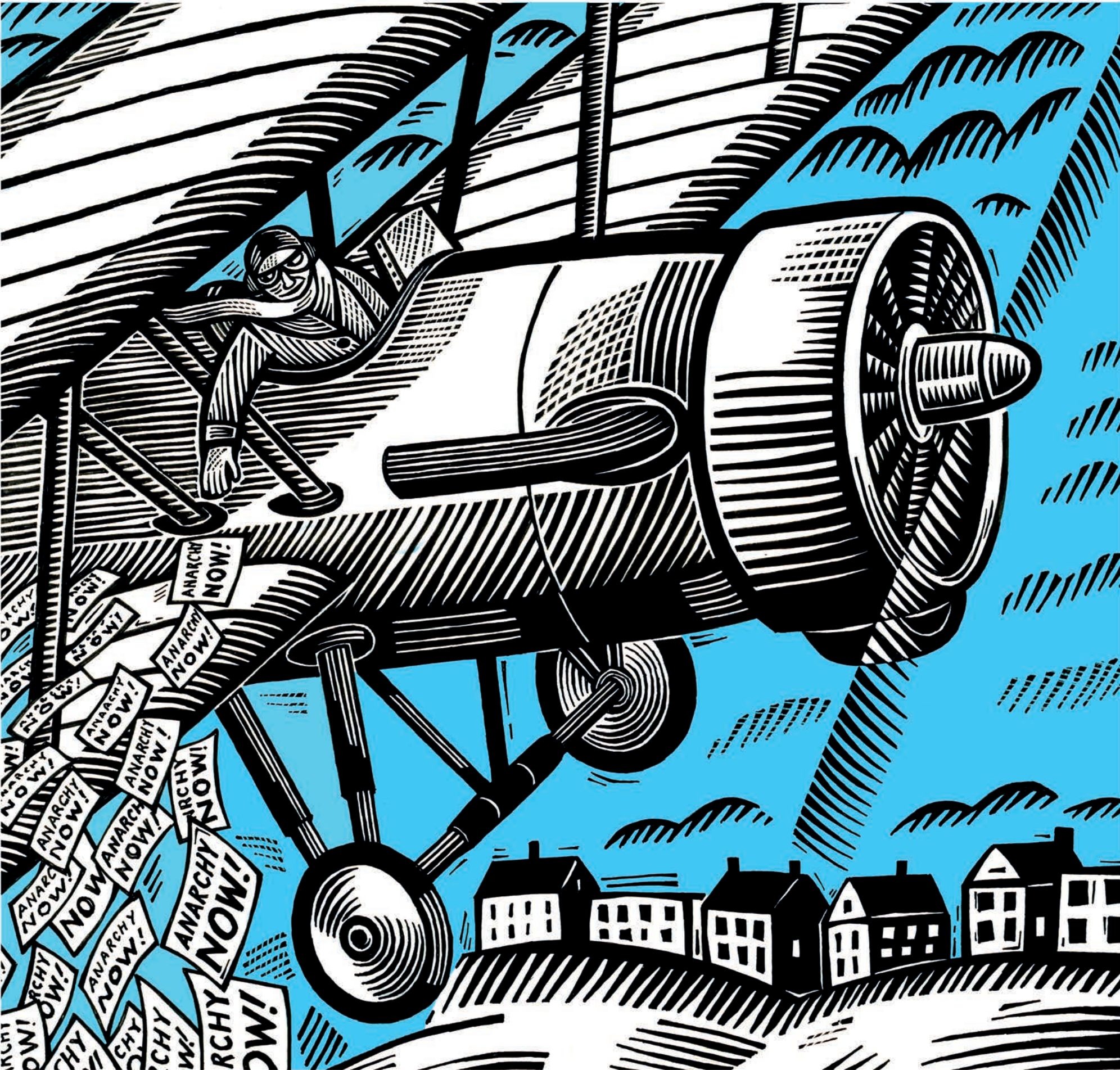




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Great Anarchists

By Ruth Kinna

I was involved in a conversation about nihilism the other day. I'd been asked to recommend some readings and I included Kropotkin's *Appeal to the Young* – a text I'm fond of – in the list. The other members of the group were less familiar with it and less taken with it, too. Readers found it old-fashioned, sentimental and full of gendered language. Where were the women in this text? Kropotkin's call to intellectuals – apparently to bridge social divisions – appeared to be grounded in a syrupy view of class relations, and reinforced conventions about domestic relationships, to boot. It expressed the views of a privileged white European male and was really part of a culture that should be unpicked and challenged. We could have quibbled about historical context, rhetoric, political motivations and interpretation, but however you explain Kropotkin's ideas, this was all fair comment.

Still, I was struck by the frustration and incomprehension that the *Appeal* seemed to have caused, at least in some members of the group. 'Old-fashioned' not only referred to the language – making the text testing to read – but also redundant, of no interest and devoid of contemporary resonances. What was the point struggling with the style, when there was nothing stimulating or useful that anyone could take from the essay?

In the introduction to the first volume of her documentary history of Emma Goldman, Candice Falk observes that historians habitually ignored late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anarchism, effectively purging it from official histories of the US. It was largely by dint of the anarchists' own efforts that a record of the traditions, ideas and cultures of the movement survived. Today, anarchists can thank two or three generations of historians for further bolstering the record and excavating a complex, multifaceted anarchist past. The collective effort has produced an extensive and growing body of material about the commitments and practices of a host of propagandists, and the circumstances in which they operated – their debates, passions, movements and experiences. There are lots of ways of engaging with it. We can mine it to shape policy, use it to uncover or recommend essential principles, or to advocate uniquely anarchist approaches or perspectives; we can pore over it to identify convergences with our preferences and positions and pinpoint strengths and short comings to build

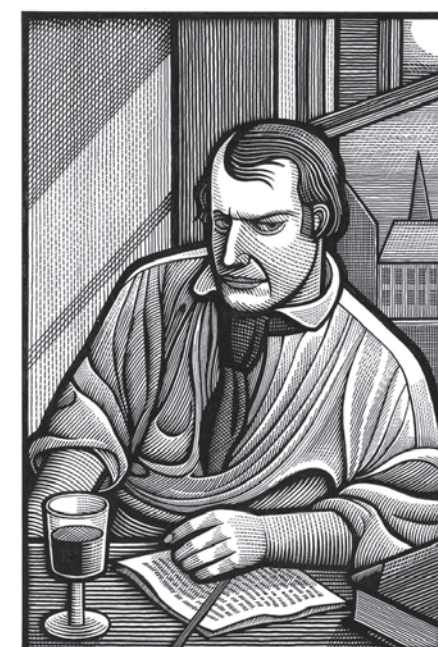
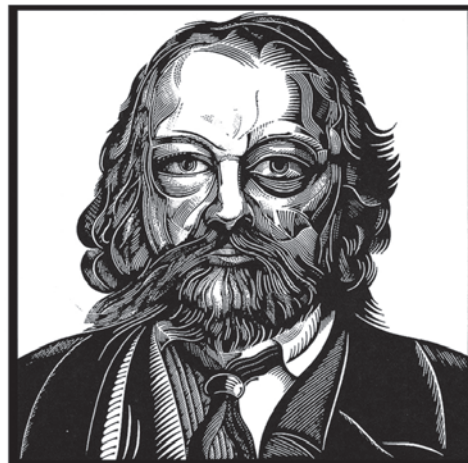
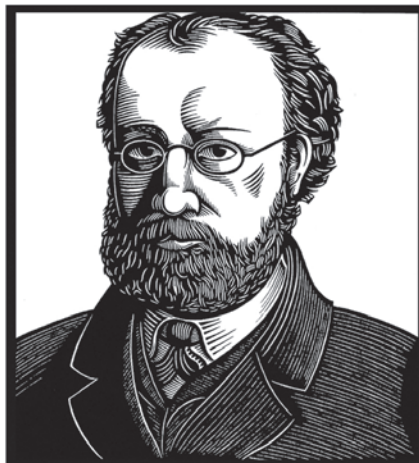
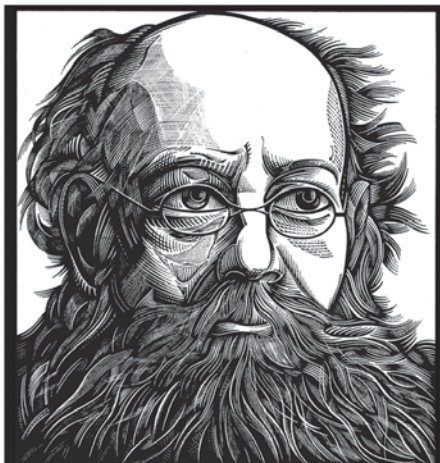
and re-build traditions. But whatever we do, we shouldn't just consign it to the dustbin or treat it as part of a movement politics that's dead and buried.

It's difficult to dispute the observation that times change. However you cut context, it's obviously true that the circumstances that Colin Ward found himself in during 1946, when the UK squatter movement started to gain momentum, was entirely different to the situation in 1976, when he produced *Housing: An Anarchist Approach*, or 1996 when George Monbiot helped set up the Pure Genius camp in Wandsworth. But part of Ward's brilliance was his ability to spot and explain political continuities over time and space. What was fifty years when the Digger and Leveller campaigns of 1646 still resonated?

The move from the basic observation that we live in altered times to the formulation "that was then and this is now", the idea that activists should detach themselves from aspirations that appear outmoded, perhaps embarrassing, risks legislating on other people's convictions and behaviours and historicising the past in unhelpful ways. Once you decide that 'revolution', for example, is redundant, pointless or self-defeating, and that the proper response is to entirely re-ground critique, you not only narrow the frame of that concept, you universalise your perspective on the shift from past to present.

Rudolf Rocker's argument – which he took from William Godwin – that man [sic] is the measure of all things, rightly draws attention to the contribution that individuals have made to the construction of anarchist conventions and to the notion of 'greatness' that anarchists have typically adopted. The strong literary and oral tradition that nineteenth-century anarchists established usually revolved around the virtues and motivations of special characters, not the world historic shifts that Great Men of History were credited with. Bakunin was an early favourite – even with latter-day 'individualists' like Henry Seymour – because of his dispute with Marx. A plethora of sentimental, reverential commentaries habitually compared his honesty, verve and courage to Marx's Machiavellianism, frostiness and detachment. But there was no shortage of 'great anarchists' to celebrate. Kropotkin wrote about the selflessness of nihilist assassins in





Russia. Charles Malato published pen portraits of their anarchist counterparts in France. Unable to find a comprehensive documentary history of feminist anarchism in the 1970s, Marian Leighton published studies of Louise Michel and Voltairine de Cleyre. The tone of her analysis differed markedly from the romantic nineteenth century commentaries. Lucy Parsons had described Michel's life as one "devoted to the interest of the working class; a life of self-abnegation, a life full of love, gentleness, tragedy, activity, sadness and kindness". Leighton provided a sharper psychological assessment alongside an analysis of the sanctification of women activists. Yet she similarly described Michel as a "prophetic type" whose behaviour exemplified her political beliefs, and she celebrated Michel's special ordinariness rather than her peculiar, muscular extraordinariness. Michel was a great anarchist because she modelled a general female experience rooted in mutual aid, empathy and care in revolutionary action.

Who counts as a great anarchist can never be firmly established. One of the strengths of anarchist politics is that it has no before or after 'science'. It's possible to identify foundational events but the interchange and exchange of anarchist and anarchistic theory and practice has no special pivot or anchor. As well as Louise Michel, Lucy Parsons included Florence Nightingale in the Famous Women of History series she published in *The Liberator*. Parsons didn't suggest that Nightingale was an anarchist, but she spotted a relationship between her and Michel. Nightingale had given up her class privilege and risked her life to help that "most stupid victim of our present system ... the soldier". This was virtuous behaviour and it also hinted at an approach to solidarity and practical movement-building that Parsons was keen to explore.

The work of past anarchists won't give anyone answers, but it provides a rich store of ideas that has moulded a plural political tradition. There is no standard conception of democracy, violence, war, class or contractual obligation. While this makes anarchism complicated, it also makes it empowering. It seems odd to me that any movement that identifies even loosely with anarchism would detach itself from this store for fear of 'canonising' a literature, especially if that results in a turn to high philosophy or the importation of a set of generic practices detached from anarchist historical experience. Adaptation, modification, amendment is all good. But just being shy about the warts in anarchist history won't help advance anarchist thinking. The dismissal of an entire body of work and experience on the grounds that it's historically conditioned hardly helps, either. Everyone should be plucking anarchist tracts from the shelves. Most of them were written accessibly and for a mass audience. And if the style or language now jars, there should be plenty of commentaries and translations. The failure to make the anarchist back-catalogue available and intelligible to everyone interested in social transformation is a serious one.

Ruth Kinna is a professor of Political Theory at Loughborough University, working in the Department of Politics, History and International Relations where she specialises in political philosophy. Since 2007 she has been the editor of the journal *Anarchist Studies*.

Her most recent book is *The Government of No One: The Theory and Practice of Anarchism* (Pelican Books)

WHITECHAPEL

1936/1940/1973/1981/1990/2003/2011/2015/2019/2022

By Laura Grace Ford

WhatsApp chats spiralling through Sylhet and Lahore, satellite channels broadcasting from Dawar stalls, splintering temporalities rendered in HD.

The city is a constellation of portals, flickering apertures. We drift through multiple selves, multiple zones:

the extended Khandan, money transfers, Lebara mobile.

But within these circuits, new blocs are mobilising, the territories are shifting.

London is possessed by CGI hoardings promoting private developments. Images of luxury lifestyles are so ubiquitous we barely notice them, champagne swilling bankers looming over scenes of abject poverty have become part of the urban fabric, internalised in the city's dream grammar.

Perhaps their potency lies in their deployment of spectrality, CGI's of future inhabitants who never arrive:

Promotional films corral us into a set of dissociative tropes, opiate induced dreams where we hover above buildings, drift through walls. This oneiric-delirial time evokes the idea of haunting and absence, a 'decanted' and socially cleansed inner London. When sites are depopulated we can imagine the future, new social imaginaries can be realised. The halo of films and hoardings around these developments make a claim on that psychic space, they define the terms of a new social imaginary.

The Rich are Boring

marker pen on glossy hoardings.

Things banked up outside my building, a broken fridge, Billy book shelves, an abandoned washing machine. The heap bears the cold dynamics of a hangover, the ossified traces of a comedown.

A wall of spidery black lines emanating from a flat screen TV. A malevolent toc toc unlocking memories of drug induced psychosis – the head unshackled from the body, the aftermath of a Shoreditch bender. Whitechapel is saturated by a keeling, tottering kind of intoxication, destructive forces engulf it.

Psychedelia opens a lens onto social conditions, it provides a multifaceted optic where the familiar becomes strange and prismatic. In Tower Hamlets poverty is apparent, it twitches and jerks beneath the gloating billboards for luxury apartments, but in their ubiquity these horrors become normalised, expected, we are persuaded of their inevitability. The hallucinogenic lens helps us re-weird, make strange that which has been naturalised, presented as normal.

Xenolithic fragments, warnings from another time.

I think of the men I worked with in the homeless hostels, negotiate the pharmacological terrain -film of sweat, a lurching gait, jittery re-issuing of speech.

The city is indelibly marked by moments of psychic intensity – what Mark Fisher called a 'staining of place'. These moments manifest as biographical fault lines, a narrative web that underscores our life in the city; these are the mental maps, the psycho-topological terrain we carve in our everyday life. Sometimes they erupt collectively, elevating us in the form of raves, occupations and riots, assailing us in times of conflict and terror. Meshes of micro-narratives coalesce in these moments, stories weave and intersect. The *dérive* is a mapping of these traces, these micro-narratives, a way of restoring visibility to stories that would otherwise be erased in marketing and 'place making' strategies.

When Walter Benjamin talks about the need to oppose "the modern propensity for amnesia, to remember those whose struggles and sufferings in the past would otherwise be forgotten" he arms us with a key strategy required to deflect the deleterious psychic effects of neoliberalism.

In Mark Fisher's interrupted project 'Acid Communism' he echoes Benjamin's warnings when he writes: "The past has to be continually re-narrated, and the political point of reactionary narratives is to suppress the potentials which still await, ready to be re-awakened, in older moments ... so to recall these multiple forms of collectivity is less an act of remembering than of unforgetting".



We can deploy this notion of unforgetting to identify moments, past and future, when the city becomes elevated, when futures previously imagined can be rekindled.

Perhaps these summonings of 'multiple forms of collectivity' manifest as visions, something seen before they are realised. Or perhaps they are breaks in the mass hallucination of neoliberalism, moments of clarity that allow us to see beyond the web of false histories and fictions.

Luxury apartment blocks erupting, underfloor parking, private gardens.

We gauge the affective shifts – abjection, disgust, a persistent subcutaneous itch.

Memory is not a sanitised image, but a texture in the moment, something historical fizzing in the present. Memory brushes against us, it scuttles across our skin. Fred Moten talks about hapticality, what he calls "modernity's insurgent feel, its inherited caress ... the feel that no individual can stand, and no state abide. Hapticality, the touch of the undercommons, the interiority of sentiment, the feel that what is to come ..."

To experience freedom and liberation, no matter how temporarily, is to have one's expectations raised. Emancipatory moments haunt us, they persist as indelible marks, and despite efforts to naturalise the dominant order through the processes of recuperation and repression they are never fully erased. Like the palimpsest with layers of text written and overwritten there are moments when previous inscriptions are grasped with vivid clarity.

Glimpses of emancipatory futures might be seen in re-configured architectures, in re-routed technologies and radically re-imagined urban zones. When something is deemed defective, obsolete and broken we are closer to unlocking its potential, its *entelechy*; in the abandoned shopping precinct we might find the fulfilment of forgotten promises. The defective machine brings new ways of hearing, what Kodwo Eshun calls new 'sonic fictions'. Objects brimming with potential demand a new relationship with time, time that allows for experimentation and drifting.



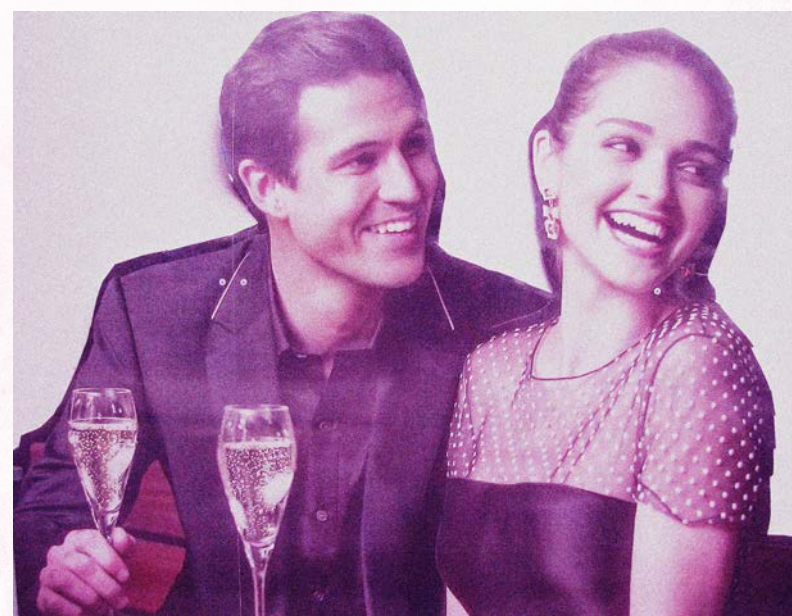
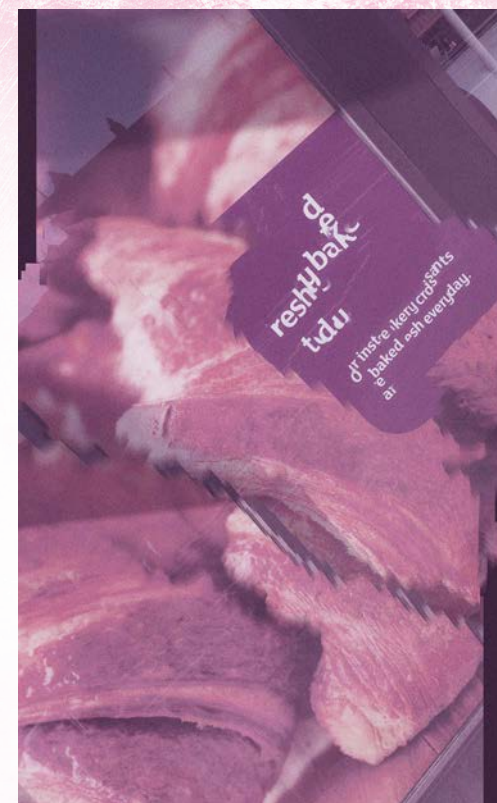
Marbled squirms of sound, psychoactive doubling, kaleidoscopic arrangements.

A political force latent in psychedelia.

Cities hold the kernels of possibility for a radical collective consciousness, moments when we emerge from decades of psychic pollution to a new plane of clarity and collectivity. From experiments in psychedelia and Afrofuturism, to the efflorescence of genres emanating from club music, it is always there, a persistent strain operating under the skin of 'official culture'.

The point is to *re-weird* those aspects of culture presented as natural and common, to distort the hectoring commands of late capitalism and *re-present* them as strange.

To walk through stalled construction sites, empty factories and derelict mills is to experience time reactivated. In these spaces we find the re-enactment of rituals-foraging, burning, scavenging, grazing, collective intoxication-as if portals are opening on to a Pre-Capitalist England. With their provisional architecture, black market economies and co-operative means of self-sufficiency these sites erode the smooth spaces of capitalism. The possibilities emerging in these sites also carry the seeds of a Post-Capitalism, an Acid Communism, a world without drudgery and pointless toil.



Laura Grace Ford is an artist and writer. A re-issue of her cult-classic *Savage Messiah* is now available (Verso).

lauragraceford.blogspot.com

Punk Matters

By Ren Aldridge



Punk is my politics, identity, community and the centre of my life right now, as the front woman of a touring band. I was drawn to its volume, passion and anti-authority politics as a teenager, and it has guided my choices throughout life since. At some point, punk passed me the mic, amplified my voice and gave me a chance to be heard.

Anti-authority – counter-hegemonic/fuck the man/radical – politics are the core of punk. It's meant to threaten the dominant, which is why I find it laughable, at best, when anyone claims that it's punk to spew sexist, racist or whatever oppressive bullshit; our society is already structurally all of these things. Historically the far right has always tried to lay a claim on punk, but punk can't be meaningfully co-opted by a politics that is authoritarian at its core. Punk has never been about establishing authority – it's about attacking it in all its forms.

Sure, punk kicked off in 1976, but people that try to hold punk in the historical moment it began are denying its true essence. Punk is constantly developing, in terms of both its politics and sound. What it meant in '76 isn't what it means now. Punk's messy and flawed but it has a good heart, which is why it has constantly addressed the problems within it: from punk bands like X-Ray Spex and The Clash playing Rock Against Racism in '78 to the Dead Kennedy's declaring 'Nazi Punks Fuck Off' in '81; from Riot Grrrl surfacing to challenge macho punk in the 90's to DIY Diaspora Punks working to decolonise punk today. Punk keeps bettering itself. It has to if it wants to remain true to its politics. Radical politics demand change, so it makes sense that punk has to keep changing itself.

It's the same with the sound. Punk isn't tied to a precise sound in the way that a lot of music genres are – it's more of an approach, an attitude of saying "fuck it, I'm gonna have a go" (whether you're musically proficient – whatever that even means – or not).

The DIY ethos of punk is audible in the beginnings of most bands, when people who don't know how to play an instrument pick one up anyway, or people who are tired of being ignored grab the mic and let loose. Punk celebrates imperfection and gives us space to suck, but it doesn't trap us there either. It leaves room for each of us to grow – hence the shredalicious skills of bands like Propagandhi and the sheer variety of bands defined as punk.



The DIY ethos is what makes punk so empowering, and where its historic alignment with anarchism becomes most clear. It's about learning by doing, whether that's playing drums or intersectional feminism; it's about practice as direct action. It's legitimately accessible. It's about being an active participant and creating your own culture – whether that's music, zines, art, whatever! – not just obediently consuming the bland shit that capitalism spoon feeds us. (Yes, punk's relationship to capitalism can be fucked up, often hypocritical and complex, but it remains critical.) DIY culture teaches us that we can do things for ourselves, and this spills over into creating political change. I really believe that disempowerment is a key reason why mainstream society so often seems apathetic, especially in terms of political struggle beyond the ballot box. People don't believe they can change anything or even take much control over their own lives – but DIY culture at least begins to show us otherwise.

Do It Yourself is, at the same time, Do It Together. Want to play in a band, go on tour or put on a show? You're going to have to work with other people. People with different skills, ideas, priorities and personalities (annoying habits). I sometimes feel like being in a band – cooperating with others to make music – is the ultimate test of my political ideals. Because punk requires active participation, it is inherently collaborative. It is simultaneously the context that we practice our politics in, as well as shorthand for those politics. DIY/DITogether culture involves sharing skills and empowering each other. It gathers us physically together in the same spaces, at the very least for gigs, and this fights the feelings of alienation that capitalism increasingly breeds in us, as mainstream society in Western countries becomes more and more individualistic (which I believe is a key cause behind a growing mental health crisis and rising xenophobia). Punk gives us a chance to meet people, and can give us an instinctive feeling of our political potential.



Punk also lets us be loud, and this is especially significant for those of us that society prefers to be quiet. My own band recently sampled what I consider the most iconic vocal moment from the first wave of punk: Poly Styrene yelling, “Some people think little girls should be seen and not heard but I think, OH BONDAGE UP YOURS, 1, 2, 3, 4!” Her voice reverberates through the decades and remains relevant and inflammatory today. Patriarchy still wants those it recognises as women to shut up and take it. I see it everywhere, from attacks on Twitter to the immediate aggression I'm met with if I challenge a man harassing me on the street; from defamation proceedings against women who've spoken up about problematic men, to that rank incident recently where a lesbian couple were beaten up on a London bus for refusing to kiss for men's entertainment. And this demand to be quiet extends to any marginalised group. In a voice workshop that I ran with Janey Starling (lead singer of Dream Nails) at DIY Space last summer, someone described the social constraints to being loud and the way that, “it becomes pretty hard-coded into being a woman or some other marginalised kind of gender identity that you learn to be quiet and use your voice in a particular way.” Similarly, in an interview that I did with them about the politics of voice, artist and vocalist of Screaming Toenail, Jacob V Joyce, spoke from their experience as a person of colour and placed the systematic demand on black people to be quiet in the colonial history of the UK:

“... our parents entry into this country was a conditional one that we respect our place in the empire ... there's been an unspoken rule that they are here to be good migrants ... to be subservient, whatever, just don't complain, don't be too noisy, don't be too this or we'll get you arrested, don't be too punk basically.”

For people that are marginalised in this society, whether that's due to race, gender identity, class or whatever, volume is resistance and punk offers us amplification. It incites us to take the mic, turn up our amps and raise our voices up loud.

Punk fizzles and sparks with potential. It gathers us together, challenges us and connects people across the world. It's constantly evolving and must never stagnate. Hold punk too tight – try and freeze it in time or snatch it from the next generation – and it will wither and die inside of you.

Ren Aldridge is an artist, writer and front-woman of feminist punk band Petrol Girls.

petrolgirls.bandcamp.com/

The Battle of Algiers 2.0

By Ryan Mahan

Jodi Dean, in her memorial lecture to academic and weird/eerie theorist Mark Fisher, takes Frederic Jameson's lament (largely attributed to Fisher), "It is easier to imagine the end of the world, than the end of capitalism", a step further:

Capitalism *is* the end of the world.

Look around. Everyone, from arch-capitalist Hollywood moguls to leftist Extinction Rebellion activists, can not only clearly envision the end of the world, they can also create limitless illustrations of its demise: from flesh-eating zombies to skin-melting environmental human-engineered cataclysms.

It's clear then that our imaginative and creative faculties are literally overrun with scenes of decay and ruin. And therein lies psychological evidence of Fisher and Jameson's – and by extension Dean's – fundamental deadlock.

In the physical sense, capitalism is the end of the world primarily because it must grow infinitely in order to survive. The Earth has finite resources. Human beings are just another set of raw materials for capital's infinite expansion.

"Capital", Marx says, "is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour and lives the more, the more labour it sucks."¹

Capital can even profit off and live beyond our destruction – what Naomi Klein calls "disaster capitalism". In this rendering, real-life catastrophes provide opportunities for capital to regenerate and "recuperate profitably".

According to David Harvey, "You get a disaster, well, you have to rebuild ... From the standpoint of humanity, I think that we will not come out of this well at all. But capital is different. Capital can come out of these things ..." ²

In the psychological world, capitalism can only survive by maintaining a certain "unconscious" screening, becoming so entrenched and naturalised that we have trouble pinpointing the role it plays in our annihilation. This is an ideology of a type that extends beyond Althusser's definition of Ideological State Apparatuses, which are more or less dependent on the state and its institutions.

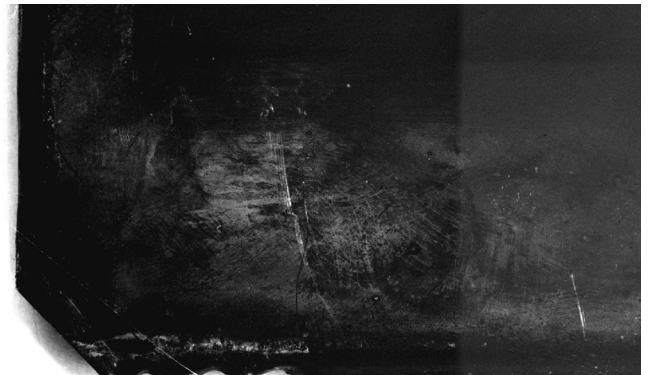
The whole complex of ideology becomes more like finance capital, less rooted, more nomadic, less fundamentally dependent on physical inputs, like labour or land, and more and more operating with its own monstrous logic.

It follows that capital has worked to generate an "end-thinking", a new type of "millenarianism", which not only generates perpetual images of current and future collapse, but also undermines our understanding of temporality, history and time. It's clear then that capital does not have to rely on pure dystopia to ensure our consent in its perpetual gestation. In fact, it often must mask this very fact.

Even popular music (my primary focus as a member of the band Algiers), which is typically seen as somewhat of an artistic glue for the masses in times of decay, suffers from such an assault on its temporal and spatial imagination. Technological innovation has enabled artists to transcend genre, while at the same time preventing us from fully understanding the social conditions and contexts that birth it. This has serious consequences for our ability to recover the radical potential of music, leaving us screened from the various ways music, as a social form, has challenged capital, and trapping us in a purgatory of gesture and cover songs. It is, indeed, a form of cognitive social apocalypse.

Given this, for artists particularly, there is something useful, even subversive, in confronting, manifesting and naming apocalypse. But we must go beyond narratives of collapse and employ Fisher's injunction: REMEMBER THE FUTURE.

"Emancipatory politics," according to Fisher, "must always destroy the appearance of a natural order, must reveal what is presented as necessary and inevitable to be a mere contingency, just as it must make what was previously deemed to be impossible seem attainable."



¹ Karl Marx, Capital Volume 1, Chapter Ten: The Working Day

² David Harvey, Why Marx's Capital Still Matters: An Interview with David Harvey, Jacobin

³ Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth

⁴ Sohail Daulatzai, Fifty Years of The Battle of Algiers: Past as Prologue

Remaining faithful to Fisher's words includes both a renewed dedication to looking to a future beyond capitalism, but also the reclaiming of a different type of apocalyptic thinking – overthrowing an end times that appears almost necessary and inevitable.

Our band Algiers finds an endless source of this type of thinking in the anti-colonial revolutionary, so-called "developing nations". While those residing in the centres of power remain busy imagining the apocalypse, the dispossessed and oppressed of the world – those on the sharp end of capitalism and colonialism – continue to live through dystopia.



The focus on a considerable amount of anti-colonial thought is most assuredly apocalyptic. Cesaire, in his *Discourse on Colonialism*, relates the West's abuse of the colonies to Nazi atrocities in Europe. Describing the US, Fanon says: "Two centuries ago, a former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which the taints, the sickness, and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions."³

Yet for most of this anti-colonial generation it is not enough to simply describe dystopia; this would be little better than modern NGOs' fetishistic appeals to charity through the graphic portrayal of famine and war. Their objective is to instead, in the words of Fanon, start "a new history of Man" – a move that involves reclaiming both lost pasts and lost futures.

Nowhere is this line of thinking more distilled than in the Third Cinema masterpiece, *The Battle of Algiers*. A majority of the film is focused on the messy and bloody reality of colonialism and resistance to it. Viewers bear witness to state terrorism, torture and maiming throughout, yet are forced to also contend with the emergence of something entirely new.



While it may be largely historical, *The Battle of Algiers* relies on an ahistorical turn and a rekindling of a memory of the future to complete its story. It finds emancipation in a people – in this case Algerians – not yet constituted, showing the entire history of colonial brutality to be a mere contingency and making independence appear attainable. The success of this turn can be found in the global response to its screenings, inspiring revolutionaries from Brazil to Gaza.

Our band takes heart from this tradition, to attempt to draw out the sound of dispossession and to maintain fidelity to its transcendence. The name itself draws attention to a real yet fictional "other" space where the future dreams of countless revolutionaries, from the Black Panthers to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), could be imagined, while simultaneously drawing out the utter violence at the heart of colonial capital. This also enables us to reclaim music as both a temporal and imaginary social space, which can represent a discursive and collective challenge to capital. Think of Paul Robeson singing the Internationale to dock workers or Pasolini employing African-American gospel music to suggest the revolutionary potential of Jesus Christ.

This is where we must start.

To take this further and to reclaim apocalyptic thinking, we must recognise, in the words of Sohail Daulatzai,⁴ that *The Battle of Algiers* is still being waged – this time on a planetary scale.

Ryan Mahan is a member of the band Algiers.
Algiers releases their new album in Autumn 2019

algiestheband.com/





Owning It

By Derek Wall

A number of disparate groups and individuals have decided that the path to liberation will come from building the solidarity economy. The solidarity economy involves the creation of a network of cooperatives, social centres, community gardens and grassroots trade unions. This is an economy that works to move the production and consumption of vital goods and services beyond both profit obsessed capitalism and a bureaucratic state. It is owned by us, the community, not by a minority of wealthy shareholders. It has at least three functions: 1) Practical solidarity which is closely linked to the concept of base building 2) The creation of ecological forms of production 3) The construction of a new society based on innovative values and practices. This isn't abstract theory: it is being built now and you can help with the building.

Practical solidarity means supporting those in need and those in struggle. Warm words and political pamphlets don't feed the hungry, help prisoners or build capacity for change. One element of the solidarity economy is providing social centres that can be used, in part, to promote activism. They can act as a meeting place, provide offices for campaign groups and host food banks. As well as providing solidarity networks, practical action can help convince people that a new society is possible. The US film-maker and musician Boots Riley has argued that movements have been too reliant on what he calls 'spectacle'; by this he means an event that gets media attention, such as direct action. He argues that we also need to build long term capacity for change. This is the essential characteristic of base building: helping to create, deepen and sustain a culture of resistance. It reflects the practice of the Black Panther Party and other African-American revolutionaries, who in the 1960s and 1970s put on free breakfast programmes for children, and other solidarity projects. Social movements and campaigns, like Occupy, Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion, are vital; efforts to build a network of social centres and community projects can help to maintain them over the long term.

The ecological element comes from producing in an environmentally friendly way: promoting permaculture, renewable energy generation, tool libraries, cycle repair and low-energy transport. Cooperation Jackson, whose members recently

undertook a speaking tour in the UK, are an excellent example. Kali Akuno from Cooperation Jackson has bluntly stated "We are at the midnight hour, and it's eco-socialism or death." Jackson is the largest city in Mississippi, and is known for its militant American population; it has been an important site of civil rights struggles and is now in the forefront of resistance to Donald Trump. Today it is the site of a major experiment in solidarity economics that aims to go carbon neutral as swiftly as possible.

The solidarity economy is militant and plural. It is militant in that it is directly building dual power, creating new institutions that challenge the state. Plural because it draws in anarchists, Marxists, eco-socialists and other groups and tendencies besides. It is based not on a narrow prescriptive ideological understanding but on practical action. You might argue that it is inventing the future.

Increasingly, radicals have been putting their hopes in figures such as Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn, who aim to win elections on a progressive policy platform. The historical record shows that left leaders have often achieved little once elected. It is not merely that they may be corrupted but it is also that state isn't something that can easily be picked up and used as a tool for positive social change. The array of forces presented against Corbyn range from the army to the media, and even the US government: US politician Mike Pompeo has ominously said he would attempt to block a Corbyn government.

The British media are in full attack mode already, while at least one General has suggested a military coup will be necessary if Jeremy were to enter Downing Street. To resist and to go beyond the electoral left, which is defined as extremism by our billionaires, we need to organise. A solidarity economy contributes to the creation of organisational capacity.

Another element of this approach includes base-building trade unions. The International Workers of the World, a radical union, mobilised millions of workers in the early 20th century. Promoting anarchist, left-libertarian and grassroots approaches, they are growing again. Acorn is another example, an international tenants' union that uses direct action to challenge abusive landlords.

New technologies such as three-dimensional printers open up the possibility of automated, low-cost community production. The practice is increasingly obvious, but a lot of the theory had been anticipated in the work of the late, great Elinor Ostrom. Elinor, who died in 2012, was the first (and, so far, the only) woman to win a Nobel Prize for economics. She won it for her study of the commons – collectively owned forms of property. In 1968 the biologist Garrett Hardin wrote ‘The Tragedy of the Commons’, where he argued that common land would be degraded because human beings could not work cooperatively to conserve resources. Elinor put much work into researching practical ways of building trust so that collective ownership could work. She was also a keen advocate of co-operatives and would no doubt have been inspired by the notion of solidarity economics.

There are various discussions about modern monetary theory, universal basic income, fully automated luxury communism, etc. To varying degrees, these may be part of a path to a better society; however, the solidarity economy is something that is being built now, and it doesn’t involve developing a policy that we hope some benevolent government will put into practice if we ask nicely enough. The virtue of the solidarity economy is that it helps to build up the forces necessary to achieve change by getting people involved and promoting activism. We learn best from practice and experience, this is how ideas are best transmitted and learnt.

Don’t believe me? Well why not visit a social centre like the Cowley Club in Brighton, with its vegan food bank, English lessons for asylum seekers and punk picnics, all inspired by Harry Cowley. Harry Cowley, a grassroots social activist from the 1920s to the 1970s, fought the fascists, moved the homeless into squats and in his later years mobilised pensioners. Or, if you are in the US, take a look at the work of Philly Socialists, which includes the creation of the César Andreu Iglesias Community Garden, named after a Puerto Rican writer and trade unionist.

Solidarity economics isn’t a perfect solution. Cooperatives can fail, community organising can be hard work and such approaches have not always proved sustainable in the past; however, it is a way of building the capacity needed for potentially revolutionary change, and doing so in a way that rejects dogma and supports community involvement. Wherever you look, the solidarity economy is diverse, dynamic and growing.

We can build a path to liberation, and maybe, even in an increasingly unjust and chaotic world, enjoy doing so.



Cycle Tracks Will Abound in Utopia

By Alex Marshall

Beast from the East ... we're out there! Hottest summer since records began ... we're out there! Hurricane Nebuchadnezzar or whatever stupid name they have come up with this time ... we're out there! Every time you look outside the window, think "screw it" and decide not to bother going out, you can guarantee there will be a load of couriers out on the road braving whatever the elements throw at them, desperately trying to make a piss-poor wage.

The unconventional way you operate as a courier, with the nomadic existence while at work – minimal interaction from bosses beyond a few orders over the radio, the (false) belief that you can work when you want, getting a job without having to produce a C.V. that symbolises putting glitter on a turd, and generally doing something that doesn't entail being sat behind a desk for ten hours a day – is what draws a lot of people in. I work alongside musicians, artists, actors, activists, punks, squatters, people who suffer from anxiety, depression, alcohol and drug abuse, and all other types that might struggle to fit into the conventions of society but still need to make a living. Being a courier is their lifeline.

You start out thinking that you are doing the work on your own terms – you are there because you choose to be – and that the job fits your lifestyle; however, soon-after the reality of it all kicks in. The idea that you are "self-employed" and can enjoy flexibility is completely bogus. Companies frown upon people who try and exercise any flexibility and there are even rules in place (attendance bonuses, delivery ratings that boost chances of getting prime shifts etc.) that actually make it detrimental to your earnings to try and exercise the "freedoms" of being self-employed. The low wages mean you are shackled to working long hours so the bills can be paid, and leaves you chasing those extra drops that make the money for a ten-hour day in the cold, hard rain just about worth the pain you have endured.

My epiphany came one evening in a pub chatting to a group of mates, all employees. I had viewed them like battery farm chickens while I was out enjoying my no-strings, lone-wolf existence on the road, going against the grain of employment. I realised that not only was I working a hell of a lot harder than them for considerably less money, I was also working longer hours every week and taking less time off every year compared to them. Turns out this freedom I had been sold did not exactly do what it said on the tin.

The attitude ingrained into the industry, from couriers to management, is that this is how it has always been and how it will always be. If you don't like it, you can go find another job. This has never sat well with me and the formation of the courier and logistics branch at the Independent Workers Great Britain (IWGB) showed me that there were others who felt the same way. I joined shortly after its inception but my membership lay dormant for a while as I believed that my personal situation was not as bad as others on the road, and didn't feel entitled to the union's immediate attention. As time went on I became

conscious that just because my situation was not as terrible as others, I was still being just as exploited and it had to stop.

I started talking to couriers at my company, The Doctor's Laboratory (TDL – an NHS contractor responsible for running pathology tests), and was amazed at how almost everyone in the fleet of over 120 was getting screwed-over in one way or another. The main issues were the denial of basic workers' rights – including paid holidays and pensions, unpaid wages and overtime – bullying by management and a clear lack of process when being disciplined, amongst many other things. To be fair on a company that does not really deserve any fairness, they were no different to every business in the industry.

The dystopian environment at TDL made recruitment and unionising a fairly straightforward task. The hope of anything better than the couriers were currently enduring was enough to convince people to sign up and start pushing for better conditions. Before long

we had a majority of the workforce as members of the IWGB and, in turn, union recognition.

In the two years that have passed since unionising started at TDL the wins have been coming thick and fast. After taking the company to tribunal we won reclassification from self-employment to Limb B workers, which means we are now entitled to holiday pay and pension contributions. Through campaigning we have driven up the salaries of long suffering van-driving employees by £5,000. We managed to get workers who were wrongly suspended reinstated. Hundreds of pounds have been reimbursed that were wrongfully deducted from workers.



Most recently, after twelve months of negotiations and the company failing to rectify a lacklustre and stagnated pay structure, the TDL couriers went on strike for two days and brought the company to its knees. They crumbled to our demands and the win saw a fleet-wide enhancement in pay and conditions. Unions work. Strikes work. Boom!

Clearly more needs to be done in all workplaces. A recent report from the TUC estimates 4.7 million of us are relying on ‘gig economy’ platform work and it’s plain to all that this erosion of workers’ rights combined with no guaranteed hours or wages is a grim and unacceptable reality.

Membership of the Courier and Logistics branch continues to expand, as riders have had enough of being mistreated and risking their lives daily to make a living. Internationally, seven workers' have already been killed in 2019 whilst working for one of the many takeaway delivery platforms.

Earlier this year, IWGB-led Deliveroo strikes took place in Bristol, Nottingham and London that exemplify the discontent bubbling not only across the country but across the world. Spain, Italy and Canada have all seen similar strikes in the last month alone. The movement is spreading and growing. Connections with sister unions abroad have been established and are being strengthened, with the realisation that riders worldwide are all staring down the same issues of precarity and abysmal pay.

The IWGB’s victory at TDL sent shockwaves across the courier industry and all the other sectors continuing to exploit workers. The union is on an upwards trajectory of success and the sense of unity amongst members is palpable. We now have a blueprint for victory and we will be tackling more places that choose to exploit our members.

With ongoing court cases, including back-dated holiday claims against City Sprint and TDL amounting to well over £1 million; an exciting project backed by trade union colossus the International Transport Federation commencing imminently; and membership being extended nationwide due to high demand for representation, the future of the branch has never looked so strong.

It’s time to rise up and get what we deserve: Unionise, organise, campaign, strike, win!



Alex Marshall is a bicycle courier at The Doctors Laboratory (TDL) and Chair of the IWGB Couriers & Logistics Branch.

iwgbclb.wordpress.com

Abolish Carceral Society

By Abolition Collective



Abolitionist politics is not about what is possible, but about making the impossible a reality. Ending slavery appeared to be an impossible challenge for Sojourner Truth, Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, John Brown, Harriet Tubman, and others, and yet they struggled for it anyway. Today we seek to abolish a number of seemingly immortal institutions, drawing inspiration from those who have sought the abolition of all systems of domination, exploitation, and oppression - from Jim Crow laws and prisons to patriarchy and capitalism. The shockingly unfinished character of these struggles can be seen from some basic facts about our present. The eighty-five richest people in the world have as much wealth as the poorest half; more African American men are in prison, jail, or parole than were enslaved in 1850; we have altered the chemical composition of our atmosphere threatening all life on this planet; women and trans people are significantly more likely than cisgender men to be victims of sexual and domestic violence; rich nations support military interventions into “developing” countries as cover for neocolonial resource exploitation.

Recognising that the institutions we fight against are both interconnected and unique, we refuse to take an easy path of revelling in abstract ideals while accepting mere reforms in practice. Instead, we seek to understand the specific power dynamics within and between these systems so we can make the impossible possible; so we can bring the entire monstrosity down.

We must ask questions that are intimately connected with abolitionist movements if we are to understand these dynamics in ways that are strategically useful. How do those in power use differences of race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and class to divide and exploit us? How do we build bridges across these divides through our organizing? Activists on the ground ask such questions often, but rarely do those within universities become involved. Instead, academia has more often been an opponent to abolitionist movements, going back to the co-constitution of early universities with colonialism and slavery, and the development of racial science and capitalist ideologies. Academic journals have functioned to maintain a culture of conformity, legitimated with myths of “political neutrality” and “meritocracy”. At the same time, colleges and universities have always been terrains of struggle, as radical organisers have found ways to expropriate their resources: from W.E.B. DuBois’s abolitionist science at Fisk University to the Black Campus Movement of the sixties. Inspired by them, we refuse to abandon the resources of academia to those who perpetuate the status quo.

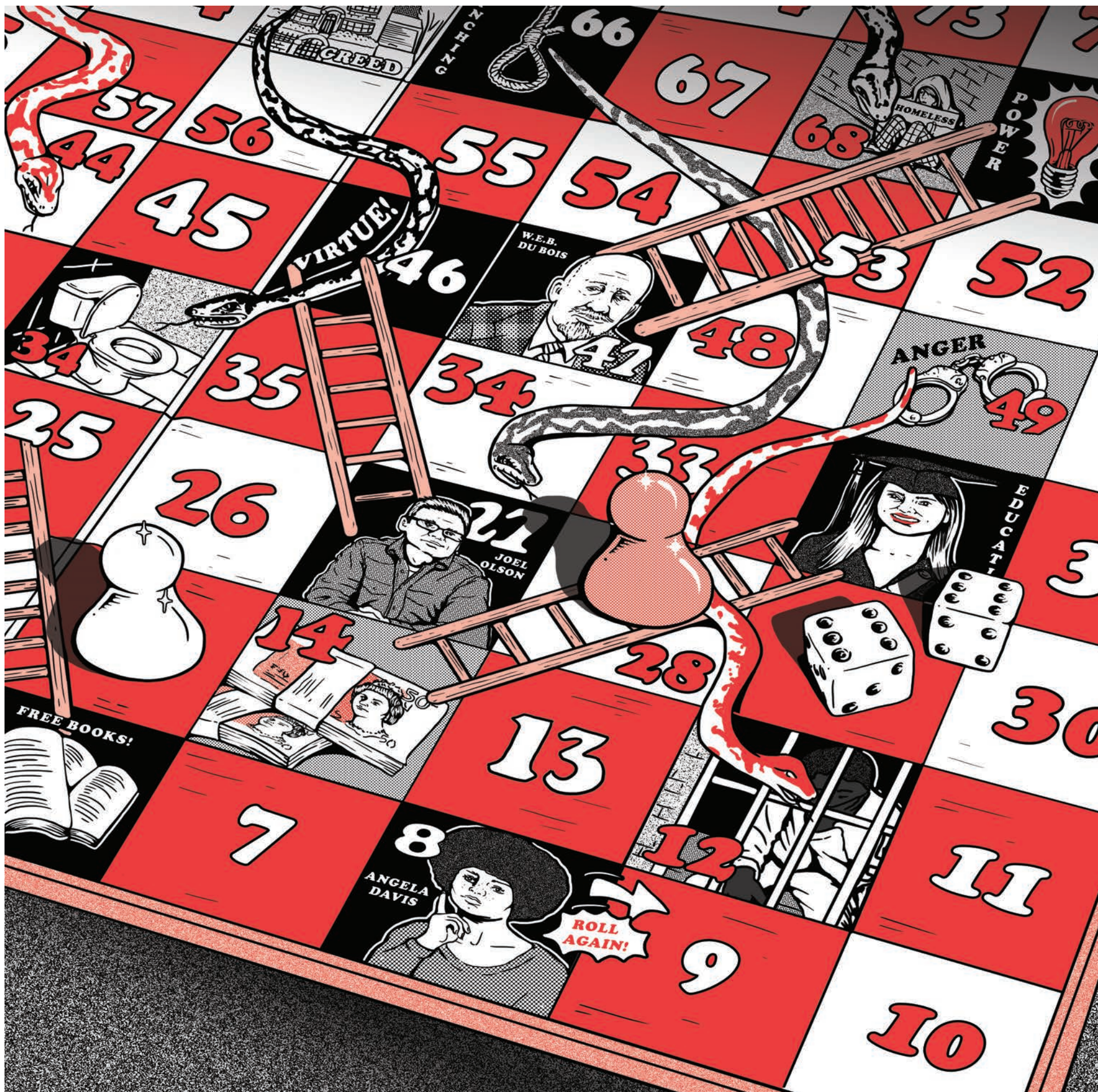
Instead, we are creating a new project, centred around Abolition: A Journal of Insurgent Politics - for research, publishing, and study that encourage us to make the impossible possible, to seek transformation well beyond policy changes and toward revolutionary abolitionism.

Our journal’s title has multiple reference points in a tense relation with one another. “Abolition” refers partly to the historical and contemporary movements that have identified themselves as “abolitionist”: those against slavery, prisons, the wage system, animal and earth exploitation, racialised, gendered, and sexualised violence, and the death penalty, among others. But we also refer to all revolutionary movements, insofar as they have abolitionist elements - whether the abolition of patriarchy, capitalism, heteronormativity, ableism, colonialism, the state, or white supremacy.

Rather than just seeking to abolish a list of oppressive institutions, we aim to support studies of the entanglement of different systems of oppression, not to erase the tensions between different movements, but to create spaces for collective experimentation with those tensions. Instead of assuming one homogenous subject as our audience (e.g., “abolitionists of the world unite!”), we write for multiple, contingent, ambivalent subjectivities - for people coming from different places, living and struggling in different circumstances, and in the process of figuring out who we are and untangling these knots to fight for a more just and liberated world. With Fanon, we are “endlessly creating” ourselves.

Abolition takes cues from the abolition-democracy espoused by figures like W.E.B. Du Bois, Angela Davis, and Joel Olson. Our orientation toward academic insurgency builds upon the struggles of the Black campus movement against the White University, the American Indian movement against the Colonial University, feminist and queer movements against the Hetero-Patriarchal University, and anarchist and communist movements against the Capitalist University. As efforts to revolutionise academia originated and drew their lifeblood from movements outside and across the boundaries of academic institutions, today we recognise that our journal’s radical aspirations must be similarly grounded. We must therefore facilitate collaborations of radical academics with and in support of movements that are struggling against oppressive regimes and for the creation of alternative futures. Recognising that the best movement - relevant intellectual work is happening both in the movements themselves and in the communities with whom they organise (e.g., in dispossessed neighbourhoods and prisons), the journal aims to support scholars whose research amplifies such grassroots intellectual activity.

“Abolition” as a concept, process, and reality becomes the common ground upon which we meet, struggle, and join together in solidarity.



Abolition: A Journal of Insurgent Politics is a collectively run project supporting radical scholarly and activist ideas, poetry, and art, publishing and disseminating work that encourages us to make the impossible possible, to seek transformation well beyond policy changes and toward revolutionary abolitionism. Abolition is a fully open access journal and strives to be as accessible as possible.

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DIY Space For London, London, SE15 1TF, diyspaceforlondon.org

Glasgow Autonomous Space, Glasgow, G5 8JD, glasgowautonomous.weebly.com

Kebele Social Centre, Easton, Bristol, B55 6JY, www.kebelecoop.org

News From Nowhere, Liverpool, L1 4HY, www.newsfromnowhere.org.uk

Mayday rooms, London, EC4Y 1DH, maydayrooms.org

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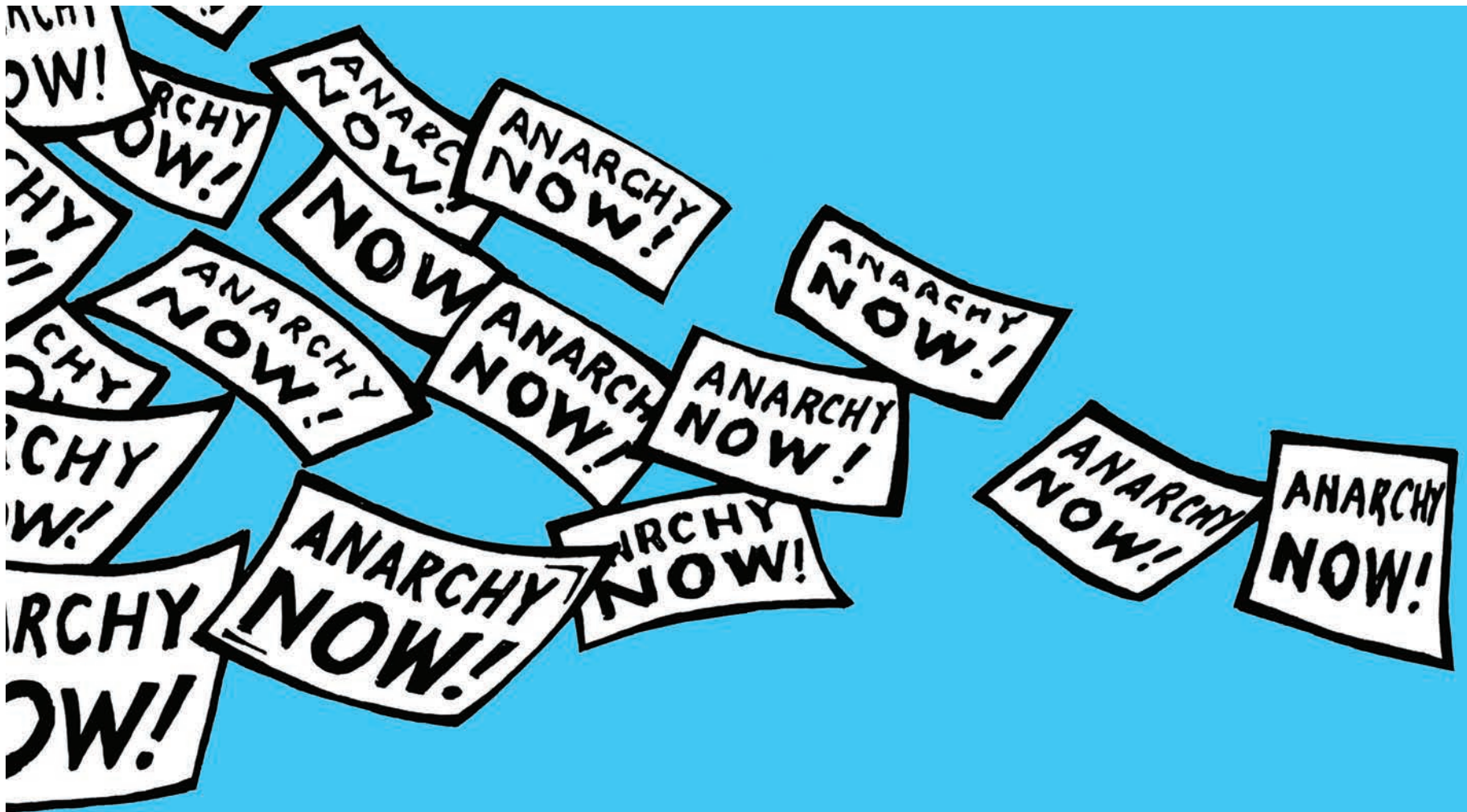
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