Aragorn!
Toward a non European Anarchism or Why a movement is the last thing that people of color need

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ous ideology (disguised as a type of common sense) that takes much more than it gives. An amoral universe is one without poles, where North and South might be controlled by the story as told instead of the Good Book. Where there may possibly be no Good and Evil.

There is much more to be told here (the seeds have been planted) but the rest of the story can wait. Suffice it to say that placing anti-authoritarian[16] principles outside of the sphere of the Eurocentric worldview is rich with possibility. It can allow for the discussion to happen outside of the shadow of specific historical figures, it allows for the vigorous contrariness of people to be seen as a central social principle and not a problem to be fixed, and it allows for an analysis of histories of cooperation as living possibilities and not just pull quotes off of posters from the 1960's.

The project is to now practice living without the established paths to guide us.

[16] Anti-authoritarian is as slippery of a word as anarchism. While on it's face it appears to be the opposition to institutions of authority, in the modern lexicon it has taken on a darker role. It can now be used to refer to the contestation with classic concepts of class struggle that only refer to the industrial proletariat with the more flexible position that also includes the rural peasant. It is an odd twist for a word, but worthy of pause.

While the intention of this essay is to evoke images of an anarchism with a center of gravity outside of the Continental Tradition it will do so while also questioning anarchists' ability to live and think outside of authority. Because while the theory of a belief system opposing authority in the form of State and Capital may seem to naturally reject Eurocentric History and culture, in practice it does not. Moreover, the ability of non-white anarchists to articulate a vision (outside of the confines of either reclaiming national liberation struggles as libertarian or parroting New Left slogans as if they were not tired and trite) is still in question.

A word about language:[1] I have chosen to italicize the term *People of Color* even though it is the most "in vogue" term to describe people of non-European descent. That is, it comes with a set of political prerogatives that should be avoided. First, it focuses its concern on the most superficial component of non-white people, their skin tone. Second, it homogenizes these same people into yet another melting pot, that just happens to not include whites, but that tends to be just as successful at eliminating difference. Third, it racializes people. As opposed to respecting the cultural differentiation that should actually be the goal of a liberating self-awareness, it represses identity into only the categories discernable by blood quantum and the reflection of light. In this essay I will attempt to use the term non-white people when I refer to the locus of a non-European

[1] Language is a deep topic and has involved a lot of thinking on my part. It also necessitates decision-making and I make mine along several lines. I often choose to capitalize terms to invoke the possibility that they may have an "institutional" connotation that is not entirely comprehendible by real live people. Take for instance Capital. On one level we can understand a definition of capital that talks about it as the extracted value of labor under conditions where others own the means of production. Or we can understand it as a global system of the fluid exchange of money done within a political context carved out of the money holders desires. My use of capitalization is an example of the general commitment that I have to be intentional and thoughtful about my use of words.

anarchism. This defines the problem as both being with whiteness and as surmountable, even by people of European descent.

Why is anarchism worth reclaiming?

While the semantics of anarchy (that is, without ruler) could illuminate the future discussion, any type of analysis of the potential of the anarchist tradition has to grapple with the ideology that is. This ideology can be seen as; a history of iconic figures, of increasingly radical ideas about social transformation, and of a practice that has been uniform only in its rejection by those in power. Understanding the repercussions of the use of language, the history (broadly defined) and the culture of the anarchist tradition will develop the possibility that anarchism has qualities worth reclaiming.

A history of Anarchism as an observation of individual anarchists.

The clearest origin of anarchism in the western tradition lies in ancient Greece and the argument of Zeno (the Stoic) for a society ruled by the sovereignty of the moral law of the individual.[2] While not specifically an anarchist position, Zeno serves as a practical counter-point to the ideal nation of Plato's Republic. In the modern, post-Enlightenment era the first treatise in defense of anarchism came from William Godwin (1793)[3]. He argued that government is unnecessary and harmful to the conduct of human affairs. He also believed that society could be transformed into a world of justice and equality through education and propaganda, and not through specific political

[2] Kropotkin, Pyotr (1910) *Anarchism* The Encyclopaedia Britannica www.anarchy.org

[3] Godwin, William (1793) Political Justice and its influence on morals and happiness

but integrate violence into living in a way that both demystifies and spiritualizes the pain that we can inflict upon ourselves and others.

It is also important (in the context of this sketch) to discuss what an Extra-European Anarchism would NOT be.

Extra-European Anarchism would not be traditional. Tradition is a multi-headed hydra. It appears to advocate for ancient ways that have shown their use and truth through age and experience AND as an excuse for static behavior in the name of tradition. While most (if not all) cultural understandings of the world that exist today (and through our understanding of history) will live on in an Extra-European Anarchism, they will not do so because they are traditional.[15] They will survive based on their own truths, the precision of their mythologies, and their ability to reflect a daily life worth living.

Extra-European Anarchism would not be a utopia. Not only would a transition to a world that could be derided as "tribal" be cataclysmic but the ability of people to live with each other outside of reified power has not been attempted for quite some time. We will be rusty. Moreover, differentiation will result in a great deal of conflict. This conflict will look very different without War Machines contextualizing them, but will be by no means perfect.

Extra-European Anarchism would not be simple. It is homogenization that makes the world as tame as it is. If we were to stop being pasteurized before we faced our neighbors and the world the possibilities of our relationships would expand by multiples.

Extra-European Anarchism would not be moral. Morality (as in the valuation of individual human behavior) is a danger-

[15] Many of my most favorite people are Traditional people. They willfully sacrifice certain (alleged) benefits of this world for the benefits of the world that was. This relationship with the past as a relationship with people, knowledge and tomorrow is to be advocated for. This type of tradition has the flexibility to not have to call itself tradition to be Traditional.

when the individual people who are affected by them create and "manage" them.[13]

Extra-European Anarchism would include extreme cultural differentiation. The idea of "one people" under any banner is a brutal lie. While self-interest (both personal and familial) allows for the practicality of observing greater truths than the self (defined as the one in relation to and not the one not in relation) it is always under threat of suppression. A primary characteristic of Extra-European Anarchism will include the natural, experimental, and vigorous difference between one culture and another.

Extra-European Anarchism would decenter personal relationships. It is the obvious result of the marriage between Religion and Capital (in the form of production) that has resulted in the twisted logic of the nuclear family. While appropriate for raising workers, the nuclear family is poorly suited for just about anything else. Decentered personal relationships would remove the magic spell of love from only existing between the dyad of a man and a woman (joined by certificate…) and re-enchant all interactions with those characteristics that are dreamed of when the word love is uttered.[14]

Extra-European Anarchism would contextualize violence as an appropriate part of the human experience. Currently violence is a problem. Not due to the violence that people are capable of inflicting on each other but due to the monopolization of violence by the state. Humans are capable of violence; capable of, interested in, repulsed by, and affected by violence. An Extra-European Anarchism would not attempt to channel violence into a specifically socially mandated form (like sports)

[13] Theorists of power should rankle at my free and loose use of the term. While I would attempt to capitalize (in theory) the word when I talk about power over, or the political power in this world, I am not necessarily consistent. Language is a terrain in which we can exert real power. I revel in this.

[14] The idea of words as combining in specific combinations to create complex potions and elixirs seems to me the source of many myths.

struggle. His influence of anarchism as a school of thought (and not just a movement for social change) cannot be overstated. The four fathers of (European) anarchism lived in the second half of the 19th century and included Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Pierre Proudhon and Max Stirner. They stand as the central figures in modern anarchist activism, anarcho-communism, mutualism, and individualism respectively. In the twentieth century such figures as Emma Goldman, known for her advocacy of contraception and free love, Sacco and Vanzetti, known for being anarchist martyr's killed by the state, and Makhno, who fought against the Bolsheviks and White armies in the Russian revolution, inform a conception of anarchism as martyrdom and activism.

This introduction to a number of anarchists is an attempt to briefly allude to the mythology of the anarchist. Not from a rejection of these particular mythologies, as, in their opposition, these are some of the most human stories that can be told, but because understanding that there are deeper stories of actual human struggle and inspiration is what an observation of individual anarchists should provide us. It is not as a result of glamorous rebels that the anarchist tradition breathes life into human experience today. But these anarchist's stories (can) exemplify the tradition without obscuring our part in it.

A history of Anarchism as the transformation of radical ideas.

While the origins of Anarchism seem most interested in the science of statecraft, anarchism has since evolved into a criticism of technology, religion, capitalism, and the state. This evolution happened because the principles that would lead one to conclude that the state was oppressive naturally led to the conclusion that those same systems also exist in other arenas of

the human experience. What are these principles? Vaneigem has described them so —

> "Although each of us starts along the path as a whole, living being, intending to return just as we were when we left off, we became completely lost in a maze of wasted time, so that what returns is only a corpse of our being, mummified in its memories. The striving of humanity after survival is a saga of childhood bartered away for decrepitude."[4]

While Vaneigem's choice of metaphors will be discussed later the principle of a "first man" runs through most libertarian literature. Bakunin in *God and the State* exemplifies the principle of contrariness.

> "The abolition of the Church and the State must be the first and indispensable condition of the true liberation of society; only after this can society be organized in another manner, but not from the top downwards and according to some ideal plan, dreamed up by a few sages and scholars, and certainly not by decrees issued by some dictatorial power or even by a national assembly elected by universal suffrage. As I have already shown, such a system would lead inevitably to the creation of a new state, and consequently to the formation of a

[4] Vaneigem, Raoul (1994) The Movement of the Free Spirit. I hate to pick on Raoul here as I take his aphorisms to be in good faith, but that does not eliminate the fact that he tends to speak of death as bad, children as good, and of a paradise lost to be reclaimed by unfettered free wills. These are nice dreams, and you see the practice of these dreams in the advocating of such things as TAZ (The Temporary Autonomous Zone), RTS (Reclaim the Streets, a brand of TAZ), Evasion (TAZ, self righteous and on the road) and the "protest hopping" that has been in vogue since the events of November 1999. I do not discourage dreaming except when dreamers believe that they

While generally criticism can be stated for its own sake, here I will offer something in conjunction. While I am not particularly interested in creating another adjective to the anarchist milieu, I am willing to accept the burdensome framework of the category of ideas that I am trying to represent. As the intention of placing anarchism outside of Europe has already been stated let this serve as an introduction to an extra-European anarchism…[11]

Extra-European Anarchism would be decentralized in regards to work. The rationalization of every aspect of the human experience has served nothing but to divide labor into equally unappealing parts. A decentralized society would favor whole people participating in projects of their own design as opposed to the imperatives of production (or of the decaying culture as a whole). Examples abound of what non-divisive work could look like.[12] These examples should be our guide.

Extra-European Anarchism would be decentralized in regards to power. Power exists. It exists now, intra-people, inter-people and extra-people. It will exist in the future. The elimination of power (of a pure equality) is a charlatan's game. Once again, there are examples of what power relationships look like

ern capitalist utopian believes that competition exists and forms the foundation of the current economic system. The classic idealist utopian connects faith to the creation of a new order and develops that world based on those assumptions.

[11] I went through a bit of torment before settling on the term "extra-European Anarchism". While clearly my premise is to develop an idea of an "outside of Europe" anarchism I also feel a great deal of distress at the idea of centering Europe in the language. The balance between rejection and relationship must be kept.

[12] I am not interested in idealizing this idea outside of the realm of what can be lived now and later. The moments I find where I am working in the least divisive ways tend to be during conversation. I am better at listening than I am at writing. There are plenty of histories that talk about what work looked like "back then", some of which I trust, many of which I do not.

trivance to assist (their perception of) "the movement". The possibility of (these more or less Machiavellian techniques) effectiveness is what attracts many non-whites. "If we can win today, it is more likely that we can win tomorrow." goes the reasoning.

This is why a movement is the last thing that *people of color* need. Not only are movement politics an explicitly European construction (with all that that implies) but the belief that as the result of some specific victory (even if that victory is at the end of a long campaign) we will get a world that reflects our values will erupt is utopian[10] at best, War Machine thinking at worst.

How are movement politics specific to Europe? While a definition of movements could expand to fit just about all human behavior there is a certain recognition that when we talk about the (a) body of humanity exerting its will onto the stage of Nation States we are talking about the modern social movement. Without industrialization, and the urbanism that resulted, there would not be the ability for people to concentrate around symbols of power that have defined movements for social change. Without the Protestant fracturing of "the one great interpretation" (that is, the Catholics) there would not be a belief that "protestants" of every political stripe could be represented. Without the history of the French Revolution (1789–1793), the American Revolution (1775–1783), and the Russian Revolution (1917–1921) there would be no history of (successful) radical social change. In the field of human experience movements are best described as junk food, an immediate thrill of flavor and sensation upon a backdrop of empty calories and specious nutrition.

What would the differences be, if anarchism where located outside of Europe?

[10] The worst kinds of utopian thinking are the fixation on the most impossible characteristics of a system as their cause and explanation. The mod-

> governmental aristocracy, that is to say a whole class of individuals having nothing in common with the mass of the people, which would immediately begin to exploit and subdue that people in the name of the commonwealth or in order to save the State."[5]

Finally, the principle of cooperation (over competition) as articulated by Pyotr Kropotkin.

> "Mutual aid is as much a law of animal life as mutual struggle…as a factor of evolution, it most probably has a far greater importance, inasmuch as if favors the development of such habits and characters as insure the maintenance and further development of the species, together with the greatest amount of welfare and enjoyment of life for the individual, with the least waste of energy."[6]

While not authoritative, most modern incantations of anarchism derive from these principles. The application and depth has evolved, but the idea that people were once free, can be again, and can do it ethically is a primary theme of the anarchist tradition.

A history of Anarchism: as failed and successful social transformation.

In practice this (social transformation) can be described as a type of activism. This happens often within larger historical movements, frequently as the action of determined individuals

are awake.

[5] Bakunin, Mikhail (1871) God and the State

[6] Kropotkin, Pyotr (1902) Mutual Aid

to transform reality, and most often as the rejection of alienated people refusing to participate in the social apparatus.

There have been a variety of movements that have had an articulated anarchistic reflection. They include the Free Spirit movement of the 13th and 14th century (scattered throughout the European Continent), where a woman is quoted as saying "I have created all things. I created more than God. It is my hand that supports Heaven and Earth. Without me nothing exists." The Digger's of the 17th century England who attempted to use public lands for living on, and were subsequently burned out of their homes. The Paris Commune where the city was liberated for 73 days before the army retook the city and slaughtered the Communards. The Russian Revolution where anarchistic Soviets provided a backbone to the revolution before they were co-opted by the Bolsheviks in the name of the people. The Industrial Workers of the World were a labor union that attempted to unite the workers into 'One Big Union' against capitalism as a whole and had some successes in early twentieth century America before many of their leaders were jailed or shipped to the Soviet Union. The 'propagandists by the deed' who successfully murdered leaders of France (Carnot, 1894), Austria (Elisabeth, 1898) and the United States (McKinley, 1901) before "saner" minds disabused them of their naïve notions of radical deconstruction. The Spanish Civil War (1936 — 1937) where millions of people collectivized their land and workplaces only to be defeated by their own compromises and the fascists (but especially the fascists).

Finally, in our parade of anarchistic moments, are the events of May 68 in France. When a coalition of students and workers brought the French nation to its knees for the month.

With the historical stage in place, know that the bulk of anarchy has happened on a much smaller scale. Whether it has been within the left counter-cultural space (living arrangements, small cooperatives), the self-help movement (alcoholics anonymous, etc.), or youth counter-culture the principles of

not a textbook or leader) is inspiring. Much of this has been known all along by just about everyone outside of the European tradition. Will an "enemy in the camp" allow for the possibility of "an exchange of hostages". Can an extra-European anarchism allow for the framework where people not of European descent can communicate with those on the inside? Or will an extra-European anarchism create a momentum towards itself. Where those stuck inside the walls will be left to their own devices and can leave the castle whenever they are ready to join the rest of humanity.

Why that reclaiming should not involve a "movement".

To push the analogy to it's natural limit, it has rarely been the case that a siege was successful through direct confrontation. A siege may involve battering the walls and razing the gates but more likely involves the show of possibility (and mobility) that exists "out there". Moreover, it is the act of starving (or ignoring) the denizens of stone and mortar out (to the wilderness?) that is rife with specific possibilities in the here and now. Part of this question involves understanding and discussing what participation looks like. What does it mean to live within the walls? Who are the border crossers? Are they compromised?

Because while the modern social/economic machine is everywhere it is not -everywhere-. Interesting (and interested) people live on the boundaries and inside. While they are not heroes they will continue to provide context to the dangerous apparatus (of statecraft, the academia, journalism, the gentle sciences…) and should not be wished (or willed) away.

What does need to change is the way in which these bordered people see appropriate action. They would petition the king, rally in the courtyard, or use just about any political con-

Take for example the Vaneigem's quote (see the source of footnote 4). While true in that a history of humanity can surely be told that positions us (as children) in a state of happiness (grace) before we were beset upon by Leviathan. It is not true in that both the linear model of growth (and innocence) is flawed AND the idea that general humanity (outside of the European *paterland*) consciously "bartered" for the current state of affairs is patently ridiculous.

The observation of this kind of (clearly benign and well intentioned) thinking is the reason that the answer to the question of Anarchy? for not white people is most often no.

Why is the anarchist tradition (specifically) worth reclaiming, even if not in name?

The anarchist tradition contains the possibility of serving as a bridge between the a-historicized and European thought from a position of strength for the not representable. While the possibility of tweaking the current machines of production, politics, and knowledge exist, they only do so within the realm of extreme power (over) relations. It is primarily the anarchist tradition that makes claims of challenging this power (that is, destroying and possibly rebuilding something that could be called the same name) as opposed to transforming pre-existing institutions into more humane golems. It is the anarchist tradition (not practice, but tradition) that alludes to the possibility that there may not be just one answer to the question "what should a better world look like?" It is the anarchist tradition that is possibly not universalist. This should be particularly appealing to people coming from non-European traditions and cultures. Not only is the history such that any possibility of seeing our way out of the current dilemma should be attended to but the idea that there may not be just one answer, that our specific cultural identities may inform our specific answers (and

living ethically, without hierarchies (and the people who love them), in cooperation with other people, and in opposition to authority is a major part of our human experience.

Why not anarchy?

While the ideas originating from Europe are not magical or more correct, it is impossible to live within the modern world without grappling with them and their repercussions. Most of these ideas are horrible, and result in conditions much like our own. The State, Capital, Religion (in the body of a Church), Industrialization, History (as living embodied by text), the list of these ideas made real goes on and on. While wholesale rejection of these ideas is an appropriate response to them, this rejection still forces us to understand ourselves in comparison (in reaction) to them (their ideas and institutions) and not on our own terms.

Anarchism is yet another ideological option (in a cast of millions) and suffers from exactly this fate. It can only be understood in the climate of European History, Politics, and Philosophy. While there are anarchistic stories than can be told outside of Europe[7] the bulk of the idea(logy) of anarchy comes from there. Any reclaiming of the anarchist tradition has to grapple with the shallowness of anarchism as the (self?) defined opposition to all other -ism's. It is a political philosophy that has taken different conclusions from the same source material that it claims opposition to. The motivation, and capability, of people to make this leap should be met with great skepticism.

[7] Adams, Jason (2002) Nonwestern Anarchisms rethinking the global context This is a complementary essay to my own. He possibly attaches the term anarchism to a variety of tendencies that may not be interested in the term but he covers the bases that need to be hit. He tells another anarchist history, about not European people, and frames the tale under the stormy sky's of the past two hundred years.

In the current scene this[8] is seen in a few ways, discussed next. One way is the reliance on models (and model thinking), second is the emphasis on aesthetics over living, and the third is the illusory commitment to community (or more appropriately communitarian ideas). A few examples are in order.

The idea that a new, better society will look like X, where X is the value of anarcho-communism, anarcho-syndicalism, social-ecology, or anarcho-primitivism[9], is classic model thinking. It has an advantage of being successful (Democracy, Fascism, Protestantism) in the eyes of History. It actually advocates "for" something (as if living (freely) were not possible without a roadmap) and doesn't just serve as negation. In this regard anarchism has everything in common with communists (and their perfect worker), libertarians (and their perfect capital), and religiousists (and their perfect god).

The media serves as no one's friend. Its portrayal of anarchists will always rely on a lens, an author, and an interpretation that (by definition) will focus on what can be seen from the outside. To the extent that we are media creatures we internalize these messages and make them part of our own understanding of anarchism. Black clothing, destruction of corporate facades, street battles are the most visible, the most commodifiable, and the obvious example of "seeing as living" vs. "living

[8] The Eurocentric behavior of anarchists is a slow moving target that, because of my own participation in the anarchist body, I tend to not highlight. I do not feel some sense of vindication when the "crimes" of someone are exposed, with the resulting mixture of guilt, despair, apology, and apathy. I tend to only "criticize" when I am willing to take responsibility for the caring of the criticized. This is often seen as my insistence on being correct, but is actually my attentiveness to the struggle that accused people must endure.

[9] The full equation is theory plus the value of human inspiration (an easily quantifiable unit) — the value of compromises that must be made in the name of exigency (yet another quantifiable; as a log whose value will descend to zero as the value of freedom rises to infinity) = one unit of better world. Naturally X (as an accepted type of theory) multiplied by Y (the actual practice of that theory) equals the greater value of T. The full equation then reads XY + H — C = 1 bw

as living". Specifically the tendency towards the visible creates the environment where anarchists eat their old, devaluing their knowledge, energy, and beauty in exactly the same way as the normative, youth-obsessed culture at large.

The rhetoric of anarchism says the correct things about community. It does not describe community as the suffocating pillow over individual acts of self-expression. It does not treat community as the great equalizer, as a leveler, where difference is a blemish to be removed (or covered up). Rhetoric aside, anarchists have not been successful at practicing any but the most superficial aspects of community. In this they reflect the disconnected society that they live in.

Anarchism could provide an antidote to ideological thinking. A criticism of authority should entail a criticism of power relations generally. An understanding of the power that people hold over each other could lead to an understanding of the power that ideas have over people, even if those ideas are anti-authoritarian. This is not the case. Anarchists, by and large, replicate the kind of thinking that they could (as in should) reject. This makes the most successful of them barely different from a contrary politician and the rest an isolated sect with demographic limitations that also demonstrate a limited view of the world.

This is the criticism that *people of color* make of Anarchism that speaks a truth. If an idea, or a scene, does not look like you then it cannot possibly be useful or meaningful to you. While this does imply a media (visual) fixation, the criticism is still correct (even more so) if by "anarchism doesn't look like me" you are actually stating the "Representative anarchist people seem to only represent a certain (middle class, white, "countercultural") demographic that is not mine. Moreover, there seems to be a worldview shared among this demographic that prioritizes a set of cultural values that I do not share. Or even understand. I will even go so far as to say that these cultural values quite possibly are part of the problem."