be outwardly enfranchised only in so far as they are inwardly free'²¹⁵ (WARD, 1991b, p. 63). But others worry about this leading to 'the liberal individualism of the classical economist', or to 'a sort of Epicurean amorality[...] similar to that of Stirner and Nietzsche'²¹⁶ (KROPOTKIN, 2000[1910], p. 9–10), which gets them to stress that the 'full development of individual conscience can only be guaranteed through [...] organization', in the sense of 'relations built on the principles of free association and federation'²¹⁷ (BALKANSKY, 1959, p. 21). Ultimately, 'far from being adversaries', more social strands of anarchism and their individualist counterparts 'harmonize with and complement each other' (ARMAND; LYG, 1957, p. 14). Libertarian initiatives may focus on institutions or on individuals, but both matter for building ever-stronger agency, for producing robust experiences of freedom: non-dominating latitude for nonconformity may require large and complex networks of interdependence, but these cannot promote liberty unless individuals are capable of judging and acting on these structures with this value in mind (FRANCO, 2007, p. 65). Whether for anarchists this circuit is an end in itself or a means to a better life — deemed better based on other criteria — is the theme of the next section.

²¹³ See also Malatesta (2014[1892][a]), Reclus (2013[1894], p. 123), Walter (2020[1969], p. 12), John P. Clark (2013a, p. 5–6), and Pelletier (2016, p. 14–16).

²¹⁴ The idea was introduced around page 178.

²¹⁵ See also Alfred (2005, *passim*).

²¹⁶ See note 15 of section 6.1, page 258.

²¹⁷ See also Kropotkin (2014[1914], p. 202–203).

6.3.3 Instrumental or intrinsic value

Liberty is a muscle to be exercised.^{ai}

Maite Amaya²¹⁸

I have lived for liberty and I die for liberty, for liberty is my life.

Kanno Sugako²¹⁹

Woodcock (1998[1977], p. 15–16) associates anarchism with Heraclitean philosophy, as it, too, posits that ‘the unity of existence consists of its constant change’^{aj,220}. Bakunin defined nature as synonymous with reality, i.e. ‘the totality of interactive and[...] developmental causality’; which meant not only everything currently in existence but all the ‘possible movement[...] which embraces all real things’ (MCLAUGHLIN, 2002, p. 103) — including the social world, ‘all its past, present, and future developments’ (BAKUNIN, 1981[1871], p. 193–194 apud MCLAUGHLIN, 2002, p. 104). The political consequences of this stance are clear: ‘if the entire universe transforms itself, why couldn’t human institutions do it?’^{ak} (SIERRA, 1996, p. 13 apud LIMA; QUELUZ, 2018, p. 9).

For supporters of sovereignty, of course, even if they could, it might be the case that they *should not*. They evidently agree that change is a fact of life — everyone dies eventually, randomness exists, accidents happen, so on and so forth. But that does not automatically determine our reaction to it, and for them it is important to not leave specific, abstractly defined relational patterns subject to impermanence (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 224).

Anarchists, in contrast, think the best way to cope with the unavoidability of change, especially with the conflicts that come with it, is to be open to meaningful societal transformation. The less able we are to deeply alter our “normal” self-understandings and operations, the more vulnerable we are to hurt and non-fulfilment. Tied to practical struggles, anarchism can be clearly seen as attaching *instrumental value* to freedom: it is important as a method to achieve certain universalistic aims, such as general welfare, true individuality, happiness, even love²²¹. Anarchy alone, wrote Malatesta (2014[1892][a]), ‘indicates the way in which, by experience, those solutions which correspond to [...] the needs and wishes of all, can best be

²¹⁸ Maricoteca, 2020.

²¹⁹ Goldman, 2018[1931], p. 319.

²²⁰ See also Kropotkin (2019[1892], p. 5), Goldman (2018[1931], p. 351), Graeber (2001, p. 50–53, 254), Cohn (2006, p. 32, 78, 157), John P. Clark (2013b, p. 97), and Kinna (2016, p. 105).

²²¹ See e.g. John P. Clark (2013b, p. 174).

found'²²²; it is 'the struggle' for liberty, thought Goldman (2009[1908], p. 3), 'not so much [its] attainment[...], that develops all that is strongest, sturdiest and finest in human character'.

Whether freedom (also) has intrinsic worth for anarchists is not exactly the same discussion as the one about prefiguration from section 5.3. If liberty is sought after, it must not be done in ways that contradict it. But this does not necessarily relate to why freedom is wanted in the first place. Would maximising non-dominating latitude for nonconformity matter for anarchists if everyone's "needs and wishes" were guaranteed with a low amount thereof?

Anarchists, refusing the (state-)national integration of the working classes (as seen in section 1.2), were often concerned about that possibility. They were of course sceptic about it, but rather than universal welfare, perhaps only enough of it was provided, or to sufficient people, to prevent anger from overflowing or the discontent from building majoritarian coalitions.

Today's society is split into the propertied and the proletarian. It can change by doing away the status of proletarian and by making each and every one co-owner of society's wealth; or it can change whilst retaining the distinction that underpins it but guaranteeing the proletarians better treatment. In the first case, [people] would become free and socially equal[...]. In the second case, the proletarians as useful and well-fed cattle, would resign themselves to their slavish condition and be happy with their kindly masters.²²³ (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][n])

Fearing that this contradiction is absolute, some anarchists are suspicious of reforms. Even if the intention is not reformist²²⁴, making life better within the current structure could weaken the drive for further transformation (GORDON, U., 2006, p. 137; CORRÊA; SILVA, 2015, p. 47; STIFFONI, 2021, p. 37, 42–43). However, there are at least three counterarguments to this position within the anarchist tradition. First, as discussed in section 6.1.2, anarchy 'will not suddenly appear like a miracle', as Ba Jin (2021 apud CORRÊA; SILVA, 2015, p. 47) put it; 'we have to move towards [it] step by step'. It is important to 'extend the range of what people feel entitled to' (CRIMETHINC, 2012), above all effective participation in common life (ERRANDONEA, 2003, p. 55). Secondly, 'anarchism did not emerge where the laboring classes were the most miserable and oppressed' (MOYA, 2015, p. 328); winning improvements for better living standards would help people focus on better organising their own lives, including mobilising to radically transform relational patterns (GRAEBER, 2018, chap. 7; O'BRIEN; BAKER, 2021, 29:54-30:48). Finally, and most importantly, *how* reforms are won matters immensely²²⁵

²²² See also Walt and Schmidt (2009a, p. 92) and Kinna (2016, p. 108).

²²³ Errandonea (2003, p. 46) basically argued that the second scenario took place during the 20th century.

²²⁴ See section 6.1.

²²⁵ See the discussion in section 4.2.2 (around page 124), as well as Kinna (2019c, p. 142).

(ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 161). Imposing reforms on the ruling classes rather than begging for or being gifted them is often thought of by anarchists as a good way to distinguish improved conditions for non-dominating nonconformity from increasing conformist pressures (MALATESTA, 2014[1922][n]).

For anarchists, being free(r) involves anarchising relations: structurally (culturally and materially) intervening so that everyone is satisfied with the consequences of balance, diversity, and mutual aid, or at least with the political and justice-seeking methods within these conditions. However, as discussed at the end of section 5.1, a (likely large) proportion of these people would defend the resulting anarchy *only* because (and insofar as) it enables the unrestrictions they value more fundamentally. Even if anarchists at times²²⁶ posit that all humans need freedom ‘as much as the air they breathe, the water they drink, the food they eat’^{al} (RODRIGUES, 1999a, p. 218) – that there is something essential about human drives for growth and agency, such that freedom is ‘an inviolable human characteristic’ (HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 123) – they are the ones for whom ‘liberty is as dear as bread’ (KROPOTKIN, 1907, p. 33 apud KINNA, 2016, p. 146–147). It could be that everyone would benefit from experiencing more (anarchist) freedom, and from growing to consciously value it once they do. But as things stand, the anarchists are those who consistently organise with the aim of living this kind of liberty.

It is thus not enough for anarchists ‘that a comfortable ease, a pleasant and well-ordered routine, shall be secured’, wrote de Cleyre (2017[1901], p. 3); ‘free play for the spirit of change’ is their ‘first demand’. For Bookchin (1982, p. 365), ‘mutualism, self-organization, [...] and subjectivity, cohered by social ecology’s principles of unity in diversity, spontaneity, and non-hierarchical relationships’, are ‘ends in themselves’²²⁷. There is something special in being an active, socially connected participant of the world; something unique in this shared power of creation, so radically different from being severed from the making of life in common and dragged into an illusion of choice – to choice *as* illusion (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 319; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 192). Something to be cherished even in the impossibility of fulfilling various needs and wishes, as exemplified by the fighter from Rojava in the first epigraph of this thesis²²⁸. Something worth fighting for; worth *dying* for. ‘We are willing to work for peace at any price’, explained Parsons (2010[1890], p. 3), ‘except at the price of liberty’.

²²⁶ Malatesta (2014[1897]), for example, does not project this value onto everyone: ‘if it were true that the engineer and engine driver and station master simply had to be authorities’ instead of ‘partners performing certain tasks on everybody’s behalf’, people would obviously ‘rather defer to their authority than make the journey on foot’.

²²⁷ See also Bookchin (2011, p. 9).

²²⁸ To be found on page 17. See also Michel (1901).

Anarchist freedom is hence useful, practical, but also represents something deeper about the quality of our relations, animating an entire political movement and its attending tradition. To end this deep dive into the concept, I am going to use “failure in complex systems”, as approached by David Woods and colleagues (1994) – yet another idea from the field of engineering – as a useful analogy in terms of explaining a notion of liberty valued for both its intrinsic and pragmatic properties.

As Josh Pelton (2021a, 3:55–6:59) didactically explains, when operating large-scale machinery, such as aeroplanes or nuclear reactors, people tend to notice and fix what looks broken, but ‘if you shut everything down every time you have to change a light bulb, you’re never going to get anything done’. Such systems are thus usually designed with enough margins for errors that allow them to keep running in spite of issues; ‘repairs happen when they’re necessary or when there’s a convenient opportunity’. Complex systems, then, run ‘in a constant state of slight disrepair’, with everyone weighing risk against their productive goals in nearly every decision. Sometimes, however, a combination of things left unfixed leads to catastrophic failure, hurting people. When this happens, it is common to search for a single cause that explains the disaster, especially if it allows for attribution of guilt (PELTON, 2021a, 5:30–5:41). “Human error” is quickly found, for even if the cause was mechanical, someone may e.g. have missed evidence that something was wrong, or not have planned adequately for it from the beginning. To avoid future issues, the ‘culprits’ might be exiled, punished, or simply retrained (WOODS *et al.*, 1994, p. 200–201, 210).

However, Woods *et al.* (1994, p. 200) explain that ‘there is no such thing as human error’. Different knowledge of events and context, or different goals, lead to different judgments of people’s performances. As Pelton (2021a, 4:59–6:07) summarises, human error is above all an artefact of hindsight bias, which recontextualises everything ‘as obviously contributing to [the disaster] in a way that any idiot should have seen coming’. There will always be ways to explain failure through ‘negligence or incompetence, just because in a complex system there’s always something going wrong’. Woods *et al.* (1994, p. 203, 208) are very direct: ‘whenever you are tempted to say, how could these practitioners (whether operators, designers, or managers) have been so blind or so ignorant or whatever, stop’. Erroneous actions should be only ‘the starting point for an investigation’, but one that inquires the system itself. ‘Human error is not some deficiency or flaw or weakness that resides inside people’, being rather a result of their interaction with the system.

On the other hand, there is a counterproductive way to focus on the system. One may restrict ‘the range of human activity’, perhaps by policing practitioners so they more ‘closely follow the rules’, or by introducing ‘more automation’ to ‘eliminate people’ from the process altogether (WOODS *et al.*, 1994, p. 199–201, 208, 210). But, as Pelton (2021a, 8:06–8:21) notes, adding ‘more moving parts to [...] take humans out of the loop’ mixes in ‘new variables that might fail’, and therefore tends to produce even more errors — as well as *judgments* of human error. ‘Emphasis on increasing efficiency generates more pressure’ on operators, write Woods *et al.* (1994, p. 201), and additional technology creates ‘new burdens and complexities for already beleaguered practitioners’, leading to ‘new modes of failure’.

In contrast, ‘higher reliability organizations tend to see failures as opportunities to learn and change’. Instead of using investigations to find out how *others* failed (presumably to punish them), they reward information flow so that better decisions can be made and issues are less likely to be overlooked (WOODS *et al.*, 1994, p. 209–210). Pelton (2021a, 8:44–9:03) summarises the best way to *prevent* critical failures as ‘empowering people to spot and fix [problems] as they crop up’, making the system ‘more adaptive and robust’. Elsewhere he notes that ‘repair is messy, idiosyncratic, unpredictable’, and unlike assembly lines, ‘not conducive to automation or rote procedure’; it is ‘artisanal work’, requiring ‘a sort of artistry, problem-solving, and expertise’, as well as ‘the time necessary to experiment’ (PELTON, 2022, 6:55–7:39). Hence empowering autonomous, decentralised repair ‘includes training and experience’, but also ‘providing ample resources and opportunities to patch things’, as well as ‘understanding what pressures we’re applying to individuals that will influence how they make those moment-to-moment decisions about safety’ (PELTON, 2021a, 8:44–9:03).

Anarchists can be seen as making a similar case, only sociologically, with the “complex systems” in question standing for “societies”, machines made of their own operators, who “run” themselves to perform the “task” of living their own lives²²⁹. Interaction in a sufficiently large group always involves conflict (i.e. “we” too live in a constant “state of slight disrepair”). Yet, people do not usually suspend every commitment they have as the result of a quarrel

²²⁹ The “bureaucratic” approach (“taking humans out of the loop”) would not even make sense, then, for the “technology” to be automated is... Humans. But it would if this is understood to mean removing what is particularly human from human interaction — turning people into machines. Moreover, another way the metaphor still makes sense is that, as seen in section 2.4, every sovereignty-based model is about the domination of a partial perspective disguised as a rational or general good (taking humans out of the loop could mean leaving fewer, specific humans *in* it). Case in point, artificial intelligence (AI), which could, in theory, take humans out of the equation, consistently entrenches current inequalities instead (LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 101–102).

until their relationships are perfectly harmonious. “Society” functions basically the same, and “rituals” provide “convenient opportunities” for “fixes”, that is, restoring people’s willingness to cooperate. Still, as just discussed in section 6.3.1, individuals can hardly analyse their relations objectively, considering the complexity involved. Problems might compound and combine until they cause harm on a greater scale.

Anarchists were not the first to point out that such harm is not a matter of “human error”. A lot of post-republican Roman thinkers, for example, basically said as much by focusing on institutional shortcomings instead of the issue of “virtue”²³⁰. However, as discussed in section 5.3, for anarchists the solution cannot be bureaucratic, that is, to “take humans out of the loop”. If after things go wrong we often ‘find precursor incidents and signals’ that could have indicated vulnerabilities, then improving social consciousness — ‘seeing and appreciating the significance of such precursors’ — should be the bread and butter of how we relate (WOODS *et al.*, 1994, p. 203). This would empower us to recognise potential problems and act directly on them (“to spot them and fix them as they crop up”) in a collective, yet decentralised manner, even if this means nonconformity (making the system “more adaptive”). Doing so requires education (“training”), sharing and rotating responsibilities (“experience”), and common access against the artificial scarcity of private property (“ample resources”) to combat relevant inequalities (“pressures applied on individuals that influence their decisions”) so that people retain their capacity to keep on “fixing” and (or; therefore) improving their relations²³¹.

Moreover, ongoing negotiation and constant adjustment is emphasised over “social blueprints” — and not even repair *over* creation but repairing *as* creative activity. As such, of course, it encompasses forecast, planning for robustness²³² (ANDERSON, W. C., 2021, p. 31); accounting for path dependence and keeping in mind the coherence between means and ends. Still, ‘obsessing over [the] initial moment of creation’ misses the point that, by fixing something, someone might in the future ‘think of how fun it was to see the insides of the thing, how [they]’ve learned the right way to [do something], and how [a] friend helped [them] out’²³³. These are all things that can not be designed into a system: people ‘have to decide how to restore its functionality[...] and that decision may change or subvert the values of the designer’ (PELTON, 2022, 10:07–11:49). Metaphorically, this is all about institutions that are constantly reassessed by confident, socially conscious individuals.

²³⁰ On the other hand, see Robinson (1980, p. 42) and Eric Laursen (2021, p. 142, 162).

²³¹ See also Day-Woods (2021, p. 152).

²³² Also known in engineering as designing for tolerance; see Pelton (2018).

²³³ See also Houston *et al.* (2016).

Sovereignty-supporting traditions too want to “avoid disasters”. But for them a disaster is not ensuring predetermined ideal outcomes — not, say, causation of harm. The point of conformist social engineering is to induce people to *not* mind being harmed; as Kathy E. Ferguson (1984, p. 20) writes, bureaucracies seek ‘to “tie up our loose ends” and reduce us to a reflection of the organization’²³⁴. Society then really begins to resemble an aeroplane or a nuclear reactor: an object tied to a specific purpose regardless of what kind of machine people might require now or next (the designer’s values *cannot* be subverted)²³⁵. Even further, people become expendable, replaceable parts, evaluated according to their “performance”: they are increasingly rendered, as mentioned in section 6.1, machine-like. ‘Civilization began by turning humans into slaves and will be complete when it has turned us into robots’, goes the proverb²³⁶ (DAY-WOODS, 2021, p. 49). To respect state representatives, ponders Gelderloos (2016, chap. XIII), ‘is to mistake them for reasonable human beings rather than the organic masks that an insatiable machine wears in order to extend its power’.

As seen in sections 6.1 and 6.3.1, every social system is self-reinforcing; there is always a measure of conformity oiling the social machine. But systems reinforcing non-dominating latitude for nonconformity are different²³⁷. They do what Francisco Varela (1979, p. 19) thought good institutions should: include in their own enacting a way to undo themselves. Anarchism, analysed Benally (2021a, p. xii), is a ‘dynamic politic that invites its very destruction yet maintains composure of core principles’; it tries to create what Day-Woods (2021, p. 64) terms a ‘healthy culture’: one that ‘doesn’t keep anything that can’t be destroyed’.

This being the system’s definition of success is the same as anarchists finding intrinsic worth in liberty. Balance, diversity, and mutual aid; “operating the social machine”²³⁸ so that its

²³⁴ See also Orwell (1970, p. 29 apud LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 115).

²³⁵ Bureaucratic propaganda says that a properly set hierarchical organisation can efficiently pursue any kind of human goal, embodying any type of value, on demand (GRAEBER, 2015b, p. 166). Anarchists contest this logic by pointing to the myriad ways in which hierarchical organisation embeds specific (non-anarchistic) values and (ideologically) limits what goals one can achieve through them (FERGUSON, K. E., 1984, *passim*; CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 77; GRAEBER, 2015b, *passim*, 2018, *passim*, p. 64; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 28). It could also be said that a machine’s design influences its uses — its *users* (THORNE, A., 2022c) — or that, as the adage goes, if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

²³⁶ See also Baudrillard (2001, p. 31), John P. Clark (2013a, p. 87, 2013b, p. 96), Digilabour (2019), Saul Newman (2019, p. 157–158), and Eric Laursen (2021, p. 130).

²³⁷ There is also the interesting phenomenon that, ‘in the 17th and 18th centuries[...] European settlers kept defecting to go live with Native American families, [but] almost no Native Americans ever defected to go live with European families. Europeans occasionally captured Native Americans and forced them to come live with them[, teaching] them English and [educating] them in Western ways. But almost every time they were able, the indigenous Americans fled’ (BROOKS, D., 2020). See also Kropotkin (2021[1902], p. 89–90) and Graeber and Wengrow (2021, p. 18–20).

²³⁸ There is, in fact, no need for *a single* system (“the” social machine). As the Zapatistas, who walk toward ‘a world in which many worlds fit’ (SHENKER, 2012; LA ESCUELITA ZAPATISTA, 2013?[c], p. 73), anarchists

outputs are somehow conditioned by everyone's safety and desires; averting "disaster", as in both harm and unfulfillment for individuals and groups *and* hierarchical dynamics that strip everyone of agency. Instead of humans becoming more like machines, the institutions that anarchists are intent on (re)creating are supposed to be more organic: balanced, open-ended, plastic²³⁹. 'Creation is always anarchist', wrote Diego de Santillán, and so are creators if they do not 'create in view of automating [themselves]' (GRUPO DE ESTUDIOS JOSÉ DOMINGO GÓMEZ ROJAS, 2017, p. 25). As Kinna (2016, p. 109) discusses regarding Kropotkin's vision, his defence of organisational proposals being 'always open to revision' and 'dissent' meant that society would be a 'living, evolving organism'.

This would also make it, to some extent, more unpredictable. Anarchists are often optimists (a *progressive* tradition, after all), at least in the philosophical sense that, albeit everything is in constant flux, there *is* something we can do about it. There is a way to connect with change, not to control it nor to submit to it, but to find equilibrium between acceptance and Promethean resolve. However, there is no way to abstractly predetermine where that balance should be. It is a moving target, evolving along with the rest of the universe. In their vacillations to find it, there is a risk that people – not only "others" but also oneself – will jeopardise the liberty they have. This can make us afraid of our own powers; of failure, be it moral, physical, cognitive, or organisational. It might leave us pining for 'a flight from a world of an overbearing personal responsibility' (ROBINSON, 1980, p. 82), as bureaucracies allow people to do: to the extent that I am powerless, I was just following orders, or there was nothing I could try to do; to the extent that I am powerful, I can pin the blame on those below me, or deny there is any issue to begin with (RECLUS, 2013[1894], p. 123–124; BERKMAN, 1929, p. 184–185; NASCIMENTO, R., 2002, p. 101; FISHER, 2009, p. 55; HONEYWELL, 2012, p. 123; GRAEBER, 2018, p. 194; LAURSEN, E., 2021, p. 105, 135). Whatever happens, my conscience can be numbed. There will likely never be a shortage of people willing to let me do that if they can too.

conclude that the challenge is to integrate multiple utopias (ELLISON, 2016, p. 226–227; SILVA, P. R. da, 2020, p. 283); see the discussion on mechanisms of value in section 4.3.2, especially around page 161, as well as the previous section. But then again, maybe at this point the metaphor is being stretched too thin.

²³⁹ See also Richard Morgan (2021, p. 17–18), as well as Nassim Taleb (2012, chap. 3) on the concept of "antifragility" (the property of something that gets better under stress; with conflict, amidst chaos, or every time it breaks), especially as something particular to 'everything that has life in it'. This dovetails with the observation, from the beginning of this section, that anarchists are interested in social organisation that helps people deal better with their conflicts, and do so by welcoming them and changing ("getting better") as a result. Contrast with enforced institutions whose indisposition toward transformation means they become susceptible to catastrophic failure: mechanic and inanimate rather than organic, they 'may be robust but cannot be intrinsically antifragile'. See also Sale (1980, p. 403 apud FERGUSON, K. E., 1984, p. 207–208).

Even if anarchists want to build social systems in which personal responsibility is shared, in which our agencies overlap and find room for effective coordination, they also warn others of conformist traps by reminding people that ‘to live freely is often to live dangerously’ (DAY-WOODS, 2021, p. 24). Still, going out on a limb to protect or increase non-dominating latitude for nonconformity is always worth the risk. For anarchists, unapologetic trust in creativity and solidarity gives life its most beautiful meaning.

7 CONCLUSION

*We have become entangled in words that are not our own.
They cut our tongues as we speak. They eat our dreams as we sleep.
This is a reluctant offering.*

Klee Benally ¹

*I thought
that freedom would come with age
then I thought
that freedom would come with time
then I thought
that freedom would come with money
then I thought
that freedom would come with power
then I realised
that freedom does not come
this is not something that happens to it
it is I who must always go ^a*

Sónia Balacó ²



CONCEPTS OF FREEDOM ARE INTIMATELY TIED to political traditions. By examining how anarchists connect the notions of balance, diversity, and mutual aid to the experiences they historically call liberty, I have conceptualised a distinct notion of freedom in the anarchist tradition of political thought.

Anarchists do not depart from the abstractly defined priority of particular unrestrictions and subjective perspectives; they do not want to discern the “right reasons” for the exercise of sovereignty. They want equilibrium between agents so that none can dominate. They work to combat inequalities that can be exploited, even engendering voluntary submission. But such balance is fragile if it is an order of competing, independence-seeking agents. Dealing with imbalances and disputes means rebellious, levelling solidarity, which is made much more likely if social and subjective diversity is valued.

Resiliently diverse and dynamic webs of interdependence create a situation of high shared agency. Even if they function as (more) constraints on action, they actively promote the reconstitution of (un)restrictions — rights, duties, boundaries, identities. On the other hand, patterns of aggression, or attempts to round selves up to a narrow ideal, may produce

¹ Benally, 2021b, p. 41.

² Balacó, 2015, p. 91.

unrestriction, but (re)produce conflict, diminishing all agents' capacities to mediate quarrels by meaningfully and creatively altering reality (either "external" or "internal", in the end two sides of a thaumatrope) voluntarily "from below".

Gaining freedom entails a prefigurative strategy of building, replicating, defending, and expanding relations premised on diverse interdependence. Liberty cannot be given, because it requires us to contradict the logic by which we can visualise some being freed by others. Freedom means a fundamentally different experience; a quantitative yet complex property of relations that is not about their utter "flexibility", but their "plasticity", a quality manifested in improved self- and social awareness, autonomous collective organisation, development and justice for all. As Kinna (2016, p. 145–146) writes about the core of Kropotkin's theory, 'freedom demanded the removal of institutional constraints that perpetuated domination and inequality', but the (necessarily restrictive) institutions that take their place, the 'codes' that communities adopt instead of them, must also remain 'open to challenge'.

Quite a few metaphors were used in this thesis, based on software development, house-building, children's toys, among others. This seems apt, as anarchists often employ metaphorical imagery when discussing liberty. However, seeing as it is held to permeate much of social reality, it is hard to tell when metaphor ends and literal allusion begins³. Should Graeber's (2015, chap. 3) discussion of games and play be read as a metaphor, or are we literally to conceive of human institutions as yet other games humans play⁴? What about Bookchin's (1982, p. 278) "ecology of freedom", seeing as we are, indeed, animals?

Then there are the 'hungry ghosts' of Buddhist cosmology (MORRIS, B., 2020); or *wétiko*, the Cree word for the 'collective mental condition that Columbus brought with him from Europe': a form of 'psychosis' that made aggression against other people and nature 'an imperative', 'produced mass conformity', and hindered its victims 'from being able to see that they had been infected' (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 197). Freedom would evoke images of safety against psychological disturbances that would get us to become obsessed about seeking imbalance, independence, stiffness of being — or comparable tropes of health and sanity. These are barely metaphors, not only because capitalist greed and colonial brutality are quite real, but in the second case it is a diagnosis, and thus as "real" as any in "the West" (HACKING, 2006; JUTEL,

³ After all, this is the case even with unrestriction, abstract at times (e.g. humanity unbound by randomness) but literal, too, or at least its opposite; shackles, chains, prisons (see the discussion in section 4.2.2, around page 127). I also pause at the notion that 'the Sumerian word *amargi*, which literally meant "return to mother", is 'the first recorded word for "freedom" in any known human language' (GRAEBER, 2011a, p. 65). When does metaphor as a translation method clarify, and when does it anachronistically obscure?

⁴ See the discussion in section 4.3.2 around page 159, as well as Sherry Ortner (2007) on "serious games".

2009). In fact, Kropotkin also ‘employed images and tropes [...] from bio-political science but takes them literally and makes them real in a radical political framework’ (MORGAN, R., 2021, p. 9). At any rate, if the idea of being determined by invisible forces best relates someone’s experience, does it matter if one makes this point “poetically” or “supernaturally”⁵?

Some turn to zeitgeist-capturing technology to make a point: for Guy Debord, writing during the rise of the television in 1968-ish France, people were being ‘rendered a mere audience to [their] own lives’ (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 258); for Eric Laursen (2021), the State is like an operating system. Others are more about translating relations and subjectivities in terms of physical contact: for Heckert (2012, p. 57), ‘to hold tightly – to shame, resentment, or any emotion or any story of how the world really is – is to be held tightly’, which ‘is not freedom’; ‘to hold gently is to be held gently’, which ‘is freedom’⁶. Yet others, like Reclus (2002[1898], p. 26), warn us that ‘proverbial formulas are very dangerous, for one happily acquires the habit of repeating them like a machine, as if to avoid reflection’^{b,7}.

I found it useful to employ the figure of machines at the close of the last chapter. It symbolises – as just noted in Reclus’s warning – unconsciousness even amidst action. It is properly thematic, since anarchism took shape as the industrial revolution took flight, the latter demanding ‘a kind of submission which invaded every recess of the worker’s existence’ (ROBINSON, 1980, p. 56). It echoes literal criticism of humans made to perform inhuman rhythms: when ‘the producer’ becomes ‘a mere particle of a machine’, people are robbed ‘of free initiative, of originality’, thought Goldman (2009[1910], p. 24); with ‘machine subserviency’, slavery ‘is more complete than [with] bondage to the King’. Indeed, industrial settings increasingly epitomised faceless, bureaucratic domination. In Brazil, as Margareth Rago (2014[1985], p. 265–266) writes, the exercise of power was transferred from authoritarian figures ‘to the interior of the machine itself’, as well as to a body of ‘specialised bureaucrats’ who imposed ‘rational’ norms on working-class families in a ‘moral crusade’ that was also carried out ‘in the name of science’^c.

⁵ One could argue that the latter entails the risk of misunderstanding causes. However, not only this could also happen with the former, only the complete picture of the argument, made in its language and context, can be judged. “Ghosts” can be responsible for people supporting capitalism, and yet their exorcism could require, say, redistributing land tenure and production facilities equally so that the haunted or possessed cannot harm others in catastrophic proportions. See also Richard Price (1996, p. 63–64).

⁶ See also Malatesta’s (2014[1892]) slight subversion of tropes of unrestriction when discussing an imaginary man with ‘limbs bound from his birth’, but who learned to ‘hobble about’ and attributed to ‘the very bands that bound him his ability to move’. Fiscella (2015, p. 217) does something similar when sardonically asking if the modern ‘shuffling from one cage to another’ – from the walled house to the locked car to the barbed-wired school or the surveilled workplace and back – ‘constitutes “freedom of movement”’.

⁷ See also Angela Maria Roberti Martins (2009, p. 140–142) and Morton (2021).

The problem is not exactly machines themselves. Analysing romantic tropes, which were somewhat influential among anarchists, Tresch (2012, p. 3-4) notes that ‘machines drew forth virtual powers and brought about conversions among hidden forces; they could be used to create new wholes and organic orders, remaking humans’ relationship to nature and renewing nature itself’. But there is a difference between creating and using machines on one hand and (metaphorically) being (absorbed into) one on the other — as in the parts of a computer, controlled by an operating system. If Hobbes himself described the Leviathan as ‘a huge machine’⁸ (NEOCLEOUS, 2021, p. 152), anarchists often attacked “mechanical” political reasoning, exploring what more organic relations would look like⁹ (RECLUS, 2002[1898], p. 80; FERGUSON, K. E., 2011, p. 163–164).

Of course, to heed Reclus’s warning, this metaphor is far from straightforward. If social machines are made of ourselves and our relational patterns, there may be a difference in how organic or mechanic they are, but the boundaries between creating, using, and being them are definitely blurred, to say the least. They represent the progressiveness of actually having some agency in reality, some recourse to our vulnerability as alive beings, but also the danger that our own power represents to the very liberty they are supposed to promote. Still, it does deserve attention given recent technological developments. For Shoshana Zuboff (2019, p. 8, 11, 96, 100), present-day global technology conglomerates commodify our behaviour, shaping it ‘at scale’ through ‘automated machine processes’ that intervene ‘to nudge, coax, tune, and herd [...] toward profitable outcomes’. Their market power protected ‘by moats of secrecy, indecipherability, and expertise’, we become mere ‘human natural resources’, ‘exiles from our own behavior’, like ‘native peoples [...] whose tacit claims to self-determination have vanished from the maps of our own experience’. ‘It is no longer enough to automate information flows about us’, she further explains; ‘the goal now is to automate us’. The normalisation of technocratic ‘surveillance capitalism’, along with our effective powerlessness, ‘disposes us to rationalize the situation in resigned cynicism’, creating ‘excuses that operate like defense mechanisms (“I have nothing to hide”): conformism ‘leaves us singing in our chains’.

Zuboff focuses on a kind of liberal domination that comes from setting rewards for and shaping the contours of competitive arenas, as discussed in section 6.1.2. However, the ways people are ‘exposed to big, impersonal systems or systemic fluctuations’ also relate to a kind of bureaucratic domination exercised by capitalist and state socialist republics alike: ‘to be able to

⁸ See also Richard Morgan (2021, p. 17–18).

⁹ See the discussions about anarchism and nature in sections 3.2 and 6.3.1.

function in modern society is to submit to demands for ID numbers, for financial information, for filling out digital fields and drop-down boxes with our demographic details'¹⁰ (MARCHESE, 2023). All this data production¹¹ enables automated decision-making, private and public, leading to what Álvaro Dias (2023) calls 'dystopian iteration': when the future, 'conceived as a straight line, without surprises or chances of being transformed', is 'reified by algorithmic decisions', contributing to the 'crystallisation of imbalances and externalities'^d.

In other words, if anarchists criticise the building of agency-crushing sovereign "machines" out of our own actions and dispositions, this is becoming less metaphorical as time passes. The automated, racist control of predictive policing, credit scores, and algorithmic bosses; advances in the emulation of human likeness and knowledge; the grim suffocation of war by drone surveillance and AI-targeted strikes; the invasiveness of pregnancy-guessing gadgets – this seems to strengthen the anarchist case for a rethinking of freedom if this word is at all to remain a guiding aspiration for the future. In the following sections, the specificity of "non-dominating latitude for nonconformity" is examined, as are its capabilities as a critical lens and potential uses as a benchmark for political action.

7.1 EVERYTHING IS WHAT IT IS

*Is it not true[...] that thought is loyal to itself
only when it moves against the incline?*

Pierre Clastres¹²

*Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things
are corrupt without being charming.*

Oscar Wilde¹³

As seen in section 4.3, anarchists have always insisted in the compatibility between liberty and equality. Some, however, have gone further. If Proudhon's (2010[1840], p. 159, emphasis added) 'liberty is equality' was a syllogism¹⁴, Walter (2020[1969], p. 5, emphasis added) was less equivocal: 'freedom and equality are in the end *the same thing*'.

¹⁰ This, of course, echoes Proudhon (1989[1851], p. 294) on the experience of "being governed" ("To be GOVERNED is to be kept in sight, inspected, spied upon, directed[...]"), which I refuse to quote in full because I am annoyed by how much of a cliché it has become (it is nearly academic "copypasta" at this point, really).

¹¹ See section 4.3.2 (around page 165) and section 6.3.1.

¹² Clastres, 1989[1972], p. 26, emphasis removed.

¹³ Wilde, 2000[1891], p. 3.

¹⁴ '... because liberty exists only in society', which requires equality.

This goes too far, for balance is essential but not sufficient. Apart from the ways in which equality can be interpreted as “sameness of something” until it becomes a fixed model to be imposed, there can be static equilibriums: equally powered agents that, for that very reason, cannot change their arrangements¹⁵ (BERTOLO, 2021[1983], p. 6). Anarchist freedom and equality are strongly related but are not literally the same thing.

The contemporary era of normative discussions of freedom in academia, arguably inaugurated by Berlin (2002[1958], p. 172), brought about a pernicious search for specificity: ‘everything is what it is’, he declared; ‘liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or culture’. For an adequate conception, one ought to explain how what one is describing differs from other concepts¹⁶.

This reasoning is problematic for many reasons. It is ‘a way of using essentialist language (telling the reader what things are) to disguise the underlying ideological message [...] (telling the reader how things ought to be)’ (FISCELLA, 2015, p. 160–161, 232–233). As John P. Clark (2013b, p. 59–60) writes, Berlin ‘does not defend [his] claim through careful analysis of etymology’ or ‘an examination of the history of usage and connotation in various relevant language communities’¹⁷; he ‘merely asserts his position repeatedly’, one that skews liberal as it fastens the notion of liberty to unrestriction, crowning white common sense rather than interrogating it. ‘Just as Berlin [...] can say that [his] opponents confuse the free society with one that promotes self-realization or some other value’, continues John Clark, ‘one could with equal justice (or injustice) say that Berlin [...] confuses] a free society with a noncoercive one’.

In any case, criticising a specific understanding of liberty does not have to mean denying the concept’s particularity. Doing so could simply reaffirm an unrestriction-based definition while reassessing its connection to other ideas (e.g. “freedom is also diversity because you can only be unrestricted in the relevant sense in a diverse environment”). This is not my argument. Balance, diversity, and mutual aid are not means for securing a form of unrestriction; the liberty they create is more than the sum of the parts.

Liberty is not justice, even if ‘freedom and social justice are inseparable’^e (FABBRI, Luce, 2016[1998], p. 61). Unfreedom is arguably unjust, but specific situations may be adjudicated by sovereign forces to relatively satisfying ends. Anarchists might deem this a rare occurrence; certainly not one sovereignty begets. The distinction remains nonetheless. Freedom is not

¹⁵ See section 5.1.

¹⁶ See also Michael Taylor (2000, p. 142).

¹⁷ See e.g. Fiscella (2015, p. 396n1019).

mutual aid nor diversity either. Oppressors can help one another, and ‘solidarity for its own sake is the stuff governments are made of’ (FARROW, 2002, p. 18); social and subjective variety, in turn, can be patterned in particularly static, segregated, dominating ways¹⁸. Liberty is not participation by itself either. A cog participates in a machine; a voter, in an election. Freedom is not security nor responsibility, despite what these might do to one’s relations or how more of them, or a more solid version of them, can result from more freedom¹⁹. It is not happiness or perfection either. In fact, it can be quite demanding, and thus frustrating (KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, p. 80). Like the movement that sets a thaumatrope in motion, it pulls agents in opposite directions, calling for both bravery and tenderness, inciting us to confront and to reach out, to question others but also oneself²⁰.

This is not to say that conceptual precision is useful to discern what to trade off when one wants anything other than freedom. On the contrary, a precise definition is meant to clarify which values are compatible with it (i.e. what *tends* to increase as liberty also does) and which are not. But this, of course, returns us to the importance of traditions, since not only liberty but *all* values will tend to be defined differently in each one.

Political traditions, however, are not incommensurable. Anarchists obviously put a premium on their own concept of freedom, but others, too, can experience and even value it. Republicans and Marxists, each in their own way, try to promote shared agency by going against the domination of corruption and (or) capitalist greed. Liberals, as extensively examined in section 6.1.2, tend to look favourably on uniqueness and change, attempting to foster nonconformity via the weakening of restrictions. These discourses come close to defending anarchist liberty. Iris Marion Young’s “together-in-difference”, for example, puts her directly in the path to libertarian internationalism (KINNA, 2020b, p. 5). Anarchists have long maintained conversations with heterodox Marxists, even to the point, as noted in section 1.1, of Walt and Schmidt (2009a) categorising some notable Marxists as part of a “broad anarchist tradition”. When the Perseu Abramo Foundation (2017) published data indicating that residents of São Paulo’s slums intensely held the ‘liberals values’ of ‘individualism, competitiveness, and efficiency’, others, like economist Marcio Pochmann, concluded something different about the findings, claiming that ‘this segment of the population is much closer to the anarchist perception than to the liberal one’^f (FACHIN, 2017).

¹⁸ See note 47 of section 5.1 on page 187.

¹⁹ See sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 on participation and responsibility, as well as section 4.2 on security.

²⁰ On the other hand, as the Brazilian socialist Antonio Candido put it, being free can often be more tedious than heroic (SADER; BUCCI, 1988).

Still, definitional and practical divergences remain. From the point of view of these traditions, anarchism is about e.g. forms of personal or collective autonomy or singularity, which must then be traded off for what they call liberty. Anarchists, in turn, understand the allure of unrestriction, and can endeavour to have any form of it. Indeed, as explored at the end of section 6.1.2, social life is organised through regular restrictions and unrestrictions, and so decision-making tends to focus on their merits. But no particular configuration of unrestrictions is freedom — anarchism is about replacing attachment to specific unrestrictions with liberty. Decisions on what to institute as rights and duties must be contextual and, precisely for the sake of freedom, remain plastic with regard to non-domination.

Hence what counts as freedom matters partly because of the value commonly attributed to the word in all progressive milieus. Whatever it is, it will tend to be emphasised in practice. Even before it is, however, it changes our very perception of reality by reframing how we conceive of what we experience.

7.2 A CRITICAL TOOL

*Can you think of a more depleted, imprecise, or weaponized word?
[...] “Freedom feels like a corrupt and emptied code word for war,
a commercial export, something a patriarch might ‘give’ or ‘rescind,’”
[a friend] wrote. “That’s a white word,” said another.*

Maggie Nelson ²¹

*What we must do [...], as libertarians, is unmask
this constant intention these days to instrumentalise liberty
in order to exercise new forms of domination. ⁸*

José María Fernández ²²

If the anarchist point of view shaped the common sense understanding of freedom, some daily analogies would certainly seem odd. Responding to “are you free Friday night?” might have nothing to do with obstacles to accepting an invitation. “Gluten free” would be a somewhat confounding label. Within a capitalist system, why does not having to pay for something make it “free”²³? While costlessness is a deception, there might be a “free lunch” after all, in the sense of communal food provisions that do, for anarchists, increase freedom.

²¹ Nelson, 2021, introduction.

²² Fernández, 2017.

²³ The GNU Operating System often uses the common saying “free as in speech, not as in beer” to discuss free software; see e.g. <https://tinyurl.com/536h89xm>.

In politics, there are all sorts of things one would call free or unfree if this alternative concept were adopted. Writing for *The New York Times* regarding gun violence in the United States, Michelle Goldberg reflects on the despair of not being able to transform her surroundings:

Our institutions give [...] conservatives disproportionate power whether or not they win elections. [...] Trump, a president who lost the popular vote, was able to appoint Supreme Court justices who are poised to help overturn [restrictions on weapons]. It's increasingly hard to see a path to small-d democratic reform. And so among liberals, there's an overwhelming feeling of despair. [...] the most common sentiment is not "never again," but a bitter acknowledgment that nothing is going to change. [...] The real nightmare is not that the repetition of nihilist terrorism brings American politics to an inflection point, but that it doesn't. The nightmare is that we simply stumble on, helpless as things keep getting worse. (GOLDBERG, 2022)

For anarchists, this is a liberty deficit. Indeed, Goldberg (2022, emphasis added) comes close to saying as much as she mocks a more mainstream concept: guns are the leading cause of death for American children, she writes, but conservatives consider this 'a price worth paying for *their version* of freedom'.

What would unrestriction-based concepts of freedom, or liberty, be called, if not by these names? "Unrestriction" itself sounds too technical and, as discussed in section 2.3, too vague. Anarchists have often talked about the liberal chase of "licenses", and both republicans and Marxists could be said to emphasise "authority"²⁴ – although all three want both, judging the second based on their preferences regarding the first. One could, then, talk about personhood: having liberty is being, or living in conditions conducive to becoming, an independent individual, an integrated citizen, or an active producer. Non-interference, independence, recognition, (relative) invulnerability, control: all words that could varyingly describe unrestriction-based freedom without using this particular word.

Some of these sound somewhat conservative these days. In another column to *The New York Times*, Michael Tomasky (2022) complains that "freedom" belongs almost wholly to the right', who 'talk about it incessantly'. The centre-left "philosophical offence" he proposes, however, has nothing to do with questioning what, at the root of the concept, allows conservatives

²⁴ It is not uncommon to hear that anarchists are not against *all* authority, only the "unjustified" kind. This is traced back to Bakunin's (2009[1871], p. 18) comment on referring to the 'authority of the bootmaker' in 'the matter of boots'. To my mind, ziq (2018, p. 5) made the most persuasive correction of the record regarding this passage: 'Bakunin was trying to articulate the difference between expertise and authority, but did it in a confusing and roundabout way [...]. Expertise isn't hierarchical unless the expert is deliberately enshrined with authority. Being good at something needn't give you the right to use your craft to rule people. [Bakunin] made a poorly-worded argument 150 years ago, when the European anarchist movement was still in its infancy and the terminology was still being developed. It was a small part of a rough draft that he never completed, and it is often quoted without any context'. ziq (2018, p. 7–8) also discusses parenting, a topic around which authority is often invoked, in connection with Bakunin as well. See also Wilbur (2020[2016]).

to claim it. Writing specifically about the covid-19 pandemic, he wishes liberty to mean ‘the freedom not to get infected by the idiot who refuses to mask up’. This is still essentially about who sovereign forces are supposed to side with in a conflict. Covid denialists want license, and so does Tomasky; both appeal to authority to get it²⁵.

Covid-19 is a suitable topic for an exploration of unrestriction-based liberty as relatively conservative. More than two years after the first (attempted) lockdowns in Brazil, I was *still* wearing masks while grocery shopping, as “wave” after “wave” of infections painted a picture of castaways under stormy weather, adrift in the middle of the ocean. This pandemic helplessness represents, from an anarchist perspective as well as from one such as Tomasky’s, a freedom deficit. But for the latter the solution is more – only “better”, more “enlightened” – forced behaviour, which for anarchists is precisely the principle behind this global health failure²⁶ (INTERNATIONAL OF ANARCHIST FEDERATIONS, 2020).

Bureaucracies cannot be trusted to give up power, and for anarchists can even be expected to lie their way into more of it. This trustlessness contributed to suspicion around the effectiveness and the temporary status of anti-covid impositions. Non-compliance made for self-fulfilling misinformation: carelessness often led to spreading the virus and, as a consequence, an extended need for the measures, which then fuelled conspiracy theories²⁷. Even respected centralised decisions cannot account for the complexities of real life, which made for all sorts of cracks in the dam against viral waves²⁸. Fears of deportation or imprisonment

²⁵ In a sense, especially considering how Tomasky is quick to refer to those who do not wear masks as “idiots”, his victory actually involves giving up on engagement with the Other: he wants the sovereign way out of understanding and eventually convincing them. I mean, *I get it* – but anarchism helps perceive how this is rooted in a much more fundamental, longer-term sociopolitical issue of how we have been structuring our relations, which explains (but holds no hope for) this sort of choice in times of crises. I find Nelson’s (2021, chap. 4) words particularly fitting: ‘as a problem gets harder to solve’ (and in my metaphorical use of this quote I am thinking of all kinds of social divides in sovereign territories), ‘ignoring it becomes all the more tempting. Ignore it long enough, and eventually it becomes unsolvable. Giving up can then seem to deliver a measure of relief, in that it appears, at least for a moment, to liberate us from the agonies of our failing efforts. But such relief cannot last, as the unsolved problem will continue to create problems and cause suffering. This suffering rarely feels like freedom’. See the very last paragraph of section 6.2.2.

²⁶ See also Correia and Wall (2021a, p. 181): ‘we don’t live in a world remade by the plague; we live in a world made by police for the plague’.

²⁷ Trust in public institutions seems to be a key factor in compliance with “anti-covid” measures (SHANKA; MENEBO, 2022). Graeber (2020a) also said that ‘the places [...] closest to an anarchist situation have not done badly during the pandemic’ (in reference to ‘the Zapatista communities in Mexico’ and ‘Rojava’). This discussion, of course, refers to good faith attempts to handle the situation through restrictive policies. Anarchists have denounced the use of the crisis as an excuse to further the aims of dominating forces, which at times lapsed into misinformation territory too (LAURSEN, E., 2021, chap. I; VICENTE, 2020; METHEVEN, 2020; SO..., 2021; COLLETTIVO PPPIO, 2021; CONFEDERACIÓN NACIONAL DEL TRABAJO, 2022).

²⁸ About the interstices of nation-based measures, Everson Pereira (In press) writes: ‘the limits placed by the geopolitical fiction of borders are not enough to interrupt the path of what crosses through the chinks’ [os limites da ficção geopolítica das fronteiras não são o suficiente para interromper o curso de quem passa por frestas].

dissuaded many from getting tested or vaccinated; “just stay home” was tricky for the homeless, strenuous for people in abusive relationships, and nearly useless for hospital staff living with particularly vulnerable individuals (AGAINST..., 2022).

All “liberating” bureaucratic experiments, on the other hand, from basic income to eviction bans, came under attack as soon as elites thought they could get away with it, for they contradicted what governments are truly enacted to protect. Often described as needed for quick responses to crises, concentrated decision-making power creates conservative bottlenecks instead: during the pandemic, so much depended on so few elites, that their actions and inaction alike became single points of failure, harming local communities. ‘Far from producing an increase of productive force’, wrote Malatesta (2014[1892][a]), governments ‘diminish it’, as they ‘restrict initiative to the few[, giving them] the right to do all things, without being able, of course, to endow them with the [...] understanding of all things’. In Brazil, for instance, the federal government was fully committed to downplaying the disease and, once the crisis was impossible to ignore, to “go back to normal” as soon as possible, undoing the little it was forced to do – things that structural power imbalances often made states and cities unable to do on their own (VENTURA; AITH; REIS, 2021). As of July 2022, Brazilians had the second highest absolute number of notified deaths by covid-19 in the world: 11% of the total death toll, despite being 3% of the world’s population.

“Going back to normal”, or producing a “new normal”, is at the heart of the issue. Normalcy *is* the problem: the norm of legitimated violence; of placing profit and conformity over autonomous and diverse mutual care. As Niklas Altermark (2022?) writes, ‘responses to the pandemic also need to be understood as ways of protecting the ableist fantasy of independency and full functioning’. The notion of ‘risk groups’ in particular was often used to ‘reassure “normal” people that someone else will die’, a narrative that individualised “risk” in ways that obscured ‘our interconnectedness’. But even before this particular crisis, millions were already starving, or going to work sick anyway (with other illnesses, transmissible or otherwise) to feed themselves and their families, or getting sick from easily preventable diseases and the destruction of environments. Why, then, would the novel coronavirus make any difference in the long run?

The plague can come and go and the human heart may remain unchanged. [...] Hopefully we don’t go back to normal, because if we do, the deaths of thousands all over the world will have been for nothing. [...] We cannot go back to that rhythm, turn on all the cars, all the machines at the same time. It would be like converting oneself to denialism.^h (KRENAK, 2020)

No one was wrong to worry about how lockdowns would affect the economy; the issue is an economic system in which too few can safeguard their own health (or everyone's, really) without being left behind. But the difficulty is also in the narrower imagination linked to visions of freedom based on sovereignty²⁹. Everything else being the same, of course the absence of the SARS-CoV-2 menace makes the past seem desirable. But eradicating the threat demanded that “everything else” — the ways we related to one another — did *not* remain as they were. As Chilean anarchists wrote about the onset of the pandemic, they were dealing

with a state that prioritises social control measures over sanitary ones, putting the army on the streets as a first response; that tells people to “wash their hands” when in many territories we simply don't have water, as capitalists have robbed it for years; that tells people to “stay at home” after evicting families from camps and squats and throwing us on the streets; [...] with a state that, instead of socialising the beds of private healthcare providers, [...] rents hotels and convention centres to quarantine the infected, among other pro-market measures against public health and care for life.ⁱ (ASAMBLEA ANARQUISTA AUTOCONVOCADA BAHÍA DE QUINTIL, 2020)

Any kind of oppression we find ourselves involved with is interwoven with the dynamics of sovereignty, engendering a feeling familiar to most in the pandemic context: lacking empowered social creativity. This upsets us on a fundamental level, even many of those who are well accommodated in virtue of official “licenses”: they, too, can experience ‘a visceral feeling of rage and rejection against a system that seems both all-encompassing and monstrous’, but are immersed in ‘an official intellectual culture which can offer no theoretical explanation of why they should feel that way’ (GRAEBER, 2009, p. 260–261). Indeed, as briefly explored in section 6.1.2, anarchists are able to criticise even a form of domination ‘in which we are oppressing ourselves with the very things we desire’, producing ‘a world in which we know that we are ensnared in a system we feel scarcely able to change’ (JEFFRIES, 2021, introduction). An anarchist re-conceptualisation of freedom — to think of this dearly valued thing as something else — offers a way to name this political malaise. As Schulman (2016, conclusion) noted, those in ‘a place of Supremacy’ are ‘the least likely’ to rethink their conceptions, for they have ‘everything to lose: [their] inflated stature, the comforts of [their] life, the ways that [...] the people around [them] obey [them] in order to have a social role’. Perhaps a new understanding changes the value attributed to these things that the privileged have to lose — or, most importantly, that the downtrodden “normally” should like to have — in comparison with the kind of agency everyone has to gain.

²⁹ It was so hard to imagine a different form of sociability that governmental healthcare efforts were often framed as wartime mobilisations (MUSU, 2020; CHRISTOYANNOPOULOS, 2020a).

In a sense, then, anarchists connect with a universally accessible scepticism and uneasiness about freedom as defined in mainstream theory³⁰. It is not only that mainstream ideas condone hierarchy or forms of inequality, but that even progressive currents end up converting the yearning for social transformation – which anarchists work to institutionalise into a culture that respects this drive, that retains its energy for the future – into pressure for conformity to specific subjective and institutional models. The success of such projects of “freedom” is bound to produce what anarchists call unfreedom, manifested as feelings of despair, or at least cynicism, about affecting the way our lives are and will be lived.

This led Fiscella (2015, p. 273, 396), in his stellar exploration of subaltern experiences of freedom, to consider this concept hopelessly unrecoverable for the oppressed. For him, this white lie should be abandoned in favour of what they actually value: “(un)freedom” best described as having a ‘critical eye toward language’, ‘shouldering incalculable responsibility in community’, and challenging injustice by ‘struggling for [the] welfare of all’³¹.

My assessment contradicts Fiscella’s (2015, p. 171–174), for whom anarchist thoughts about liberty were ‘white minority views’. In this thesis, I have argued that they have instead meant something alien to the (basically white) unrestriction paradigm altogether; that they have implied, in fact, values just such as the ones he cites. As Jacques Ellul (2006, p. 163) put it, ‘liberty does not consist[...] in liberating oneself from others but in liberation with others to change society’s structures’. It is not within the scope of this thesis to judge the success of this endeavour so far, or whether anarchists should continue to pursue it or claim to promote “freedom” when doing so. However, the compatibility between Fiscella’s findings and “non-dominating latitude for nonconformity” speaks to how well the definition contemplates the worries discussed in section 2.5: this is effectively an anti-racist paradigm³².

³⁰ This is how Fiscella (2015, p. 55–56, emphasis in the original) describes C. Fred Alford’s efforts to understand the definitions and experiences of liberty among ‘largely middle class’ Americans in the beginning of the 21st century: ‘one of the things that struck him most was hearing them describe their feelings of imprisonment in a supposedly free society. *Less than half of the Americans he interviewed regarded the U.S. to be a free country.* The pursuit of the American Dream left many of them feeling caged [...]. This led them to define “freedom” as “power” (something they did not have). In contrast, their experiences of “freedom” were not equated with power so much as they were with feelings of escape, bonding with friends, and so on’.

³¹ This resembles Graeber’s (2001, p. 230) feelings that, given the power of ‘economistic ideologies’ today, the word “contract” has become ‘unsalvageable – there is no way to use [it] without assumptions about isolated individuals (usually assumed to be males about forty years old) coming to a rational agreement based on self-interested calculation. Those who think differently simply don’t have the power or influence to create new definitions in peoples’ minds, or at any rate, any significant number of them’.

³² Fiscella (2015, p. 227) also notes that while critical white theorists ‘are more quick to point out the logical inconsistencies in “freedom” or to pose an alternative conception, critical African Americans are more prone to challenge the distribution of “freedom” however it is defined’; in other words, whereas the first ‘search for a way to live with their own conscience, critical African Americans demand the means to live as equals’.

In fact, interesting parallels can be drawn³³, based on this understanding of liberty, departing from the concept of *quilombos*, briefly mentioned in section 5.1. Formed by people contesting domination, especially black slaves, they were struggles for spaces (“social” as well as territorial) that could sustain rebel nonconformity to spur transformation. Led by the most oppressed groups in a given context (... like Kurdish women in Rojava, or the indigenous poor in Zapatista Chiapas) but multi-ethnic in aspiration and practice (... like these regions again, like anarchist internationalist efforts, like the openness to difference in so many anarchic non-Western cultures³⁴), they were ‘ancestral technologies’ (“social, organic machines”) in the sense of weaving economic, cultural, and political patterns to solve practical problems – which included cooperating for equality and diversity³⁵ (SOUTO, S. S. d. S., 2021, p. 92–93). As the anarchist movement³⁶ would later do, they adopted the derogatory names given to them³⁷ (FUNARI, 1996, p. 31–32) and refused hierarchical methods to seek change: “loyal opposition” – as anarchists often describe parliamentary Marxists and social democrats, whom Zapatistas call ‘embarrassed right-wingers’^j (SUBCOMANDANTE INSURGENTE MARCOS, 2007); submission to “the enemy of my enemy” – which Rojava also refused; and organising for conquest – the refusal of which within indigenous resurgence movements Alfred (2005), for one, defends. Just as in Rojava the armies fighting to defend the network’s freedom are based on the principle that ‘all military activity is of a reactive nature’³⁸ (KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, p. 139), so do *quilombos* mean

to produce or reproduce a moment of peace. *Quilombo* is a warrior when it has to be. And also a retreat when fighting is not needed. It is awareness, it is wisdom. The continuity of life, the act of creating a happy moment, even when

Even if I am yet another white (albeit Latin-American) theorist putting forward an alternative conception, I do not think the anarchist concept I defined in this thesis allows anyone to live with their own conscience of inequality. I do think it is rather a means to buttress demands for the means to live as equals *through* a technical language of freedom.

³³ I am not the first to draw them; see e.g. Gomes (2021).

³⁴ See the discussion about “anarchist formations” in section 5.1 (around page 189).

³⁵ See also Richard Price (1996, p. 59–61) oh how some reported centralised institutions in *quilombos* are basically Eurocentric projections, often fruit of them being misled by the Quilombolas themselves; tangentially, see also Falleiros (2017, p. 203). At the same time, these were *not* spaces devoid of contradictions themselves. See e.g. João José Reis (1996).

³⁶ See the discussion in section 1.2 around page 26.

³⁷ Not only in Portuguese but also in other languages; the English equivalent to *quilombos*, for example, the term “maroon”, ‘derives from the Castilian *cimarrón*, initially applied to fugitive animals’ [deriva do castelhano *cimarrón*, inicialmente aplicado a animais fugidos] (FUNARI, 1996, p. 32).

³⁸ ‘Our theory is the theory of the rose, a flower that defends itself[...] Every being has to create methods of self-defense according to its own way of living, growing, and connecting with others. The aim is not to destroy an enemy but to force it to give up its intention to attack. [...] It’s a method of self-empowerment. [...] National armies serve the state, but they leave the people without defense’ (KNAPP; FLACH; AYBOGA, 2016, p. 139).

the enemy is powerful, and even when it wants to kill you. The resistance. A possibility in days of destruction.^k (NASCIMENTO, M. B., 2018, p. 7 apud SOUTO, S. S. d. S., 2021, p. 85)

The principles and structures of *aquilombamentos*, then, the contemporary, fragmented, thematic attempts by Brazilian black communities to make room for freedom anywhere they find themselves to be (SOUTO, S. S. d. S., 2021, p. 94), resonate with similar efforts by anarchists – in squats, communes, cooperative libraries, social movements – as well as with indigenous resistance aimed at protecting territories from market harassment. It is a resonance that refers to the fight for a liberty that, rejecting inequalities that engender racialisation, seek to overcome both exclusion (from the resources needed for the development of each agent in balance with all others) *and* assimilation into uniformity.

7.3 FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM

They put me in the world of the “sub” prefix, as sub-human, subaltern, submissive, but I chose to be subversive. [...] Yes I do dedicate myself to subverting this order and affirming myself as I am. I am what I am, and I reconstituted myself and found my voice and embraced my freedom among others. [...] The liberty of one is the liberty of all. [...] If a single person lacks freedom, you are not free at all. The freedom of private property [...] is not] the concept of freedom that gets us to a better place.^l

Andréa Nascimento³⁹

No one of the demands of life should ever be answered in a manner to preclude future free development.

Voltaireine de Cleyre⁴⁰

What the maximisation of this freedom entails in practice always depends on the circumstances (ROCKER, 2009[1938], p. 48; CORNELL, 2016, p. 287–288; CHELGREN, 2018). Anarchists do tend to develop “subcultures” in their time and place, like bohemian unionist printers or zine-making environmentalist punks. As Kinna (2019b, p. 112–113, 261–268) writes, ‘disentangling social order from the orders into which we are acculturated is a step towards anarchy’. But there is no narrow set of cultural codes dearest to anarchism (MONTEBELLO, 2002, p. 257), just like certain institutions are seen as generally *likely* to enhance liberty (as explored in section 6.3.2) but are not the endpoint of freedom themselves.

³⁹ Pfeil *et al.*, 2021, 32:08–32:18, 32:27–32:51, 1:49:08–1:49:38.

⁴⁰ de Cleyre, 2004[1907], p. 312.

‘Surely it is disingenuous to suggest that anarchization does not ask people to give things up’, Kinna (2019b, p. 271) also argues. But it is fair to say there are few absolutes. The issue is not so much the objects, appearances, activities, or terms in interpersonal agreements one might want (ALBERT, 2012, p. 328), but building a *licence* for them: attaching one’s selfhood so irrevocably to an order of motivations to the point of legitimising violence to *ensure* the relevant unrestrictions remain unshaken against objections.

Eating meat, for example, might be rejected for personal reasons by individuals who happen to be anarchists. But veganism is most related to anarchism because guaranteeing that the market is flooded with meat – something like “callous carnivorous licence” – means degradation and oppression⁴¹ (LIMA *et al.*, 2021). There is no general relationship between freedom and eating meat or not doing so, even if a majority of anarchists did one or the other, because liberty is less about individual choices than interpersonal relations (BLACK FLAG GROUP, 2021[1968], p. 30–31). ‘The desire to consume limitlessly’, which Kinna (2019b, p. 271) cites as an example of what anarchy requires giving up, is not really a problem if the object of consumption is safely abundant (one would think that limitless access to clean water is not too much to ask for). Complications begin if authority structures allow someone to not live directly with the bad consequences of their boundlessness (if there are any⁴²), or force only some to suffer when there is not abundance for all.

In other words, anarchists refuse to convert a pattern judged as desirable here and now into a doctrine for the future. Should people have unrestricted access to guns? For a liberal to remain consistent with their principles, they ought to ponder if that is included in the minimum area of personal liberties, applying the conclusion everywhere, anytime. Even a Marxist, “conditional” stance (liberating is whatever pushes everyone the hardest into a certain economic model) fixes an absolute reference for the varying decisions. Anarchists take contexts into account more radically. The answer is not going to be the same in Rojava, where a literal army of women emerged from a civil war to structure a feminist revolution, and in Brazil, where the relaxation of rules for acquiring weapons today would more likely worsen domestic violence (FERREIRA, 2019; MARQUES, 2022). Should there be “vaccine passports” during health emergencies? For a republican, it might be a matter of what the majority of a country wants, or what the current government decides to do (if constitutional); for libertarian socialists this is not enough context. Even if opposition seems to be more coherent for them (because it amounts

⁴¹ See also Wallace (2020).

⁴² On water consumption, see e.g. Knapp, Flach, and Ayboga (2016, p. 215–217).

to increased state surveillance), anarchists were much more vocal about it in territories with more illegal immigrants than in those with fewer such people, where contesting the measure could further threaten working class lives.

“Free speech” is another thorny issue⁴³. According to Stanley Fish (1994, p. 103–107), any purposeful activity can be contradicted by acts *and* kinds of expression (which are acts too, in the end); these must then be limited for the sake of the purposes. In fact, restrictions (cultural, at least) on speech are at all times constitutive of speech itself: without a ‘sense of what it would be meaningless to say or wrong to say, there could be no assertion’, and so “unrestricted speech” could only be a ‘primary value’ (i.e. above others) if what one values is ‘the right to make noise’. Anarchists often follow this argument in practice by focusing on the context of what is being said when weighing whether restrictions should apply. As Tariq Khan (2015) writes, ‘there is a difference between speech that is “offensive” and speech that is “oppressive[”]’. Anarchists have historically championed the right to express ‘uncomfortable and controversial ideas’, but racist expression — leading to e.g. legal oppression or lynchings — makes a space ‘not “uncomfortable,” but unsafe’. Anarchists, then, ‘have not allowed a liberal notion of free speech as an excuse to sit idly by while fascists spew hate speech’.

Clearly it is disingenuous to assume that muffling or repressing speech will always make the cause it represents more powerful⁴⁴. If that were the case, not only people would never attempt to publicise their political claims, the anarchist movement would have been immensely more successful at anarchising relations given the intense repression they have suffered⁴⁵. Still, simply restricting oppressive speech does not address its root causes, which are likely to continue seeding strife⁴⁶. Grievances, even based on hateful premises, need to be aired so that they can be identified and dealt with. This does not mean “anything goes” — especially not that everything should be able to be said without repercussions.

Key here is a distinction, explored throughout this thesis, between the restrictions inherent to social interaction — manifesting norms, established or to-be — and sovereign *punishment*. In anarchic contexts, agents’ reactions to one another[’s speech], invoking or conjuring values and rules, premises and prospects, are expected to lead to conversations about how and to what ends people (can) live and work together. Practical repercussions that force conflict mediation are the alternative to impossibly neutral quietism *and* hierarchical censure.

⁴³ I have written about this theme elsewhere, but without considering anarchism (SILVA, P. R. da, 2015).

⁴⁴ Even Mill (1955, chap. II) would disagree.

⁴⁵ See note 15 of section 1.1.

⁴⁶ See note 25 of the previous section.

An anarchist rethinking of the meaning of liberty along the lines of what was just argued in this thesis must mean that speech is (more) free not when it is (more) unrestricted⁴⁷, but when *people* are (more) free by virtue of the qualities of their relations. Expression can be formally unmolested and still (consciously or not) shaped at the source by all kinds of inequalities: free speech is more at risk, Khan (2015) argues, the easier it is to fire (and financially ruin) someone, to shun someone (into isolation), or prosecute someone (into financial, social, emotional, and possibly physical collapse). Likewise, decisions regarding what restrictions to apply on speech are made based on what will most likely *promote* balance, diversity, and mutual aid.

In the end, then, restrictions are always contextual with respect to non-dominating latitude for nonconformity (GRAEBER, 2001, p. 227), which also means they should not themselves emulate statist regulation — the prefigurative character of anarchist liberty can hardly be overstated. Furthermore, solutions should not be reduced to their “technical” dimension:

we cannot merely invent an economic scheme for settling, say, fights over where pollution will end up.[...] communities will have to [...] debate, compromise, and craft the best solution for all. [...] struggles concerning power can be mediated by structures, but structures are only the shell of a solution. They provide no guarantees, and ultimately such political problems require a material, social, and historical analysis of that situation. Inevitably we require more experiences, practice, and experimentation to address it beyond truism, vague generalities, and empty formalisms. (NAPPALOS, 2012, p. 306)

As Kinna (2019b, p. 208) explains regarding Kropotkin’s revolutionary project, there was a need to ensure not only that struggles effectively anarchised relations, but that people also had ‘the capacity to conduct protracted revolutionary campaigns’ in defence of such anarchisation. However, *life*, for anarchists, could be described as a “protracted campaign” against already existing or would-be rulers, bosses, lords. Anarchisation is meant to help people mediate their conflicts in ways that do not leave some wanting to install or reinforce sovereignty — and that empower everyone to deal effectively with anyone who tries. Anarchists will always and continually grapple with imbalances and dogmatisms, even if some circumstances are deemed better (freer) than others precisely due to the lower demands they present in this regard. This involves complicated questions about which restrictions and unrestrictions best serve the goal of maximising liberty *today*. Still, if anarchists cannot make ‘a revolution as [they] would like it’, wrote Malatesta (2014[1922][i]), ‘an anarchy extended to all the population and all the social relations’, rather than giving in to a kind of relativism that only ends up serving the powerful⁴⁸,

⁴⁷ See Sunstein (1993) and Torres (2012) on more “republican” interpretations of free speech.

⁴⁸ See also Graeber (2009, p. 450).

they should seek ‘the best that could be done in favor of the anarchist cause in a social upheaval as can happen in the present situation’.

Every blow given to the institutions of private property and to the government, every exaltation of [human conscience], every disruption of the present conditions, every lie unmasked, every part of human activity taken away from the control of the authority, every augmentation of the spirit of solidarity and initiative, is a step towards Anarchy.⁴⁹ (MALATESTA, 2014[1899])

Whatever these measures are in any given context may happen to be supported by liberals, republicans, or Marxists⁵⁰. Anarchists might support universal basic income, generic freedom of speech, gay marriage, publicly-owned, universal, abortion-performing health care systems, Western military aid for Rojava, laws criminalising domestic abuse, to name a few (FRANKS, 2012, p. 63; WILSON, M., 2011, p. 91; GRAEBER, 2016, 2018, chap. 7). But these would be defended from an alternative angle, just as ‘anarchist critiques of capitalism are different from’ Marxist ones and their criticisms of Marxism have ‘nothing to do with liberalism’ (EVREN, 2012, p. 305). As Cochrane and Monaghan (2012, p. 114) see it, working with or at least supporting ‘allies who may not share our organizing principles or prefigurative ideals[...] does not require compromising our principles’, for it is possible to ‘balance vigilance towards centralizing tendencies[...], avoid the exclusionary and reactionary divisiveness that limits movement building, and work short-term with allies who share’ the limited goals of a specific campaign⁵¹.

Their reliance on context, however, which prevents them from answering each question the same way according to a fixed view of the future to be achieved, can make them look inconsistent⁵². They certainly will be: as Reis and Gomes (1996, p. 26) argued about Quilombolas, radicals are ‘not always able to behave with the certainties and the coherence normally attributed to heroes’^m; freedom, Barbara Fields (1985, p. 193 apud REIS; GOMES, 1996, p. 25) wrote, ‘was no fixed condition but a constantly moving target’.

⁴⁹ See also John P. Clark (2013a, p. 53).

⁵⁰ It is unlikely, however, that any are also shared with ideologies such as fascism. At the very least, that would give anarchists pause. One interesting case is eugenics, a word many anarchists once adopted *while, however*, defining “race” as “the human race”, setting its sights on improving the health of *all* individuals, and being inclusive rather than punitive in terms of methods (LIMA; QUELUZ, 2018, p. 5; MORGAN, R., 2021, p. 127–128). Still, this terminology understandably vanished from the movement over time.

⁵¹ See also Prada (2018[1906][b], p. 52), Bonomo (2007, p. 128), and Danton (2011[2007]), as well as Leval (1958, p. 8) for an example of anarchists failing to perform this balance – but Cornell (2016, p. 289) for an example of success.

⁵² To turn to Emma Goldman’s life again, Kathy E. Ferguson (2011, p. 299–300) notes that over time she learned not to worry so much about maintaining ‘a consistent political position’ so that she could work on ‘the maintenance of human relationships and the gathering of resources to continue the struggle’.

For Gago (2020[2010], p. xxii), a way of thinking based on ‘ambiguity’ and ‘transformations’ helps understand the ‘oblique and convoluted paths and effects of Indian resistance’. Something similar could be said of anarchism. What anarchists want to do with the partial changes they come to support; the way they fight for the very meaning of what is instituted⁵³; all of this promotes an ambitious, yet still pragmatic, fight for freedom. ‘If you keep the idea that the contradiction is there, you will never seek a synthesis, or desire the unity of a state’, said Cusicanqui; ‘we must discover the path of freedom and self-organisation beyond central powers’ⁿ (CRÍTICA..., 2018[2014], p. 12). There is always room for further education, participation, variety, problem-solving innovation – not in the sense of inclusion in or tweaking an unshakeable model but of allowing less dominating ones to flourish (VENTURA, 2000, p. 198; MCLAUGHLIN, 2002, p. 31–32; SALLES, 2005, p. 57).

This contrasts with the perspective of sovereignty-supporting progressives. Since the unrestrictions they favour are seen as liberty itself, they may conclude there is no further progress to achieve. For Reclus, progressives winning elections may feel like a victory, but the same laws that ‘sanction the liberty that has been won’ also ‘limit it’, determining ‘the precise limit at which the victors must stop’, which then ‘becomes the point of departure for a retreat’ (CLARK, J. P., 2013a, p. 76–77). This is why statist progressive in-fighting such as the following sounds very ironic to anarchists:

Bentham and Paley and their ilk were reformers, committed to having the state cater for the freedom [...] of the whole population, not just [...] of mainstream, propertied males that government had traditionally protected. So why would they have weakened the ideal of freedom so that it is not compromised by having to live under the power of another, only by active interference? My own hunch is that it was more realistic to argue for universal freedom if freedom was something that a wife could enjoy at the hands of a kind husband, a worker under the rule of a tolerant employer, and did not require redressing the power imbalances allowed under contemporary family and master-slaver law[...]. It may be for this reason that Paley [...] described freedom as [non-domination...] as one of those versions of “civil freedom” that are “unattainable in experience, inflame expectations that can never be gratified, and disturb the public content with complaints, which no wisdom or benevolence of government can remove[.]” (PETTIT, 2013, p. 174)

Libertarians often hear about their prospects being “unattainable in experience” (RODRIGUES, 1983, p. XII); and they could (and did) likewise say that e.g. republicans think it “more realistic to argue for a liberty that a people could enjoy under the rule of good politicians,

⁵³ State-managed, obligatory, universal schooling, for example, may be better than the privatised kind, even if it strengthens some kinds of oppression (KINNA, 2019b, p. 112–113); I have analysed this sort of conundrum in more detail, along with colleagues, elsewhere (SILVA; BEAKLINI; OLIVEIRA, 2020). For a really interesting analysis of mistakes made by anarchists in this regard, see Cornell (2016, p. 287).

judges, and capitalists” (TOLSTOY, 2019[1900], p. 28; A PLEBE, 2007, p. 24; CRIMETHINC, 2016a). For anarchists, ‘authority means something quite different during the death throes of absolutist states than it does today, in societies with advanced and impersonal bureaucracies’ (PRICHARD, 2019, p. 73) – which anyone can recognise, of course, but not necessarily use as a reason to rethink the definition of freedom. ‘Merely to repeat venerable republican and liberal clichés’ without taking into account new circumstances, writes John P. Clark (2013b, p. 119, 125), ‘results in the ideological legitimation of the present system of domination’; in a veritable ‘republic of rationalizations’. This is why it seems so difficult, today, to deal with corporate domination (HOYE, 2021), managerial feudalism (GRAEBER, 2018, p. 199), or the technocracy described in the introduction to this chapter. ‘Anarchism is an open and incomplete word, and in this resides its potential’, writes Hartman (2021, p. XV–XVI). Whatever oppression is emerging today – both brand new kinds and refurbished remnants – *will* claim compatibility with unrestriction-based liberty, which anarchists are, with this concept, able to transcend.

The anarchist *movement*, or the participation of anarchists in non-specific organisations (assemblies, unions, campaigns, etc.), may be “incoherent” – but the *tradition* gains consistency over time through the way their disagreements revolve around certain shared commitments. If anarchists are not attuned to their own tradition in that sense, to the lessons of their history as it pertains to the concepts that can be abstracted from their struggles, they may more easily fall into rhetorical traps dictated by their very circumstances (WILBUR, 2020[2016], p. 5). Case in point: the common sense around freedom today makes it is easier to fight for unrestrictions; against e.g. tangible acts of aggression, or senseless bureaucratic impediments to initiative. But in some cases liberty *might* require more or reworked restrictions instead. An inability to fight for the establishment of rules, rather than for their abandonment, could leave anarchists less able to resist certain liberty-aggravating dynamics; less able to solve problems for which “letting each individual do whatever they want” is not a solution⁵⁴ (KRØVEL, 2010, p. 33; HAMILTON, 2012, p. 42–43). As things currently stand, anarchists have to go to great lengths to explain that what they want is different from the use of bureaucratic apparatuses to *impose* rules (as with freedom of speech); to disentangle collective choice from a contractual notion of being forcibly bound to whatever was chosen. That is why such an important part of the anarchist struggle is educational, (counter)cultural, intergenerational – and it involves coming up with persuasive metaphors and stories that adequately convey what they are really fighting for.

⁵⁴ Tangentially, see also Emba (2022).

There is no desperation over the possibility that we may not at any point — let alone soon — be perfectly, “globally” free⁵⁵ (BLACK FLAG GROUP, 2021[1968], p. 29); no frustration that would impact how anarchists think of freedom, at least, or convince them not to want more of it. In fact, they contend that the binary ‘choice between anarchy and domination is one that dominators insist upon in order to justify the status quo’ (KINNA, 2019b, p. 112–113). A quantitative notion of freedom helps in that regard. ‘I used to think that if the revolution didn’t happen tomorrow, we would all be doomed to a catastrophic (or at least, catatonic) fate’, confessed Kornegger (2002, p. 30); not only she does not believe that any more, she thinks ‘we set ourselves up for failure and despair by thinking of it in those terms’. Setting us up for success in getting closer to anarchy — in experiencing more freedom — requires ‘more than just believing that we can win’, as Alston (2007[2003], p. 7) wrote: ‘we need to have structures in place that can carry us through when we feel like we cannot go another step’. Places, in our minds, beside each other, as well as in dwellings and ecological niches, to nurture non-dominating latitude for nonconformity.

I say the question of how much freedom we can hope to experience is wide open. We will never know how far we can go if we are not willing to go as far as we can.

⁵⁵ Even if, for Kropotkin, ‘the principles of fluidity that inspired anarchist organising were far better suited to global realities than the state was’ (KINNA, 2016, p. 101). Moreover, not only we may never be “completely” free, each one may never feel completely free as an individual. As Nelson (2021, chap. 2) opines, ‘ambivalence about responsibility for our own freedom does not mean we are stupid, self-destructive, incapable, or desirous of harm. It means we are human. And part of being human is not always wanting every moment of our lives to be a step on a long march toward emancipation and enlightenment’.

QUOTES IN THEIR ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

Iwona Janicka [...] suggests that the question is not so much one of “who can speak?” as it is of “how best to listen.” [...] human beings are enabled to speak (rather than simply emit meaningless noise) by the efforts of listeners to “translate” them.

Jesse Cohn¹

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

a. Automatic online translation from French. Notre appel doit être entendu par tous ceux pour qui la liberté n’est pas un vain mot.

b. Lyrics were adapted so as to follow their rhymes as much as possible.

Nossa gente tão cansada de sofrer

Vamos juntos descobrir o que fazer

Se o governo e os patrões só nos oprimem

Acumulando riqueza e poder

Ação direta é a arma que nós temos

Pra fazer justiça pra viver

c. [O anarquismo pode ser resumido na] imagem do vulcão: [...] o discurso anarquista pretendeu, sempre, ser a cratera mais alta que expelisse a fome e a fúria mais profunda; uma erupção vulcânica que atingisse as nuvens e derretesse neves, repondo as coisas e [as pessoas] em novo equilíbrio.

d. O anarquismo esteve/está presente em todas as Américas, em praticamente toda a Europa, na maioria dos países da Ásia, em grande parte da Oceania e em parte significativa da África.

e. El anarquismo no es una enseñanza exclusivamente teórica, a partir de programas desarrollados artificialmente con el fin de definir el camino; es una enseñanza trazada a partir de la vida, a través de todas sus manifestaciones[...].

f. na questão da liberdade, as pessoas se identificam.

CHAPTER 2 – THE UNRESTRICTION PARADIGM

a. Lyrics were adapted so as to follow their rhymes as much as possible.

Pois se a liberdade hoje se parece com um cigarro

¹ Cohn, 2022.

Ou com o carro mais potente do mercado

Me desculpe, mas as bolas foram trocadas bem na sua frente

E você nem se tocou; pagou, comprou, levou assim mesmo o seu atual presente: Felicidade completa como uma boca sem dente

b. A defesa intransigente da necessidade do desenvolvimento tecnológico para a libertação é, aqui, contrabalançada pela consciência de que as estruturas, peculiares à natureza impõem limites à sua absorção total.

c. Urge certamente a volta, mas não a volta à natureza e sim a volta dentro da natureza.

d. são razoáveis; procuram conquistar o poder público, e por conseguinte, movem-se na órbita das nossas leis

e. ¿Acaso es posible que los débiles impongan la ley a los fuertes? Y si no son los débiles, sino los fuertes, los que están en condiciones de imponer la ley, ¿no se da en tal caso un arma más a los fuertes contra los débiles?

f. *estadolatria / estadolátrico*

CHAPTER 3 – REINTERPRETING THE ANARCHIST APPROACH

a. O anarquismo é o viajante que vai pelos caminhos da história, e luta com os homens tais como são e constrói com as pedras que lhe proporciona sua época.

b. En todo caso, pues, importa ante todo que nuestro ideal sea, si no aceptado, al menos conocido por un número lo mayor posible de nombres, y eso no se hace por la teoría: [...] nuestras ideas deben ser presentadas de una manera tangible, más palpable de lo que están en los folletos más populares.

c. Tem-se o costume de dizer que Proudhon faz alarde de um conhecimento jurídico estreito e hipertrofiado. É verdade que Proudhon fala em excesso de direito, do Direito, de contrato... etc. Por um lado, foi prisioneiro da linguagem de seu tempo. Pois, se continua a empregar o vocabulário tradicional do seu tempo (o que é devido, por um lado, á sua vontade de evitar uma linguagem esotérica que o afastaria dos seus leitores-trabalhadores), é em acepções absolutamente diferentes, no quadro de um sistema por sua vez interpretativo do capitalismo e projetivo de uma nova organização social.

d. Para teorizar com eficácia é imprescindível atuar.

e. O militante anarquista vale mais pela coerência de suas atitudes, de seu modo de proceder, no lar e na atuação pública, do que por sua capacidade de escrever ou discursar.

- f. O ideal nasce da realidade não dos sonhos.
- g. Isa cita sempre suas leituras, num tom coloquial e quase de conversa com os leitores ao mesmo tempo em que descreve situações cotidianas observadas pelas ruas da cidade[...] a partir de uma perspectiva da mulher proletária.
- h. O uso das primeiras pessoas do singular e do plural são recorrentes pois, para elas, escrever é uma extensão de seus corpos em luta e de suas ações em resistência.
- i. Lyrics were adapted so as to follow their rhymes as much as possible.

Eu não estou interessado em nenhuma teoria

Em nenhuma fantasia, nem no algo mais[...]

A minha alucinação é suportar o dia a dia[...]

Amar e mudar as coisas me interessa mais

j. ... a natureza sempre tende ao equilíbrio, à busca de pontos de estabilidade.

k. ... nós, revolucionários, [...] devemos conseguir compreender com perfeita retidão e sinceridade todas as idéias [sic] daqueles que combatemos; devemos fazê-las nossas, mas para dar-lhes seu verdadeiro sentido. Todos os raciocínios de nossos interlocutores[...] classificam-se naturalmente em seu verdadeiro lugar, no passado, não no futuro.

CHAPTER 4 – BALANCE

- a. A anarquia é a ordem pela harmonia.
- b. ... momentos de certa harmonia, de equilíbrio de forças, quando determinado status-quo se forma e se mantém durante algum tempo, nada mais são que um resultado temporário dos conflitos.
- c. Nossa República possui milhares de reis.
- d. Un patrón en su fábrica suele ser un reyezuelo con sus ministros, sus aduladores, sus espías, suas lacayos y sus favoritas. No gasta dinero en pretorianos ni gendarmes, que dispone de la fuerza pública para sofocar las huelgas y reducir a los rebeldes.
- e. ... para os que estão no poder, o inimigo é o povo
- f. Ravachol [...] dizia que para que a revolução se realizasse, só faltaria “um empurrão”[...]. Para ele, a violência funciona como uma ferramenta para criar movimentos revolucionários, um gatilho, uma forma propaganda [sic] que, por meio da vingança, inspira membros das classes dominadas a ingressarem em um processo mais radicalizado de luta. A [fAu ...] sustenta, distintamente, que [...] uma das condições para o sucesso de uma insurreição é “o apoio das

massas[...]”. Para isso, é fundamental, antes de uma ação deste tipo, “um trabalho político prévio”[...]. Assim, a violência deve ser utilizada a partir de movimentos populares previamente estabelecidos, de maneira a aumentar sua força no processo de luta de classes; a violência [...] não sendo] um gatilho para criá-las ou a melhor maneira de realizar propaganda para atrair pessoas para a luta.

g. Veem-se aí, antes do mais, Heidegger e Schmitt: a “decisão”, a vontade sem conteúdo que também está no coração da política do Estado. [...] Admirar a violência e o ódio enquanto tais ajudará o sistema capitalista a descarregar a fúria de suas vítimas em bodes expiatórios.

h. E a competitividade é uma violência sem nome.

i. Que paz era aquela? [...]

A paz silenciosa do medo

que não quer abandonar nossos corações [...]

Dias de paz sem ter havido equilíbrio [...]

E não é paz a teu lado, é guerra:

a paz da morte

j. Orgulhoso e altaneiro com os súditos, invejoso com os vizinhos, o Estado é, no interior, a agressão, e, no exterior, a guerra. Sob o pretexto de ser o agasalho da segurança pública, é, por necessidade, desapossador e violento; com o pretexto de custodiar a paz entre os cidadãos e as partes interessadas, é o provocador de guerras internas e externas. Chama bondade à obediência, ordem ao silêncio, expansão à destruição, civilização à dissimulação.

k. é-lhes sempre necessário um povo mais ou menos ignorante, insignificante, incapaz [...] a fim de terem sempre ocasião para se dedicarem à causa pública e assim [...] o possam também explorar um pouco.

l. Ao passo que os capitalistas buscam o mercado pela intenção de lucro, os trabalhadores o fazem pelo medo da fome. E a igualdade jurídica não significa nada quando, numa relação de trabalho, se encontram dois agentes econômicos tão díspares em termos de força social (para a qual também conta a possibilidade de espera do capitalista e a urgência do trabalhador em sair do desemprego) — decerto o capitalista se imporá nessa relação.

m. Não há, em nenhum aspecto, em nenhuma morte na guerra territorial que a Amazônia vive, a ausência do Estado brasileiro.

n. nos congressos nunca se resolvem trabalhos que metam medo ao Estado[.]

- o. Toda melhoria, política ou social, só é concedida quando se torna perigoso, para os detentores da autoridade, recusá-la por mais tempo.
- p. Proudhon queria mostrar que [...] é preciso procurar, em permanência, as formas de organização social que permitem aos conflitos aparecer e aprender a suportar os estados de tensão.
- q. This source in Brazilian Portuguese has adapted “Asayîş” into “Asayish”. Original text: Querem que todos sejam capazes de praticar a autodefesa e de intervir em situações nas quais em outras sociedades só a polícia poderia fazê-lo. Logo, vê-se que o objetivo final é eliminar os Asayish como organismo.
- r. Eles querem o desaparecimento da burguesia, como classe privilegiada, mas não a morte dos burgueses.
- s. ... não é a divisão em ricos e pobres, exploradores e explorados, a primeira divisão, aquela que funda afinal todas as outras; é a divisão entre os que comandam e os que obedecem.
- t. Eis uma lei social [...] que se aplica não só a nações inteiras como às classes, às companhias e aos indivíduos. É a lei da igualdade, condição suprema da liberdade [...].
- u. Dirão [...] que são os maus que fazem mau uso delas. Então, elas não os corrigem? É porque são impotentes para isso. [...] Se uma ação é justa, mas fere o capitalismo, a lei deve puni-la, e os que estiverem de posse do poder não hesitarão em sacrificar a justiça à lei[...].
- v. ... se houver um estuprador em nossa comunidade. Por que o deixamos crescer?
- w. O feminismo de hoje confunde patriarcado com machismo. Esse é um enorme erro político que interessa a esse sistema de dominação.
- x. uma pessoa livre não obedece a ordens[...], mas atende a pedidos e/ou desempenhará suas responsabilidades sociais que considerar justas. Esse talvez seja o núcleo central do pensamento libertário.
- y. O escravo livre das algemas não conhece ainda a liberdade de que falamos.
- z. Não existe uma instituição que seja francamente, claramente autoritária[...] o poder não ousa mais ser absoluto ou só o é por capricho, contra prisioneiros por exemplo, [...] ou pessoas sem amigos. Cada soberano [...] está obrigado, ligado por precedentes, considerações, protocolos, convenções[...]: o Luís XIV mais insolente encontra-se emaranhado em mil fios duma malha da qual nunca se livrará.
- aa. A máxima igualdade é aquela na qual cada um possa exercer plenamente sua diferença.

- ab. Consiste en una ‘probabilidad’ compuesta por expectativas mutuas internalizadas — que se hacen comunes — las cuales configuran contenidos posibles de mandatos.
- ac. Socializar é tornar a propriedade e os instrumentos de trabalho, enfim toda a riqueza e o que a produz, disponível à sociedade, acabando com a exploração[...]. Mas, para o socialismo libertário[...] é preciso socializar o saber, a informação e todos os bens culturais. Mas, o que é fundamental, jamais haverá socialismo se não se fizer a socialização do poder[...].
- ad. os instrumentos de trabalho, as invenções representando um legado de gerações passadas e anônimas não podem constituir propriedade exclusiva de alguns homens apenas.
- ae. hubo un caso en que se posicionaron los compañeros en la tierra recuperada y se había dicho que iba a trabajarse de manera comunal, pero se vio que empezaron a surgir problemas desde ahí. Luego se accedió a que se parcelara [...], pero cada compa *no va ser propietario* de esa tierra, es propiedad del pueblo. [...] cuando uno es propietario de la tierra no hay lugar para todos, por ejemplo, [...] está esa costumbre de que el ejidatario hereda a su hijo menor, [...] y si tiene más hijos quedan afuera. Entonces la pregunta es: ¿dónde van a vivir sus otros hijos? Es una de esas prácticas que [estamos] aprendiendo a cambiar.
- af. Essa desigualdade nos é imposta pela natureza. Mesmo assim, num regime igualitário como nós queremos, essa desigualdade reduzir-se-ia muito para dar lugar somente às desigualdades de vocações, às diferenças de gostos pela variedades de ofícios e profissões[...].
- ag. Aquele que sabe mais dominará naturalmente aquele que sabe menos; e se existir entre duas classes apenas esta diferença de educação e de instrução, esta diferença produzirá em pouco tempo todas as outras.
- ah. Na história, os que desejaram dominar seus semelhantes sempre usaram a ignorância ou mantiveram na ignorância os dominados.
- ai. hacer anarquismo es poner bibliotecas.
- aj. Anarquia [...] é uma escola sem donos, tutores, hierarquias, elitismos[...]. Nas suas anotações [Nettlau] não distinguiu autores, colaboradores; cada um[...] fez o que pôde e sabia.
- ak. Portanto, para além de uma escolha, o indivíduo deveria ter condições de atingir a consciência livre e visualizar outras possibilidades de interpretação da realidade. Nesse sentido, a educação libertadora foi defendida como meio para alcançar autonomia.
- al. Essa mesma educação desenvolveria um tipo de consciência social, que estaria preocupada com o melhoramento da vida coletiva, fatores que desencadeariam condições tanto para que os

trabalhadores pudessem realizar a vislumbrada revolução quanto para manter o novo sistema proposto.

am. se dijo que las mujeres tienen sus derechos, pero si sólo saben del derecho pero no lo llevan en práctica ¿dónde están sus derechos? Así se vio la necesidad de que las compañeras tienen que trabajar y hacer también todo tipo de trabajo junto con los compañeros.

CHAPTER 5 – DIVERSITY AND MUTUAL AID

a. Although “hermanos” can be meant as “siblings of all genders”, I think it is quite clear they are talking about male relatives, and I therefore have translated it as brothers. Original text: tenemos la seguridad de que [...] has deseado [...] crearte una vida independiente para ti sola. [...] Queremos que tú tengas la misma libertad que tus hermanos, [...] que tu voz sea oída con el mismo respeto que se oye la de tu padre.[...] para llegar a alcanzarlo necesitas el concurso de otras compañeras. Necesitas [...] apoyarte en ellas y que ellas se apoyen en ti.

b. ... compreender a dívida como substrato compartilhado, porém, contextualizado de culpabilização, vergonha e solidão[...].

c. Rodear os conflitos de solidariedade

d. Llegar a una auténtica coincidencia entre compañeros y compañeras; convivir, colaborar y no excluirse; sumar energías en la obra común.

e. Revolução? Elimine tudo o que não seja imediatamente útil para o combate e a vitória. [...] Para além disso, [...] uma doação total para todos os sacrifícios, uma doação sem reservas de tudo o que somos e o que temos[.]

f. Somos combatentes de uma grande guerra. Todos os combatentes se “entendem” mutuamente para combater, assumem “compromissos”, sem os quais não pode haver unidade de ação.

g. A unidade pode ser feita desde que ela não seja confundida com uniformidade. [...] Porque quando nós [anarquistas] falamos em unidade de ação, a gente entende de imediato que essa unidade se deve a uma urgência que precisa de esforço coletivo, para além do nosso próprio esforço, para que essa [...] necessidade seja suprida. Por outro lado, as tradições socialistas mais estatistas, elas quando falam de unidade, elas [...] pressupõem] um único método, uma única condição, e mais que tudo, a subordinação do grupo a uma parte. [...] Às vezes pode parecer que é um tipo de arrogância do campo libertário não querer "se misturar", mas não é nada disso. A mistura é necessária. Aliás, nós já nascemos na política misturados. O importante é que

[...] que não é possível unidade com subordinação. Isso aparece no debate entre centralistas e federalistas na Comuna [de Paris].

h. O anarquista[...] não aspira viver à parte, enquanto todos sofrem[...].

i. Quando dizemos: “Tratemos os outros como queremos ser tratados”, recomendamos egoísmo ou altruísmo?

j. Actúa como piensas o acabaras pensando como actúas.

k. Aquilo que você é em essência é justamente a capacidade de transitar por tudo isso que te compõe. É aí que está o exercício da liberdade, de efetivar uma liberdade subjetiva e de se estruturar enquanto sujeito. [...] Devemos pensar] uma identidade na encruzilhada de todas as demais, eu acho que isso faz com que a gente escape dessa identidade como essência, que precisa ser fechada porque o Outro pode corrompê-la. Based on Barros' (2019) work more generally, I chose to capitalise “the Other” so as to imply he means the philosophical concept.

l. el poder que [los hombres] han ganado sobre la mujer, lo han pagado en la dependencia del capitalismo.

m. O anarquista[...] não separa a sua causa da de seus companheiros[...].

n. Sê homem e tão multilateral quanto possível — mas, sobretudo aplica-te a realizar tua tarefa quotidiana [sic]. E poderás dizer a não importa quem e não importa quando: Elevei-me acima da minha própria Individualidade, cheia de heranças más; Elevei-me acima da classe em que me situava meu trabalho; Elevei-me acima do Estado cujas leis me humilham, oprimem e rebelam; Elevei-me acima da Pátria em que nasci casualmente — e acima da Sociedade que especula sobre todas as minhas necessidades e sobre todos os meus atos[...].

o. Quando as antigas estruturas, as formas demasiado limitadas do organismo, tornam-se insuficientes, a vida desloca-se para realizar-se em uma nova formação. Ocorre uma revolução.

p. ... eles conservariam o belo papel que não lhes pertence e a história os apresentaria de modo mentiroso. [...] Seria temerário que a admiração e o reconhecimento públicos os reintegrasse no seu lugar usurpado. [...] é preciso que os oprimidos se ergam por sua própria conta[...].

q. É[...] a nós mesmos que incumbe libertar-nos, [...] e que permanecemos solidários a [todas as pessoas] lesad[a]s e sofredor[a]s, em todas as regiões do mundo.

r. Ninguém diz a outrem o que deve fazer, mas sugere o que ele próprio fará. [...] é preciso, contudo, que alguém dê início à ação, tirando da inércia as disposições.

CHAPTER 6 – ANARCHIST FREEDOM

a. A pedagogia libertária tem por finalidade [...] criando novas formas de relações humanas, mais livres. [...] Então a gente tem que começar a criar esses espaços através dessa educação de liberdade, [...] dentro de casa, no trabalho, na escola, e em todo o lugar [...], procurando diminuir essas opressões, [...] começando a se autoafirmar, e ser solidário. Aí você pode criar conceitos e padrões de comportamento no sentido realmente de igualdade, de respeito mútuo, de solidariedade, de apoio mútuo. Porque do contrário, [...] nós vamos sempre procurar estimular para ver quem chega primeiro, [...] quem é o mais forte, pra explorar e pisar no pé do outro.

b. Lyrics were adapted so as to follow their rhymes as much as possible.

Não quero regra nem nada [...]

Já tenho este peso, que me fere as costas

E não vou, eu mesmo, atar minha mão

O que transforma o velho no novo

Bendito fruto do povo será

E a única forma que pode ser norma [...]

É nunca fazer nada que o mestre mandar

Sempre desobedecer, nunca reverenciar

c. Nas tradições estruturalistas, há habitualmente ambiguidade sobre se as estruturas se referem a uma matriz de transformações admissíveis dentro de um conjunto ou a regras de transformação que governam a matriz. Eu trato a estrutura, pelo menos em seu significado mais elementar, como referente a tais regras (e recursos).

d. É que o caráter do indivíduo é de tal forma moldado que, cada um, pessoalmente, crê-se capaz de dispensar a tutela, mas não vê sem inquietude o vizinho entregue à sua própria responsabilidade.

e. implica, por um lado, a garantia de que todos os indivíduos encontrem condições para [desenvolvimento]; por outro, [...] a garantia de que nenhum indivíduo ou coletivo possa impor suas leis e vontades sobre outros

f. Quando não querem mudar as condições que as produzem, [pessoas] solitári[a]s suportam eternamente as mesmas dores. Seria bom que, enfim, o ninho da humanidade fosse construído sobre um galho sólido. Seria bom que mudássemos a base, ao invés de perder tempo rearranjando fios de palha.

g. The book's title could be translated to English as "The Clown is on Strike".

– Será que não enxerga? Você tinha uma família, um emprego, um lar. Mas, não, isso não bastava! Você queria ser outra coisa. Muito além do que estava a seu alcance. Jogou tudo fora para [protestar] se prende[ndo] a uma grade.

– Mas[...] como é que alguém pode evoluir na vida acorrentado ao conformismo?

h. Vivemos num século de engenheiros e soldados, para os quais tudo deve ser traçado à linha e de modo regular. "Alinhamento!" tal é a palavra-chave desses pobres de espírito que só vêm a beleza na simetria, a vida na rigidez da morte.

i. This works better in Portuguese, seeing as "limitant" is a fringe word in English, possibly not even fitting for this context; in this sentence, consider it to mean "something that limits something else".

O ser obediente é [...] passivo por não exercer a imaginação e criatividade, limitando-se a persistir num circuito estímulo-resposta ou, quando muito, exercitando sua imaginação no estreito campo balizado por uma verdade oficial (um limitante e não um militante).

j. Visto que há ricos e pobres[...], senhores e servidores[...], as pessoas avisadas que se coloquem do lado dos ricos e dos senhores[...]! Se alguma boa estrela, presidindo ao nascimento deles, dispensou-os de toda luta, [...] de que se queixariam? [...] Quanto ao egoísta que a sociedade não dotou ricamente desde seu berço[...], ele] pelo menos pode esperar conquistar seu lugar [...] por um feliz golpe de sorte ou mesmo por um trabalho ardoroso posto a serviço dos poderosos. [...] Longe de buscar a justiça para todos, basta-lhe visar o privilégio para a sua própria pessoa.

k. Se lleva a cabo un acto de inconformismo para hacer enseguida una muestra de absoluta conformidad (con aquello que está por llegar, porque ya se ha publicitado como futuro al cual hay que llegar).

l. A sinceridade de seu pensamento e de sua conduta situa-os acima da crítica: nós os declaramos nossos irmãos, ainda que reconhecendo com pesar o quanto é estreito o campo de luta no qual eles estão acantonados e como, por sua [...] especial cólera contra um único abuso, parecem considerar justas todas as outras iniquidades [sic].

m. No es tan sencillo, se obvia aquí todo aquello que nos conduce a ese aparente "deseo"[...].

n. Que cada um de nós os saúde com emoção e que se diga: 'saibamos igualá-los em nosso campo de batalha, bem mais vasto, compreendendo a terra inteira!'

- o. Não queremos tomar o poder, e sim lutar incansavelmente[...] contra todos os poderes nefastos por sua própria essência[... Entre os balantas não há] classes dominantes, nem chefes exploradores e [sua cultura] se baseia numa democracia direta, não imposta de cima para baixo.
- p. As coisas simplesmente mudaram de nome. A moenda continua tão pesada quanto antes. É ela que devemos quebrar a fim de que ninguém volte a usá-la para moer as multidões.
- q. La anarquía ha de ser [...] como un campo de experimentación para todas las semillas humanas, para todas las naturalezas humanas[...].
- r. Tudo o que vive só vive com a condição suprema de intervir[...] na vida dos outros. [...] O que nós queremos, é a abolição das influências artificiais, privilegiadas, legais, Oficiais.
- s. Somos contra a lei-autoridade, não contra a lei-entendimento, a lei-ordem. Queremos ser livres e trabalhar numa sociedade livre que terá a sua [...] organização. [...] Mas não queremos a lei que prende, a lei que mata, a lei que tiraniza, a lei que tortura e manda[...].
- t. [A liberdade] não pode ser confundida com *LICENÇA*, muito menos que, em seu nome, faça-se de alguém um autômato!
- u. O problema está, pois, não em fazer amar as liberdades, mas em fazer amar a liberdade, o que não é a mesma coisa.
- v. Escolhas individuais que se impõem coletivamente [...] permitem que determinados grupos possam gozar de prazer, satisfação, e... eu ia falar [“]liberdade[”], mas vou falar *poder*... e os outros não.
- w. Igualmente, hay que ver la libertad, no meramente como la consecución de un deseo, sino como una praxis creativa e innovadora, que a medida que se desarrolla abre nuevos campos y posibilidades. [...] la libertad para el anarquismo no es individual, sino que está inscrita en lo social[...].
- x. [La persona] más libre es aquel[la] que tiene más tratos con sus semejantes.
- y. — ¡Hola! ¡Qué chiquita sos! ¿Cómo te llamas?
— Libertad
(One panel of them merely looking at each other)
— ¿Sacaste ya tu conclusión estúpida? Todo el mundo saca su conclusión estúpida cuando me conoce
- z. Talvez seja este o “*mau desejo*”, bipartido entre o “desejo de poder” e o “desejo de submissão”: *desejar-se a si mesmo*. Um “desejo de liberdade[...]]exige que a natureza do sujeito nunca seja determinada, nem cada um, nem todos”.

- aa. Gritamos aos privilegiados [...] para que compreendam a iniquidade das coisas que os protegem; aos deserdados, gritamos para que se revoltem.
- ab. Os movimentos populares que tiveram participação e/ou hegemonia anarquista incluíram milhares de militantes que nunca se identificaram com o anarquismo.
- ac. Conhecer é [...] abrir espaços à liberdade.
- ad. é necessário reconhecer os limites da ciência e de lhe lembrar que ela não é o todo, é só uma parte, e que o todo é a vida...
- ae. Si hubiéramos de aprender a vivirlo, no terminaríamos nunca el aprendizaje.[...] Se empieza por decidirse a obrar, y obrando se aprende.
- af. Igualdade, harmonia universal aos humanos e a tudo que existe[...].
- ag. Prefiro viver [...] de acordo com a natureza, da qual sou uma pequena partícula, neste gigantesco sistema[...] pois] as grandes centralizações nada de equilíbrio e harmonia traziam para a espécie humana.
- ah. Claramente, o consenso não deverá ser utilizado na maioria das decisões, visto que é muito pouco eficiente — principalmente se pensarmos as decisões em larga escala —, além de darem grande poder a agentes isolados que podem barrar o consenso ou ter muito impacto sobre uma decisão em que são minoria. As questões podem ser decididas por voto, após o devido debate, podendo variar se quem vence é quem possui 50% + 1 dos votos, ou se quem vence é quem possui 2/3 dos votos, e assim por diante. [...] temos também de nos preocupar com a agilidade neste processo.
- ai. La libertad es un músculo a ejercitar
- aj. A unidade da existência consiste na sua constante mudança.
- ak. Se o Universo inteiro se transforma, porque não poderiam fazê-lo as instituições humanas?
- al. Liberdade é tão necessária ao ser humano quanto o ar que respira, a água que bebe, o alimento de que se nutre.

CHAPTER 7 — CONCLUSION

- a. pensei
que a liberdade vinha com a idade
depois pensei
que a liberdade vinha com o tempo
depois pensei

que a liberdade vinha com o dinheiro

depois percebi

que a liberdade não vem

não é coisa que lhe aconteça

terei sempre de ir eu

b. As fórmulas proverbiais são muito perigosas, pois se adquire, de bom grado, o hábito de repeti-las maquinalmente, como para evitar refletir.

c. Quanto mais o trabalhador foi integrado ao aparato da produção[...], tanto mais o exercício da dominação procurou dissimular-se, transferindo-se da figura autoritária do contramestre ou do patrão para o interior mesmo da máquina. A figura do industrial/senhorio que dita despótica e arbitrariamente os regulamentos internos de fábrica ou os códigos de conduta no interior das vilas e conjuntos residenciais que aluga para seus empregados cede lugar, no palco da história, a um corpo de burocratas especializados[... , detentores] de respostas racionais e “únicas”, [impondo], em nome da ciência, normas [... que ignoram] os desejos e os interesses daqueles cujos destinos decidem. A redefinição dos papéis familiares atribuídos principalmente à mulher e à criança completou esta cruzada moral lançada sobre a classe trabalhadora[...].

d. O algoritmo contribui para a cristalização de desequilíbrios e externalidades, quando o ideal seria que atuasse alinhado às forças da transformação. [...] Iteração distópica é a prática emergente quando o futuro é reificado pelas decisões algorítmicas, a despeito destas atingirem seus objetivos, caso a caso. Sob a sua batuta, a história é concebida como se fosse uma reta, sem surpresas ou chances de transformação[...].

e. Libertad y justicia social son inseparables.

f. esse segmento está muito mais próximo da percepção anarquista do que da liberal..

g. Lo que debemos hacer [...], como libertarios, es desenmascarar ese intento actual constante de instrumentalizar la libertad para ejercer nuevas formas de dominación.

h. O sociólogo italiano Domenico De Masi cita a obra profética *A peste*, de Albert Camus: a peste pode vir e ir embora sem que o coração do homem seja modificado. [...] Tomara que não voltemos à normalidade, pois, se voltarmos, é porque não valeu nada a morte de milhares de pessoas no mundo inteiro. [...] Não podemos voltar àquele ritmo, ligar todos os carros, todas as máquinas ao mesmo tempo. Seria como se converter ao negacionismo.

i. Con un Estado que pone las medidas de control social por sobre las medidas sanitarias, sacando los militares a las calles como primera respuesta; que manda a “lavarse las manos”

cuando en muchos territorios simplemente no tenemos agua, pues los grandes empresarios llevan años saqueándola; que manda a “quedarse en casa” después de desalojar a las familias de campamentos y tomas de terrenos y dejarnos en la calle; [...] con un Estado, que en vez de socializar las camas del sistema privado de salud que tanto ha ganado por años, arrienda piezas de hoteles y centros de eventos para lxs infectadxs en cuarentena, entre otras medidas a favor del mercado y no de la salud pública y del cuidado de la vida.

j. derecha vergonzante.

k. O quilombo é um avanço, é produzir ou reproduzir um momento de paz. Quilombo é um guerreiro quando precisa ser um guerreiro. E também é o recuo quando a luta não é necessária. É uma sapiência, uma sabedoria. A continuidade de vida, o ato de criar um momento feliz, mesmo quando o inimigo é poderoso, e mesmo quando ele quer matar você. A resistência. Uma possibilidade nos dias de destruição.

l. Me colocaram no mundo do prefixo “sub”, como sub-humana, subalterna, submissa, mas escolhi ser subversiva. [...] Me dedico sim a subverter essa ordem e me afirmar como eu sou. Eu sou o que eu sou, e eu me reconstituí e encontrei a minha voz e abracei a minha liberdade no coletivo. [...] A liberdade de uma é a liberdade de todas. [...] Se tiver uma só que não tenha liberdade, você não é livre coisa nenhuma. A liberdade da propriedade privada [...] não é] o conceito de liberdade que tira a gente desse lugar.

m. Que sejam celebrados como heróis da liberdade, mas o que celebramos [...] é a luta de homens e mulheres que para viverem a liberdade nem sempre puderam se comportar com as certezas e a coerência normalmente atribuídas aos heróis.

n. Se você mantém a ideia de que a contradição está lá, nunca estará buscando uma síntese, não desejar a unidade de um estado, ou de um poder central. Acho que devemos descobrir o caminho da liberdade e auto organização para além de poderes centrais.

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With no intention to have said all there is to say on a topic so many have dedicated themselves to[...], it is worth saying that valuable organisations, events, publications, and incidents escaped this research. Something similar could be said of militants that have done so much to publicise and defend anarchism.

Edgar Rodrigues ¹

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¹ Rodrigues, 1999c, p. 229. Because the endnotes with quotes in their original language have already been compiled above, this last one goes here: “Sem pretensões de ter esgotado o assunto a que tantos já se dedicaram[...], vale dizer que organizações, eventos, publicações e acontecimentos valiosos escaparam a esta pesquisa. Outro tanto diria de militantes que muito fizeram para divulgar e defender o anarquismo”.

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