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*Notes sur de possibles hiérarchies au sein de(s) l'anarchisme(s) en anthropologie*

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Journal des anthropologues

## NOTES ON SOME POSSIBLE HIERARCHIES WITHIN ANTHROPOLOGY'S ANARCHISM(S)

Nikolai JEFFS\*

The social weight anarchism has today is nothing particularly extraordinary. In terms of radical politics, many see the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century as one dominated by Marxism, a view supposedly confirmed by its culmination and victory in Russia's 1917 October Revolution, the 1919 Spartakist Uprising in Berlin or the 1936 French Front Populaire. But this is not the case. In his magisterial study of the Filipino writers José Regala and Isabello de los Reyes, Benedict Anderson sets the record straight: "Following the collapse of the First International and Marx's death in 1883, anarchism in its characteristically variegated forms was the dominant element in the self-consciously internationalist radical Left" (Anderson, 2007: 2).

Anarchist political practice and anarchist thinkers were thus not in the least marginal to public intellectual life in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Elisé Reclus and Petr Kropotkin were, for instance, both well respected scientists *and* anarchists. The first sentence of an otherwise hostile review of Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* in *Political Science Quarterly* (December, 1903) nonetheless asserts: "The very title of the book shows that a problem of great scientific importance is approached" (Simkhovitch, 1903: 702).

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We are not making wild assertions here. In her study of how the overcoming of the effects of humanmade and natural disasters, from wars to floods and earthquakes, frequently dispenses with market economics and various social hierarchies, and how this thus leads to forms of organisation that can be recognised as anarchist, the writer and activist Rebecca Solnit makes an argument similar to Anderson's. She rehabilitates the philosophical as well as scientific value of *Mutual Aid* while, among other arguments, offering the example of the frequency with which the Anglican Priest Samuel Price and the philosopher and psychologist William James referred to anarchism in their writings, or to the way it influenced the radical Catholic socialist Dorothy Day. Solnit thus notes: "Among the many strains of radical thought in their time, anarchism was an important one. The mainstream has forgotten it now..." (Solnit, 2009: 90).

In the main time on the side of political action, Anarchism inspired social upheavals and revolutionary projects as exemplified by some protagonists of the Mexican Revolution (1910-16), the Frente Popular period (1936-38) of the Second Spanish Republic with its all encompassing institutions like the CNT (Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo) and the FAI (Federacion Anarquista Iberica) (Leval, 1975) or the resistance of the Makhnovist Army against Tsarists and Bolsheviks from 1917 to 1921 in Ukraine (Arshinov, 1927) and the Kronstadt troop rebellion against Bolshevik commandment in 1921.

Attention has to be drawn to the above in order to convey the point that the historical presence of anarchism as an existing political practice and ideology in the past has been much greater than many actually admit. Thus, the perceived rise of anarchism today can be the result of a temporal hierarchy, of a presentism by which our own times are seen as fundamentally more anarchising than those of the past.

Of course, the presence of anarchism either as a political ideology, or a form of organising (the two are not necessarily always self-consciously connected) in today's newest social movements and in the alterglobalisation movement generally is indisputable. But,

while many “within” anarchism may want to see this as a development that is still in the process of assessing the social weight of anarchism in the past, some of those who view anarchism from “without” may risk downplaying the degree to which current forms of anarchism are also dependent on a vibrant historical consciousness regarding the anarchism of the past, and on the way living links both with anarchists of the past and with the cultural heritage of anarchism have been established and carried forth from one generation to another. Anarchism today is, therefore, neither a completely new rupture, nor an unexpected arrival that has emerged completely out of nowhere.

Nonetheless, one crucial change with regard to anarchism today is the degree to which it has entered academia. Only a brief, idiosyncratic and therefore inconclusive overview is possible here, but some important signposts could include writings within anthropology undertaken by J.C. Scott and David Graeber, interventions in political science (Day, 2005), pedagogy (Haworth, 2012), sociology (Shatz and Williams, 2013), and literary history and cultural studies (Cohn, 2014). The fusion of poststructuralism and anarchism has given rise to postanarchist philosophy (May, 1994; Newman, 2011; Rousselle and Evren, 2011). *Dialogues in Human Geography* published a ground-breaking polemical debate regarding the relative importance of anarchism and Marxism within its field (see, among others, Springer, 2014; Harvey, 2017; Springer, 2017) while in 2017 the Society of American Archeology dedicated a special section of its journal *The SAA Archeological Record* to anarchy and archaeology. All in all, it is possible to identify a definite “anarchist turn” in the humanities and social sciences (Blumenfeld, Bottici, and Critchley, 2013). Concurrently, important volumes on anarchist history, practice, and theory that successfully bridge lay and academic audiences have been published by AK Press and PM Press and now reach farwider readerships than some of the anarchist and libertarian presses of the past, while many mainstream publishers are now more open to publishing anarchist volumes than they once were.

Anarchism is thus emerging as an object of study, as methodologically informative, and as an intertext in academia to a degree not previously seen. This article will thus attempt to address how to conceptualise the value of contemporary anarchism, the possible hierarchies that exist between different anarchisms and some of the problems anarchists face in an academic environment, and as they pertain to fieldwork, writing, and estimations of possible collective futures.

### **Invisible, latent, and manifest anarchism**

Is, with regard to the aims of scientific research, anarchism fully knowable? And, if it is, how is it knowable? Regardless of how we consider the relationship of contemporary anarchisms to their historical predecessors, or how we evaluate contemporary anarchisms themselves, much anarchism may still remain invisible to both the insider and the outsider. That is to say, no self-conscious adoption of any of the main currents of contemporary anarchism is necessary for one to act in ways that can be identified as anarchist. Apart from its disavowal of power, it is precisely this ability to recognise (and possibly assimilate) practices that are not self-declaredly anarchist into anarchism that differentiates anarchism from all the main political ideologies of our time. Fascism, conservatism, Christian-democracy, liberalism, social-democracy, socialism, Marxism and the various political practices based on the religious identities of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism all demand a self-referential ascription and naming of their practices. Anarchism does not. Hence, a lot of what is otherwise one form of anarchism or another cannot be easily identified as such.

Indeed, precisely where highly identifiable and/or sectarian forms of anarchisms prevail, invisible anarchism may be on the rise too. In other words, the axiom that there are as many anarchisms as there are anarchists can be followed up with the truism that one person's anarchist is another person's authoritarian. Thus, one's response to this may be an even firmer entrenchment in one's own particular anarchist camp. But another response is to work from a

position of invisible and undeclared anarchism. Precisely in order to engender dialogue and cooperation and to avoid sectarian conflict, some contemporary anarchists may refuse to call themselves anarchists (Graeber, 2002). With this invisible anarchism in mind, one must thus simply reaffirm the principle that, in evaluating the possible anarchism of the Other, labels are less important than actions: we can only properly judge people not by what they say of themselves, but on the basis of how they act.

It is within this nexus of evaluating actual behaviour that considerations of latent anarchism come to the fore. Latent anarchism exists there where combinations of non-exploitative and non-hierarchical forms of individual, economic, and social behaviour prevail, but without a self-conscious espousal of the practice and ideology of political anarchism proper (Jeffs, 1998, 2007). Indeed, if a genuine transformative force is to be ascribed to anarchism, then forms of both invisible and latent anarchism should be considered as valuable as self-conscious political anarchism, or manifest anarchism (Jeffs, 1998, 2007). This is precisely because these invisible and latent anarchisms test and change existing practices, but without demanding adherence and assimilation to determinate anarchist traditions, ideologies, and the groups that may represent them and who have, by definition, an identity that may separate them from the rest of civil society.

In this respect, the history of latent anarchism is one of relative success. That is, anarchy is the socio-economic formation within which humanity has lived since its emergence as *Homo Sapiens* up to the advent of class-based societies and the state. Hence, reviewing a mass of literature on the subject, Christopher Boehm has come to the conclusion that egalitarian societies practice “reverse dominance hierarchy”, by which power is held in check. Current evidence thus suggests a strong hypothesis regarding the past. Boehm thus believes that “as of 40,000 years ago, with the advent of anatomically modern humans who continued to live in small groups and had not yet domesticated plants and animals, it is very likely that all human societies practiced egalitarian behavior and that most of the time

they did so very successfully” (Boehm *et al*, 1993 : 236). The anarchist and anthropologist Harold Barclay is even more forthright: “...since the egalitarian hunter-gathering society is the oldest type of human society and prevailed for the longest period of time – over thousands of decades – then anarchy must be the oldest and one of the most enduring kinds of polity. Ten thousand years ago everyone was an anarchist” (Barclay, 2009: 42).

This view of an all-pervasive anarchy of the past is somewhat complicated by Marshall Sahlins’ conceptualisation of an original political society that, despite being egalitarian within itself, was still determined, and subject to, hierarchical relations of power emanating from a cosmic ur-state, or a metaphysical realm of spirits and gods fused with the social one on earth and subordinated it to its will: “There are kingly beings in heaven where there are no chiefs on earth” (Sahlins, 2017 : 92). This is, then, a condition that gives rise to further political developments down on earth: the birth of the state out of the spirit of its cosmic ur-form inasmuch as “Kings are human imitations of gods, rather than gods of kings” (*ibid.*)

Nonetheless, individuals and societies living under the shadow of the cosmic ur-state, a state of religion, may still desire to assert as much autonomy as possible, and thus maximise the possibilities to do so either through religious observance by, for instance, playing different cosmic deities amongst themselves, or through an invisible anarchism that takes the form of what we would today characterise as disbelief, agnosticism, and atheism. It is true that when we are dealing with oral societies as we are here, such dissent is difficult to reproduce and connect with the community as whole. But this does not mean that it does not exist. As the philosopher K.A. Appiah notes: “Oral traditions have a habit of transmitting only the consensus, the accepted view: those who are in intellectual rebellion (and European anthropologists and missionaries have met plenty of these) often have to begin in each generation all over again” (Appiah, 1992: 92). One way to begin again, and a probably underestimated factor in the spread of human societies across the globe and in the existence of cultural diversity, is to dissent by

simply voting with one's feet and migrating out of a domestic culture deemed too repressive.

### **The imperative of pluralism**

The existence of a cosmic ur-state does not fatefully diminish the achievements of the original political polities in conducting egalitarian relations within themselves. Today, forms of latent and manifest anarchism also exist within webs of power relations and the state. But this determination does not detract us from using such anarchisms as the points of departure in imagining different mutual relations, societies and futures for ourselves, with these based on the practices in the here and now that we know of and experience every day.

For instance, by the way in which it can foster relations based on reciprocity, the nuclear family, albeit a product of modernity, can still engender experiences of mutual aid. In what can be understood as reference to the Soviet Union ("the rising collectivist order"), Theodor Adorno puts it thus:

With the family there passes away, while the system lasts, not only the most effective agency of the bourgeoisie, but also the resistance which, though repressing the individual, also strengthened, perhaps even produced him. The end of the family paralyses the forces of opposition. The rising collectivist order is a mockery of a classless one: together with the bourgeois it liquidates the Utopia that once drew sustenance from motherly love. (Adorno, 1996: 23)

Obviously, the possibly utopian nature of family life does not lessen the horrors that the reality of family life can sometimes be subject to. But even in the most advanced capitalist societies, relations within family life are not usually monetised and relations that can be characterised as anarchist govern much of everyday life anyway. Indeed, the anarchist Gustav Landauer famously located the axis of anarchist change around personal relationships: "The State is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behavior; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by



behaving differently” (Cited *in* Ward, 2004: 8).

In addition, David Graeber has noted how what he calls “baseline communism” is still very much a feature of our everyday lives. The principle of “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs” exists in courtesies and conversation, gift giving, sharing, solidarity, and hospitality (Graeber, 2011: 94-102). In other words, rather than anarchists prioritising (and focusing exclusively) on the immediate abolition of the state, as they are often charged with, anarchists frequently focus on intrapersonal relationships and on the transformation of everyday life, as well as on forms of organisation within given existing and functioning, social formations and spaces.

Of course, manifest anarchism *can* self-consciously draw on elements of latent anarchism and *can* refer to one or another of the traditions of political anarchism proper. But there is no necessity here. A belief in the possibility of anarchism, whether latent or manifest, does not have to stem from an idealistic view of human nature as essential and as fundamentally benign with which some charge classical anarchism (May, 1994). Instead, anarchism (both latent and manifest) can be born out of the spontaneous affirmation of absolute self-worth and the negation of power in its various forms. This is a transhistorical and transcultural response. It is what Benjamin Noys has called the “anarchist invariant”, and what the post-anarchist philosopher Sol Newman characterises as “the recurring desire for life without government that haunts the political imagination” (Newman, 2011: 1).

In this respect, charges that anarchism, unlike Marxism, has no coherent and overarching theory are somewhat spurious. Firstly, because anarchism can deploy (but does not require) grand theory to function and, secondly, because there are many anarchisms within anarchism, each mobilising their own theoretical knowledge if they are so inclined.

Consider, for example, the neo-primitivist current of anarchism as exemplified by John Zerzan, and as a form of manifest anarchism that seeks the emancipation of humanity through return to a hunter-

gatherer existence. One attack on neo-primitivism was launched by Murray Bookchin, who accused neo-primitivism and other currents of “lifestyle anarchism” of individualism, mysticism and primitivism, as opposed to technology, social intervention, and reflection (Bookchin, 1995).

But the use of a doctrinaire *metawand*, by which the emancipatory potential of one manifest anarchism is criticised at the expense of another, just reinforces Guy Debord’s critique of anarchists as “*specialists in freedom*” (Debord, 1987: 93; italics in the original). In this light, anarchists (of one persuasion) can be dismissed as individuals who thereby reinforce monoglossia, domination over other anarchists, and the vanguardism of one anarchist current, cluster or formation in relation to all others and vis-a-vis civil society as a whole.

But rather than hierarchising one anarchist current as more anarchist than other forms of anarchism, a return to pluralism resulting from championing “individuated meaning in discourse” and forming the epistemological basis of anarchism (Koch, 2011: 38), and therefore informing the evaluation of all anarchisms, makes better political sense. All the more so in light of how the anarchist Colin Ward warns that what delegitimises anarchy the most to outsiders “are the internal factional disputes that some anarchists enjoy pursuing” (Ward and Goodway, 2014: 111).

Verily, hunter-gatherer societies are an especially pertinent way to think anarchist pluralism and the possibility of the coexistence of different societies living side by side. This is because some hunter-gatherer societies are the result of an active expression of a negative freedom, that is, an active rejection *of*, and the freedom *from*, the toil associated with agriculture, or such communities can be the result of flight from various forms of state conquest including colonial incursions. Therefore, a possible neo-primitivism of the future could also be a form of the positive freedom to live under neo-primitive conditions by choice. True, this may seem somewhat farfetched, but the crux of the matter is that there can be no consistent anarchist rejection of the anarchist Other. Any manifest anarchism cannot, by

definition, prescribe how others should live. Many different and mutually coexisting anarchist societies of the future are possible and this pluralist vision is what is also implied in Colin Ward's assertion that "The anarchist alternative is that of fragmentation, fission rather than fusion, diversity rather than unity, a mass of societies rather than a mass society" (Ward, 1973: 52).

Indeed, before dismissing other anarchist visions as Other, some cultural, and not just political, relativism is needed. The anthropologist and anarchist Brian Morris makes the case against neo-primitivism thusly: "having experienced the reality of hunter-gather existence, I personally never contemplated, any more than did Kropotkin, becoming a permanent forager" (Morris, 2014: 142). To this we may add the obvious observation that, precisely as an anarchist and as a culturally-sensitive anthropologist, Morris would not prevent anybody else from becoming a forager, nor would he deny actually existing foragers of various kinds their dignity.

Obviously, this recognition of the immanent worth of a society under observation holds for other anthropologists too, but who are not at all anarchists. Evans Pritchard's famous phrase from *The Nuer* about the "ordered anarchy" that exists among the Nuer, who have no law, no recognisable political institutions in the classical western sense of the term, nor individuals whom one could describe as leaders, is a case in point. (Evans Pritchard, 1993). To this one may add Mauss' championing of forms of gift economy (Mauss, 2002), and Sahlins' assertion in *Stone Age Economics* that hunter-gathers live with less work than we do and are thus characterised by more spare time and less hunger than is the case of many of the dispossessed in our own societies (Sahlins, 1999).

Evans Pritchard, Mauss, and Sahlins thus implicitly promote the possibility of an egalitarian society with a non-exploitative economy at its base. The key point is this: what was possible in the past is not impossible in the future, albeit in a form complementary to the material and other needs of this future. These authors also prove a more general point that could be illustrated by recourse to many other authors (Alfred Radcliffe-Brown immediately comes to

mind)<sup>1</sup> and anthropological monographs: the encounter with stateless societies, egalitarian societies, with primitive communism, with latent anarchism, is constitutive of anthropology as an academic discipline.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, with the wide recognition of anthropologists and anarchists such as James C. Scott and David Graeber, the chances of an encounter with anarchism within anthropology have only increased over the years. Again, and in this context, hierarchising different anarchisms amongst them makes little sense as both Scott and Grabber can perform a function similar to that performed by the anarchist, linguist and political analyst Noam Chomsky for an earlier generation. That is, Scott and Graeber can be productive of new manifest anarchists (of different, even mutually exclusive anarchisms) in the sense that their example as both respectable scholars and anarchists can allow many to shamelessly “come out” as anarchists in an (academic) environment in which anarchism can otherwise be seen as the pursuit of crackpots and troublemakers.

### **Utopian lines of flight**

Once in an academic environment, what are some of the further dilemmas that an anarchist may face? Among all the academic disciplines, it is only anthropology that can claim to systematically give a substantial number of its students and scholars a real taste of utopia. This utopia is called fieldwork. Obviously, the

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Kuper’s *Anthropology and Anthropologists* presents a testimony by E.L. Grant Watson according to which his friend, Radcliffe-Brown, also known as “anarchy Brown”, was very much still an anarchist when he was doing fieldwork for what later became *The Andaman Islanders* (1922), (Kuper, 2005: 53-54).

<sup>2</sup> This encounter is also constitutive of archaeology, and the way Lewis C. Brock and Matthew C. Sanger characterise archaeology holds for much of anthropology as well: “Archaeology is particularly well suited to engage with, and benefit from, anarchist theory since we often study non-state societies, points of political dissolution, active rejection of authority by past peoples, and the accrual of power by elites and institutions” (Brock and Sanger, 2017: 13).

conditions of fieldwork vary. But when, for example, fieldwork entails going to a foreign country with a research grant, this allows one to (at least somewhat) dispense with the drudgery of the quotidian, to have relatively sufficient funds at hand, to forget the pressures of teaching and the stress of departmental politics, and to take a break from immediate wage labour.

Anthropological fieldwork is neither a holiday nor a permanent festival, but fieldwork may nonetheless legitimise “hanging out and about” and participating (if necessary) in various forms of intoxication in a way that very few other research methods do<sup>3</sup>. What the Situationist International (1957-1972) identified as possibly revolutionary acts with regards to the transformation of everyday life, the *dérive* (aimless wandering) and psychogeography (the subjective psychological mapping of the environment), can also be constitutive of fieldwork.

Thus, despite pressures concerning meeting and appeasing informants, sticking to timetables, and observing local mores, fieldwork can still be utopian precisely because the researcher is unconcerned with their own immediate economic self-reproduction and because the status of the anthropologist as a foreigner may offer at least some initial protection from violent and/or legal actions in their host environments. Also, there is always the return ticket home, the ability to travel and freely traverse the globe in ways that many of those under observation frequently cannot, or at least not legally and leisurely.

No matter how exacting, demanding, and dangerous fieldwork is, no matter how punishingly self-disciplined one is while carrying fieldwork out, no matter how consistent an authoritarian one is, no researcher can escape at least some of the utopian dimensions of anthropological fieldwork. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari’s succinct summary on how to pursue radical and ethical politics reads like a meta-summary of the motivations, aims, and effects of anthropological fieldwork as the product of a nomadic line of flight

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Sara Pistotnik for this observation.

and as productive of what Deleuze and Guattari call the “Body without Organs” (the BwO; a body divested of its social encoding):

This is how it should be done: lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialisation, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO. Connect, conjugate, continue... (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003: 161)

Conversely, however, no matter how libertarian the anthropologist in question, no matter the risks they are willing to take, no matter how deeply embedded in their participant observation so as to render them all but completely transparent to the community they are in, the anthropologist will not be able to escape the economic and epistemological hierarchies produced by anthropological sovereignty. If for no other reason, such anthropological sovereignty arises, for instance, out of the inherent division of labour that fieldwork reproduces by way of its privileged cognitive endproduct. Even if fully apologetic, guiltless, self-reflexive and dialogic (i.e., “postmodern”) this end product will be further reproducing this division of labour and producing objects from its subjects, by definition stepping in for their self-representation, and transforming the raw material of a lived life of immanence into an authoritative (and therefore at least somewhat authoritarian) narrative.

The utopian nature of fieldwork, or at least the promise of such temporary and highly individualised utopia, can produce a hierarchy that displaces social transformation from the sites where it can be immediate and effective. On the one hand, in the name of not taking risks, the anthropologist may stand aloof from the social struggles waged on the terrain of fieldwork. On the other hand, if the current divide between radical activists and intellectuals has never

been greater (Graeber, 2002), this may also be due to the fact that many otherwise radical intellectuals may eschew change within their own home environments and/or outside, as we shall see below, the contemporary Republic of Letters. Few academics may want to rock the boat there where it may sink, as such interventions may lead to the loss of that employment which offers the individual (at least temporary) reanimation in fieldwork, research, and writing.

### **The dilemmas of meso-anarchy**

What happens when the anarchist is back in the department as it were? If many activists can be the object and/or subject of the “tyranny of structurelessness” (Freeman, 1972) by which given informal relations within an emancipatory formation or space produce highly authoritarian individuals and practices, then many academics can face a related condition when departments, faculties and universities, albeit still containing vestiges of (academic) self-management, are the targets of various neoliberal offensives. These attacks may then render the supposedly collegial nature of relations within an academic department (as well as the autonomy of the university) practically null and void. Thus similar instances of “authoritarian, repressive and fundamentalist politics” (Newman 2011: 179) as those sometimes identifiable in autonomous activist spaces may pertain. But what Sol Newman affirms for these spaces should be valid for the academic department and for the concept of the autonomy of the University as a whole: “autonomy must refer not only to the independence from the state of a particular political and territorial space, but also to the internal micro-political constitution of that space, to the organisation of social, political and economic relations within it. The collective organisation of social life within an independent community cannot come at the expense of individual freedom, but on the contrary, should be seen as coextensive with it” (Newman, 2011: 179).

Some negative responses to the erosion of academic autonomy include quietism, increased self-exploitation, and, as already stated, sally from the immediate workplace under siege and into the utopias

of fieldwork, research, and writing. What can be lost in all this is meso-anarchy which, in the context of this essay, concerns questions of power in the classroom, the academic department, and the faculty.

Meso-anarchy foists on the anarchist an epistemological, existential, and psychological dilemma that has at least two possible outcomes: repression and trauma on the one hand, or release on the other. As the latter can entail loss of promotion and/or employment, the first outcome (repression) can wreak its vengeance. Anarchists who do not practice what they preach can provoke charges of hypocrisy that is then ascribed to anarchism as a whole. If they introduce anarchist or progressive materials into the classroom but without matching them with principles of (collective) self-management and horizontalism, they may end up legitimising the micropolitics of solely their own individual emancipation shorn from its collective counterpart, or possibly underwriting the deferral of change to some future grand and global revolution, or simply delegitimize (precisely because of the perceived hypocrisy at play) the immediate use value of any progressive and emancipatory (teaching) materials at hand.

Concurrently, however, the anarchist academic (or any progressive academic) may face the horror of the instruments of collective self-determination being used against them and not just by hostile fellow academics. Student's complaints regarding unorthodox course contents and delivery styles, evaluation reports of their teachers, student desires to attain skills and competencies that may be favourably exchanged for employment, may give rise to a reverse dominance hierarchy within the classroom by which the thus disciplined teacher gives in to materials and teaching methods that serve the reproduction of existing social hierarchies both inside and outside academic life.

### **On the possible and tactical equivalence of science and culture**

Similarly to fieldwork, the contemporary Republic of Letters, that space where writing and ideas freely circulate, may represent another destination in the utopian line of flight that risks avoiding



the productive engagement with meso-anarchy. Like any republic this one too is marked by relations of power and hierarchy that can belie the cause of anarchism. Consider Pierre Clastres' work on societies without the state and in which there is an active struggle against the entrenchment of power. But Clastres has been criticised by other anthropologists who, like Clastres, are also anarchists. Thus, although this being fully consistent with the structuralist method deployed, Clastres' has been faulted for not including the voices and opinions of those under collective representation (Barclay, 1997: 105). A further serious charge is that *Society Against the State* eschews considerations of gender and intergenerational hierarchy and violence (Barclay, 1997: 105; Graeber, 2013: 25). In contrast, however, one may want to repeat the argument made earlier in this essay: any academic anarchists or any volume with whatever degree of academic respectability allows latent anarchists to come out as manifest ones. Clastres is no exception. And, in this respect, his own anarchism may engender anarchisms that are, in contrast to Clastres' writing, fully cognisant of intergenerational and gender hierarchies and the power relations they inform.

Simultaneously, there is also another domain in which anarchism and anthropology meet: the conjunction at which the latter is born. Highly influential examples of ethnographic writing are indeed to be found in speculative fiction and writing generally prior to the emergency of scientific ethnography proper. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) is thus a self-conscious description of complex communism set on an imaginary island. Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* (1570-1592) "Of Cannibals" describes South American Indian societies in latent anarchist terms for they have "no name of magistrate or political superiority; no use of service, riches or poverty, no contracts, no successions, no dividends, no properties, no employments, but those of leisure" (Montaigne, 1877). The ideological project of Montaigne is not just to promote cultural relativism, but also to intervene domestically, as it were. Not only are the Indians of his essay treated with dignity, but the social

relations they weave can also be seen as far more desirable than those of 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

Both More and Montaigne's works, to which we can add Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), serve as counterpoints to the societies out which they are actually written. If this is their political effect, that is, the socio-economic and political texture of their own societies is not a self-evident nor an inescapable inevitability, then the epistemological consequence of More, Montaigne, and Swift is to produce a cultural relativist stance towards the world. This is a cultural relativism that they share with the pedagogic, scientific, and emancipatory aims of contemporary progressive anthropology.

In this context, the demand for scientific rigour, the strict policing and compartmentalisation of different narratives and genres, such as those of fiction and those of fact, risks two things. Firstly, with regard to the "dubious" value of Clastres, this may obscure the way in which Clastres, to borrow a slogan from the current alterglobalisation movement, tried to show (specifically in the context of post-1968 France) that "Another world is possible". Thus *Society Against the State* disseminates conceptions of society and politics that are neither hierarchical nor captured by the State; conceptions that, precisely by being presented in the way they are, cannot be read as so completely outlandish as they may initially seem. As such, they can inspire the future.

Secondly, to cancel the political value of any given text on the basis of its veracity restricts the possibility of emancipation precisely because such cancelation introduces a hierarchy between actual (in this case scientific) production and desire (as expressed through fiction and in culture generally). Thus, unnecessary restrictions are placed on the unfolding of individual imagination and collective (future) potential. Félix Guattari has this to say on the matter: "The real question is whether a production of a desire, a dream, a passion, a concrete Utopia, will finally acquire the same existential dignity in social life as the manufacturing of cars or fads" (Guattari, 1995: 213).

The road to a concrete Utopia may not lead through imaginary utopias, but they certainly do make the journey more, rather than less, enjoyable and probable. Hence, one can make the case that since the 1960s onwards, popular culture – music in particular (rock, punk, and rave), and fiction, especially novels such as Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* (1974), Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), and Mike Gilliland’s *The Free* (1986) – have been as important elements in the dissemination of anarchism as books on anarchist history and theory. In addition, precisely because of its form and genre, anarchist fiction in general also has the advantage over anarchist non-fiction inasmuch as it can mitigate outright rejections of anarchism and prevent sectarian anarchist readings. Thus, David Graeber states that “since the visions developed in novels are not claiming to be anything but fiction, those who enjoy reading (or writing) them do not claim alternative visions are wrong” (Graeber, 2009: 219).

### **The trope of anarchy as an impossible dream**

Last but not least, how do dissenting visions of the future inform practices in the present? Tellingly, the fanzine published by the anarcho-punk band Poison Girls in the 1980s was entitled *The Impossible Dream*. We see the same trope deployed in book titles, so that Peter Marshall’s impressive one-volume history of anarchism bares the title *Demanding the Impossible* (1993), while David Morland’s 1996 study of anarchist conceptions of human nature has the same title, but with the question mark added. Both Marshall and Morland have a positive evaluation of the future possibilities of anarchism. John P. Clark’s *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism* (2013) deploys a variation of this trope, but as Clark himself has stated: “We need to stop demanding the impossible and simply do what is impossible” (Santoro, 2013).

The trope of anarchism as an impossible dream has echoes of the famous Paris May 1968 situationist inspired graffiti, “Be realistic, demand the impossible”. But the trope goes further and may be seen as implicitly motivating manifest anarchist content so as

to transform it into its opposite. Thus, Harold Barclay's *People without Government: An Anthropology of Anarchy* concludes that "anarchy is unlikely to be achieved because of the improbability of dispensing with the state", and that "the prospect for subsequent modes of organisation remaining decentralised, autonomous and free is as doubtful as the likelihood of the participants being truly dedicated to 'freedom, equality, and justice for all'" (Barclay, 2009: 149). In *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, James C. Scott admits that: "I believe that both theoretically and practically, the abolition of the state is not an option", and that challenging the state "may well be beyond our reach" (Scott, 2012: xvi). In *Infinitely Demanding*, the philosopher Simon Critchley endorses some contemporary forms of anarchism, but also notes that "it seems to me that we cannot hope, at this point in history, to attain a complete withering away of the state..." (Critchley, 2007: 111-112). Instead, Critchley advocates the practice of politics as an interstitial distance within the state (*ibid*: 88-132).

Point taken, but such minimalist anarchy can still inspire others to explore anarchism's maximalist demands. Moreover, radical politics can still be productively conducted by distinguishing between long-term visions and short-term goals, as Noam Chomsky has done: the vision is anarchist, while goals may require defending the state as a possible bulwark against the expansion of political control over the state by big business, multinational corporations, and neoliberal economics, and their desire to eradicate what still remains of human rights and democracy (Chomsky, 1996).

Thus, if there is no need to strategically prioritise a possible anarchist future by giving up on various tactical battles that could be fought in the here and now, then waging these battles need not dispense with desires for an anarchist future either. Precisely the past evidence of various forms of existent latent and manifest anarchisms counters the view that there is something highly peculiar, bizarre, otherworldly, or shameful in the maximalist demands of anarchism.

### Conclusion

Against the backdrop of anarchism's past and the contemporary emergence of anarchism within academia, this article has attempted to make the case for the pluralism and coexistence of different anarchisms, rather than a hierarchisation that claims that one or another specific invisible, latent or manifest anarchism is essentially more properly anarchist and emancipatory than the others. Anthropological debates were utilised to this end because an encounter with latent anarchism is constitutive of anthropology as a discipline. Crucially, the cultural relativism that anthropology fosters is also a means of an anarchising political relativism that works in favour of anarchism in general, and *within* anarchism in particular. In other words, anthropology unwittingly promotes anarchy inasmuch as it sees no existent culture or society, and even less a political order, as natural, eternal and, therefore, beyond any transformation. At the same time, cultural relativism can promote a greater tolerance towards the anarchism of the Other, and thus decrease sectarian divides within anarchism.

An anarchist coming-out in an academic environment, however, does not just entail actively positioning oneself in relation to different anarchist currents, but opens up dilemmas as to how to put one's anarchism to work. One of the aims of this article was to draw attention to meso-anarchy, to a practice within a space that is neither fully private and micropolitical, nor completely public and macropolitical, but exists at the intersection of both. For the purposes of this article, this space of meso-anarchy was identified with that of the classroom, the department, and the faculty. It is a space of engagement that may be overlooked in considerations of the two poles that fatefully determine many an academic career and that this article has problematised in terms of some of the dilemmas faced during fieldwork, or while orientating oneself in the Republic of Letters. A consistently radical engagement with a view to effecting social change equally across all the domains of fieldwork, pedagogy, and scientific reading and writing may be extremely difficult to sustain, and this article has tried to draw out some of the

quandaries connected to these domains and to the goal of their mutually-informed consistency.

Finally, views of a seemingly impossible anarchist future were also discussed. In contrast to these, a case was made for retaining the long-term vision and maximalist demands of anarchism. By definition, these demands make the forms of invisible, latent, and manifest anarchism not only more tenable but also more realisable in the here and now. This is because belief in a possible anarchist future serves as a potent counter-narrative that can inspire intermediate practices that already problematise the unfettered reproduction of the existent social and political order precisely by insisting and showing, in steps that may seem minimal at first, that this order is not in the least unquestioned or unsurpassable.

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**Summary**

This article argues that a part of the perceived rise in contemporary anarchism is somewhat misplaced. Political anarchism has been a potent force since the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

Several variations of anarchist thought and the possible hierarchies that they have established are examined here, ones that the article notably rejects, in the name of a pluralism that is at the heart of anarchism. Other strategies and dilemmas of contemporary anarchism, as they pertain to anthropology, the classroom and academia are also treated. The imperative of strict scientific rigor is problematized, with the aim of a more tactical appreciation of the uses of fiction and of fictional ethnographic fields. In conclusion, the article argues against the trope of anarchism as an impossible dream. It affirms that a needed consequence of the cultural relativism common to both anarchism and anthropology is a political pluralism that should exist among the different self-conscious anarchisms.

**Key-words:** Anarchism, anthropology, fieldwork, pedagogy, fiction, utopia.

**Résumé**

Notes sur de possibles hiérarchies au sein de(s) l'anarchisme(s) en anthropologie

Cet article soutient qu'une partie de la montée perçue de l'anarchisme contemporain est quelque peu déplacée. L'anarchisme politique a été une force puissante depuis le milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Certaines formes de pensée anarchiste sont ensuite examinées, ainsi que les hiérarchies possibles qu'elles ont institué au sein d'elles-mêmes, que l'article rejette par ailleurs, au nom du pluralisme qui se situe au cœur de l'anarchisme. D'autres stratégies de l'anarchisme contemporain en rapport avec l'anthropologie, la salle de cours, et le monde universitaire, sont aussi traitées. Au nom d'une appréciation plus tactique des usages de la fiction et de travaux de terrain fictionnels, l'impératif de la stricte rigueur scientifique est problématisé. En conclusion, l'article plaide contre le trope de l'anarchisme comme rêve impossible et affirme qu'une conséquence du relativisme culturel commune à l'anarchisme et à l'anthropologie nécessite un pluralisme politique qui devrait exister parmi les différents anarchismes conscients d'eux-mêmes.

**Mots-clefs:** Anarchisme, anthropologie, terrain, pédagogie, fiction, utopie.

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