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A Modern Anarchism (Part 1): Anarchist Analysis

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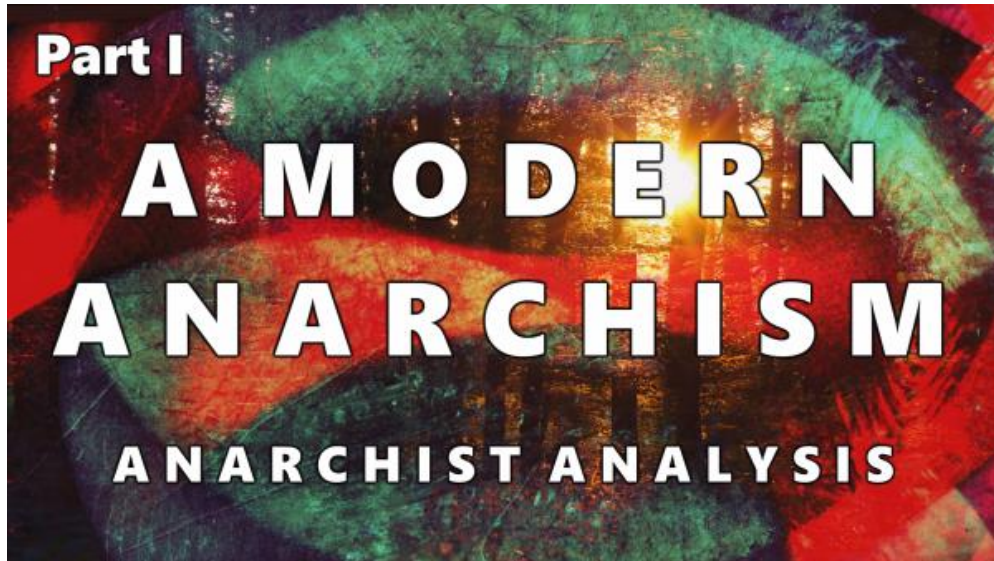
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A Modern Anarchism (Part 1): Anarchist Analysis

Daniel Baryon

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<https://libcom.org/article/modern-anarchism-part-1-anarchist-analysis>

This essay is the first in a several part series where I am developing a modern synthesis of anarchism. It is not intended as an introduction to anarchism, but instead a broad coverage of anarchist ideas, discussing the state, Capital as Power, kyriarchy, the mega-machine, queer anarchism, Black anarchism, social ecology, decolonial ideas, and much more... Here we will lay out the anarchist mode of structural critique and apply this theory of power to a variety of hierarchical power structures.

Author's Note

The following is the script of the video I published on my channel Anark. If you would like to watch that video, it is [here](#)

Minor edits have been made to the script to instead refer to itself as an essay instead of a video. Other than this, the content has remained the same and may be seen as a copy of the video, in text form, that can be distributed wholly in place of the video.

Solidarity forever in opposition to the mega-machine. Refuse defeat until death.

Introduction

We stand now at a turning point, wherein many roads sprawl out in front of us. With unprecedented access to information, the atlas seems to lie within our hands. But, at this crossroads, the popularizers of these many paths shout over one another to persuade new travelers, only to find that most travelers now choose tourism rather than migration; exploration rather than arrival. It is hard to blame them.

Having seen many return from a path leading to a dead-end, or worse, having lost those they know to a terrible bramble from which they will never escape, these weary travelers are paralyzed by choice. Confused and discouraged, many simply return home where a tormentor awaits, but wherein there is no longer the stress of uncertainty.

I would like to tell you of a new path: its extent not yet fully explored, but peering through the forestation beyond, a great light emanates forth. Before we proceed, I would like to pose a question: why has this society accumulated so much power, yet somehow fails to meet the most basic needs of humanity? Why has this hierarchical structure changed hands between so many rulers, yet the peace they have promised never lasts? Their hands bloody, their adherents marching behind, a new society of domination always follows in time. Why? Those intent on creating their own societies of domination will offer all manner of empty excuses. But the true answers lie within an ideology which has been suppressed by the power hoarders: anarchism.

This work is not meant to be a brief introduction to the topic. There are plenty of those already in existence. Instead, I want to offer a modern synthesis of anarchist ideas. So, whereas many other books and essays endeavor to give a broad, non-committal overview, here I want to ground you in a particular location within the body of anarchist thought. In doing this, we will not wander down every trail, but we will stop to look at the scenery from time to time. And, for this reason, one might see this work as motivated by the impulse described by Voline in his work *On Synthesis*¹:

“The anarchist conception must be synthetic: it must seek to become the great living synthesis of the different elements of life, established by scientific analysis and rendered fruitful by the synthesis of our ideas, our aspirations and the bits of truth that we have succeeded in discovering; it must do it if it wishes to be that precursor of truth, that true and undistorted factor, not bankrupting of human liberation and progress, which the dozens of sullen, narrow and fossilized ‘isms’ obviously cannot become.”

Such a process is, of course, a lofty goal for any one person to carry out. To do this, I will go beyond the standard list of European thinkers that one is typically introduced to when they begin an inspection of this subject. These names will certainly feature in our narrative, as they were very important figures in the development of anarchism as a revolutionary movement. But the ideas of the anarchists are not only important to some specific geographic region. Now, more than ever before, anarchism has achieved a state of critical insight, especially as it has been informed by the work of Black, queer, indigenous, feminist, decolonial, and other anarchist thinkers.

All those people who strive to be free of oppression will find their common struggle within its basis. After all, many of these realizations root to the earliest stages of humanity and will likely be at play in any possible human society. Many other anarchist works have failed to take into account these new developments of anarchist theory, to understand where the original struggles have fallen short, and then cooperate alongside this new coalition of thinkers in bringing anarchist principles to their highest culmination.

So let us begin...

¹ On Synthesis, Voline (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/voline-on-synthesis>)

First Principles

Before we set off on this journey to form what I have called a “modern anarchism,” we seem obliged to answer a much simpler question: what is anarchism? Unfortunately, more than any other subject, one is forced to confront the many propaganda campaigns that have been carried out against it. And this is no mistake. As Lorenzo Kom’Boa Ervin has said in *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*²:

“All who strive to oppress and exploit the working class, and gain power for themselves, whether they come from the right or the left, will always be threatened by Anarchism [...] because Anarchists hold that all authority and coercion must be struggled against.”

Threatened by its liberatory ideas, the many enemies of anarchism have all spread their own falsehoods. They each have an interest in muddying the waters to obscure its true meaning and to dissuade their followers from considering it. As a result, the layman’s understanding of anarchism is that it represents the rejection of all rules and organization, leading many to envision chaos or power vacuum, to be quickly filled with a new tyrant or a wilderness fought over by atomized humans. But, behind the spectacles of destruction and revolt which the reigning power structures have distributed in deceptively cut video clips and convenient political narratives, there is an entire body of theory and revolutionary history that is hidden.

And within this body of theory, there have been a number of different ways of defining anarchism, each with its own merit. Before I give my definition, I would like to inspect a few passages from notable thinkers in the field, so that we can see what facets reoccur within the discussion. In the introduction to *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice*³, for example, Rudolf Rocker says that:

“Anarchism is a definite intellectual current in the life of our times, whose adherents advocate the abolition of economic monopolies and of all political and social coercive institutions within society.”

Errico Malatesta states his definition of anarchism quite clearly in a response he wrote to Kropotkin’s *Science and Anarchy*⁴, saying that:

“Anarchism is the method of reaching anarchy, through freedom, [...] without those authoritarian institutions that impose their will on others by force, even if it happens to be in a good cause.”

It is also commonly said, by thinkers such as Peter Kropotkin⁵ or Lorenzo Kom’Boa Ervin, that anarchism is:

“the no government system of socialism.”

² Anarchism and the Black Revolution, Ervin (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/lorenzo-kom-boa-ervin-anarchism-and-the-black-revolution>)

³ Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice, Rocker (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/rudolf-rocker-anarchosyndicalism>)

⁴ Note on Hz’s article, ‘Science and Anarchy’, Malatesta (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/malatesta/1925/note-on-hz-article.html>)

⁵ The Scientific Basis of Anarchism, Kropotkin (<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/kropotkin-peter/1887/scibasis.htm>)

Many other variations can be found throughout the literature. But what we will explore in the following series of essays is how each of these actually describe different aspects of a cohesive theoretical whole. After all, there are many aspects to the body of anarchism that one might wish to include in their definition. In both Rocker and Malatesta's versions, for example, we see a shared understanding of anarchism as being the method through which a new form of society is reached. In Rocker's, additionally, we get an understanding of anarchism as a body of political theory, an "intellectual current" as he says. And, lastly, In Ervin and Kropotkin's, we get a description of its orientation within the body of socialist theory as an anti-state philosophy. Here I will offer the following definition:

Anarchism is the opposition to all hierarchical power structures, the framework for locating and understanding them, and the method by which we might dismantle and replace those hierarchical power structures with a horizontal society of free association, controlled together by the people, which we call anarchy.

This definition then references three distinct aspects of anarchism: a mode of analysis, a method of struggle, and a socio-political goal. This part in our series will primarily focus on the first of these; the anarchist mode of analysis, saving the anarchist method and theory of anarchy for later parts. But, although it will not be the subject of this video, just understand that this usage of "anarchy" does not mean chaos or lack of organization, as you have likely been told. Anarchy is both individual and collective freedom to develop our full creative capacities, constituted through equality of structural power and the eternal principle of human solidarity. Such a society is not then a state of unrest, but the condition of existence in which humanity can determine for themselves what sort of future they wish to inhabit, free of direction by some dominator class, instead carried forth by their own motivated wills. If this society has been explained to you as a state of chaos, understand only that your rulers wish you to think of a society without domination, a society in which you are in control, as chaos. However, before we return to that topic in much greater depth in the later parts of this series, we will need to lay out an understanding of the society in which we currently exist. To do this, I will state what I think are the three primary principles that underlie all anarchist analysis:

1. Means cannot be disentangled from ends
2. Hierarchical power begets monopoly and domination
3. Power structures seek to perpetuate themselves

Though much else is said within the vast breadth of anarchist literature, I contend that it is these three principles which span the gamut. Indeed, they are of such importance, I will essentially spend the rest of this work explaining how they are justified and developing a structure of understanding based on their consequences. But, before we set out on that journey, let us take a few moments to discuss what is meant by "power" in these principles.

When I say power I mean, quite simply, "the ability to successfully enact one's will." This is sometimes called a theory of "power to" as opposed to "power over." The "power to" do a thing does not come along with a default value judgment. In order to derive whether some power is good or bad, we must develop a theory of how power functions and how different powers connect to human needs. If you can acquire food, for example, and if your body is in normal functioning order, you have the "power to" eat. If you can operate a vehicle and you have the ability to provide it with fuel, you have the "power to" travel. Neither of these are, in themselves bad powers for one to have; we would then be required to ask: food by what means? A vehicle that does what?

The statement of how powerful some entity is, the measure of that entity's ability to enact its will, is then also a statement about that entity's ability to transform the universe around them. And such

powers, grounded as they are in reality, are limited by natural bounds. For this reason, powers are never purely creative nor purely destructive. In deriving any power, a being must balance its creative and destructive aspects. In the production of a painting, materials are exhausted. In the performance of a play, sweat and tears are shed, fat is burned, time is used up. It is a great strength of the firearm that it spends only the bullet it fires, yet it can kill so easily. It is a great service to the master that the servant is obedient, so that they expend little effort in disciplining them. And it is a benefit to the writer that their work exhausts only graphite or ink or reorients the switches on a hard drive, yet has the ability to create entire worlds. Powers are complex, multi-faceted, and contextual.

However, in the coming dialogue, you may see a few authors use the word power in a different way than I have just explained. They are using the “power over” usage I mentioned a few moments ago. The power “over” a thing may be seen as the power to dominate that thing; to use it or dispose of it as one pleases. From the perspective of the power to do something, power over other people might be seen as the “power to extract the obedience of others” which, as we will explore, has led to prolific suffering and destruction. However, I will be using this more holistic conception, as it has been developed in my work [Power](#), which serves as a companion piece for those who are interested in the subject.

With this understanding in hand, the problem is not that every individual has power in anarchism. Power, after all, is something that every individual has and which, depending on their context and desires, will differ considerably. In order for us to specify the real subject of our conversation, we must discuss what is called a power structure. A power structure is a material and conceptual system embodied through social, technological, and environmental relations that then determine how the collective powers of some group of conscious beings are directed. Any place wherein people orient their social arrangements, implement their technologies, or interact with their environment in a way where they redirect the total of their powers toward a coordinated end, they will have created a power structure. Like power, a power structure is not inherently bad. The agreement between two people to divide their labor as to pertain to their strengths is a very simple mutualistic power structure. But a vast system of domination, where there are those who sit above in cushioned seats and command the masses to carry out their will, would also be a power structure; although a very different kind.

It must then be said that the object of critique in anarchism is what is called a hierarchical power structure. A hierarchical power structure is a system organized to give one group of people both greater power than another group and power over that other group. And this is not an arbitrary construction. As we shall set out to demonstrate in this essay, as a material fact of how such hierarchical power structures are constructed, they will always have a very particular kind of relation to their society, technology, and ecology; the relations which we call authoritarianism and domination. Here and elsewhere, I use these words in a precise way:

Authoritarianism: The degree to which a power structure monopolizes control over the total social implementation of some power.

Domination: The degree to which some power structure utilizes coercion, violence, and/or deception to achieve its ends.

I have separated these two terms because, although the phenomena they describe nearly always occur together, they can and do occur apart at the scale of individuals. However, where it is allowed to perpetuate, authoritarianism almost always demands domination of some sort in order to maintain its monopoly, whether it is threat of physical or social violence, grievous bodily harm, or a propaganda system through which it can manufacture consent. And a system of domination will almost always demand the establishment of authoritarian relations, wherein the subjugator class can keep such

control of coercion, violence, and deception to themselves. Domination and authoritarianism might then be said to be the methods used by hierarchical powers to solidify and perpetuate themselves.

But the anarchist does not then tell us to just sit back and watch as these systems of domination expand and despoil the Earth. Hierarchical power structures are not inevitably constituted by the organic capacities of human beings, they are imposed upon human society by a ruthless process. The mistaken axiom at the core of all hierarchical ideology is that, because there are differences in individual powers, that this both necessitates and justifies hierarchical power structures.

Yet, just because the person who can construct a house is more powerful in the means of creating shelter than those who cannot, does this mean that they are also better than others as a chef or as a scientist or as an artist? The one who can compose a work of musical beauty is not better or worse than the analyst or the technician. The spectrum of human powers find their fullest expression in a society where all others are practiced. We are all reliant on one another.

Seeking to bring out these better aspects of humanity, the anarchist posits the creation of horizontal power structures, wherein power is distributed more equitably among all people and all decisions are made by those who are affected. These are then best represented in opposite tendencies to those of authoritarianism and domination. These are:

Libertarianism: The degree to which decisions about the implementation of total social power are socially distributed.

Mutuality: The degree to which a power structure utilizes impulses of cooperation, self-defense, and free thought to achieve its ends.

In these, we see how the most productive strengths of humans lie within their better capacities, not conceiving of difference as necessitating hierarchy, but embracing a unity in diversity. And it is the contention of the anarchists that, so long as these better impulses are not embraced and brought to bear in organizing society, humanity will suffer under a perpetual subjugation.

But up until this point, I have stated a great deal and provided little justification. In the following sections I would like to explain to you why power structures function as they do and give you an understanding of what dynamics are at play that lead to these issues. In order to do this I think it is best that we start from the beginning.

Kyriarchal Power

Before all other considerations, there is the physical world. The universe, existing prior to consciousness, also then existed prior to power. After all, power is reliant on the existence of a will and there is no will in the procession of particles nor their assemblies until they have been constructed together into the form of a conscious being. Before the conceptions and intentions of conscious beings, there are only flows of energy, information, embodied in relations and structure. The universe is configured and reconfigured by these flows between its internal components, driven by differences from one part to the next. A cascade of events takes place at scales beyond all human reckoning every single fraction of every single second. With or without humans these churning processes would still proceed.

But we are holistically embedded within that universe. And, by this measure, every power that we have necessarily derives from those interactions with the real flows of physical reality which surround

us. However, we have become separated from this fact. We forget where all things have come from and where all things will one day return. The world has ceased to be, as many organic societies considered it, the vital substrate of all existence, but instead a thing to be tamed, exploited, conquered, and extracted from. We have come to forget our place within this vast ecological balance and have sought to separate ourselves from its inherent movements. Worse than this, due to our mistaken belief in a separation, we have lost an understanding of how many of those flows even function. We can never grasp the full scope of nature, not just at the scale of the cosmos, but at the scale of our own planet, of our own continent, of our own communities.

Where the universe knows only what is, we have imposed upon it arbitrary relations such as private ownership, status, domination, obedience, and so on. Yet none of these can cover up our origins within the ecology, nor can they remake what the universe is. Every single process we carry out is foundationally predicated on the utilization of ecological growth, the long processes of natural chemistry, and our coincidentally hospitable place within the solar system. After all, there would be no human power to speak of if any of these were not so. What minerals and organic materials would human labor extract to build its tools? What animals would it consume? What landscape would it settle within? Our very physiology is an agglomeration of gradual improvements arising from millions of years of adaptation. As Murray Bookchin⁶ has said:

“We are part of nature, a product of a long evolutionary journey. To some degree, we carry the ancient oceans in our blood. [...] Our brains and nervous systems did not suddenly spring into existence without long antecedents in natural history. That which we most prize as integral to our humanity – our extraordinary capacity to think on complex conceptual levels – can be traced back to the nerve network of primitive invertebrates, the ganglia of a mollusk, the spinal cord of a fish, the brain of an amphibian, and the cerebral cortex of a primate.”

Yet, despite these facts, we have come to see the universe as nothing more than a stage, the ecology a distant, niche concern, obscuring the manner in which we are holistically embedded within it. Layers and layers of the ecosphere are built up, all of them reliant on one another, all of them variegated by the diverse flows of energy within the universe. Together, these living materials represent a most robust transformation of physical matter, providing a biotic scaffolding that allows all other things to exist. And in this fact, the coordination of living material has been a crucial mechanism for the derivation of human power. We cannot hope to describe the countless, subtle ways in which humans were connected with the flora and fauna of their areas. Life was once inextricably oriented within the local ecology: the cycles of nature given meaning and purpose, their rhythm fostering an intimate knowledge of the patterns of the natural environment, as well as its pitfalls.

However, the truest catalyst for human power was the coordination with other human beings. In the expansion and redirection of these creative and destructive powers, the widest potentiality was discovered. Society was no convenience, it was a necessity both for survival and in providing the best life for those early peoples. Society was a thing arising from humanity’s natural capacities for empathy and socialization, put to work in ensuring communal safety within the environment. Humans are equipped with a brain that is wired for sociality. Our very physiology pushes us toward a consideration of how the needs of others are equal to our own. In *A General Theory of Love*⁷, professors of psychiatry Thomas

⁶ Defending the Earth, Bookchin (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-and-dave-foreman-defending-the-earth-a-debate>)

⁷ *A General Theory of Love*, Lewis, Amini, Lannon (<https://libgen.is/book/index.php?md5=8159DAC0E907FACC76EBF29700C96A32>)

Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon expound at length about how this human sociality is constructed, noting:

"[...] because human physiology is (at least in part) an open-loop arrangement, an individual does not direct all of his own functions. A second person transmits regulatory information that can alter hormone levels, cardiovascular function, sleep rhythms, immune function, and more—inside the body of the first. The reciprocal process occurs simultaneously: the first person regulates the physiology of the second, even as he himself is regulated. Neither is a functioning whole on his own; each has open loops that only somebody else can complete. Together they create a stable, properly balanced pair of organisms. And the two trade their complementary data through the open channel their limbic connection provides. [...] That open-loop design means that in some important ways, people cannot be stable on their own—not should or shouldn't be, but can't be. [...] Total self-sufficiency turns out to be a daydream whose bubble is burst by the sharp edge of the limbic brain. Stability means finding people who regulate you well and staying near them."

Because the human is a being in eternal process, an open loop. Continually, the human is confronted with new stimuli, each imprinting themselves upon them in different ways, leading to internal changes to their psyche. And, in order to act effectively, they must attempt to coordinate their actions with their expectations, such that the feedback from their actions will form an end in coordination with their goals. Upon every step, seeing the results of what they have done, the human must choose whether they will adjust their expectations or adjust their actions. And this is no obscure philosophical fact. Human actions transform the world, changing its content and provoking responses from those other entities which exist.

All of these loops open, each human being and their entire environment then vies over how their actions and expectations will be formed. This alteration of expectations and intentions, then coordinated with actions, I will call "conditioning," as it is named in psychological literature. Conditioning is not always nefarious, of course. We are conditioned, especially at the beginning of our lives, to avoid actions which will genuinely harm us. It is good that we learn to withdraw our hand from the stove top. Pavlov's Dog is not being taught to do anything harmful when he begins to salivate at the sound of the bell, any more than some humans have begun to salivate and proceed home at the sound of the dinner bell. Given this flexibility of conscious beings and taking seriously the need of humans to bond deeply with one another, it would seem that we are encouraged to produce a society of reconciliation with others, consideration of conscious needs, and mutuality with the environment.

But hierarchical power is predicated on the negation of these impulses. Hierarchical powers wish to bring those that they control into obedience to the seat of command, because obedience guarantees service to the goals of that structural leadership and the perpetuation of their direction of the powers of others. In order to achieve this, power structures are driven to utilize reward and punishment; what is called "operant conditioning" in the psychological literature. And by this measure, hierarchical society can be seen as something like psychologist B.F. Skinner's "operant conditioning chambers." In these operant conditioning chambers, the animal is given the option to either do some desired task and therefore receive a reward (typically food) or not do some desired task and therefore receive a punishment (some form of pain). These chambers then program the animals that are inside them to do the desired task, quite reliably as well. Hierarchical society then functions as an elaborate operant conditioning chamber, such that it may contort us into misery, yet still extract our compliance.

As the scholar Lewis Mumford reminds us in his theory of the mega-machine, hierarchical power is mechanistic. And in a machine, the relation between components must be specified very closely. After

all, if these relations are not fine-tuned, then small changes in the input of one component may lead to run-on effects. Indeed, every time that information is conveyed from one juncture to the next, the worse that that information is conveyed, the more distorted the signal will be at the next step, like we see in a game of telephone. And hierarchical power, seeking to reduce all variance between its commands and the actions of its subjects, seeks for its power to be conveyed smoothly through us. Therefore, as we are the means by which this machine conveys its power, the invariant conveyance of power means the reduction of human lives, with all their creative energies, into dead components.

In this, we hear the echoes of Rudolf Rocker's thesis in *Nationalism and Culture* that, the more hierarchical the power resting over some society is, the more that the culture of that people is strangled. Culture, after all, is the creative social product of a people, the result of their accumulated creativity unconstrained and turned onto the universe. Hierarchical structures, by contrast, relying upon the existence of a latent decentral power outside of themselves that they may then redirect to their whims, are necessarily sterilizing. As Rudolf Rocker⁸ says:

“Culture is not created by command. It creates itself, arising spontaneously from the necessities of men and their social cooperative activity. No ruler could ever command men to fashion the first tools, first use fire, invent the telescope and the steam engine, or compose the Iliad. Cultural values do not arise by direction of higher authorities. They cannot be compelled by dictates nor called into life by the resolution of legislative assemblies.”

Hierarchical power is then reliant on the persistence of an organic society that it is alien to, which it exploits but cannot recreate. Because, though it is this ability of their human subjects to think of things outside precedent, to devise new talents, and to overcome complex obstacles which unlocks the power within many other things, these are the very same impulses that hierarchy must seek to suffocate so that it may ensure obedience. This is why power hierarchy drives toward the same end in all circumstances, even though its manifestations may differ; its eternal method is unquestioning conformity and thus the mechanization of the human subject.

This is one of the primary insights which has driven the anarchist analysis throughout history. And it has provided anarchist theorists with a powerful lens by which to understand and predict the actions of hierarchical structures. Indeed, this is why, even though anarchists have sometimes fallen victim to economic reductionism, it has never been a totalizing impulse within the movement. In an essay written by Deric Shannon and J Rogue called *Refusing to Wait*,⁹ they summarize some of these early theoretical developments:

“Early anarchists were writing about issues such as prostitution and sex trafficking (Goldman), forced sterilizations (Kropotkin), and marriage (de Cleyre) to widen the anarchist critique of hierarchy to give critical concern to women's issues in their own right, while also articulating a socialist vision of a future cooperative and classless society.”

But there was a tendency of historical anarchists to see some of these social issues as fundamentally unalterable until the conditions of capitalism and state domination were overturned. This is not because these issues were seen as unimportant, as we have already pointed out. It is instead that classical

⁸ *Nationalism and Culture*, Rocker (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/rudolf-rocker-nationalism-and-culture>)

⁹ *Refusing to Wait: Anarchism and Intersectionality*, Shannon, Rogue (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/deric-shannon-and-j-rogue-refusing-to-wait-anarchism-and-intersectionality>)

anarchists have often viewed capitalism and the state as the foundational mechanisms through which all other hierarchies are maintained. Consequently, these groups have sometimes been told that their liberation ultimately had to wait until after the revolution to be resolved, and asked to struggle instead toward emancipation from capital and the state first. This is precisely why the title of Shannon and Rogue's piece on this subject is "Refusing to Wait." Here they argue for an anarchist intersectionality with very good reason, pointing out that anarchists cannot put off the struggles of oppressed people in hopes that, one day, a rupture will eliminate capitalism and the state.

These struggles against hierarchy are not separate and we cannot procrastinate in their elimination until some rosy future after the revolution. They function right here and now to maintain all other hierarchies of power. In absorbing intersectionality, it must become a tool that is complementary to the anarchist framework, which requires that we expand it past a simple liberal analysis of identity and instead relate that identity to structure and vice versa. This is why J. Rogue and Abbey Volcano say the following in their piece about anarchist intersectionality titled *Insurrections at the Intersections*¹⁰:

"Our interest lies with how institutions function and how institutions are reproduced through our daily lives and patterns of social relations. How can we trace our 'individual experiences' back to the systems that (re)produce them (and vice versa)? How can we trace the ways that these systems (re)produce one another? How can we smash them and create new social relations that foster freedom?"

This echoes the words of the more radical tradition within intersectional feminism. Heard again from bell hooks in one of her interviews¹¹:

"I began to use the phrase, in my work, white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, because I wanted to have some language that would actually remind us continually of the interlocking systems of domination that define our reality and not just to have one thing be like...gender is the important issue, race is the important issue. [...] 'all of these things actually are functioning simultaneously at all times in our lives.'"

In this, we hear the common conclusion of intersectionality and our own power analysis: each hierarchy is fundamentally involved in the maintenance of the complete structure of domination and cannot be disentangled. Whether these powers derive from extraction, exploitation, degradation, deception, or subjugation simply does not matter to a hierarchical system. What matters to the hierarchy is only what they may achieve through their means. This is what has motivated the development within intersectional theory of what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza calls the "kyriarchy." In her book *Transforming Vision*¹², she describes the kyriarchy as

"a complex pyramidal system of relations of domination that works through the violence of economic exploitation and lived subordination."

Here we see a very close overlap with Mumford's conception of the mega-machine, but with an emphasis upon the ways that this system is carried out through its relations. What Fiorenza and the rest

¹⁰ *Insurrections at the Intersections*, Volcano, Rogue (<https://libcom.org/library/insurrections-intersections-feminism-intersectionality-anarchism>)

¹¹ bell hooks Interview (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUpY8PZlgV8>)

¹² *Transforming Vision*, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324463244_Transforming_Vision_Explorations_in_Feminist_Theology)

of the intersectional theorists want us to recognize is that it is not one singular hierarchy which transfigures any given society, but a web of domination systems, wherein one may be privileged within one hierarchy and not within another, in extreme danger within one environment and completely safe in another.

These contexts are not mere attitudes, upon each juncture they have been built into the structures of our cities, protected or discriminated against by law, externalized into systems of automation and bureaucracy; said in our own parlance, used as means to expand and protect power monopoly. Each location in the global mega-machine merely utilizes different aspects of the kyriarchy in order to maintain rulership, ordering and reordering these to establish a more supreme dominance. This is not to say that specific hierarchies do not function as the major ordering ethos within certain spheres; different hierarchies clearly have cultural and systemic dominance within their contexts, capitalism and the state perhaps most notable among them. But it cannot be said that domination is ever so simple that it can be boiled down to only the reign of capital or the state or patriarchy or white supremacy or any other single manifestation of kyriarchy, because each of these rely upon one another within their context in order to maintain hierarchical control.

All of these systems of discrimination and bigotry form part of the integral functioning of the factories and the roadways and the commodities that the kyriarchy produces and the effects can be seen in how these very things have been systematized within reality. This is why the separation between base and superstructure or a software-hardware metaphor still fails to understand the situation at hand; the truest goal for hierarchical power is to warp reality such that their will can be carried out. All means that achieve their goals lay upon the table waiting for use. Because, in this reduction of all things into power accumulation, the momentum of the mega-machine is toward a world where everything is unified within it and thus everything is reproductive of its complete control. This process of social reproduction is what Bichler and Nitzan call creorder. The creorder of any society is the dynamic process by which it continually adjusts and maintains itself to create a new ordered state. As they say¹³:

“A creorder can be hierarchical as in dictatorship or tight bureaucracy, horizontal as in direct democracy, or something in between. Its pace of change can be imperceptibly slow – as it was in many ancient tyrannies – yielding the impression of complete stability; or it can be so fast as to undermine any semblance of structure, as it often is in capitalism. Its transformative pattern can be continuous or discrete, uniform or erratic, singular or multifaceted. But whatever its particular properties, it is always a paradoxical duality – a dynamic creation of a static order.”

This process plays out then at every level, in the development of our creative and destructive capacities, through the formation of our expectations, in the development of our intentions, in the domination of our will, and all else. Through creorder, all of these aspects of ourselves and the world are disfigured into the shape that is needed by the machine and the range of possibilities we might achieve is sullied to meet demands of the rulers.

Because, though hierarchical power views itself as a form of godhood whose extent is infinite and limitations always temporary, the mega-machine is actually nothing more than a parasite by nature. Its power is derived solely in the fact that, standing at the juncture where decisions are made, those that stand above in the hierarchy act as gatekeepers to the total social flow of power. And, though this gatekeeping of command creates the illusion of facilitation, the work of hierarchy is actually to

¹³ Capital as Power, Bichler, Nitzan
(https://bnarchives.yorku.ca/259/2/20090522_nb_casp_full_indexed.pdf)

sabotage the free coordination of powers by splitting what already exists within the world, into an infinite procession of thresholds, staffed by middle men who each extract their toll.

This process is one of the driving factors to why hierarchical power actually serves to reduce complexity. This is spoken about at length by James C. Scott, in his book *Seeing Like a State*¹⁴:

“Officials of the modern state are, of necessity, at least one step— and often several steps— removed from the society they are charged with governing. They assess the life of their society by a series of typifications that are always some distance from the full reality these abstractions are meant to capture. [...] State simplifications [...] represent techniques for grasping a large and complex reality; in order for officials to be able to comprehend aspects of the ensemble, that complex reality must be reduced to schematic categories. The only way to accomplish this is to reduce an infinite array of detail to a set of categories that will facilitate summary descriptions, comparisons, and aggregation.”

But this is not only a problem seen in the state. Hierarchical powers, in general, will have similar interactions with their society. As a matter of principle, the narrower the bottleneck of power, the further information will be simplified by removal from the origin. And this is hardly an ambitious claim. We can see that they know these very limitations in the way they organize their own systems of power, demanding that the world be reduced into a scale they can understand, what Scott calls “legibility.”

“Certain forms of knowledge and control require a narrowing of vision. The great advantage of such tunnel vision is that it brings into sharp focus certain limited aspects of an otherwise far more complex and unwieldy reality. This very simplification, in turn, makes the phenomenon at the center of the field of vision more legible and hence more susceptible to careful measurement and calculation.”

Such a striving for legibility can be quite useful in the physical sciences, but human lives are not particles in a box. Seeing society from on high, humans become like ants, the details of the local landscape are obscured to those who make all decisions. The higher up one stands on the structure, the more that they see a summary map, and one lacking all of the nuances of ecological, economic, and social complexity. As a result, the flows of social life, containing all of their infinite suffering and happiness and all that lies in between become statistics, the great aggregation of labor power becomes a number by which they chart the disastrous course of the machine.

Whereas complexity requires a system of agents who are allowed to have variable action and association, enabling them to combine in new and unique ways, hierarchy demands that complexity reduce itself to the limits of the machine. Because, hierarchical power does not gather its data out of sheer curiosity. It is not like the scientist who measures much and interacts as little as possible. The information that centralized bodies endeavor to gather is gathered in order to then act upon the world; that is to say, to dominate society and to therefore reproduce their central authority.

And so, to any hierarchical machine, alterations can be made, but only within a certain range. These forces of simplification and legibility are not mistakes, they are the inborn dynamics of hierarchical power and they will arise anywhere it is imposed. Where the kyriarchal machine acts, it acts to sheer off any rough edges that stray too far from its prototypes, to externalize the importance of pertinent

¹⁴ Seeing Like a State, Scott (<https://libcom.org/files/Seeing%20Like%20a%20State%20-%20James%20C.%20Scott.pdf>)

organizing details, to forcefully stratify both reality and information as to fit their schemas of interpretation, and to inflict real physical and emotional violence in order to achieve the absolute obedience of everything and everyone that exists.

This reordering force of simplification and regimentation is one of the driving factors to why authoritarian systems produce such misery within their people. As the gatekeeping of power becomes more strict and as the group of power controllers becomes arbitrarily smaller, the hierarchy of power becomes more extreme. The subjects of that hierarchical power are more and more alienated from their own capacities: those qualities within their personhood which could be turned onto the world in far more beneficial ways, are instead put toward menial labor and repetition. Their blood, sweat, and tears are shed only so that this great parasitic force dwelling over them may extract its diet.

Defined in its narrow monopoly over the flow of power in society, hierarchy demands that the raucous creative impulses of humanity are constrained to the needs of the hierarchs. And, in this, it would not matter whether one argued that these structures were a natural outcome of human society or not. By the fact that they turn humans into miserable machines, hierarchical structures stand counterposed to the organic human composition and its fundamental desires and needs. As Rocker says:

“Neither in Egypt nor in Babylon, nor in any other land was culture created by the heads of systems of political power. They merely appropriated an already existing and developed culture and made it subservient to their special political purposes. But thereby they put the ax to the root of all future cultural progress, for in the same degree as political power became confirmed, and subjected all social life to its influence, occurred the inner atrophy of the old forms of culture, until within their former field of action no fresh growth could start.”

That hierarchical society continues, even though it relies on sabotage of the full capacities of human beings and the production of their misery may seem difficult to imagine. After all, given that the machine utilizes those very flows in order to derive its power, it would seem to benefit much more greatly from their expansion. But, if total human power is expanded in such a way that the hierarchs cannot extract their toll from the expansion, then they will slowly begin to lose their power leverage over the masses. And so, the only growth which is acceptable to hierarchical power is that power which it can exploit. Because, in order for power structures to perpetuate themselves, the most primary goal is always power leverage; to maintain a position of superior power over all other rivals. In this, it might be said that there is always an arms race between hierarchical powers; however it is far more complex than the acquisition of actual arms; it is a ruthless competition to earn access to means of domination and authoritarianism.

As this monopoly is factually established, competing power structures are then less able to access the means to accumulate their own power, which slows their accumulation more, leading to a destructive feedback cycle. So in order to ensure this affair takes place for competitors, but not for themselves, hierarchical powers utilize their access to domination to sabotage other structures. As a result, social power is concentrated into tiers by a systemic disallowance of other beings to access the broader capacities of society and thus the disallowance of others to express their own creative and destructive powers, unless it serves the owners. Therefore, hierarchical power must strangle the fullest expression of human potentials, lest it bring about its own destruction. Hierarchical power is then not a producer of progress, but an exploitative parasite which extracts its sustenance from constraining passage through the many gates of control.

The phenomena being described is clearest to see within the economy. The economy is that place wherein power has been made so legible to hierarchy that it is literally made into numbers; measured

in dollars and cents, calculated, predicted, and discounted, invested, depreciated, and so on... As Bichler and Nitzan would say, capital is a symbolic quantification of power. Capital measures the real, numeric ability of its holders to organize and reorganize society to their will. And, because power structures always seek to expand, the owners of capital then seek to accumulate all of the components for creation, distribution, syndication, and all other manner of production. They can, through this accumulation, acquire the services of all of those with their desired creative powers, the technological infrastructure needed to coordinate those powers, and the supply of extracted ecological materials to continue the construction of their means. They can come to own the warehouses. They can come to own the land on which the businesses might be constructed. And if those other entities within society try to resist, they can exert their leverage to carry out wars both of attrition and aggression.

As they gain control of these new services and access to new information, the field of quantized power then expands, invading more and more deeply into our personal as well as our professional lives. The organic society which functions by way of its freedom from this incursion of hierarchy, comes to be more and more atomized, more and more alienated, more and more filled with the vanity of economic domination. After all, the owners of capital did not simply will their capital into existence. Their capital was accumulated because they requisitioned some portion of the power already afforded to them in order to control more of the world around them; that is to say, to exact obedience from the economy, society, and the ecology and to therefore perpetuate their further control of obedience. The capitalist, having the capital within their hands to begin with, pays the workers to produce products, sell them, coordinate their distribution, facilitate their repair, and so on, such that the owner of the enterprise derives all power. And the capitalist, desiring to extract the maximum amount possible from that labor, seeks to concede as little of that accumulated power to the worker as possible.

After all, the capitalist does not need to negotiate with the land or the buildings or the machinery they use to run their business. These things demand only the cost of upkeep. The worker though, thinks to demand more than starvation! The human being demands dignity! And the capitalist, no matter how magnanimous, is drawn to resent this fact. The conditioning of the mega-machine is such that the capitalists will try to reduce the worker to the status of a machine. This means to reduce the wage of the laborer, to charge the consumer a higher price, and to yield less through taxation; that is to say, to limit the amount of power which escapes the grasp of the owner of capital. And, were there no minimum wages or were the workers to roll over and do nothing, the capitalist would happily wring out every last scrap of power which they could extract out of them, such that they were relegated to slavery.

And, with this power they have extracted, fed back into an economy wherein all things are quantized by capital, nearly all things become possible. Capital is not limited only to the creation of new commodities. If the corporation truly seeks to ensure its accumulation, it means to sabotage the market, to more strictly constrain the access to new technologies, to carry out adversarial ad campaigns, to accumulate contested assets, and to capture interested consumer demographics. If it does not, its competitors may catch up, thus leading to an ever-expanding urge to increase power leverage. And it is this reliable leverage accumulation that solidifies the hierarchy of one rung over another. This is what drives the process of differential accumulation in the theory of Capital as Power:

“...capitalism isn’t simply an order; it is a creorder. It involves the ongoing imposition of power and therefore the dynamic transformation of society. In this process the key is differential accumulation: the goal is not merely to retain one’s relative capitalization but to increase it. And since relative capitalization represents power, increases in relative capitalization represent the augmentation of power. The accumulation of capital and the changing power of capitalists to transform society become two sides of the same creorder.”

This desire to accumulate power faster than their competitors is a universal law of hierarchical power. And, indeed, the utilization of the power of society does not end only where power is quantized. As we have said, the entire kyriarchal machine is unified and thus the power of capital rests on a continuum with the other powers in society. In fact, one of the most primary mechanisms through which the capitalist class ensures their leverage over the masses is the gatekeeping of popular power by the state, specifically: the police and the army. Through these, the state enforces both economic and political monopolies through violence, enabling the ruling class to maintain its narrow bottleneck of control. Because those workers who labor toward the goals of the capitalist, what access do they have to these means? If workers seek to take the warehouses and the tools and the supply lines back from those who own them, capital will employ the violence of the state to stop them.

This is the component purpose of the state in the mega-machine: to establish a fixed schema, put into place by those who already rule, in order to maintain and encourage kyriarchal growth, enforced through monopoly on violence, coercion, and threat. Said otherwise: the state is the primary mechanism of domination, carried out on behalf of whichever parasite stands at the juncture of 'deservedness.' In this way, the state serves to alienate the masses from the most basic capacities of society and to instead transform each into a form of rulership. This is why Malatesta defines the state in the following way¹⁵:

“Anarchists, including this writer, have used the word State, and still do, to mean the sum total of the political, legislative, judiciary, military and financial institutions through which the management of their own affairs, the control over their personal behavior, the responsibility for their personal safety, are taken away from the people and entrusted to others who, by usurpation or delegation, are vested with the powers to make the laws for everything and everybody, and to oblige the people to observe them, if need be, by the use of collective force.”

This interpretation stands in contrast to the liberal conceit of the state: that the state was meant to be a central representation of the society it stood over and, in this role, was also meant to act as mediator to alienate capital from complete administration of society. This mistaken belief in the separation of politics and economics is, in fact, what fuels the delusion presented by capitalists that they stand in opposition to state regulation. But this separation between capital and state has always been a convenient fiction. Bichler and Nitzan explain why this is the case in their work, saying:

“[T]he pivotal impact of mergers is to creorder not capitalist production but capitalist power at large. [...] By constantly pushing toward, and eventually breaking through their successive social ‘envelopes’ – from the industry, to the sector, to the nation-state, to the world as a whole – mergers create a strong drive toward ‘jurisdictional integration’ [...] Yet this very integration pits dominant capital against new rivals under new circumstances, and so creates the need to constantly creorder the wider power institutions of society, including the state of capital, international relations, ideology and violence.”

Though Bichler and Nitzan are focusing on these facts as they are pertinent to capital, it is true of all hierarchical power. Seeing opposition, the state will always seek to destroy or merge with its opponents in time, whether this is through wars of imperialism, trade agreements, foreign occupations, colonialism, annexation, invasion, or any other mechanism. Where there exists opposition, there exists a threat to perpetuation that must be eliminated, its autonomy replaced with subjugation, its oppositional will destroyed. However, both domestically and abroad, in recognition of their common interests to control the masses, capital and state always rationally choose merger, no matter what

¹⁵ Anarchy, Malatesta (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/errico-malatesta-anarchy>)

temporary theater they have offered to say otherwise. Capital benefits greatly from having the duty to do violence to protect itself outsourced to the state and the state benefits greatly from the extractive economy of capitalism generating a surplus for it to bridle.

This is also why there never has been and never will be a “proletarian state.” The very nature of a hierarchical power such as the state is to alienate the masses from power. This is within its form as a machine. Or, as Rocker has said in *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice*:

“[J]ust as the functions of the bodily organs of plants and animals cannot be arbitrarily altered, so that, for example, one cannot at will hear with his eyes and see with his ears, so also one cannot at pleasure transform an organ of social oppression into an instrument for the liberation of the oppressed. The state can only be what it is: the defender of mass exploitation and social privileges, the creator of privileged classes and castes and of new monopolies. Who fails to recognise this function of the state does not understand the real nature of the present social order at all, and is incapable of pointing out to humanity new outlooks for its social evolution.”

This is why the masses, no matter their power, can never merge with the state. Hierarchy and the masses empowered are polar opposites, deriving the impulses which give them their strength from precisely contradictory principles. If the masses were to hold the power to overcome the state, this would have represented a preceding deprivation of the state of its power monopoly. And in the event that the people hold this power to themselves, they would have only the choice to abolish the remaining, anemic state or to let it remain and in doing so, let an opposing power to themselves continue to exist - a power which, built hierarchically as it is, would soon again seek sabotage or monopoly as by its nature.

Because, though the defenders of the state often claim that it arose as a compromise wherein the people sacrifice some freedom in exchange for protection, this turns out only to be an incidental fact. The state only defends its people when it is beneficial for the state or its conjoined hierarchies. When it is not, the state cares nothing for them unless compelled. Their citizenry is a power host from which they begrudgingly extract their means of subjugation. And, because the state is therefore bound to the people underneath it in order to derive its power, it seeks to convince them that they should be grateful for the service of sheer self-interest that the state carries out in its defensive and offensive capacities against other states.

To imbue this selfish delusion, the mega-machine seeks to establish a nationalistic fervor which conceals the conflict playing out between all peoples and their rulers, of a power alienated from the masses and made to serve the needs of the ruling class, of a people gorged on the spoils of other alienated peoples as a bribery for domestic suffering. Empire seeks to convince the people that its wars of imperialism are necessary to defend the citizens, when it is really just that the domination of their state has expanded to such a degree that it now carries out a global project of sabotage to maintain its power monopoly. In every sphere that hierarchical power then expands, it is named differently as its exhibitions differ: imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, colonialism, and so on... But each of these represent its need to reproduce a global mega-machine, to control all urge to rebel, to turn all collective powers of the planet into clientele.

Everywhere the kyriarchal machine expands, we experience the distress of constantly living under subjugation, surveilled by the very commodities we produce, deceived by every flow of information, distorted into sad simulacrum by day, distracted by monotonous entertainment by night, and forced into every other measure of distress offered by the domination machine. Every day it tempts the limits of our misery, discovering what new deprivation it might enforce upon us without provoking revolt.

However, the machine does not want to have to fight against the internally motivated will of the beings it dominates; that is a costly imposition. Given that there is a fundamental mismatch between the needs of the masses of humans and the needs of the structures that they are subsumed under, hierarchical powers have a wish to transform not only the expectations and intentions of their subjects, but also their desires; to desire their own domination and to participate in the domination of others. Because, though domination is quite often perpetuated through violence and coercion, systems generally much prefer deception if it is available.

Mega-Mechanical Colonization

In his book *Capitalist Realism*¹⁶, Mark Fisher speaks about a social phenomenon wherein the people have come to accept their state of subjugation under capitalist society. He explains this concept, which he calls capitalism realism as:

"...the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it."

In this way, Fisher says, capitalism has come not only to represent a single system oriented as it is within history, but instead the horizon of all possible systems. We have not only reached a new stage of society, in the words of Francis Fukayama, we have reached the 'end of history.' And Fisher's claim is hardly controversial. We can see this being explicitly conveyed by the ruling class, for example, in Margaret Thatcher's propagandistic phrase "there is no alternative." This philosophy of justification is not even a celebration of capitalism, but an attitude of dour acceptance. Though we want better, we are simply not good enough for it.

But there is much more to this global power structure than capitalism. As we have discussed, the mega-machine is not programmed as a purely economic construct. A complex of hierarchical ideologies work together to produce the functioning of the mega-machine, what I have called the justifying philosophies of hierarchy in my other work. And it is for this reason that we are faced with more than just a capitalist realism. Because of the conditioning of hierarchical power structures, we have become deeply enmeshed in a hierarchical realism. Whereas capitalist realism might be said to have endeavored upon a few hundred years of brainwashing to support its rein, hierarchical society has had thousands. And, beaten down by these millennia of rulership, many of us can no longer even imagine what it would look like to be free.

This is because, as each human moves through these hierarchical systems, they are not only contorted into functional components by the machine, they undergo considerable internal conditioning as well. After all, no one likes to imagine themselves the villain of the story of life and becoming reliant upon the privileges afforded to them by the power structure, they will tend to justify the system they are embedded within. The power of those beings acting within the structure, having become intertwined with the system itself, is then also reliant upon the perpetuation of that system. And for the system to cease is for their expanded power to cease. In this, as one proceeds through a system of power, it becomes more and more unthinkable that they should destroy what they have built, that they should ever demure from the seizure of new power, or that they should ever diminish the power they have accumulated at some later date. As Rudolf Rucker says in *Nationalism and Culture*:

¹⁶ Capitalism Realism, Fisher
(https://libcom.org/files/Capitalist%20Realism_%20Is%20There%20No%20Alternat%20-%20Mark%20Fisher.pdf)

“It is in the nature of all ambitions to political power that those animated by them hesitate at no means which promise success even though such success must be purchased by treason, lies, mean cunning, and hypocritical intrigue. The maxim that the end justifies the means has always been the first article of faith of all power politics. No Jesuits were needed to invent it. Every power-lustful conqueror, every politician, subscribes to it, Semite and German, Roman and Mongol, for the baseness of method is as closely related to power as decay is to death.”

And worse than this, hierarchical power attracts the corrupted. Seeing within this structure a means by which they can achieve a dominator’s ends there is little question of whether the petty tyrant will seize the opportunity. They do not care, after all, whether they are “corrupted” by our standards by the conditioning of the mega-machine; their simple impulse is to accumulate power and that impulse is rewarded prolifically within the hierarchical structures which have been brought into being. With these corrupted components in place, it is a guarantee that such a system will become filled with opportunists and parasites.

These hierarchical structures, controlled by the power hungry, bungled by corrupted reformers, and staffed by an endless array of sycophants, then have almost no checks on the free expansion of their influence. Where these systems persist, they will tend to pervade every sphere with their philosophies of justification, forcefully establishing the assumptions of the ruling class as the new standards of society. And, as this process goes on for longer and longer, it will tend to create a new notion of normalcy which benefits it, whether it is patriarchal, capitalist, or otherwise. The perpetuation of this normalized way of being becomes like a social ritual that, when repeated, brings hierarchical power further into reality.

This is the topic which queer anarchism orients itself around most notably. That is to say, what is this construct of “normalcy” that society develops and how are those that deviate from this standard of normalcy treated? Susan Song summarizes this in her piece *Polyamory and Queer Anarchism*.¹⁷

“Queer theory opens up a space to critique how we relate to each other socially in a distinctly different way than typical anarchist practice. Where classical anarchism is mostly focused on analyzing power relations between people, the economy, and the state, queer theory understands people in relation to the normal and the deviant [...] Queer theory seeks to disrupt the ‘normal’ with the same impulse that anarchists do with relations of hierarchy, exploitation, and oppression.”

Despite its internal drive toward mechanical uniformity, however, the kyriarchy does not have the power to ever fully eliminate these deviations from the norm. Humanity is a boundless source of new creative impulses which threaten to burst forth from any container made to restrain them. And this provides an eternal struggle for the mega-machine. The very existence of these deviations threatens the machine’s ability to control the boundaries of what is considered “normal” and thus to homogenize culture to maintain a bottleneck of power.

Because hierarchical power cannot turn itself into something it is not. Once the rulership realizes that it cannot eliminate some deviation from the norm, it must neutralize the conflict of that form of deviation and its own principles. This is what drives the process of recuperation. Recuperation is the process by which some subversive ideology or identity is maximally neutralized by a power structure.

¹⁷ Polyamory and Queer Anarchism (contained in *Queering Anarchism* compilation: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/c-b-daring-j-rogue-deric-shannon-and-abbey-volcano-queering-anarchism>)

Instead of actually absorbing the orientation, however, hierarchical power structures are forced to absorb a mutated copy that has had all its subversive content stripped out. And the more subversive that that idea is to authority, the more elements they will have to neutralize. The more and more that this ideology is hollowed out in the process of creating its mutated double, the more that what will remain is a facade of what once was.

Thus we see how, any time some people who have historically been oppressed gain the power to demand their equal treatment, if they cannot overturn the very hierarchical system itself in the process, the machine that they have allowed to exist proceeds to tear away all of those aspects of the popular struggle that once existed within their movement, neutering their further ability to control the boundaries of normalcy. The system then holds these up as trophies of its ability to progress; empty images skirting across the screens to assure us that all is in order; “the machine is legitimate and it can harbor progress. Be grateful for the limited cessation of your necessary suffering.”

Through the expansion and enforcement of all of these means, every time the mega-machine moves, it reiterates itself through its functional components. And it is now so well polished, its reordering dynamics so adaptive, that the machine hardly even fears a cultural rebellion. Upon any disruption, all of its pieces go to work in discovering which aspects of its counterbalance it may present as catharsis, even while defying all impulses toward change. The system no longer even needs to suppress its critics; it has demoralized the populace so thoroughly that it even recuperates the symbols of anti-capitalist rebellion. It lets these act as pressure release valves which diffuse popular revolt or desire for real transformation. It uses the shifting tides of subjectivity as a protectant against action.

As a result, the kyriarchy has now settled into nearly every region and ecosystem, injecting its values of authoritarianism and domination deeply into our cultures and intentions, convincing us that we are the ones who have something wrong with us. Contained in all of its propaganda is the idea that mutuality and libertarianism are inferior modes of social order, that we too should desire to become subjugators, even while no such path is made available to us. The machine vampirizes a mass organic creativity to even exist, while demeaning its existence. It dissuades us from a full embrace of mutuality, even knowing that everything would utterly devolve without it. Hierarchical power, the parasite that it is, must convince its host to despise its own strength, so that it never acts to free itself.

In this dystopian landscape, we hear the echoes of ideas which are explored by decolonial thinkers. In colonial occupations, the colonizing culture comes to determine the set of thoughts which can be thought, it establishes legitimacy, it gatekeeps power within those institutions which prop it up and excludes access to those it dominates. Imperialist white supremacy comes to replace the basic cultural values of the lands it occupies, driving these colonial subjects to even believe the myths of their own inferiority. Many even become ashamed of their stigmatized qualities and seek relief in mimicry of the occupying empire.

But this situation wherein the dominated peoples have become the progenitors of their dominator’s ideology is not only the province of foreign colonial occupation. As many Black radicals have pointed out, the Black peoples of the Americas can also be understood as a colonized people. Taken from their lands of origin and transplanted onto another continent, they retain much of their culture (indeed, they have built a culture anew), constantly at odds with the dominator’s conditioning. In this way, it is almost as if they are a sovereign people, yet integrated into a foreign nation. This is what Lorenzo Kom’Boa Ervin means in his work *Anarchism and the Black Revolution* when he says:

“Blacks (or Africans in America) are colonized. America is a mother country with an internal colony. For Africans in America, our situation is one of total oppression. No people are truly

free until they can determine their own destiny. Ours is a captive, oppressed colonial status that must be overthrown, not just smashing ideological racism or denial of civil rights.”

That such direct parallels can be drawn between foreign colonial subjugation and domestic colonial subjugation is no coincidence. Each component of the kyriarchy, crossing over oceans and into other boundaries, separate though they may seem, are in fact all parts of a historical colonial process which drives the functioning of the mega-machine. In each, we see the establishment of a privileged group which can coerce the behaviors of another, through the social conception of some form of legitimacy, respectability, civility, or superiority. This then serves as justification for why a privileged group should be given access to the distribution of some resource, the application of some form of physical or mental violence, or the right to exact some form of deprivation upon the non-privileged group.

During colonization the machine has to subjugate a people that has some memory of an oppositional culture and thus an inherent knowledge of how they are now warped into the desired shape of their subjugator. This drives the colonized populations to misery as they witness their people degraded, their culture destroyed, their connection to the land, and all else, slowly eroded. That is to say, colonized peoples are those that are experiencing the first generations under degradation of hierarchical realism, whereas those peoples fully subsumed by the machine have long ago had their social conceptions distorted and their original histories of resistance erased.

Perpetuating itself for so many cycles in our daily actions to form and reform the world around us, the continuous existence of a ruling class has left us exceptionally well deceived by our captors. There is now almost no recess of our minds which does not contain the poison seeds of our dominator’s ideology. Just as Marilyn Buck called prison “a relationship with an abuser who controls your every move, keeps you locked in the house” using “the ever-present threat of violence or further repression,” society has functioned to make the abuser’s mentality social. We are like those victims who blame themselves for being beaten, our abuser telling us every time that we are humiliated that it is our fault, that we need to improve ourselves to prevent our further abuse. Within the belly of the beast, the power host is made docile, pushed to carry out its own subjugation and the subjugation of those abroad.

Said otherwise: humanity itself is the victim of a mega-mechanical colonization. An ancient cycle of exploitation wherein the mega-machine has moved into some area, crushed the organic culture of resistance, and then absorbed these peoples and their lands into the system as a power host. These settler peoples that now live upon colonized lands are the descendants of a millennia-spanning program of colonization that was once carried out upon their ancestors, but now upon their supposed “enemies.” As a result, nearly all peoples have had their relation to the land destroyed, their minds deeply pervaded with the ideology of their oppressors, and an organic culture of resistance replaced with relations of servitude.

Those who experience the results of a present day settler colonialism can then be seen as the most recent subjects of this process of mega-mechanical colonization. And, for this reason, these peoples also contain a crucial knowledge of what is lost as the mega-machine expands, of that organic culture of resistance which the forces of colonization are still at work trying to destroy. For hundreds of years, they have pleaded with the mega-mechanical colonists to embrace the counter-system, but the forces of hierarchical realism have long ago destroyed all hope within them.

And so, even those who consider themselves radical in many countries now spend their days begging for reforms from liberal republics which nonetheless slide further into totalitarianism by the moment, fighting momentary insurrections for joy of struggle, not in hopes of success, or developing micro-sects which convince themselves that one day their work will come to courageously domineer the

revolution even as they sink further and further into irrelevance. The enemy has so fully recuperated the revolutionary project that all that remains is aesthetics and this is enough to dupe many millions of people. Indeed, even many of those who call themselves revolutionaries have come to uncritically accept systems of domination which have alienated the masses from power just the same as the capitalist paradigm, but with the state operating as the new monopoly capitalist. They cannot even see clearly that they have configured another enemy system in this process, their project so poisoned by hierarchical realism it represents a sort of disastrous self-sabotage.

For many, what we have so far discussed will rightly appear to be a dire landscape and it is not shocking how one could portray this framework as a sort of political nihilism or social pessimism. For those who have given in to hierarchical realism, this may all only seem to imply that hierarchical power is too strong to ever defeat, that these structures will degrade and degrade us as they proceed over time. Indeed, nowhere within this discussion have we come to understand how to end those power structures, nor where hope lies in the contentious terrain. The principles of mutuality and libertarianism which we inspected at the beginning of this work seem now such a distant thought that they might appear to us as fantasy.

But humans cannot stand the misery of disempowerment forever. Though these structures of brainwashing and erasure are expansive, the resentment that grows in the core of the mechanized human can never be truly suppressed. Just as decolonial thinkers tell us that, in order for there to be a successful struggle, the colonial subject must reject white supremacist conditioning, reclaim their dignity, and overthrow their master, we must do the same. There is a struggle that lies ahead, standing between us and our liberation. Through the trees in the distance, that faint light still glows. Let us now proceed toward it.

A Revolutionary Light

It may seem, after this long journey, that we have wandered far from where we began. Whereas we started with a depiction of the natural flows of the universe and our redirection of them, of the ecology as the originator of complex interrelations, and of the organic powers of human beings as the creative engine of society; we, like humanity itself, have traveled a dark path. And that light upon the horizon which I mentioned at the beginning of our dialogue may seem now so distant that there is no hope of escape. Worse, the very path which humanity walked to reach this pitch blackness is so overgrown that we can no longer even double back, nor is it clear we should want to.

But the flows of the universe move with or without our desires, the ecology churns forth upon its processes of natural chemistry and complexity, the human urge to create unbidden by limitation proceeds whether power structures like it or not. It is just that our ability to see the foundations has been obscured by a towering monolith within our field of vision. Gazing so long upon its face, many have become entranced by it, worshipping at its foot instead of rising to approach the crossroads.

Knowing what we have discussed, it seems our most imminent duty is to shake the supplicants from their trance, pleading with them to look around and witness what subjugation that they have grown to endure. And it is true, where these subjects of hierarchy have been deluded, distracted, or distorted into the needs of the kyriarchy in order to function, we must kindle the undying flame of defiance within them. It is this flame of defiance that will immolate hierarchical realism and all its associated justifications. It is this flame of defiance that can burn down the kyriarchal machine, that can light the lantern which guides us from the darkness; lying deep within the human psyche, though hierarchy has endeavored for millennia to snuff it out, defiance is a light that cannot die.

But we must do more than this. To rouse many individuals awake and to bring about a driving outrage within them is not enough by itself. We must bring about enormous energy to overthrow the system as it stands. And to do this, a very sizable proportion of the masses must be unified together in a common struggle. This is why the anarchist movements of history have focused so much upon economic issues. Capitalism is one of the only systems of oppression that cuts across all other issues of identity, making it a fulcrum around which an enormous diversity of peoples can be mobilized to collective action. Indeed, even those peoples once detached from capitalist hegemony are now quite entangled with it as it spans the globe. Thus it was not then and it is not now reductive to focus upon capitalism as a central hierarchy. If situated properly within this greater constellation of intersecting hierarchies, it must be understood in order to move forward.

However, there is something more universal than capitalist oppression discovered within the anarchist framework. Capitalism, after all, is an invention lasting only a few hundred years, pervasive though it is. When we create an analysis which only understands societies in terms of their economic arrangements, we build something fleeting and contingent; we apply this totalizing influence of capital to history mistakenly, projecting onto past peoples anachronistic motives and modes; we project onto the future the very desires and attitudes that we currently wish to bring to an end.

Such a reduction of oppression will never suffice: the true unifying struggle of all oppressed peoples is the struggle against hierarchical power. All peoples know misery when mechanized by hierarchy; all people, whether conscious of it or not, experience alienation from the holistic application of their human powers. Submission to arbitrary authority is contrary to an inherent desire for boundlessness. And it is this issue that cuts across all identities past, present and future, from birth until death, in the public and the private, domestic or abroad, in the realm of the physical and the ideological. Wherever hierarchy reins, humanity suffers under subjugation.

And so, if anarchism can bring itself forward as the true opposition to all hierarchies of power, it may communicate a revolutionary vision to all peoples. This has always been the position which anarchism was meant to fill, almost the one it was crafted to fulfill from its inception. And this is why hierarchical advocates of all types have worked tirelessly to defame and distort the real goals and ideas of the movement.

If we are to tread that road which leads us from the darkness, we must wage a war on both the ideological and material front. The machine as it has been built is not a mere collection of individual attitudes. It is a systemized apparatus of coercion. And, no matter the feelings or beliefs of its masses of subjects, so long as it maintains its domination, it will simply act to suppress those attitudes which undermine it. The mega-machine will not be defeated simply by the passionate expression of new desires or words of solidarity or radical attitudes. The conflict at hand cannot be fought for in a collection of ideological silos, focused inwardly on the personal views of a small sect of adherents or a radical circle and their immediate periphery. As Bookchin says¹⁸:

“To disengage ourselves from the existing social machinery, to create a domain to meet one's needs as a human being, to form a public sphere in which to function as part of a protoplasmic body politic-all can be summed up in a single word: re-empowerment. I speak of re-empowerment in its fullest personal and public sense, not as a psychic experience in a specious and reductionist form of psychological ‘energetics’ that is fixated on one's own ‘vibes’ and ‘space.’ There is no journey ‘inward’ that is not a journey ‘outward’ and no ‘inner space’ that can hope

¹⁸ The Ecology of Freedom, Bookchin (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-the-ecology-of-freedom>)

to survive without a very palpable ‘public space’ as well. But public space, like inner space, becomes mere empty space when it is not structured, articulated, and given body. It must be provided with institutional form, no less so than our highly integrated personal bodies, which cannot exist without structure. Without form and articulation, there can be no identity, no definition, and none of the specificity that yields variety. What is actually at issue when one discusses institutions is not whether they should exist at all but what form they should take—libertarian or authoritarian.”

Because the truth which hierarchical realism has been developed to keep hidden from sight is that this is a systems war: a war between the system which could represent a social ecological society, to bring our collective needs and values into existence, and the system which represents a hierarchical society, one predicated on maintaining the privilege of a few gatekeepers and parasites. We have simply been unaware of this war for so long, purposely concealed as it has been from our sight, that we have neglected to tend to those systems of horizontal power which nourish our better nature. For now, the kyriarchy has seized almost all available territory, conceded by the masses out of ignorance to the conflict they are embroiled in.

This is why anarchists must not only change hierarchical consciousness, but construct a counter-power to the kyriarchal machine. Because our strength lies in reclaiming our alienated power and constructing the counter-system which might direct our efforts toward a common liberatory goal. The society of people who are turned toward hierarchical ends must recognize their strength and redevelop the horizontal power structures which will enable them to resist, to end the arbitrary, treacherous expansion of hierarchical influence.

When we choose to construct hierarchical power structures, we have not chosen, as “true utilitarians,” the means required to soberly carry out our affairs; it is instead that we have chosen to labor in the construction of the enemy system. As we pioneer forth in building a new authoritarian structure or trying to seize the reins of one that already exists, we really only work to neutralize the revolutionary aspirations of the people and prepare that same populace to be integrated into a global mega-machine. In the very movement which could potentially threaten hierarchical power, capitulation to its means instead helps to reclaim contested territory for the subjugator. Hierarchical power can only serve to create a further hierarchical power. Where it exists, it will attract the corrupted, corrupt the well-intentioned, and ultimately mangle the society which it dominates.

For this reason, if we as human beings wish to create a society wherein values opposite to such a system are expanded, it is also our responsibility to carry out actions which produce different social conditioning. Errico Malatesta offers a clear summary¹⁹:

“[I]t is not enough to desire something; if one really wants it adequate means must be used to secure it. And these means are not arbitrary, but instead cannot but be conditioned by the ends we aspire to and by the circumstances in which the struggle takes place, for if we ignore the choice of means we would achieve other ends, possibly diametrically opposed to those we aspire to, and this would be the obvious and inevitable consequence of our choice of means. Whoever sets out on the highroad and takes a wrong turn does not go where he intends to go but where the road leads him.”

¹⁹ An Anarchist Programme, Malatesta (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/errico-malatesta-an-anarchist-programme>)

Anarchism then heeds this call for the creation of a maximally libertarian approach, containing elements at its very core that are so conflicting to authoritarian modes that it cannot be recuperated lest hierarchical power risk a full refutation of its existence. Anarchism stands as the pure negation of oppression. And it is through this vector that we must work to create a revolutionary constituency and then cooperate upon our shared strategic landscape. We must bring together all peoples oppressed by the machine to undermine its functioning and to begin forming its most robust opposition together, respecting the unity in diversity and the equal deservedness of autonomy and dignity for all. Because within such aspirations, a hope exists for transformation; a coalition of all those degraded by hierarchical power, a growing series of waves to tear down the kyriarchal mega-machine and to reverse its colonization of horizontal society.

Having now traveled through a dark wood, filled with the most terrible horrors, let us set upon that trail leading out of the forest. Over the horizon there is the coming of a glorious reprieve. Beyond lies anarchy.