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Beyond Exclusion: Democracy and an Anarchist Ethic

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modes of expressing it. The space we're in now is crowded; the music is unfamiliar — a bit ominous, a little sleazy, at times manic but captivating, intense and ever-changing. And we still might (or might never, after all) learn whether we can all be partners.

But we're still dancing!...

In this context, even the spirited debate between "lifestyle anarchism" and "social anarchism" that ushered out the 20th century seems a bit ridiculous. Much of what currently passes for lifestyle anarchism, after all, is actually a mixture of Radical Green orthodoxies and an elaborate, tightly-constructed, pinched and mannered, highly prescriptive code of behavior built around the laundry-list (often steeped in its own leftist dogmatisms even more deeply than the social anarchism whose leftist dogmatism it maligns).

Even a vision as compelling as Free Love loses much of its vibrancy as one starts to recognize how a fluid miasma of polymorphous lust can eventually become little more than a stagnant, polluted backwater. But — as a veteran lifestylist, counterculture advocate, and gay man — I've also learned a few things that might be worth sharing.

Maybe what anarchists need is to allow their manners to be rougher, more democratic in Tocqueville's or Whitman's sense, rather than demanding that each other's manners become ever finer and politically or culturally purer. Further refinements and rhetorical contrivances tacked onto upper-middle or upper-class rebellion (or worse, perhaps, academic snobbery) are hardly the way toward genuine inclusion.

Inclusion (let alone anarchism) doesn't mean invariably dining on vegan swill among white, whisper-toned twentysomethings with expensive bicycles, constantly lamenting their privilege and the absence of more people of color or working-class people from their cliques. It may mean speaking Spanish, day-to-day, in many parts of *Los Estados Unidos*, or revisiting the gritty ethic and style (and recipes) of the Diggers and ditching the soup-kitchen rectitude that's made Food Not Bombs such a hit for extracurricular credit among Alternative Youth. Above all, inclusion means obliterating, once and for all, the arrogant, sorry concept of outreach — as if anarchists, as the prime contenders for the Crown of Creation, are obliged by decency and ideology (or simple *noblesse oblige*) to share our glory.

There are (we're told) over six billion humans alive on this planet, each of us with a different idea of how, why and whether to save it-of how, why and whether to save ourselves (individually and/or collectively)-six billion different notions of who we are, six billion

In the context of anarchy, I hold the following to be true:

1. Sovereignty on a planetary, human-wide, or universal scale cannot legitimately belong to any human being or humanly-devised institution. Some (myself included) believe that such sovereignty can belong only to God — providing an implicit ground for understanding a common or shared reality, while preempting human authority. Others might prefer to sidestep the "God" terminology, using some other means of expressing a recognition that reality exceeds or transcends the human capability to rule.

2. Institutions that claim to have a life of their own apart from, beyond or on behalf of the individual lack legitimacy: they're fictions that acquire their very existence by being abstracted or alienated from realtime, lived experience. This even applies to those institutions claiming to be derived from knowledge or from ownership. In this sense, too, "government by the people" is both an oxymoron and superfluous.

3. All this transpires because of the arbitrary and imperfect manner-the limited comprehension — with and within which human language and cognition organize information and attempt to organize the world — instigating subject-object distinctions, promulgating the apparent power of labeling or definition, and deploying externalized memory (getting it in writing, apart from lived experience), to establish the "reality of record."

4. Ideas and time cannot be owned (only shared), unlike things. Ideas and time create the context in which ownership (of things) can exist.

5. Justice is an implicitly social phenomenon, but no human measure can apply adequately to the normative condition commonly called "social justice,", so all attempts to determine or dispense it are arbitrary and imperfect — illegitimate and, by definition, authoritarian.
Nonetheless — because two subtly, but crucially different meanings of the word "judgment" are often conflated — justice is routinely overextended. Judgment can be an attribute available specifically to an individual (as in, "That decision involves a value judgment," or "Children don't have the judgment necessary for

driving"). But judgment can also refer to a function of social or political institutions (even when the function utilizes individuals) to impinge on those under those institutions' jurisdiction. Individuals have the right to exercise judgment in the first sense, but neither they nor institutions have a right to exercise judgment in the second sense.

6. The aspect of individual human identity crucial to legitimate community is shared consciousness or affect — the experience of existence as a shared reality — a sensing that "we're all in this together" that might be called *resonant empathy* or *charismatic mutuality*. In such a reality, all communication is conducted in good faith, without deliberate lying — and with an awareness that every individual manifests a sense of community,. This sensibility, rather than any institution or power, is humanity's only legitimate ground for claiming a common identity, destiny or interest.

7. It should be possible — in conjunction with this — for individuals to organize themselves and to act together spontaneously on an ad-hoc basis (as in a barn-raising or on the Internet), without the mediation or creation of institutions or organizations to embody or to represent their actions.

As an anarchist, then, I renounce all governance or rule-whether by the State or by any other means-in favor of direct personal responsibility in real time.

I nonetheless agree with the old chestnut that "democracy is the worst form of government, except for all others." In other words, democracy is the best form of government that humans have yet devised and, *if the best aspects of democracy are understood and accepted*, it may even have a peculiar, unique propensity to evolve toward a viable condition of anarchy.

Democracies include a number of institutional safeguards to individual freedom. These are desirable, and worthy of further extension. They even remain desirable and worthwhile as bases for modes of discourse and codes of personal decency (without the institutional scaffolding) if an anarchic reality is to supersede democracy as a means by which we humans conduct our affairs.

it, wherever it goes, to carry the baggage of additional information about its ownership; or implementations of ownership rights that prohibit or confound its being shared, fully understood, or improved-upon by its users). Thus, ownership of information becomes an impediment to optimum realization of that information's very value (as well as to individual self-expression); concentrations of ownership (or capital) meanwhile become increasingly recognizable as barriers to sharing among autonomous individuals.

Thus, democracy — whether it runs to the individualist Right or the communalist Left — ultimately finds itself impelled toward the same, remarkably Jeffersonian (or Marxist), objective — increasing openness and repudiation of the hegemony of capital — with imperial brute force eventually remaining as its only other survival option.

What does all this mean for anarchists?

An anarchist community or set of communities as an excluding, exclusive, and excluded entity (or set of competing entities) is contrary to this notion of an evolution, through and beyond democracy, toward anarchy. Anarchists are long accustomed to thinking of themselves in terms of who and what they oppose, but focusing on opposition or exclusion may be inappropriate as a central feature of an anarchist ethic in a kaleidoscopically changing world.

Disruption is, of course, an old, proud anarchist tradition; anarchists risk parodying it by continually staging disruptions as scheduled and scripted confrontations with familiar adversaries: world leaders and establishment flunkies whose forces outgun them, whose reservoirs of sentimentality and common decency have run dry, and whose self-importance makes them obliging (and particularly brutal) foils.

Anarchists sometimes seem most proficient at generating ever-narrower forms of sanctimoniously radical parochialisms. We're all-too-familiar with the laundry list of oppressions, a categorical litany of guilts and ideologies that deflects broader participation — at best, attracting liaisons-to-the-oppressed whose strongest actual identity is tokenism, elitism, or careerism (generally within the nonprofit/NGO sector or in academia). Meanwhile, many of the same anarchists have little tolerance — irony of ironies! — for disruptive (that is, unscripted, or unexpectedly divergent) ideas, people, or behaviors.

go beyond a pluralistic understanding of democratic community, the corresponding need to provide protection or redress for minorities remains fairly obvious. Consensus, conversely, can seem to demand that one either suppress one's divergence from group unanimity, or face the reality of exclusion. (In a truly anarchist situation, meanwhile, there's simply no legislative function — no separation between participants' lives and their decisions; deliberation exists to enhance understanding and facilitate communication, not to make and apply decisions on behalf of the group as a whole.)

Until we've fully developed an inclusive culture and sense of selfhood, governments (especially increasingly inclusive democratic ones) may remain legitimate means to secure those ends. A community is ready to serve the cause of individual freedom (and a universally-inclusive subjectivity) without such formal structures only when such inclusivity is incorporated in the consciousness of each and every individual. Ironically, one becomes most fully oneself — one comes most fully to own oneself — when being oneself includes recognizing most fully that it means (that is, how it feels) being owned (by each other?).

This brings us to the question of boundaries and borders, and finally, to the related issue of privacy. Once one suspends or eliminates the distinction between the State and other forms of authority that may or may not call themselves States, the distinction between boundaries and borders disappears, and the terms become interchangeable.

Eliminating boundaries doesn't eliminate privacy, however. It redefines privacy as a consideration that arises when an individual is preoccupied with a process that requires solitude or concentration (for example, a creative or personal activity). This fluid understanding of privacy doesn't equate it with arbitrary obstructions like boundaries that may actually weaken legitimate claims to privacy. It also resists the routine misuse of privacy as a pretext for hypocrisy or a refuge for hidden agendas.

In a world where information is recognized as humanity's ecological niche — the prime source of value — information wants to be free. Its optimum functioning and value are impeded when its free flow is obstructed by ownership (e.g., encumbering information by obliging

Can we reach a point where we don't need institutional enforcement, where decency is common practice? In the world where we live, the continued existence and evolution of personal freedom depends on how we meet this challenge.

Terms like "power" and "fairness" have been absent from this discussion thus far: that's largely deliberate. These terms carry more baggage than denotative meaning; when stating general principles, I've found little need to introduce them, and good reason to avoid them.

In fact, I'm highly skeptical of Foucault's notion that it's impossible to eliminate power relationships-phenomena where one person has power over another, or where institutions or groups have power over individuals or other institutions or groups. While we obviously haven't arrived at a point where all such relationships have been (or can be) eliminated, all net increases in human freedom are defined precisely by such elimination, however frustratingly piecemeal.

Such an elimination is also a prerequisite for anarchy, if anarchy is to optimize human freedom and is not merely a pretext for the exercise 'of some new configuration of explicit or covert power or authority. In fact, it's the only process that can get us there.

Simultaneously, the ostensible tenets and procedures of democracy — due process; the right to face one's accusers; freedom of expression; good-faith, open debate; abstaining from violence (except, perhaps, as a last resort), etc. — can evolve from institutional constructs into manifestations of individual conscience: ethical imperatives through which the shared consciousness or resonant empathy in which individuals coexist is experienced and implemented. This, however, leaves us confronting the complex, sometimes seemingly contradictory nuances of two more freedoms often addressed by democratic safeguards — freedom of association and the right to privacy. It also demands that we consider, in turn, how both those freedoms might best coexist with the resonant empathy or charismatic mutuality that must become increasingly inextricable from individual identity or consciousness in order for democracy to retain legitimacy and to evolve toward sustainable anarchy. Genuine freedom of association is a function of an increasingly inclusive

democracy: it is manifest in the freedom of individuals to be included (and to include others), but not in the option to exclude. In a democracy-a form of governance — those excluded are nonetheless objects of the governance conducted by those included. The structures and processes democracies use to safeguard the freedoms of the excluded are therefore preliminary efforts to facilitate their ultimate, full inclusion as members of a community, rather than as objects of rule.

Though the issue of governance seems to vanish in a condition of anarchy, it re-emerges as a de facto reality when exclusion is practiced. In a condition of anarchy, where resonant empathy or charismatic mutuality are ongoing and pivotal to identity, exclusion becomes an experience of devastating disempowerment that strikes at the heart of one's very self.

Such devastation occurs, of course, only if the resonant empathy or charismatic mutuality is genuine, an aspect of the ongoing experience of reality. Conversely, where empathy is absent, exclusion can't be devastating; under such circumstances it may even legitimately protect a community from predators. The challenge is in making such distinctions.

We may, for instance, be confronted with a skillful presentation, a simulacrum of shared reality, a counterfeit semblance of experience — whose performer is numb to the actual experience of empathy or shared affect, and who shares only the experience of violating the authenticity at the very core of shared reality.

Such violations of common understanding are often derided as sociopathic, but unfortunately, there are residues of just such numbness within all of us — presenting obstacles to our evolution toward a sustainable self-interest and empathetic understanding experienced as a single, seamless identity. We live amid institutions and organizations that demand and reward performances that enhance their fictitious identities, and that grant them the apparent power to override even the reality we know and share as actual human experience. In this unreal reality, numbness and counterfeit mutuality is often recognized not as pathological, but as a practical necessity — fundamental to realism, to maturity, to being street smart. We seem to

live in this world as lovers (treasuring what we share), but to survive (by skills and wits, as honestly as we can) as whores.

One thing that's nonetheless obvious is that the prerogative of excluding those who are genuinely open to inclusion is not freedom at all. Such exclusivity may promote itself as "freedom of association," but a truncated, restricted-access version of mutuality is counterfeit — mere cliquishness, elitism or xenophobia — no matter how much eloquent lip service its adherents may pay to anti-authoritarianism.

Historically, meaningful reforms in democratic societies have extended civil liberties (full benefits of citizenship) to an increasingly broader range of those formerly excluded — (e.g., people of color, women, or sexual minorities). However, for such inclusion to be meaningful and sustainable, it must incorporate the *subjectivity* of those included — with appreciation and understanding of their uniquely personal expressions of human identity. Inclusivity doesn't merely mean equal repression of all, as *objects* of governance or rule.

In this way, the extension of formalistic, procedural, institutional rights paves the way toward inclusion as a matter of conscience among all individuals in the community. The creation or perpetuation of formalistic structures can be seen (and can only be valued) as a means to the end of a democratic (and ultimately, an anarchic) culture — providing individuals with opportunities to develop the wisdom needed for life in an inclusive community.

Decision-making procedures can enhance or impede inclusion in various, sometimes not-so-obvious ways. Appropriate scale; free access to the means of acquiring and disseminating information; and direct democracy (rather than contrivances of representation) are obviously likely to enhance inclusion.

Nonetheless, some exclusion and objectification are inherent in all institutional procedures and decisions other than those made on the fly. In this sense, formal decision-making procedures — even in nominally anarchist organizations — can only be, at best, directly democratic forms of governance or methods of rule, rather than truly anarchist phenomena.

Substituting consensus for majoritarian procedures doesn't change this; in fact, in many instances, majoritarian methods may be *less* likely to exclude. Because majoritarianism doesn't pretend to