Foreword: Anarchy is forever: The infinite and eternal moment of struggle

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Life exists only at this very moment, and in this moment it is infinite and eternal, for the present moment is infinitely small; before we can measure it, it has gone, and yet it exists forever.¹

Geography has a very unpleasant history. From the very outset of the discipline, geography was at the frontlines of the colonial project. It continues to be entangled with militarism through a steady stream of funding for geographers who see no ethical qualms about the perpetuation of war. The Bowman Expeditions immediately come to mind, where geography professors, Jerome Dobson and Peter Herlihy, from the University of Kansas took funding from the U.S. Army’s Foreign Military Studies Office to map indigenous lands in Mexico. Ostensibly this project sought to advance the rights of indigenous peoples, yet the researchers failed to disclose who was bankrolling the project to participating communities and the fact that the collected data was being transmitted to Radiance Technologies, a military contractor that billed itself as ‘creating innovative solutions for the warfighter’. The project culminated in controversy, as the Zapotec people discovered they had been duped.² This was undeniably a very ugly moment for geography, bringing tremendous shame and embarrassment to the discipline. But what might happen if we start thinking about geography in a different light, where instead of paying service to military pursuits and ceding to the interests of imperialists, we were to instead orient it towards the anarchist horizons of possibility?³

This is the exact question that this book grapples with and it is a concern that Petr Kropotkin and Élisée Reclus were already raising over a century ago. While their contemporaries were busy contributing to the realisation of colonial machinations and planning for the next round of stripping indigenous peoples of their lands,⁴ these two men were tearing apart the racist underpinnings of environmental determinism and eviscerating all the implications that were being assumed of Charles Darwin’s work. Rather than allowing geography to be a means of justifying domination and war, Reclus and Kropotkin viewed the discipline as a conduit for dissipating prejudice by aligning it to anarchism. This desire for an anarchist geography should not be thought of as a quaint and idiosyncratic memory of the past, subsumed beneath the
tides of more important geographical traditions. Instead, there is much to learn
from anarchist geographies today, where anarchism pulses within many of the
discipline's current veins. Reclus' notion of a 'universal geography' for
example has significant resonance with the recent relational turn in geo-
graphy, and his environmental outlook anticipated the field of political ecol-
ogy. Similarly, Kropotkin's theory of 'mutual aid' is a primary source of
inspiration for emergent ideas around reciprocity and the geographies of care,
but it also hits at the possibilities of current more-than-human geographies by
recognising the agency of non-human actors and the symbiotic relationships
that enable our very existence on planet Earth. A reengagement of anarchism
within contemporary geographical theory and practice opens a renewed path
towards the open fields of emancipation, veering far to the left of the thorny
thickets of militarism and imperialism that sadly some geographers continue to
preen. Yet in realising the possibilities that can grow out of the synergies
between anarchism and geography within the present moment, it is important
to look to the lessons of the past.

We can start our journey along the contours of anarchist geographies in the
depths of time immemorial. It is in the unknowable mystery of this olden
domain that anarchy first took shape as the very condition of life itself.
Anarchy is indicative a world free from servitude and the intrusions of govern-
ance, where there are no hierarchical institutions or mechanisms of control. It
reveals a world of free association and constant change, a deep inter-
dependence between everything that exists and the perpetual evolution of the
unfolding interactions of being. In the midst of this immanence, domination
represents a disruption, where in the grand scheme of things it is quickly
corrected by the prevailing order of existence. Anarchy can accordingly be
considered at once the infinite and unfathomable vibrations of the universe
and the geometry of life itself. It is the energy that flows through our natural
world, a beautiful fractal that can never actually be broken, only temporarily
interrupted. Any suggestion that anarchy is chaos consequently signals a
profound lack of understanding and serves not as truth, but as the manifes-
tation of an anxiety born from the parochial hubris of the human mind as it
attempts to restructure what actually exists in accordance with what it pro-
blematically thinks should be. Anarchy is only mayhem through the distorted
lens of a fool's sense of order.

In contrast to anarchy, anarchism is a political philosophy and practice that
attempts to correct the strange intermission of the present moment, where the
rhythm and flow of symbiosis has been disrupted by extraordinary mass vio-
ence. The state, capitalism, religion, sexism, racism, ableism, childism, and
speciesism are all representative of the archy, or systems of domination, that
form the nebula of this interference, clouding our vision through the myopia
of gradation and supremacy. It is precisely these facets of rule that are the
target of anarchists. In attempting to realise the end of such cruelty, anarchists
recognise that there is no primacy to the ordering of life, only the harmony of
oneness. We are connected to existence as equals, with none taking
precedence over another. On a larger temporal timescale it is guaranteed that
the system will correct itself, whereby consonance will be restored and all
existent chains of command severed. Greed, extractivism, and the accumula-
tion of capital will push humanity to extinction and the entire order of our
planet will reset itself, shattering the false dichotomies and hierarchies that
humans have fabricated. Yet for anarchists this is not the desired outcome. The
pursuit of anarchism is an attempt to restore balance to the world before our
collective demise becomes assured. It is a reaction to the nihilism of avarice,
premised on the very radical idea that humans should continue to be woven
into the fabric of the great unravelling enigma that is the universe.

Through the institution of the state and the spread of capitalism we have
collectively wrestled with the natural world, imposing hierarchies and modes of
domination upon the structure of our planetary existence that simply don’t make
sense. They are the reflections of human arrogance that have taken us through
the looking glass into a dystopian reality of profound malevolence. We can take
some measure of solace in the idea that the state and capital are facile and
fugitive attempts at organisation that will undoubtedly come undone, but any
politics of resignation is fundamentally a practice of necromancy. These are
institutions that signify the celebration of our demise and any communion with
them is the fulfilment of a death wish. If we do nothing and simply wait for the
eternal recurrence to arrive, our shared misery as we plunge headlong towards
oblivion is virtually assured. Anarchism requires more of us. An anarchist politics
insists that apathy give way to empathy. It demands the impossible, summoning
us to take action in recreating the world through the realignment of our geo-
graphies towards the possibility of a tomorrow that at present cannot be assured.
The primary mode of restitution is prefiguration, a process of living life today, in
this very moment, in this exact space, in a way that is befitting of the future we
seek to establish. Our future is consequently to be found in the past, in the
primordial anarchy that is ancient beyond memory, record, or tradition, and
the living anarchism that was documented in historical struggles.

The chapters that comprise this book offer a powerful reminder of what we
can jointly achieve when we are willing to struggle in the face of oppression.
The anarchist lessons of the past are brought to bear on geography, not as the
anachronistic stains of a yesterday that can never be revisited, but as a vital
pigmentation of what becomes possible today when we have the courage to see
the full spectrum of colour that this life provides. Just as anarchy was the stuff of
there and then, anarchism attempts to realise a here and now. Yet this too is
indicative of a false separation of space and time, demonstrating the ways
that language all too often fails us. There is here, and then is now. Anything
else is illusion, veiled in the ignorance of separation. The cosmology of space-
time folds into itself, and the eternal-now-infinite-here is but a matter of fact,
the very basis of existence.

So if anarchy is the filament of our past, then anarchism is the incandes-
cence of our present. Each plays a role in illuminating our future with the
passionate radiance of connection. If we are to remain a part of the chronicle
of life in its beautiful mercurial narration, we need to let the stories-so-far of anarchism guide us into a future that embraces our past as the space of anarchy. It is the embrace of this infinite and eternal moment of struggle that sees us emerge from our chrysalis to spread our wings. It gives purpose to the work of transforming the world as we glide along a cyclical line of flight towards the reawakening of harmony. Anarchism is an uroboric geography. It is the realisation of the macrocosm in the microcosm, the momentary in the infinite, the universe in a speck of dust. Through explorations of the past, the musings offered in the pages of this book promote a vision of the horizon, enabling us to realise that anarchist geographies are the fulfilment of a world that we have the active ability to create, an ontology that yearns to be created. They envision an earth beyond militarism, beyond cruelty, beyond violence, and beyond hate, in short, a world that we would actually want to live in. They remind us that while anarchism may be fleeting, anarchy is forever.

Notes
1 Watts, Become What You Are, 10.
4 Driver, Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire.
5 Reclus, The Earth and Its Inhabitants: The Universal Geography.
6 Kropotkin, Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution.
7 Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra.
8 Ince, 'In the Shell of the Old: Anarchist Geographies of Territorialisation'.
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Introduction

Federico Ferretti, Gerónimo Barrera de la Torre,
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In the last few years, anarchism has been rediscovered as a transnational, cosmopolitan and multifaceted movement and its traditions, often hastily dismissed in the name of Marxism, Liberalism or post-structuralism, are increasingly revealing insights which inspire present-day scholarship in anthropology, sociology, philosophy, biology, social history and, last but not least, geography. This work is the first attempt to provide a historical geography of anarchism, addressing at the same time places and spatiality of historical anarchist movements and key thinkers, and the present scientific challenges of the geographical anarchist traditions in the fields of social movements, environmental struggles, post-statist geographies, indigenous thinking and situated cosmopolitanisms.

This book collects the proceedings of the multiple session ‘Historical Geographies of Anarchism: Situating Struggles, Studying Environments’ organised by the Editors for the Royal Geographical Society–Institute of British Geographers Annual International Conference on the theme of ‘Geographies of Anthropocene’, which took place in Exeter in September 2015. While in recent years there has been a growing number of sessions on anarchism's relationship with geography, this conference was the first one organised on these specific historical topics and the contributions drew on three main strands of international literature on Anarchist geographic research.

The first strand concerns the recent rediscovery of anarchist geographies, which has occurred increasingly since the special issues consecrated to anarchist geographies by the journals ACME and Antipode in 2012. These journal issues included works on anarchist geographies' genealogies¹ and historical figures like Léon Metchnikoff/Lev Mečnikov (1838–1888), Élisée Reclus (1830–1905)² and Petr Kropotkin (1842–1921)³ now addressed by a great number of multilingual contributions.⁴ Recent works have also promoted new debates in the fields of anarchist pedagogies⁵ and post-statist geographies,⁶ among numerous other critical, substantive contributions to existing debates. The second is the literature analysing historical geographies of science and scientific revolutions⁷ as a part of the wider context of the spatial turn in social sciences, addressing the localisations and mobilities of scientific knowledge as decisive elements in understanding it.⁸ The third strand of the book is the historical literature considering anarchism as a transnational
movement based on networks and cosmopolite circulations of ideas, publications and militants, a line of research which has successfully challenged the shortcomings of more traditional histories of anarchism which were dependent on what Davide Turcato defines as a ‘cyclical pattern of advances and retreats’, leading to false ‘millenaristic’ readings of anarchism that impede a clear understanding of how this movement really worked.

A common topic for a great part of our contributions is an analysis of the transnational and cosmopolitan networks and circulations affecting both social movements and the construction of knowledge by early anarchist geographers: the transnational nature of the anarchist movement can help to explain the anti-colonialist thinking of its early intellectuals, such as Reclus and Kropotkin. Thus, the idea of linking anarchism and its history to its places and circulations is a central one for this collective work, which addresses at the same time the history of anarchism and present-day anarchist movements and their spatiality. Consistent with the transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and multilingualism of the anarchist tradition, we include works produced by an international collective of authors who worked (at the date of the conference) in Brazil, Mexico, Spain, Germany, Sweden, Ireland, Switzerland, UK and USA. Thus, one of our aims is to give accounts of works and debates outside the English-speaking world, which has become the de facto centre of academic knowledge production, and beyond mainstream academia altogether. Another characteristic of this book is its interdisciplinary nature, as one can find among the authors, historians, historical geographers, cultural and political geographers who have found in the spatiality of anarchism a common ground for research and discussion.

The first part of the book addresses spaces and places in the history of anarchism under a transnational standpoint. Carl Levy traces a wide historical outlook of the city as the place for anarchist experiments in self-government and as a generator of powerful revolutionary imaginaries. The historical experiences raised in this essay include the medieval city, the 1871 Paris commune, the 1936 revolutionary Barcelona and the capitals of 1968 risings, interrogating each case on its significance for the history and development of anarchist thinking. Andrew Hoyt presents a geographical approach to the distribution of the Italian-speaking anarchist journal Cronaca Sovversiva all over the United States, in order to analyse the spatial patterns of distribution of transnational anarchist propaganda by applying the concept of ‘social field’. Davide Turcato likewise addresses the Italian anarchist press in the USA, in this case to investigate the relation between internationalism, cosmopolitan practices and ideas of national cultural belonging among transnational anarchist militants. Julian Brigstocke analyses a body of documents from late nineteenth century France to open up a discursive critique of the relationship between humour and violence in militant mentality and in wider biopolitical practices of that time.

The second part of the book analyses topics related to the spaces of early anarchist geographers, focusing mainly on the figures of Reclus and
Kropotkin. These authors were the inventors of a solidaristic interpretation of evolution, known as the theory of mutual aid, which challenged established theories of the time, such as Malthusianism and Social Darwinism. At the same time, they were committed to the study of the ongoing relations between humankind and environment, refuting the positioning of so-called ‘human’ and ‘natural’ environments as separable domains. Drawing less on ideas of wilderness and protection, these thinkers sought solutions to ‘harmonise’ the coexistence of living beings on the earth’s surface, anticipating some of the contemporary themes of more-than-human approaches. Secular and rational ‘science’ was thus considered as a fundamental instrument for that. Problematising all these topics entails also reflexions and new debates on the present coming back of Creationism, Malthusianism and environmental Determinism. Francisco Toro analyses the Reclus’s thinking with regard to the intellectual context of present-day degrowth theories, showing Reclus’s commitment lead to very effective concerns in today’s fields of geography of resources and environmental geographies. Federico Ferretti addresses three cases of analysis by early anarchist geographers Reclus, Kropotkin and Mikhail Draganonov [or Drahomanov] (1841–1895) of colonised or recently decolonised nations in order to understand the complex links between anarchism, nationalism and anti-colonialism in the Age of the Empire. Pascale Siegrist analyses Kropotkin’s and Reclus’s commitment to the scientific field of their time in order to problematise the definition of ‘anarchist geography’, a relatively recent label, which did not exist during their period of activity.

The third part of the book addresses the spatiality of present challenges for anarchist geographers. David Crouch analyses the effectiveness of the social geography of Colin Ward (1924–2010), a thinker who is considered as one of the most important references for present-day anarchism, mainly in English-speaking countries. Crouch addresses at the same time his personal experience of collaboration with Ward, the latter’s references in the history of geographical thought and his insights for contemporary cultural geographies and urban planning. Rita Velloso analyses the spatiality and ‘insurrectionary architecture’ of the 2013 ‘Brazilian Spring’ as it occurred in Belo Horizonte, its relations with urban spaces and the general social aims of the movement. Anthony Ince and Gerônimo Barrera address an innovative linkage between non-statist geographies and de-colonial geographies, matching in this sense the historical tradition of anarchist geographers Reclus and Kropotkin, committed to building a regional science which did not assume the state and the administrative boundaries as its framework of reference. For today’s critical and radical geographies, the association with archaeology means a deeper historical reflexion in thinking and questioning recent assumptions and discourses on the dissolution of states, emphasising the necessity for critical scholarship to destablise the state as an analytical category. Finally, Gerônimo Barrera de la Torre and Narciso Barrera-Bassols analyse the relations between anarchism and indigenous movements, mobilising an anarchist view of Anthropocene which draws on Reclus’s idea of the consubstantiality of the terms
traditionally considered as ‘humankind’ and ‘nature’. The authors propose an analysis of contemporary ecological emergencies through the lens of a set of perspectives distinct from the classical European and Eurocentric intellectual tools. In particular, they utilise indigenous thinking and seek to integrate it with a range of anarchist ideas on plurality and social solidarity. Thereby, they target an alternative view of modernity, drawn from what de-colonial thinkers in Latin America call ‘pluriversality’.  

These contributions present a heterogeneous panorama in their historical and geographical span, but they also share important points in common. First, their common understanding of anarchism as a transnational, cosmopolitan and multilingual tradition which has to be studied in its places, networks and flows. Second, is the importance of the historical tradition of the ‘classical’ anarchist geographers to provide insights for present day revival of anarchist scholarship in geography: this legacy, as several of our authors argue, should not be taken uncritically, but to be first historically and spatially contextualised to interact with recent debates while avoiding anachronism. Third, there is a common commitment to rethink the epistemological framework of geography questioning the long-lasting hegemony of readings based on the state, or on state-like territories, as the privileged framework of reference. Networks, material and immaterial flows, diverse localisations of intellectual and political movements addressed in this book show how much more complex the spatialities of these phenomena are; likewise, present-day global and reticular protest movements all over the world, and the left/libertarian revolutions which occurred in regions like Chiapas and more recently in Rojava, show that state and state reason are increasingly intellectually unfit to explain reality and to inform scholarship committed to social transformation. Through the contributions of this book and its authors, we therefore seek to open up new analytical frameworks and frontiers of study for the future development of historical geographies in general, and anarchist historical geographies in particular.

Notes

2 Ferretti, Élisée Reclus; Pelletier, *Géographie et anarchie.*
3 Adams, Kropotkin; Kinna, *Kropotkin*; MacLauglin, *Kropotkin.*
4 For an idea of the international and multilingual contributions consecrated to these figures, consult the site http://rafemin.info/reclus/
6 Ince and Barrera, ‘For Post-Statist Geographies’.
7 Livingstone and Withers, *Geography and Revolution*; Livingstone and Withers, *Geographies of Nineteenth-Century Science.*
8 Naylor, ‘Historical Geography’; Secord, ‘Knowledge in Transit’.
10 Turcato, ‘Italian Anarchism as a Transnational Movement’, 408.
11 Carrillo, *Pluriverso. Un ensayo sobre el conocimiento indígena contemporáneo.*
12 Knapp, Flach and Ayboga, *Revolution in Rojava.*