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Our actions are justified by fiat & our relations are shaped by treaties with other autarchs. We make the law for our own domains — & the chains of the law have been broken. At present perhaps we survive as mere Pretenders — but even so we may seize a few instants, a few square feet of reality over which to impose our absolute will, *our royaume. L'etat, c'est moi.*

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ANARCHO-MONARCHISM



[29] Aside from his better-known texts referenced above, see also *The Movement of the Free Spirit*. [30] My understanding of this fine book (also, I might note, signed with a pseudonym) leads me to think that much of what I have written here ought to be consonant with its provocations.

[31] *Creative Evolution*, 260.

*Squandering life with
unthinking jubilation and
untrammelled desire*

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Black Crown & Black Rose: Anarcho-Monarchism & Anarcho-Mysticism

Excerpt from T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism by Hakim Bey

In sleep we dream of only two forms of government — anarchy & monarchy. Primordial root consciousness understands no politics & never plays fair. A democratic dream? a socialist dream? Impossible.

Whether my REMs bring verdical near-prophetic visions or mere Viennese wish-fulfillment, only kings & wild people populate my night. Monads & nomads.

Pallid day (when nothing shines by its own light) slinks & insinuates & suggests that we compromise with a sad & lackluster reality. But in dream we are never ruled except by love or sorcery, which are the skills of chaotes & sultans.

Among a people who cannot create or play, but can only *work*, artists also know no choice but anarchy & monarchy. Like the dreamer, they must possess & *do* possess their own perceptions, & for this they must sacrifice the merely social to a “tyrannical Muse.” Art dies when treated “fairly.” It must enjoy a caveman’s wildness or else have its mouth filled with gold by some prince. Bureaucrats & sales personnel poison it, professors chew it up, & philosophers spit it out. Art is a kind

[22] “The one-sidedness of Stirner’s notions on the relations with the organization that he enters or leaves at whim (though it does contain a kernel of truth regarding *that aspect* of freedom) does not allow any independent basis for his passive and defenseless ghost of an ‘organization.’ Such an incoherent and undisciplined organization is at the mercy of any individual ‘egoist,’ who can cynically exploit it for his own ends while disdaining any social aims it might have” (“The Ideology of Dialogue,” in Knabb, 231). This in the course of a defense of the presumably ‘disciplined practice of exclusion.

[23] Bergson again: “The organized elements composing the individual have themselves a certain individuality, and each will claim its own vital principle if the individual pretends to have its own. But, on the other hand, the individual itself is not sufficiently independent, not sufficiently cut off from other things, for us to allow it a “vital principle’ of its own” (Creative Evolution, 42-43).

[24] Despret, 97 and passim.

[25] *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 178.

[26] Ibid.

[27] *Sacrifice*, 62.

[28] This notion of sacrifice was clearly important to Raoul Vaneigem in the writing of “Basic Banalities,” reprinted in *Situationist International Anthology*, and is taken up again in chapter 12 of *The Revolution of Everyday life*. In this sense he represents the aspect of Situationist theory and practice more receptive to Stirner.

[16] Giorgio Agamben writes: “Do we not see around and among us men and peoples who no longer have any essence or identity - who are delivered over, so to speak, to their inessentiality and their inactivity - and who grope everywhere, and at the cost of gross falsifications, for an inheritance and a task, *an inheritance as a task?*” (*The Open*, 76).

[17] See my ‘Two Styles of Anti-Statist Subjectivity...’ I think there are also many points of comparison, geohistorically speaking closer to Stirner, with the Russian nihilists. We probably need these comparisons since Stirner is clearly the stupidest - not to mention most preposterously racist! - when he stages a crude universal history at the outset of *The Ego and its Own*.

[18] *Escape from the Nineteenth Century*, 10. My sense of Landauer is that he would have dissolved this Absolute in the direction I outlined in the previous section—that of annihilating the self. In his case, the inspiration was probably mystical, given his interest in Meister Eckhart and Jewish mysticism.

[19] *Creative Evolution*, 15. But “life nevertheless manifests a seatSh for individuality, as if it strove to constitute systems naturally isolated, naturally closed.”

[20] I take inspiration here from Felix Guattari’s idea of “vectors of Rectification.” See his discussion in *The Three Ecologies*, 44-45.

[21] Intercourse can refer to economic exchanges or sexual pleasures. “Intercourse is the enjoyment of the world” (282). Both senses converge here.

of byzantine barbarity fit only for nobles & heathens. If you had known the sweetness of life as a poet in the reign of some venal, corrupt, decadent, ineffective & ridiculous Pasha or Emir, some Qajar shah, some King Farouk, some Queen of Persia, you would know that this is what every anarchist must want. How they loved poems & paintings, those dead luxurious fools, how they absorbed all roses & cool breezes, tulips & lutes! Hate their cruelty & caprice, yes — but at least they were human. The bureaucrats, however, who smear the walls of the mind with odorless filth — so kind, so *gemutlich* — who pollute the inner air with numbness — they’re not even worthy of hate. They scarcely exist outside the bloodless Ideas they serve.

And besides: the dreamer, the artist, the anarchist — do they not share some tinge of cruel caprice with the most outrageous of moghuls? Can genuine life occur without some folly, some excess, some bouts of Heraclitan “strife”? We do not rule — but we cannot & will not *be ruled*.

In Russia the Narodnik-Anarchists would sometimes forge a *ukase* or manifesto in the name of the Czar; in it the Autocrat would complain that greedy lords & unfeeling officials had sealed him in his palace & cut him off from his beloved people. He would proclaim the end of serfdom & call on peasants & workers to rise in His Name against the government.

Several times this ploy actually succeeded in sparking revolts. Why? Because the single absolute ruler acts metaphorically

as a mirror for the unique and utter absoluteness of the self. Each peasant looked into this glassy legend & beheld his or her own freedom — an illusion, but one that borrowed its magic from the logic of the dream.

A similar myth must have inspired the 17th century Ranters & Antinomians & Fifth Monarchy Men who flocked to the Jacobite standard with its erudite cabals & bloodproud conspiracies. The radical mystics were betrayed first by Cromwell & then by the Restoration — why not, finally, join with flippant cavaliers & foppish counts, with Rosicrucians & Scottish Rite Masons, to place an occult messiah on Albion's throne?

Among a people who cannot conceive human society without a monarch, the desires of radicals may be expressed in monarchical terms. Among a people who cannot conceive human existence without a religion, radical desires may speak the language of heresy.

Taoism rejected the whole of Confucian bureaucracy but retained the image of the Emperor-Sage, who would sit silent on his throne facing a propitious direction, doing absolutely nothing. In Islam the Ismailis took the idea of the Imam of the Prophet's Household & metamorphosed it into the Imam-of-one's-own-being, the perfected self who is beyond all Law & rule, who is atoned with the One. And this doctrine led them into revolt against Islam, to terror & assassination in the name of pure esoteric self-liberation & total realization.

[10] *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 160.

[11] *Ibid.*, 161.

[12] *Ibid.*, 162. Maurizio Lazzarato once made the same claim for the Situationists: in *their* generation, they took the dialectic to its limits: "It is the honor of the situationists to have led the dialectic right to its point of disintegration, within the impasse that restrained it, beyond Marx." I cite from my unpublished translation of "Hurlements en faveur du situationnisme."

[13] Michael Hardt has written some profoundly lucid pages on the relation between absolute annihilation (what some Scholastics called *pars destruens*) and the dissolution of dialectics in the introduction to his Gilles Deleuze.

[14] One can find some remarks along similar lines in Hakim Bey's communique "Black Crown and Black Rose: Anarcho-Monarchism and Anarcho-Mysticism." Some of what I write below on the Id also echoes this fine missive.

[15] Stirner's occasional references to enthusiasm are important. First, they align his thought with a philosophy, stretching back at least to the Enlightenment, that connected revolutionary activities with the dangerous fanaticism they so often reproduce. Second, they underline that the haunting of the world is not merely a matter of minds and ideas. Possession has a strong affective component, and perhaps not even a component. Perhaps all we are thinking through here are forms of the transmission of sadness.

[1] It is additionally appropriate that there are no paintings or photographs of Stirner. There is, of course, that delightfully crude sketch made by Engels from memory - nostalgic, perhaps, for the company of the Free.

[2] "Two Styles of Anti-Statist Subjectivity."

[3] *The Ego and its Own* by Max Stirner, 316,149. All other references in parentheses in the essay.

[4] I am alluding, of course, to Landauer's famous description: "The State is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behavior; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently." Cited in Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, 46. Goldman and many others have given similar accounts.

[5] As has been said of a person free of myth, or of the unconscious. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 58.

[6] *Society of the Spectacle*, § 20, translation modified. Debord's concept of spectacle usefully illustrates the social machines through which such imaginary subjects come to appear real.

[7] The idea of a gift of organs was suggested in a different context by Jean-Francois Lyotard. I am thinking of all of the nonverbal ways in which we are invited or seduced to join a Cause.

[8] "The Platonist," 92.

[9] The event of breaking with the Cause is not itself a Cause: however, it is common enough that instances of such breaks are eventually memorialized as part of a new Cause.

Classical 19th century anarchism defined itself in the struggle against crown & church, & therefore on the waking level it considered itself egalitarian & atheist. This rhetoric however obscures what really happens: the "king" becomes the "anarchist," the "priest" a "heretic." In this strange duet of mutability the politician, the democrat, the socialist, the rational ideologue can find no place; they are deaf to the music & lack all sense of rhythm. Terrorist & monarch are *archetypes*; these others are mere functionaries.

Once anarch & king clutched each other's throats & waltzed a totentanz — a splendid battle. Now, however, both are relegated to history's trashbin — has-beens, curiosities of a leisurely & more cultivated past. They whirl around so fast that they seem to meld together...can they somehow have become one thing, a Siamese twin, a Janus, a freakish unity? "The sleep of Reason..." ah! most desirable & desirous monsters!

Ontological Anarchy proclaims flatly, bluntly, & almost brainlessly: yes, the two are now one. As a single entity the anarch/king now is reborn; each of us the ruler of our own flesh, our own creations — and as much of everything else as we can grab & hold.

Our actions are justified by fiat & our relations are shaped by treaties with other autarchs. We make the law for our own domains — & the chains of the law have been broken. At present perhaps we survive as mere Pretenders — but even so we may seize a few instants, a few square feet of reality

over which to impose our absolute will, *our royaume. L'etat, c'est moi.*

If we are bound by any ethic or morality it must be one which we ourselves have imagined, fabulously more exalted & more liberating than the “moralic acid” of puritans & humanists. “Ye are as gods” — “Thou art That.”

The words *monarchism & mysticism* are used here in part simply *pour epater* those egalito-atheist anarchists who react with pious horror to any mention of pomp or superstition-mongering. No champagne revolutions for *them!*

Our brand of anti-authoritarianism, however, thrives on baroque paradox; it favors states of consciousness, emotion & aesthetics over all petrified ideologies & dogma; it embraces multitudes & relishes contradictions. Ontological Anarchy is a hobgoblin for BIG minds. The translation of the title (& key term) of Max Stirner’s magnum opus as *The Ego & Its Own* has led to a subtle misinterpretation of “individualism.” The English-Latin word *ego* comes freighted & weighed with freudian & protestant baggage. A careful reading of Stirner suggests that *The Unique & His Own-ness* would better reflect his intentions, given that he never defines the ego *in opposition to* libido or id, or in opposition to “soul” or “spirit.” The Unique (*der Einzige*) might best be construed simply as the individual self.

Stirner commits no metaphysics, yet bestows on the Unique a certain absoluteness. In what way then does this *Einzige* differ

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from the Self of Advaita Vedanta? *Tat tvam asi*: Thou (individual Self) art That (absolute Self).

Many believe that mysticism "dissolves the ego." Rubbish. Only death does that (or such at least is our Sadducean assumption). Nor does mysticism destroy the "carnal" or "animal" self — which would also amount to suicide. What mysticism really tries to surmount is false consciousness, illusion, Consensus Reality, & all the failures of self that accompany these ills. True mysticism creates a "self at peace," a self with power. The highest task of metaphysics (accomplished for example by Ibn Arabi, Boehme, Ramana Maharshi) is in a sense to self-destruct, to identify metaphysical & physical, transcendent & immanent, as ONE. Certain *radical monists* have pushed this doctrine far beyond mere pantheism or religious mysticism. An apprehension of the immanent oneness of being inspires certain antinomian heresies (the Ranters, the Assassins) whom we consider our ancestors.

Stirner himself seems deaf to the possible spiritual resonances of Individualism — & in this he belongs to the 19th century: born long after the deliquescence of Christendom, but long before the discovery of the Orient & of the hidden illuminist tradition in Western alchemy, revolutionary heresy & occult activism. Stirner quite correctly despised what he knew as "mysticism," a mere pietistic sentimentality based on self-abnegation & world hatred. Nietzsche nailed down the lid on "God" a few years later. Since then, who has dared to suggest

that Individualism & mysticism might be reconciled & synthesized?

The missing ingredient in Stirner (Nietzsche comes closer) is a working concept of *nonordinary consciousness*. The realization of the unique self (or *ubermensch*) must reverberate & expand like waves or spirals or music to embrace direct experience or intuitive perception of the uniqueness of reality itself. This realization engulfs & erases all duality, dichotomy, & dialectic. It carries with itself, like an electric charge, an intense & wordless sense of *value*: it “divinizes” the self.

Being/consciousness/bliss (*satchitananda*) cannot be dismissed as merely another Stirnerian “spook” or “wheel in the head.” It invokes no exclusively transcendent principle for which the *Einzig* must sacrifice his/her own-ness. It simply states that intense awareness of existence itself results in “bliss” — or in less loaded language, “valuative consciousness.” The goal of the Unique after all is to *possess everything*; the radical monist attains this by identifying self with perception, like the Chinese inkbrush painter who “becomes the bamboo,” so that “it paints itself.”

Despite mysterious hints Stirner drops about a “union of Unique-ones” & despite Nietzsche’s eternal “Yea” & exaltation of life, their Individualism seems somehow shaped by a certain *coldness toward the other*. In part they cultivated a bracing, cleansing chilliness against the warm suffocation of

I would like to thank the organizers and participants of the Renewing the Anarchist Tradition conference, where a first version of this essay was presented in September 2006. I would also like to thank my friend Leona for typing up a transcript of that talk.

Retrieved from theanarchistlibrary.org

Originally published in *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* Issue 67

Suggested Further Reading:

An Invitation to Desertion by Bellamy Fitzpatrick

The Unique and its Property by Max Stirner

Against His-story, Against Leviathan! by Fredy Perlman

Anarchism and Individualism by Georges Palante

Above the Arch by Renzo Novatore

Language by John Zerzan

Black Seed: A Journal of Indigenous Anarchy

Prison Break by Flower Bomb

The Temporary Autonomous Zone by Hakim Bey

Illegalism by Paul Z Simons

Atassa

Against the Grain by James C Scott

human, if I understand what Frfcrc Dupont was grasping after with these notions in the book, *species being*.^[30] It could be what Bergson called “a haunting of the social form in the genesis of the individual.”^[31] It could be everyday life - but not the everyday life (*le quotidien*) of citizens (of the *polis*) that the Situationists described, after Lefebvre, as colonized. Not *le quotidien*, then, but what Bergson, again, called *le courant*: literally, the flowing. The flux of life in and beyond the human.

life in this sense is ultimately an impersonal circulation of desires, impulses, affects. That is what an egoist paradoxically, impossibly almost, speaks in the name of when he rejects the Cause, when she joins or parts ways with the Union of Egoists. So many masks at play on the fields of ownness: hello, egoists. Hello, nihilists. And all of this has been my fancy decoration on another such mask, one I wear today, to tell you that if anything is worth reading, it is not to find something to believe in. That other mask that accepted the gift of a nickname, *Stirner*, wrote: “We read it because we are interested in handling something and making it ours.”

19th century sentimentality & altruism; in part they simply despised what someone (Mencken?) called “Homo Boobensis.”

And yet, reading behind & beneath the layer of ice, we uncover traces of a fiery doctrine — what Gaston Bachelard might have called “a Poetics of the Other.” The *Einzige*’s relation with the Other cannot be defined or limited by any institution or idea. And yet clearly, however paradoxically, the Unique depends for completeness on the Other, & cannot & will not be realized in any bitter isolation.

The examples of “wolf children” or *enfants sauvages* suggest that a human infant deprived of human company for too long will never attain conscious humanity — will never acquire language. The Wild Child perhaps provides a poetic metaphor for the Unique-one — and yet simultaneously marks the precise point where Unique & Other must meet, coalesce, unify — or else fail to attain & possess all of which they are capable.

The Other mirrors the Self — the Other is our *witness*. The Other completes the Self — the Other gives us the key to the perception of oneness-of-being. When we speak of being & consciousness, we point to the Self; when we speak of bliss we implicate the Other.

The acquisition of language falls under the sign of Eros — all communication is essentially erotic, all relations are erotic. Avicenna & Dante claimed that love moves the very stars &

planets in their courses — the *Rg Veda* & Hesiod's *Theogony* both proclaim Love the first god born after Chaos. Affections, affinities, aesthetic perceptions, beautiful creations, conviviality — all the most precious possessions of the Unique-one arise from the conjunction of Self & Other in the constellation of Desire.

Here again the project begun by Individualism can be evolved & revived by a graft with mysticism — specifically with tantra. As an esoteric *technique* divorced from orthodox Hinduism, tantra provides a symbolic framework (“Net of Jewels”) for the identification of sexual pleasure & non-ordinary consciousness. All antinomian sects have contained some “tantrik” aspect, from the families of Love & Free Brethren & Adamites of Europe to the pederast sufis of Persia to the Taoist alchemists of China. Even classical anarchism has enjoyed its tantrik moments: Fourier's Phalansteries; the “Mystical Anarchism” of G. Ivanov & other fin-de-siècle Russian symbolists; the incestuous erotism of Arzibashaev's *Sanine*; the weird combination of Nihilism & Kali-worship which inspired the Bengali Terrorist Party (to which my tantrik guru Sri Kamanaransan Biswas had the honor of belonging)... We, however, propose a much deeper syncretism of anarchy & tantra than any of these. In fact, we simply suggest that Individual Anarchism & Radical Monism are to be considered henceforth one and the same movement.

theogony, much less an anthropogony: it is the ever-repeated destruction of property in oneself.

About the Fields of Ownness

What could Vaneigem have intended in his often invoked distinction between life (vie) and survival (survie)?[29] Although he often deployed it in a simplistic way, the idea is beautiful in its inversion of the apparently obvious dominance of the economy (understood in a restricted sense): survival is not what is basic, primary, of the body and its needs, but rather a weakening, a vampirism, the imposition of a superior (sur) element on life (vie). And this by life itself. Vaneigem perhaps invited us to try to conceive of life itself - life *by* itself, life's ownness, without transcendent illusions.

In this sense life cannot be conceived, much less lived, in terms of any transcendent meaning or project. Contemplating our emptiness, considering the swarming micro-Egos that compose us, we might learn the lesson of our irreparable relations to something alive but impersonal, inhuman. It could be what Stirner called “The Un-man who is in some sense in every individual” (125). It could be the pre-human or for-

Yes, digest! For you are the “desecrator” (165). But observe: Stirner assumes that you are hungry. To be hungry, to be desirous in any way, corresponds to the feeling of being empty. Such feelings are indices. They are clues for patient meditators who stubbornly insist, on slowing down the *prestissimo* of our present. These conditions testify to emptiness and not to a lack that could be filled. They tell me not just that I need to eat (to consume so that I will be something) but also that I am to set off across what others call sacred space; to me it is a void. I continually discover and lose myself in the void. Yet I continue to act. That is what Stirner meant, I think, by excessive remark: “I do not love [the world], I *annihilate* it as I annihilate myself; I *dissolve* it” (262). To seriously take up Ego as a Cause to which I am obligated would inevitably mean to be possessed by myself, by some element that I no longer want to be. It would be my horrible apotheosis. That cannot be ownness. So, repeatedly, patiently, Stirner interrupts such moments, returning to these sentiments. I’m hungry. I’m dispossessed. I’m nothing. As Unique, the creative nothing is not the beginning of a

This hybrid has been called “spiritual materialism,” a term which burns up all metaphysics in the fire of oneness of spirit & matter. We also like “Ontological Anarchy” because it suggests that being itself remains in a state of “divine Chaos,” of all-potentiality, of continual creation.

In this flux only the *jiva mukti*, or “liberated individual,” is self-realized, and thus monarch or owner of his perceptions and relations. In this ceaseless flow only desire offers any principle of order, and thus the only possible society (as Fourier understood) is that of lovers.

Anarchism is dead, long live anarchy! We no longer need the baggage of revolutionary masochism or idealist self-sacrifice — or the frigidity of Individualism with its disdain for conviviality, of *living together* — or the vulgar superstitions of 19th century atheism, scientism, and progressism. All that dead weight! Frowsy proletarian suitcases, heavy bourgeois steamer-trunks, boring philosophical portmanteaux — over the side with them!

We want from these systems only their vitality, their life-forces, daring, intransigence, anger, heedlessness — their power, their *shakti*. Before we jettison the rubbish and the carpetbags, we’ll rifle the luggage for billfolds, revolvers, jewels, drugs and other useful items — keep what we like and trash the rest. Why not? Are we priests of a cult, to croon over relics and mumble our martyrologies?

Monarchism too has something we want — a grace, an ease, a pride, a superabundance. We'll take these, and dump the woes of authority & torture in history's garbage bin. Mysticism has something we need — “self-overcoming,” exalted awareness, reservoirs of psychic potency. These we will expropriate in the name of our insurrection — and leave the woes of morality & religion to rot & decompose.

As the Ranters used to say when greeting any “fellow creature” — from king to cut-purse — “Rejoice! All is ours!”

Alternatively, to think of ourselves as eating something and not being possessed by it is to think ourselves dispossessed.

Stirner writes, as I mentioned, about the world being haunted: always more ghosts, more and more spirits, more and more things that possess, more and more guilt, and so on. He writes about how this is growing. Here he is navigating Nietzsche's accelerating world:

Around the altar rise the arches of the church and its walls keep moving further and further out. What they enclose is *sacred*. You can no longer get to it, no longer touch it.

Shrieking with the hunger that devours you, you wander around about these walls and search for the little that is profane. And the circles of your course keep getting more and more extended. Soon that church will embrace the whole world, and you will be driven out to the extreme edge. Another step and the *world of the sacred* has conquered: you sink into the abyss. Therefore take courage while there it is yet time, wander about no longer in the profane where now it is dry feeding, dare the leap and rush the gates into the sanctuary itself. If you *devour* the *sacred* you have made it your *own*. Digest the sacramental wafer and you are rid of it. (88-89)

Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert's 1898 article on "the nature and function of sacrifice" could be read, in all its glorious sociological dryness, as an expose of the sacrificial logic of the sacred Cause. They describe religious rituals in which the credulous one eats: "By eating the sacred thing, in which the god is thought to be immanent, the sacrificer absorbs him. He is possessed by him..."[27] The sacrificial logic is a logic of absorption: and in absorption, possession. Absorption would then be the psychological or physiological prerequisite for identifying yourself with an alien Cause. It should not surprise us, then, that *The Ego and its Own* is peppered with constant references to eating: eating things, eating other people, eating gods too. Stirner's rejection of the Cause is a rejection of the practice of sacrifice, and of every politics and morality based on a sacrificial logic.[28] "Everything sacred is a tie, a fetter" (176).

For every Cause is indigestible to the credulous. "What I take as absolute, I cannot devour" (183). It remains and separates me from myself, arbitrarily and painfully redistributing the micro-Egos, generating an imaginary fullness, fixing an identity.

From *Escape from the 19th Century* by Peter Lamborn Wilson

Fourier Stirner Nietzsche

We need warm Fourier to counterbalance cool Stirner and Nietzsche, and we need Stirner and Nietzsche to even out Fourier. Stirner exterminates a few spooks still rattling around in Fourier's head; for "altruism" sometimes appears in Fourier detached from the interest of individuals, floating free as an abstraction; at other times however Fourier makes it clear that self-interest alone is sufficient motivation to bring about Harmony, since the individual can only realize full individuality in a social setting where need ("work") and pleasure are nearly synonymous, and where one's own passions are complemented and fulfilled by others of the appropriate Series. The Phalanx can thus be seen as one possible form for the Stirnerite "Union of Egoists" (or more accurately, "unique-ones"). It has been argued (by Gustav Landauer for example) that "Ego" for Stirner still retains—despite all Stirner's determination—a taint of the Absolute, in the same way that "Society" (or Association) does for Fourier. In this case, Nietzsche appears as a positive/ambiguous third term or pivot of reconciliation between the two extreme cases, first in his image of the "free spirit", which could stand for Stirner's and Fourier's ideals as well; and second, in his "perspectivalism," which precisely puts the two extreme

perspectives *in perspective*. Moreover, Nietzsche and Fourier agree on the question of the Necessary Illusion, the social myth; in this light one might interpret the Phalanx as the “will to power” of the combined Passional Series and Groups. All three thinkers are “radical aristocrats,” disbelievers in equality and democracy. Believing in the possibility of a synthesis of these three cranky geniuses may involve the aesthetic. of the well-known mating, on operating table, of sewing machine and umbrella; but that’s old hat. Indeed, we can add a few more “impossibles” to the mix, and hope for six before breakfast. For example: a number of nineteenth-century American utopianists managed to reconcile Fourier’s theory of Attraction with Josiah Warren’s “Society of Individual Sovereigns”—particularly Stephen Pearl Andrews, founder of the UNIVERSAL PANTARCHY and of “Modern Times,” the anarchist community in Brentwood, Long Island. In fact Fourierism dovetails nicely with what might be called the “left” wing of Individualist anarchism, its labor movement-oriented side, represented by Tucker and Mackay. A similar synthesis was made in the “pleasure politics” of Situationism, which probably absorbed Fourier through Surrealism. Fourier’s *Nouveau monde amoureux*, his most overtly erotic work—which never appeared in his lifetime and was lost—finally made it into print for the first time in 1967; if it was not a precipitating factor of the following year’s “Events,” it was surely a symbolic premonition.

About how he Eats Gods

All of us return, then, if we are fortunate, to the destruction of property—to consumption. One of the plans for thinking modernity that Nietzsche sketched out in his notebooks reflects on unfortunate, sad modern people who cannot digest anything. We might understand all of modernity “using the metaphor of feeding and digestion.”[25] “Sensibility unutterably more excitable (- the increase in excitability dressed in immoralistic finery as the increase of *compassion* -), the abundance of disparate impressions greater than ever before - the *cosmopolitanism* of dishes, of literatures, newspapers, forms, tastes, even landscapes, etc. The tempo of this influx is *prestissimo*; the impressions efface each other; one instinctively resists taking something in, taking something *deeply*, ‘digesting’ something - this results in a *weakening* of the digestive power.”[26] For Nietzsche, what one can digest is a test of one’s health, strength, and power. Metaphorical or not, this Alimentary Logic is profoundly consonant with Stirner’s thought: what we have digested is literally what we have made our own, and digesting or consuming something else is also how we become more than what we are.

might meet: “The last and most decided opposition, that of unique against unique, is at bottom beyond what is called opposition, but without having sunk back into unity and unison” (186). There are not two; there is not one. The empty Ego is nondenumerable, or beyond measure.

Indeed: Vinciane Despret suggests in her ethnopsychological study *Our Emotional Makeup* that one can crudely classify responses to theoretical and practical crises of notions of the self into two sets.[24] The one that has been more common in the so-called Western tradition is to multiply selves, severing a supposedly unified being into various sub-selves invariably distributed in hierarchical structures. (The first cleavage, from Plato to Freud and after, divides the rational and the irrational.) The one that has been less popular, always controversial, sometimes heretical, in that tradition is to erase or annihilate the self. Stirner plays and in playing transforms all three games of the self: the unified self (Unique and unnamable), the multiple self (from the abyss of unregulated impulses to the Union of Egoists), and no self (Nothing, emptiness, “thoughtlessness”). The Ego’s process extends in both directions. Uniquely.

... in order not to have the trouble of forgetting the books of philosophy, I have never taken the trouble to read them. (PHS I 117)

The Series needs discords as much as it need harmonies. (UVCF 231)

The biggest area of difference between Fourier and Stirner/Nietzsche, and the biggest area of difference between Fourier and the whole later development of socialist anarchism, is the area of religion. Stirner/Nietzsche did not believe in “God,” and neither did Proudhon or Kropotkin (who both read Fourier with “fascination” when young). But Fourier did believe in something. He attacked “Religion” as an aspect of Civilization, but he spoke without hesitation of a “God” and of “UNIVERSAL DIVINE PROVIDENCE” (as a necessary axiom to the proof that all humans should enjoy an economic and erotic “minimum,” without which it would become necessary to accuse “God” of injustice). Fourier’s theory of correspondences is also metaphysical or “occult.” Fourier’s deity, however, cannot be identified with that of Abrahamic Monotheism, since His most essential feature is His approval of all passions and forms of sexuality, indeed His virtual *identity with the Passions*. Fourier’s monist pantheism invites comparison with the non-Religious spirituality of certain radical mystics and heretics (such as William Blake), and also with certain contemporary movements such as anarcho-Taoism or anarcho-paganism. (These in turn are of course updated

versions of earlier heresies such as the Brook Farmers' Transcendentalism, a sort of mix of Fourier and Unitarianism. Spiritualism and Swedenborgianism were also rife amongst nineteenth-century radicals.)

happening in individual bodies.[23] If you have been unlucky enough to sleep through the lessons in which life teaches you the multiplicity of your body, you might still think that the Ego is the liberal individual, the full and substantial self, and that the Union of Egoists is a temporary association among them. Of course *that* ought to sound ridiculous, because nothing will get done except through some combination of coercion and good luck. If you cease to divide up *self* by individual body specifically, feeling the many Unique selves in each body, there must also be equally complex collective selves beyond individual bodies. That would be truly following Stirner's intuition: the paradoxical statement that I have assumed my own Cause means that in such moments of mutual appropriation and disappropriation we clear the sort of space in which the nothing creates. He was after the greatest possible intensity of the creative moment. How do we take it to where it has almost no limit? What is the plateau of maximum circulation?

There can be no single answer to these questions. I will offer a somewhat abstract description of the feeling involved, though. Stirner has a strange passage that relates to how you and I

body. There is no particular reason to think of (always imperfectly) individual bodies as the best or highest instance of the Unique, as opposed to unique desires and impulses - or unique groups. Individuality is not absolute, but relative. There are actions in which I act as one; there are also actions that are profoundly conflicted and even self-contradictory. This is not necessarily a weakness and it is not always a mark of separation in me. For we are each of us already a Union of Egoists. My part in composing a group as a Union of Egoists is to disband one Union and convene another, setting multiple selves in circulation, so that certain of mine connect with certain of yours. In the group, these impulses or micro-Egos circulate in a way both related and unrelated to their circulation in me. Naturally all of what goes on in my body is not connected to all of what goes on in your body. A Union of Egoists is an “ever- fluid” circulation of selves, a circulation of affects or desires. Thus what ends up being *I* or *me* - my Cause, my property, ownership, finally - has to be redefined beyond the individual body. For the exact duration of a Union of Egoists, *I* is distributed in it. When others appear or disappear, *I* is redistributed. That is precisely what is already

From Immediatism by Hakim Bey

Ontological Anarchy In a Nutshell

Since absolutely nothing can be predicated with any real certainty as to the “true nature of things”, all projects (as Nietzsche says) can only be “founded on nothing.” And yet *there must be a project*—if only because we ourselves resist being categorized as “nothing.” Out of nothing we will make something: the Uprising, the revolt against everything which proclaims: “The Nature of Things is such-&-such.” We disagree, we are unnatural, we are less than nothing in the eyes of the Law—Divine Law, Natural Law, or Social Law—take your pick. Out of nothing we will imagine our *values*, and by this act of invention we shall live.

As we mediate on the *nothing* we notice that although it cannot be de-fined, nevertheless paradoxically we *can* say something about it (even if only metaphorically):—it appears to be a “chaos.” Both as ancient myth and as “new science”, chaos lies at the heart of our project. The great serpent (Tiamat, Python, Leviathan), Hesiod’s primal Chaos, presides over the vast long dreaming of the Paleolithic—before all kings, priests, agents of Order, History, Hierarchy, Law. “Nothing” begins to take on a face—the smooth, featureless egg- or gourd-visage of Mr. Hun-Tun, chaos-as-becoming, chaos-as-excess, the generous outpouring of nothing into something.

In effect, chaos is life. All mess, all riot of color, all protoplasmic urgency, all *movement*—is chaos. From this point of view, Order appears as death, cessation, crystallization, alien silence.

Anarchists have been claiming for years that “anarchy is not chaos.” Even anarchism seems to want a *natural law*, an inner and innate morality in matter, an entelechy or purpose-of-being. (No better than Christians in this respect, or so Nietzsche believed—radical only in the depth of their *resentment*.) Anarchism says that “the state should be abolished” only to institute a new more radical form of order in its place. Ontological Anarchy however replies that no “state” can “exist” in chaos, that all ontological claims are spurious except the claim of chaos (which however is undetermined), and therefore that governance of any sort is impossible. “Chaos never died.” Any form of “order” which we have not imagined and produced directly and spontaneously in sheer “existential freedom” for our own celebratory purposes—is an illusion.

Of course, illusions can kill. Images of punishment haunt the sleep of Order. Ontological Anarchy proposes that we wake up, and create our own day—even in the shadow of the State, that pustulant giant who sleeps, and whose dreams of Order metastatize as spasms of spectacular violence.

The only force significant enough to facilitate our act of creation seems to be desire, or as Charles Fourier called it,

annihilate it, and form in its place the *Union of Egoists*” (161). The Union of Egoists is precisely what made so many communists - even the Situationists - turn away and run from Stirner.[22] His suggestion was, simply, that the inevitable processes of formation of groups would involve folks joining and leaving the group at will. “If a union has crystallized into a society, it has ceased to be a coalition; for coalition is an incessant self-uniting; it has become a unitedness, come to a standstill, degenerated into a fixity; it is — *dead* as a union, it is the corpse of the union or coalition, it is - society, community. A striking example of this kind is furnished by the *party*” (271). The Union does not, cannot, operate through separation or the police care that manages it. I approach or recede, variously saying: I want to use the group and be used by it; now I don't - I withdraw myself.

If we start from the Ego, as the imaginarily full and substantial individual, and conceive of *that* entity entering and exiting the Union of Egoists, there are many reasons to conclude that this is not a viable scheme for cooperation or coexistence.

However, from the perspective of an empty and creative self, we are thinking of multiple selves already going on in one

seduce me. The process or processes are the chaos together with unregulated impulses as emergent desires.

Tempt us; attract us; repel us; seduce us. All of us. For now I am many. Too many for a Cause - for we do not all agree.

That, it seems to me, would be a better reason to say that no Cause can be mine but my own. If there were some kind of absolute limit it would be: my body is my own. Stirner's parodic seizure of power over himself echoes this weirdest of all feelings. Perhaps that nonsense is how the sense of what is appropriate or proper arises. It could also be how the concept of property is ultimately dissolved.

We could understand this still empty, now multiple, self in *and* as the famous Union of Egoists that Stirner presents as annihilating society and State. "Society is our state of nature ... But the dissolution of society is intercourse[21] or union" (271)

"It is not another state that men aim at, but, their *union*, uniting, this ever-fluid uniting of everything standing" (199).

"The State and I are enemies. I sacrifice nothing to human society, I only utilize it; but to be able to utilize it completely I transform it into my property and my creature, that is, I

"Passion." Just as Chaos and Eros (along with Earth and Old Night) are Hesiod's first deities, so too no human endeavor occurs outside their cosmogeneous circle of attraction.

The logic of Passion leads to the conclusion that all "states" are impossible, all "orders" illusory, except those of desire. No being, only becoming—hence the only viable government is that of love, or "attraction." Civilization merely hides from itself—behind a thin static scrim of rationality—the truth that only desire creates values. And so the values of Civilization are based on the denial of desire.

Capitalism, which claims to produce Order by means of the reproduction of desire, in fact originates in the production of *scarcity*, and only reproduce itself in unfulfillment, negation, and alienation. As the Spectacle disintegrates (like a malfunctioning VR program) it reveals the fleshless bones of the Commodity. Like those tranced travelers in Irish fairy tales who visit the Otherworld and seem to dine on supernatural delicacies, we wake in a bleary dawn with ashes in our mouths.

Individual vs. Group—Self vs. Other—a false dichotomy propagated through the Media of Control, and above all through language. Hermes—the Angel—the medium is the Messenger. All forms of communicativeness should be angelic—language itself should be angelic—a kind of divine chaos. Instead it is infected with a self-replicating virus, an infinite

crystal of separation, the *grammar* which prevents us from killing Nobodaddy once and for all.

Self and Other complement and complete one another. There is no Absolute Category, no Ego, no Society—but only a chaotically complex web of relation—and the “Strange Attractor”, *attraction itself*, which evokes resonances and patterns in the flow of becoming.

Values arise from this turbulence, values which are based on abundance rather than scarcity, the gift rather than the commodity, and on the synergistic and mutual enhancement of individual and group;—values which are in every way the opposite of the morality and ethics of Civilization, because they have to do with life rather than death.

“Freedom is a psycho-kinetic skill”—not an abstract noun. A process, not a “state”—a movement, not a form of governance. The Land of the Dead knows that perfect Order from which the organic and animate shrink in horror—which explains why the Civilization of Slippage is more than half in love with easeful death. From Babylon and Egypt to the 20th Century, the architecture of Power can never quite be distinguished from the tumuli of the necropolis.

Nomadism, and the Uprising, provide us with possible models for an “everyday life” of Ontological Anarchy. The crystalline perfections of Civilization and Revolution cease to interest us when we have experienced them both as forms of War, variations on that tired old Babylonian Con, the myth of

happy consequence: I can affirm myself as multiple and have done with pledging allegiance to the Unified Self and the Cause for which it stands.

I like to think that the process of appropriation and misappropriation, of making proper and making improper, is happening in the emptiness of the self, as its effort of selfconstitution, as much as it is happening beyond, as relations with others. Stirner does sometimes write about internal conflicts, but I rarely have the sense of clarity about what I want that he tends to assume. (Perhaps my mask does not fit as well as his did.) One could express the process of individuation that makes me Unique as a series of inner conflicts. That is, we could concretize the concept of the Ego by adopting another perspective in which there are many processes, not just one. Something like that is a concrete aspect of embodiment. I find that I am composite, that I am composed by many Ego nodules, partial or micro selves[20] that crop up and fade away depending on what activity I take up or abandon. They are in some conflict with each other inasmuch as there are different kinds of available activities and pleasures that tempt me, attract me, repel me, and

despite all Stirner's determination - a taint of the Absolute." [18] Certainly when I read Stirner I sometimes have to pause to cleanse the unpleasant aftertaste left by too much comparison of Self with God. It's what is still all too dialectical in Stirner, the desire to invert the monotheist nightmare rather than just wake up from it. Certainly I have witnessed people assimilating such an Ego to an individualism that is rugged, all too rugged. I mean that the theoretical mistake of identifying what makes me Unique with what I think I am (Ego as conscience or consciousness) is perhaps a variant of the more ordinary mistake of believing that one can just be an individual in some simple way. Reflecting on the phenomenon of life, Henri Bergson wrote: "Individuality is never perfect ... it is often difficult, sometimes impossible, to tell what is an individual." [19] As though we are not all divided within and sometimes against ourselves first and foremost, before and after possession! But that is *not* separation. To disattach the Ego from the Cause, to allow it to float off in a nominal or indexical way instead of delivering it to oneself and others as though it bears the heaviest weight (conscience or consciousness, terrible psychological depths, etc) has this

Scarcity. Like the bedouin we choose an architecture of skins—and an earth full of places of disappearance. Like the Commune, we choose a liquid space of celebration and risk rather than the icy waste of the Prism (or Prison) of Work, the economy of Lost Time, the rictus of nostalgia for a synthetic future.

A utopian poetics helps us to know our desires. The mirror of Utopia provides us with a kind of critical theory which no mere practical politics nor systematic philosophy can hope to evolve. But we have no time for theory which merely limits itself to the contemplation of utopia as "no-place place" while bewailing the "impossibility of desire." The penetration of everyday life by the marvelous—the creation of "situations"—belongs to the "material bodily principle", and to the imagination, and to the living fabric of the present.

The individual who realizes this immediacy can widen the circle of pleasure to some extent, simply by waking from the hypnosis of the "Spooks" (as Stirner called all abstractions); and yet more can be accomplished by "crime"; and still more by the doubling of the Self in sexuality. From Stirner's "Union of Self-Owning Ones" we proceed to Nietzsche's circle of "Free Spirits" and thence to Fourier's "Passional Series", doubling and redoubling ourselves even as the Other multiplies itself in the *eros* of the group.

The activity of such a group will come to replace Art as we poor PoMo bastards know it. Gratuitous creativity, or "play",

and the exchange of gifts, will cause the withering-away of Art as the reproduction of commodities. “Dada epistemology” will meltingly erase all separation, and give rebirth to a psychic paleolithism in which life and beauty can no longer be distinguished. Art in this sense has always been camouflaged and repressed throughout the whole of High History, but has never entirely vanished from our lives. One favourite example: —the *quilting bee*—a spontaneous patterning carried out by a non-hierarchic creative collective to produce a unique and useful and beautiful object, typically as a gift for someone connected to the circle.

The task of Immediatist organization can be summed up as the widening of the circle. The greater the portion of my life that can be wrenched from the Work/Consume/Die cycle, and (re)turned over to the economy of the “bee”, the greater my chance for pleasure. One runs a certain risk in thus thwarting the vampiric energies of institutions. But risk itself makes up part of the direct experience of pleasure, a fact noted in all insurrectionary moments—all moments of making-up—of intense adventurous enjoyments:—the festal aspect of the Uprising, the insurrectionary nature of the Festival.

But between the lonely awakening of the individual, and the synergetic anamnesis of the insurrectionary collectivity, there stretches out a whole spectrum of social forms with some potential for our “project”. Some last no longer than a chance meeting between two kindred spirits who might enlarge each other by their brief and mysterious encounter; others are like

lexicon, it is because it is comparatively easy to call someone out for being bossy, for telling other people what to do. It is more difficult to think of and intervene in the subtle and insidious forms that police care takes. A rich terrain.

For those of the Community, any alternative to belonging seems like it will fail. Indeed, it will fail the Community, or the Community will fail in and through it. What is outside Community, since coexistence is in some sense inevitable? I learned this lesson in reflecting on something I do constantly: public speaking. Of this activity Stirner writes that it is to ask others to consume me (305). Enjoy me, the Unique invites you, consume me. (To this I am tempted to add the masochist’s erotic whisper: “use me.”) Render inappropriate what I appropriated. But what is this gathering of consumers who feel allegiance to nothing, not even to the Community?

We are all Unions of Egoists

Peter Lamborn Wilson has noted in several places that perhaps the Ego is another ghost, well on its way to being another Cause. One can, after all, take oneself too seriously. Referencing Landauer, Wilson suggests the Ego “still retains -

gatherings of people that take good police care of each other. As Causes they maintain themselves first of all. “Every ego is from birth a criminal to begin with against the people, the State. Hence it is that it does really keep watch over all. It sees in each one an egoist and is afraid of the egoist. It presumes the worst about each one and takes care, police care, that no harm happens to the State” (179).

That is how a moral or, of course, political ideal is invoked as the Super-Ego of the group or of the Community. Remember someone’s repetitive chatter: *Don’t we all believe in this and so don’t you want to be doing it?...* Of course this is the very form of the dialogue—if we can still call it that—in which someone invokes the Cause, and more or less politely demands allegiance, threatening meaninglessness as the terrible alternative. What I am asked to do is to sacrifice myself for the sake of belonging in exchange for the gift of meaning, of words and organs. This is the blueprint for all moralizing politics. Some of that should have been obvious in the preceding. If I emphasize the Community as a Cause, as it so often and so sadly is, if I indulge my wish to bring this phrase, *taking police care of one another*, into the everyday

holidays, still other like pirate utopias. None seems to last very long—but so what? Religions and States boasts of their *permanence*—which, we know, is just jive...; what they mean is *death*.

We do not require “Revolutionary” *institutions*. “After the Revolution” we would still continue to drift, to evade the instant sclerosis of a politics of revenge, and instead seek out the excessive, the *strange*—which for us has become the sole possible norm. If we join or support certain “revolutionary” movements now, we’d certainly be the first to “betray” them if they “came to *power*”. Power, after all, is for *us*—not some fucking vanguard party.

In *The Temporary Autonomous Zone* (Autonomedia, NY, 1991) there was a discussion of “the will to power as disappearance”, emphasizing the evasive nature and ambiguity of the moment of “freedom”. In the present series of texts (originally presented as Radio Sermonettes on an FM station in New York, and published under that title by the anarchist Libertarian Book Club), the focus shifts to the idea of a praxis of *re-appearance*, and thus to the problem of organization. An attempt at a theory of the aesthetics of the group—rather than a sociology or *politique*—has been expressed here as a game for free spirits, rather than as a blueprint for an institution. The group as medium, or as mechanism of alienation, has been replaced by the Immediatist group, devoted to the overcoming of separation. This book might be called a thought-experiment on *festal*

sodality—it has no higher ambitions. Above all, it does not pretend to know “what must be done”—the delusion of would-be commissars and gurus. It wants no disciples—it would prefer to be burned—immolation not emulation! In fact it has almost no interest in “dialogue” at all, and would prefer rather to attract co-conspirators than readers. It loves to talk, but only because talk is a kind of celebration rather than a kind of work. And only intoxication stands between this book—and silence.
— Hakim Bey
(Vernal Equinox 1993)

Often, when we try to think about or practice mutual aid, we drag into our activities an entire alien morality, thinking and living in terms of what Stirner calls the *police care*, in short making the community another Cause. As Cause, the Community is already a micro-State, a “tissue and plexus of belonging and adherence” (198). It is all too common for people to feel a horrible obligation to the Community and therefore to feel guilty when they fail, which of course they inevitably do. Somewhere a standard or measure arises or is borrowed, and immediately someone starts measuring. Someone else accepts the measure and asks: how *much am I* giving? Stirner observes: “The spy and eavesdropper, ‘conscience,’ watches over every motion of the mind, and all thought and action is for it a ‘matter of conscience,’ that is, police business. This tearing apart of man into ‘natural impulse’ and ‘conscience’ (inner populace and inner police) is what constitutes the Protestant” (81-82). Need I say that this is not only about certain sects of Christianity, but many more of us besides; first of all those of us, atheist or not, who have absorbed what is still called a work ethic? The State, or the States *in ovo* that so many Communities manifest, are

substantial self, unlike the possessed, it consumes events and actions and makes them appropriate to nothing, to something that is ultimately empty. This is a . mockery of that “sacred” (220) notion of property which concerns things. It takes the relations of property to such an excessive point that they simply fail to work and so is, in the strictest sense, a destruction of property To make sense, property requires legal and economic individuals. 'Legal and economic individuals' describes at least two causes, two forms of possession, two imaginary substances. If Stirner only said to us: *I want to use you; I want to make you my own*, then he would still be a weird, exaggerated variant of a liberal. But he also says: *I want you to use me. I expect you to use me. I don't want you to ask me for help; I want you to take from me. And I'm going to take from you.* “I do not step shyly back from your property, but look upon it always as *my* property,' in which I need to 'respect' nothing. Pray do the like with what you call my property!” (220). Now this is a description of an economy, however rudimentary. In fact, we could call it Stirner's outlandish idea of mutual aid.

The Three Gypsies by Goethe

Three Gypsies I found once
lying by a willow,
as my cart with weary torture
crawled over the sandy heath.
One, for himself alone, was holding
his fiddle in his hands,
playing, as the sunset glow surrounded him,
a merry little tune.
The second held a pipe in his mouth
and watched his smoke
with cheer, as if from the world
he required nothing more for his happiness.
And the third slept comfortably:
from the tree hung his cymbalom;
over its strings the wind's breath ran;
in his heart a dream was playing.
On the clothing those three wore
were holes and colorful patches;
but, defiantly free, they made
a mockery of earthly fate.
Trebly they showed me
how, when life grows dark for us,
one can smoke, sleep or play it away,
and thus trebly to scorn it.
At the Gypsies, longer yet
I had to gaze in passing,
at their dark brown faces,
at their black-locked hair.

Egoism by John Beverly Robinson

There is no word more generally misinterpreted than the word egoism, in its modern sense. In the first place, it is supposed to mean devotion to self interest, without regard to the interest of others. It is thus opposed to altruism — devotion to others and sacrifice of self. This interpretation is due to the use of the word thus antithetically by Herbert Spencer.

Again, it is identified with hedonism or eudaimonism, or epicureanism, philosophies that teach that the attainment of pleasure or happiness or advantage, whichever you may choose to phrase it, is the rule of life.

Modern egoism, as propounded by Stirner and Nietzsche, and expounded by Ibsen, Palante, Shaw and others, is all these; but it is more. It is the realization by the individual that they are an individual; that, as far as they are concerned, they are the *only* individual.

For each one of us stands alone in the midst of a universe. We are surrounded by sights and sounds which we interpret as exterior to ourselves, although all we know of them are the

how to think through and truly feel such experiences, or gaps in experience, and the way people act and think politically or antipolitically out of them. Stirner, in his particular European geopolitical trajectory, seems to have arrived at something like this vertiginous *zeroself*.^[17] With regard to the countless Causes through which peoples have thought of themselves as inhabiting or developing a collective sense of self (more or less successfully distributed to individuals),

I conclude that at least some of us are breaking out of History. That some of us never entered it. That many of us feel ourselves empty.

About the funny term Police-care

The empty transhistorical or creative self, the Unique, enacts appropriation, making everything proper to itself, at least everything that it wants. By now this should mean: it indefatigably discovers or invents a singular perspective on itself, and by extension on everything else. What is funny about this is that we might also call this to *consume*. The empty Ego consumes whatever it desires. But unlike a full and

historical and contingent Self inasmuch as nobody chooses what he or she is possessed by. At least at first.

Another sense of Self could be called transhistorical and creative. I am thinking again about the process, about what Stirner could have intended by writing "I am the creative nothing." One outcome of the dispossession, of what one could call the exorcism, would be to realize that the self is nothing. To take the intimacy of belonging to its degree zero. That is, if I am only what I can possess or affirm, this never excludes the possibility that I have nothing or can affirm nothing. All the courage in Stirner's book, all of its scattershot nobility, has to do with accepting this possibility. It is a kind of psychic mortality: the fact is that the psyche can vanish and a point of view, one or more, that says I, remains. I recall here the countless people confined to asylums. I also remember here peoples who, as a result of processes of colonization or war, have lost all access to what they once called their culture, their land, or their language. Any of these peoples, and so many others of us who feel ourselves without essence, may still try to identify with something.[16] But when we try to access it, we have nothing. We are only beginning to learn

impressions on our retina and ear drums and other organs of sense. The universe for the individual is measured by these sensations; they are, for him/her, the universe. Some of them they interpret as denoting other individuals, whom they conceive as more or less like themselves. But none of these is his/herself. He/she stands apart. His/her consciousness, and the desires and gratifications that enter into it, is a thing unique; no other can enter into it.

However near and dear to you may be your spouse, children, friends, they are not you; they are outside of you. You are forever alone. Your thoughts and emotions are yours alone. There is no other who experiences your thoughts or your feelings.

No doubt it gives you pleasure when others think as you do, and inform you of it through language; or when others enjoy the same things that you do. Moreover, quite apart from their enjoying the same things that you enjoy, it gives you pleasure to see them enjoy themselves in any way. Such gratification to the individual is the pleasure of sympathy, one of the most acute pleasures possible for most people.

According to your sympathy, you will take pleasure in your own happiness or in the happiness of other people; but it is always your own happiness you seek. The most profound egoist may be the most complete altruist; but he knows that her altruism is, at the bottom, nothing but self-indulgence.

But egoism is more than this. It is the realization by the individual that she/he is above all institutions and all formulas; that they exist only so far as he chooses to make them her own by accepting them.

When you see clearly that *you* are the measure of the universe, that everything that exists exists for *you* only so far as it is reflected in your own consciousness, you become a new person; you see everything by a new light: you stand on a height and feel the fresh air blowing on your face; and find new strength and glory in it.

Whatever gods you worship, you realize that they are *your* gods, the product of your own mind, terrible or amiable, as you may choose to depict them. You hold them in your hand, and play with them, as a child with its paper dolls; for you have

with, free myself from. But the Id, the *It* in me, the source of bizarre impulses, that, for Freud, I cannot ever quite identify with, is, for Stirner, just as much me as the Ego. The Unique affirms the Ego and Id indistinctly. Stirner writes, clearly and often, that there is no interest in saying I am more the rational series than the irrational series. I am “an abyss of unregulated and lawless impulses, desires, wishes, passions, a chaos without guiding light or star!” (146). *Chaos ergo sum*.

For the sake of discussion, I propose a distinction between two concepts of Self in Stirner, corresponding roughly to unconfessed and confessed egoism. The first would be everything we discover by thinking about the self as a subject or object of possession: it is what I undergo when I carelessly accept the gift of words or organs. Indebted, I mistake another's Cause for my own, and I do so in my most intimate sense of belonging: to God, to the nation, to some moral code, to a community that takes good care of me. (Notice that these tend to involve what is called Truth). I take myself to be substantial and full; I draw meaning from the identification-operation. Clearly this involves one or more fundamental self-deceptions, manifest as a separation in the Unique. This is a

appropriation is what is going to *dispossess* me. It is not only what is going to free me from having been possessed by these Causes but also the very event of my self-affirmation. This has to do not with survival but with life. Simply put, it is not about things, but about actions or events that I may affirm as me or as mine. Stirner offers many wonderful images of how we allow constellations of inadequate or fixed ideas to rule us. He uses the language of ghosts. "The whole world is haunted." (36); "Ghosts in every corner!" Credulous, we are "enthusiastic" and possessed (48).[15] The desire, then, when I proclaim my Cause, when I affirm myself, is to be a dispossessed Ego, playing in, wandering about, the fields of ownness.

For some of us Ego has a psychoanalytic resonance. It fits in the infamous second Freudian topology (that of *The Ego and the Id*) between the Id and the Super-Ego. If we were to redraw this picture, to playfully illustrate Stirner with Freud's topology, it would look something like this: the Super-Ego is the Causes. That is to say, everything with which I stupidly or superstitiously identify, precisely the litany of ways I am possessed. It is what I have to get rid of, what I have to break

learned not to fear them, that they are but the "imagination of your heart."

All the ideals which people generally think are realities, you have learned to see through; you have learned that they are *your* ideals. Whether you have originated them, which is unlikely, or have accepted somebody else's ideals, makes no difference. They are *your* ideals just so far as you accept them. The priest is reverend only so far as *you* reverence him. If you cease to reverence him, he is no longer reverend for *you*. You have power to make and unmake priests as easily as you can make and unmake gods. You are the one of whom the poet tells, who stands unmoved, though the universe falls in fragments about you.

And all the other ideals by which people are moved, to which people are enslaved, for which humans afflict themselves, have no power over you; you are no longer afraid of them, for you know them to be your *own* ideals, made in your own mind, for your own pleasure, to be changed or ignored, just as you choose to change or ignore them. They are your own little pets, to be played with, not to be feared.

“The State” or “The Government” is idealized by the many as a thing above them, to be revered and feared. They call it “My Country,” and if you utter the magic words, they will rush to kill their friends, whom they would not injure by so much as a pin scratch, if they were not intoxicated and blinded by their ideal. Most people are deprived of their reason under the influence of their ideals. Moved by the ideal of “religion” or “communism” or “community” or “patriotism” or “morality,” they fly at each others’ throats — they, who are otherwise often the gentlest of neighbors! But their ideals are for them like the “fixed ideas” of lunatics. They become irrational and irresponsible under the influence of their ideals. They will not only destroy others, but they will quite often sink their own interests, and rush madly to destroy themselves as a sacrifice to the all-devouring ideal. Curious, is it not, to one who looks on with a philosophical mind?

But the egoist has no ideals, for the knowledge that her ideals are only *her* ideals, frees her from their domination. She acts for her own interest, not for the interest of ideals. She will neither hang a person nor whip a child in the interest of “morality,” if it is disagreeable to her to do so. He/she has no

paradoxical vindication of my Cause as my own says that nothing can replace the singularity that I am or that I have. That I call I. That I cannot exchange. Ego is the name of the “unutterable” (275), unnamable Unique.

Stirner was one of those few philosophers who are more interested in having than being. Probably the most succinct way to describe this Unique, this Ego, is to say that I am exactly what I can appropriate *right now*, what I can say is proper to me *at this moment*. As though in my process I affirm a series of parts of me as Unique (my properties) and disavow another series as all those things through which I am possessed by an alien Cause. What is left is ownness. “My own I remain” (143). This corresponds exactly with Spinoza’s formula: *aquiescentia in se ipso*.

Keeping in mind what I have written about dialectics, clearly there is something very strange happening in Stirner with regard to having, with the concept of property. On one side there is a language that seems to parrot good old free- market capitalism: there is an individual who must appropriate to survive. On the other side, we find the claim that this

people with no essence.) Perhaps there is no Nihilism, just these curious nihilists.

About the Unique and the Id

If we are able to grasp what is parodic in Stirner, if Ego is not a Cause in the same sense as the others, an Ego can be neither an object nor a subject. It must be a process. Any Ego has, perhaps as its beginning, certainly and repeatedly as part of its process, a creative nothing. The process is not a process that fills the void. It is rather an atomic, irreversible way of acting in a void: these acts are called appropriating, misappropriating, disappropriating, expropriating, finding, losing... Translating the book's title literally, we understand what it underlines>Not *The Ego and its Own*; rather something like *The Unique and Its Property* ,[14] For the funny Latin-English term Ego translates *Ich*, "I," not *Einzig*, "Unique." It is not easy to say Unique the way that we say I. What we might hear in this awkwardness is a way to say singularity, expressed appropriately, perhaps even poetically, by replacing a pronoun with an adjective. I am not abstract me but myself with all of my qualities - my properties. Unique. The

reverence for "The State." She knows that "The Government" is but a set of men, mostly as big fools as she is herself, many of them bigger. If the State does things that benefit her, she will support it; if it attacks her and encroaches on her liberty, she will evade it by any means in her power, if she is not strong enough to withstand it. He/she is a person without a country.

"The Flag," that most people adore, as people always adore symbols, worshipping the symbol more than the principle it is supposed to set forth, is for the egoist but a rather inharmonious piece of patch-work; and anybody may walk on it or spit on it if they will, without exciting their emotion any more than if it were a tarpaulin that they walked upon — or spat upon. The principles that it symbolizes, they will maintain as far as it seems to their advantage to maintain them; but if the principles require them to kill people or be killed themselves, you will have to demonstrate to them just what benefit they will gain by killing or being killed, before you can persuade them to uphold them.

When the judge enters court in his togger, (judges and ministers and professors know the value of togger in impressing the populace) the egoist is unterrified. She/he has not even any respect for "The Law." If the law happens to be to her advantage, she will avail herself of it; if it invades her liberty she will transgress it as far as she thinks it wise to do so. But she has no regard for it as a thing supernal. It is to her the clumsy creation of them who still "sit in darkness."

Nor does she bow the knee to Morality — Sacred Morality! Some of its precepts she may accept, if she chooses to do so; but you cannot scare her off by telling her it is not "right." She usually prefers not to kill or steal; but if she must kill or steal to save herself, she will do it with a good heart, and without any qualms of "conscience."

And "morality" will never persuade her to injure others when it is of no advantage to herself. She will not be found among a band of "white caps," flogging and burning poor devils, because their actions do not conform to the dictates of "morality," though they have injured none by such actions; nor will he have any hand in persecuting helpless girls, and

absolutely negating negation, leaving nothing. "Stirner is the dialectician who reveals nihilism as the truth of the dialectic." [11] This in the sense that if God, Humanity, and the other Subjects-Causes do not exist, I have no grounds to assert that I do merely because I have scornfully reduplicated the broken logic according to which those more credulous than I superstitiously suppose they do. Deleuze is right: "Stirner is too much of a dialectician to think in any other terms but those of property, alienation, and reappropriation - but too exacting not to see where this thought leads: to the ego which is nothing, to nihilism." [12] But (and this is the crucial question): *which* nihilism? *Whose*? The problem Deleuze set himself was to enlist Nietzsche in an escape from dialectical reasoning, with all of its sloppy logic and its priestly morality. For my part, I want to meet today's confessed egoists and nihilists. Especially since they seem to have responded intelligently to the fact that our present evidences ever more images of catastrophe, of absolute annihilation. [13] (Three provisional figures of catastrophe in our time are nuclear warfare, environmental devastation, and the company of

this inexplicable and perilous moment wherein I subtract myself from a Cause that appears to give meaning to my life from beyond? (I repeat that this is first and foremost to subtract myself from the gift of meaning offered or imposed by one who imagines the Cause as their own.) It includes the possibility of being nothing or of doing nothing. This experience of nothingness recurs regularly in *The Ego and its Own*. But the crucial difference between nothing in the sense of emptiness and the creative nothing is that the first is not-Cause (to be rid of it, or *freedom*) and the second is beyond any serious relation to Causes (to be myself, or ownness), not defined in terms of contradiction or breaking-with. This is a gesture of autonomy - to speak in one's own name. But, rhetorical disavowals aside, the name is empty; it is a mask. So maybe the dialectical game ends here.

Gilles Deleuze gives Stirner a special place in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, as the last gasp of dialectics, its parody-moment for that Free generation. "The dialectic cannot be halted until I become a proprietor. Even if it means ending up in nothingness." [10] Briefly, it's that Stirner implodes the dialectical mechanism, finally having done with breaking-with,

throwing them out into the street, when she has received no ill at their hands.

To her friends — to those who deserve the truth from her, — she will tell the truth; but you cannot force the truth from her because she is "afraid to tell a lie." She has no fear, not even of perjury, for she knows that oaths are but devices to enslave the mind by an appeal to supernatural fears.

And for all the other small, tenuous ideals, with which we have fettered our minds and to which we have shrunk our petty lives; they are for the egoist as though they were not.

"Filial love and respect" she will give to her parents if they have earned it by deserving it. If they have beaten her in infancy, and scorned her in childhood, and domineered over her in maturity, she may possibly love them in spite of maltreatment; but if they have alienated her affection, they will not reawaken it by an appeal to "duty".

In brief, egoism in its modern interpretation, is the antithesis, not of altruism, but of idealism. The ordinary person — the idealist — subordinates their interests to the interests of their ideals, and usually suffers for it. The egoist is fooled by no

ideals: she/he discards them or uses them, as may suit her own interest. If he/she likes to be altruistic, they will sacrifice themselves for others; but only because they like to do so; they demand no gratitude nor glory in return.

possibility of meaninglessness. He does not assume that, now that the God Cause, the State Cause, etc, etc; is no longer my own, I immediately know what I am doing, or what to do next. To assume my Cause as my own does not mean that I know what I am or what I want to do.[9] I can say that I will make my Cause my own, but I may not know what that means. I might trip up in my imaginary self-constitution. Not knowing is not only possible but probable. Someone sure of the next step has probably just switched Causes. Sometimes that is called progress.

Towards the end of the opening rant, Stirner affirms: "If God, if mankind, as you affirm, have substance enough in themselves to be all in all to themselves, then I feel that I shall still less lack that, and that I shall have no complaint to make of my 'emptiness.' I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but I am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything" (7). His rhetoric is fascinating: *If, as you affirm ...* - but why grant anything to this interlocutor? *If, as the credulous affirm, then I feel...* Nothing has been proven. What, then, is Stirner evoking? What is this creative nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything? What is

did that its operation is separation, the introduction of a “scission within human beings.”[6] But that cannot be the whole story. I agree with Stirner that there is no Man: Humanity is another Cause. Scission or separation within what, then? Just this cipher we call the Ego, this variable that names not generic humanity but individual human bodies. Individuals? Humans? I will come back to individuals and humans.

The imagination does not speak. *Someone* has spoken. He or she is a representative of the Cause, or wants you to think so. He does not speak in his own name. She says she speaks for the Cause. He shares, without invitation, his imagination. She insists that you accept her gift of words, sometimes even of organs.[7] As David Hume once put it: “In vain, by pompous phrase and passionate expression, each recommends his own pursuit, and invites the credulous hearers to an imitation of his life and manners.”[8] *Someone* says (usually repeats) to you that you must take this Cause as your own; that without it, your life is meaningless. “Every man must have something that is more to him than himself’ (254). Stirner implies that, in such moments, you might accept, even embrace, the

Excerpts from The Unique and its Property by Max Stirner

I Have Based My Affair on Nothing

What is not supposed to be my affair! Above all, the good cause, then God’s cause, the cause of humanity, of truth, of freedom, of humaneness, of justice; furthermore, the cause of my people, my prince, my fatherland; finally even the cause of mind and a thousand other causes. Only my own cause is never supposed to be my affair. “Down with the egoist who only thinks of himself!”

Let’s see then how they deal with their cause, those for whose cause we are supposed to work, sacrifice ourselves, and be filled with enthusiasm.

You are able to report thoroughly on God, since you have investigated “the depths of divinity” for thousands of years, and have seen into its heart, so that you can probably tell us how God himself deals with “God’s cause,” which we are called to serve. Nor do you conceal the Lord’s activities. Now

what is his cause? Does he make an alien cause, the cause of truth or love, his own, as he expects us to do? You are outraged at this misunderstanding, and you inform us that God's cause is indeed the cause of truth and love, but this cause cannot be called alien to him, because God himself is truth and love; you are outraged at the assumption that God might resemble us poor worms by promoting an alien cause as his own. "Should God promote the cause of truth, if he is not himself truth?" He cares only for his own cause, but since he is all in all, therefore all is his affair! But we, we are not all in all, and our affair is utterly small and contemptible; therefore, we must "serve a higher cause." —Now it is clear, God cares only for what is his, deals only with himself, thinks only of himself and looks out only for himself; woe to all that is not well-pleasing to him. He serves nothing higher and satisfies only himself. His cause is—a purely egoistic affair.

How does it stand with humanity, whose cause we should make ours? Is its cause perhaps that of another, and does humanity serve a higher cause? No, humanity sees only itself, humanity wants to promote only humanity, humanity itself is its own cause. So that it develops, it lets people struggle away in

any of us might come to make such a claim. Now please read those statements again and observe for yourself. The relation of *being its own main concern* is said of an entity that is totally hypothetical. More precisely: imaginary. Stirner never gives us any reason to believe that there is God or Humanity beyond the quasiexistence that constellations of fixed ideas in the imagination might be said to have. As for the State, according to a definition that ought to be familiar to anarchists, it can be clearly shown to be the modes of behavior of those who live in accord with that profoundly inadequate constellation of ideas, that Cause.[4] So, through a more circuitous route, the same difference. None. A paradoxical question: if all of these Causes-Subjects are imaginary, am I imaginary? What was I before this constitutive event, before this process began? What am I once I break with the Cause? Was I ever, can I ever be again, its orphan and its atheist?[5]

In the sacred and sacrificial logic of every Cause except perhaps my own, the imaginary greater subject (God, Humanity, the State, etc, etc.), the one that defines me, forcibly constitutes me in mediate relation, not only to things and actions, but above all to myself. One could say, as Debord

of my subordination to a greater subject. We know that it is a subject because that is how it appears in our speech. It is greater than me inasmuch as it is imagined as transcendent or eternal. It seems to constitute me in mediate relation to things and actions, by means of constituting me in immediate relation to itself, to its Cause.

I will rehearse the enumeration of causes in the delightful opening rant of the book, entitled “I Have Based My Affair on Nothing.” Stirner opens *The Ego and its Own* in the first person: “What is not supposed to be my concern!” (5). What follows is a list of Causes that I am asked to accept as my own: the Cause of God, the Cause of Humanity, the Cause of the State, etc, etc. In each case I am asked to identify with a Cause alien to my interest. The terms of this offer are hardly delicate. Stirner observes: what we can say about God is that God is God’s main concern. What we can say about Humanity is that Humanity is Humanity’s main concern. What we can say about the State is that the State is the State’s main concern. But inexplicably I find myself in this statement: “I myself am my concern” (7). My Cause will be my own. I note with interest that Stirner gives *no explanation* as to how he or

its service, and when they have accomplished what humanity needs, it throws them on the dung-heap of history in its gratitude. Isn’t humanity’s cause—a purely egoistic affair? I don’t at all need to show that everything that tries to push its cause over on us is concerned only with itself, and not with us, only with its well-being, and not with ours. Just have a look for yourselves at the rest. Do truth, freedom, humaneness, justice want anything else than that you get enthusiastic about them and serve them?

They all do exceptionally well when they are zealously revered. Take a look at the nation, which is defended by devoted patriots. The patriots fall in bloody battle or in the fight against hunger and need; what does the nation say about that? With the manure of these corpses, the nation becomes a “blossoming nation.” Individuals have died for “the great cause of the nation,” and the nation sends some words of thanks after them—and profits from it. I would call this lucrative egoism.

But just look at the Sultan who so lovingly cares for “his own.” Isn’t he pure selflessness itself, and doesn’t he sacrifice

himself hour after hour for his own? Yes, of course, for “his own.” Try just once to show yourself not as his own, but as your own; for escaping his egoism, you will take a trip to his jail. The sultan has based his affair on nothing but himself; he is for himself the all in all and the only one, and tolerates no one who dares not to be his own.

And won't you learn from these shining examples that the egoist gets on best? I, for my part, take a lesson from them, and instead of serving those great egoists unselfishly anymore, I would prefer to be the [selfish] egoist myself.

God and humanity have based their affair on nothing, on nothing but themselves. I likewise base my affair on myself, this I who just like God am the nothing of all others, this I who am my all, this I who am the Unique.

If God, if humanity, as you affirm, have enough content in themselves to be all in all to themselves, then I feel that I would lack it even less, and that I would have no complaint to make about my “emptiness.” I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself create everything as creator.

confess? We need better examples, far stranger examples; we need to finally meet or at least envision *confessed* egoists. We need, in all, another perspective.

This second perspective sets out from a consideration of the Ego as a kind of cipher or variable, something fundamentally unknown. The first thing we know of it is its allergy to any Cause that can be resolved into an *Ism*. Its characteristic activity—in Stirner's time, in our own, perhaps for all time—is the *schism* in which one breaks with the Cause. I will have to come back, and soon, to this inadequately adequate denomination, Ego. For the moment let us play a provisional dialectical game, and suppose that Ego= x is defined in opposition to the Cause.

Cause, or, in German, **Sache**: either has one of those amusingly long dictionary entries which might make us laugh at the game of definition. Playing this game for a moment, we might read under *Sache* thing, object, article, cause, action, legal case... and so we might learn what game Stirner was playing. These are all things that, though they may seem to be objects of the subject that I am, are eminently marks or signs

around it; it is dubbed “individualism.” Naturally, this image presupposes the individual self (as psyche and as body) as a metaphysical given. Modern-day, free-market libertarian, anarcho-capitalist types seem to be inspired directly or indirectly by this caricature.

Now, I would not say that there is nothing in Stirner that opens onto such a caricature. After all, there are many caricatures in *The Ego and its Own*. And to each Ego her Own! If I set it all aside, though, and try to summon for myself his intuition in all its vertiginous danger, it seems to me that he must have had something rather different in mind than the stultifying conclusion that the greatest example of an egoist would be something like a Wall Street banker. As if he or she who is only out for themselves and wants to appropriate everything is exemplified by one of our great privatizers, those who attempt to turn as much of the world as possible into private property. Of course those little men and women are egoists. But so is everyone else: “Unconsciously and involuntarily we all strive towards ownness.” “All your doings are *unconfessed*, secret, covert, and concealed egoism.”[3] Yes, the real question is (and do please be kind enough to laugh at this): who will

Away, then, with every cause that is not completely my affair. You think that at least the “good cause” must be my affair? Which good, which bad? I am myself my own affair, and I am neither good nor bad. Neither makes any sense to me.

The divine is God’s affair; the human cause is “humanity’s.” My affair is neither the divine nor the human; it is not the good, the true, the just, the free, etc., but only my own, and it is not general, but is—unique, as I am unique.

For me, there is nothing greater than me!

Man, your head is haunted; you have bats in your belfry! You’re imagining big things and painting for yourself a whole world of gods that is there for you, a haunted realm to which you are called, an ideal that beckons to you. You have a fixed idea! Do not think that I am joking or speaking figuratively when I look upon those who cling to something higher, and, since this includes the vast majority, almost the whole human world, as veritable fools, fools in a madhouse. What, then, is called a “fixed idea”? An idea that has subjected people to itself. When you recognize such a fixed idea as folly, you lock

its slave up in an asylum. And the truth of the faith, which one is not to doubt; the majesty of the people, which one must not question (whoever does so is a—traitor to the crown); virtue, against which the censor must not let a word pass, so that morality will remain pure; aren't these "fixed ideas"? Isn't all the foolish chatter, for example, in most of our newspapers, the babble of fools, who suffer from the fixed ideas of morality, legality, Christianity, etc., and only appear to walk about freely because the madhouse in which they wander covers such a vast space? If you touch the fixed idea of such a fool, you will immediately have to guard your back against the lunatic's treachery.

....

To come back to property, the lord is the property owner. Choose then whether you want to be lord, or whether society shall be lord! This will determine whether you will be an *owner* or a *pauper*! The egoist is owner, the socially conscious person a pauper. But pauperism[\[395\]](#) or propertylessness is the meaning of feudalism, of the feudal system, which since the last century has only changed feudal lord, putting "the

theory - I think one might understand Stirner as an anarchist and as something else as well. For there is no doubt that, for many, Anarchism is a Cause. What I have to say here is a gift to those who wish to betray that Cause.

To put Stirner in dialogue with our present, we have to get past a certain caricature of his thought (a caricature for which he is partly responsible, due mostly to his excessive prose style). Should you care to read the usually short section on Stirner to be found in introductory books on anarchism, you will find more or less this: Stirner, writing before Marx and Nietzsche, made a radical vindication of the freedom of the individual against all powers: the church, the state, all forms of authority. He did so in a way that was inspiring for many but at the same time could go no farther than a parodic exaggeration of liberal individualism. What you get is a vague, almost mythical, image, of someone who is completely out for him- or herself, and whose relations to all others are conditional on their own benefit. Benefit is understood in a typical capitalist, economic way: property and individual sovereignty. In a way that simultaneously includes and excludes Stirner's aberrant claim to ownness, this an imaginary that associatively gathers

How the Stirner Eats Gods by Alejandro de Acosta

About his philosophical nickname

The author of the fine book *The Ego and its Own* was a man whose forehead sprouted a name: *Stirner* refers to his great brow. There is something charming about the fact that this book was signed with a pseudonym - this book that insists to the death on irreducible, irreparable uniqueness. As if one's proper name is never remarkable enough, and every Ego requires the artifice of a nickname to become a Unique signature. *Stirner* is his philosophical nickname, the signature of an unknown visage[1] who dedicates his book to his sweetheart, then passes it to us in all ambiguity and says: *use it.*

About his allergy to the Cause

I have previously taken the liberty of calling Max Stirner an anarchist.[2] In the context of that discussion, as perhaps with most discussions of *The Ego and its Own*, I suppose that it worked. I do not doubt that he belongs to our genealogy. In the long run, however - in the name of a truly perspectival

human being” in the place of God, and accepting as a fief from humanity what had earlier been a fief from the grace of God. That the pauperism of communism is led out through the humane principle to the absolute or shabbiest pauperism has been shown above; but at the same time we have also shown how only in this way can pauperism suddenly turn into ownness. The *old* feudal system was so thoroughly scrapped in the revolution that since then all reactionary cunning has remained fruitless, and will always remain fruitless, because dead—is dead; but also the resurrection had to prove itself as a truth in Christian history, and has proved itself: because feudalism has risen again in an afterlife with a transfigured body, the *new* feudalism under the suzerainty of “the human being.”

Christianity is not destroyed, but the believers are right if they have trustingly assumed up to now that every battle against it could only serve for its purification and reinforcement; because it has actually only been transfigured, and “Christianity exposed”[396] is the—*human* Christianity. We still live wholly in the Christian age, and those who get the angriest about it are the ones who most eagerly contribute to completing it. The more human, the better feudalism has become to us; because the less that we believe that it is still

feudalism, the more confidently we take it for our own and think that we have found what is “most our own” when we discover “the human.”

Liberalism wants to give me what is mine, but means to obtain it for me not under the title of mine, but under that of “the human.” As if it were to be reached under this mask! Human rights, the costly work of the revolution, have the meaning that the human being in me *entitles* me to this or that; I as an individual, as this one, am not entitled, but the human being has the right and entitles me. So as a human being I may well be entitled; but since I am more than a human being, namely, an odd human being, it could get denied to just *me*, the odd one. If, on the other hand, you hold to the value of your gift, keep it at price, don’t let yourself be forced to get rid of it below price, don’t let yourself be convinced that your product is not worth the price, don’t make yourself ridiculous by a “ridiculous bargain price,” but imitate the courageous one who says: “I will *sell* my life (property) dear, the enemy shall not have it at a cheap *bargain*”; then you have recognized the reverse of communism as the suitable thing, and then it’s not: “Give up your property!” but rather “*actualize*^[397] your property!”

Over the gateway of our time stands not the Apollonian slogan “Know thyself,” but “*Actualize yourself!*”

laborious and more difficult in the middle of the thousand gears of an increasingly tyrannical social mechanism. Science itself, by intensifying within the individual the consciousness of the vital conditions made for him by society, arrives only at darkening his intellectual and moral horizons. *Qui auget scientiam auget et dolorem.*

We see that individualism is essentially a social pessimism. Under its most moderate form it admits that if life in society is not an absolute evil and completely destructive of individuality, for the individualist is at the very least a restrictive and oppressive condition, a necessary evil and a last resort.

From Anarchism and Individualism by Georges Palante

Individualism is the sentiment of a profound, irreducible antinomy between the individual and society. The individualist is he who, by virtue of his temperament, is predisposed to feel in a particularly acute fashion the ineluctable disharmonies between his intimate being and his social milieu. At the same time, he is a man for whom life has reserved some decisive occasion to remark this disharmony. Whether through brutality, or the continuity of his experiences, for him it has become clear that for the individual society is a perpetual creator of constraints, humiliations and miseries, a kind of continuous generation of human pain. In the name of his own experience and his personal sensation of life the individualist feels he has the right to relegate to the rank of utopia any ideal of a future society where the hoped-for harmony between the individual and society will be established. Far from the development of society diminishing evil, it does nothing but intensify it by rendering the life of the individual more complicated, more

Through the heaven of civilization, the human being seeks to isolate himself from the world, to break its hostile power. But this heavenly isolation must also be broken, and the true end of heaven-storming is the—downfall of heaven, the destruction of heaven.

Hierarchy is the rule of thoughts, the rule of the spirit!

Protestantism has actually made the human being into a “secret police state.” The spy and lookout, “conscience,” monitors every movement of the mind, and every thought and action is a “matter of conscience,” i.e., a police matter. The Protestant consists in this fragmentation of the human being into “natural desire” and “conscience” (inner populace and inner police). Biblical reason (in the place of the Catholic “Church reason”) is considered sacred, and this feeling and consciousness that the biblical word is sacred is called—conscience. With this, then, sacredness gets “shoved into one’s conscience.” If one doesn’t free himself from conscience, the consciousness of the sacred, he can indeed act unconscientiously, but never without conscience.

Our societies and states *are* without our *making* them, are combined without our combining, are predestined and exist, or have an independent existence of their own; are the imperishable established order against us egoists. Today's global battle is, as they say, directed against the "established order." Still people are in the habit of misunderstanding this, as if the present established order should only be exchanged for another, better established order. But war might rather be declared against the established order itself, i.e., the *state* (*status*), not a particular state, nor, for instance, only the current condition of the state; people aren't aiming for another state (say, a "people's state"), but at their *association*, their combination, this ever-fluid combination of all that exists.—A state exists even without my assistance: I am born and raised in it, placed under an obligation to it, and have to "pay homage" to it. It takes me up into its "favor," and I live by its "grace." So the independent existence of the state establishes my lack of independence; its "naturalness," its organism, demands that my nature doesn't grow freely, but is cut to fit it. So that it can develop naturally, it applies the shears of

[13] Anderson, M. Kat. *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources*.

[14] Tucker, Kevin, *Black And Green Forum*.

[15] Zerzan, John, "Patriarchy, Civilization, And The Origins Of Gender".

precipitated, perhaps necessitated, the domestication of plants and animals in order to furnish the sedentary lifestyle dictated by the construction, maintenance, and worship of the monuments. The monuments themselves display symbols that might be interpreted as the human domination of the nonhuman (humans holding, perhaps controlling, various animals that might be considered dangerous) and the triumph of patriarchy (phallocentrism).

[10] Rosset, Clément. "The Cruelty Principle". *Joyful Cruelty*.

[11] Real, Terrence. *I Don't Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression*.

[12] A number of biologists dating back to the early 1900s have discussed variants of this theory. Margulis put forth the modern version, still controversial but widely accepted, arguing that animal and plant cells first formed through the unification of simpler cells. She has since argued, more controversially, that symbiogenesis ought to be considered a major factor of evolution, influential on a par with selection by competition.

"civilization" to me; it gives me an education and culture suitable to it, not me, and teaches me, for example, to respect the law, to abstain from the violation of state property (i.e., private property), to revere a divine and earthly sovereignty, etc.; in short, it teaches me to—*not be culpable*, by which I mean to "sacrifice" my ownness to "sacredness" (everything possible is sacred; for example, property, the lives of others, etc.). This is the sort of civilization and culture the state is able to give me; it teaches me to be a "useful tool," a "useful member of society."

Around the altar a church bulges its arches, and its walls are moving further and further out. What they enclose is—*sacred*. You can no longer reach out for it, no longer touch it. Howling with a devouring hunger you wander round about these walls, searching for the little that is profane, and the circles of your path keep on extending further and further. Soon that church will embrace the whole world, and you'll be driven out to the furthest edge; one more step, and the *world of the sacred* has triumphed: you sink into the abyss. So take courage while

there is still time, stray no longer in the overgrazed profane,
dare the leap, and rush in through the gates into the sanctuary
itself. When you *devour the sacred*, you have made it your
own! Digest the sacramental wafer, and you are rid of it!

If religion has put forward the proposition that we are all of us
sinners, I set another against it: we are all of us perfect!

Because, in each moment, we are all we can be, and never
need to be more. Because no defect sticks to us, sin also has
no meaning. Show me a sinner still in the world, when no one
any longer needs to do what suits a higher power!

...

If something that one imagines to be quite possible is not, or
does not happen, then one may rest assured that something
stands in the way of the thing, and that it is—impossible. Our
time has its art, science, etc.: the art may be utterly awful; but
could one say that we deserve to have a better one, and
“could” we have it if we only wanted it? We have just as much
art as we can have. Our present-day art is the only art
possible, and therefore actual, now.

The Unique and its Property, trans. Wolfi Landstreicher,
Berkley: Little Black Cart 2017.

[2] Merlau-Ponty, Maurice. “The Visible and the Invisible: The
Intertwining—The Chiasm”.

[3] “Interview with Jason McQuinn on Critical Self-Theory”,
Free Radical Radio, 02/27/2015.

[4] See my “In Defense of the Creative Nothing” at
bellamy.anarchyplanet.org

[5] *The Unique and its Property*

[6] Nietzsche, Friedrich. “On the Prejudices of Philosophers”,
Beyond Good and Evil.

[7] Note that by Gaia Perspective, I do not mean to refer to the
Gaia Hypothesis advanced by James Lovelock

[8] Hayes, Cliff. “Slaves to Our Own Creations”, *Black And
Green Review*, vol. 1.

[9] Consider the recent claims by archaeologist Klaus Schmidt
– leader of the excavation of Goebekli Tepe, the earliest
known human monument – that a human turn toward religion
was the beginning of Civilization as its construction

an unfounded claim about transcendental goods and evils or a conceptualization of the nonhuman; it is one immediately felt.

The flattening of living ground into dead, uniform parking plots is the flattening of our affect. The mediation of our lives

through representations is a stifling of creativity and dreams.

The denuding and toxification of the biosphere is the

restriction of our lives and the narrowing of possibilities. Our

sorrow and rage is not directed at some essential

metaphysical Other that attacks Nature; it is directed at an

immediate mutilation of our experience, of ourselves.

[1] Stirner writes, for instance, when imagining a conversation with people who feel they need absolute values to guide them lest they merely follow their instincts and passions and thus “do the most senseless thing possible. – Thus each deems himself the – devil; for, if, so far as he is unconcerned about religion, he only deemed himself a beast, he would easily find that the beast, which does follow only its impulse (as it were, its advice), does not advise and impel itself to do the ‘most senseless’ things, but takes very correct steps.” Stirner, Max.

I, for my part, start from an assumption in assuming *myself*; but my assumption does not struggle for its perfection, like the “human being struggling for its perfection,” but only serves me to enjoy and consume it. I consume nothing but my assumption, and exist only by consuming it. But for this reason that assumption is no assumption at all; because since I am the unique, I know nothing of the duality of an assuming and an assumed / (an “incomplete” and a “complete” / or human being); but that I consume myself means only that I am. I do not assume myself, because in each moment I am really setting up or creating myself for the first time, and am only I, not by being assumed, but by being set up, and again set up only in the moment when I set myself up; i.e., I am creator and creature in one.

My freedom becomes complete only when it is my—*power*; but by this I cease to be merely a free person and become an own person. Why is the freedom of the people a “hollow word”? Because the people have no power! With a breath from the living I, I blow peoples over, whether it’s the breath of

a Nero, a Chinese emperor, or a poor writer. Why then do the chambers of the G— parliament yearn in vain for freedom, and get lectured for it by the cabinet ministers? Because they are not the “powerful”! Power is a fine matter, and useful for many things; for “one goes further with a handful of power than with a bagful of right.” You long for freedom? You fools! If you took power, then freedom would come of itself. See, one who has power stands above the law. How does this view taste to you, you “law-abiding” people? But you have no taste!

The call for “freedom” rings out loudly all around. But does one feel or know what a bestowed or imposed freedom has to mean? People don’t recognize in the complete fullness of the word that all freedom is essentially—self-liberation, i.e., that I can only have as much freedom as I get through my ownness.

The friends of freedom are enraged against selfishness because in their religious striving after freedom, they cannot free themselves from the sublime “self-denial.” The anger of the liberal is aimed at egoism, because the egoist, indeed,

are really two sides of the same coin, what the restoration ecologist William Jordan terms the ‘coin of alienation’ [...] Both positions treat nature as an abstraction—separate from humans and not understood, not real.”[\[13\]](#)

But the egoist perspective dissolves this alienation. It refuses the notion that our selves are limited to this little bag of skin; it insists that we extend our bodies to encompass our perceptual horizons. I am every person I have met, however fleetingly; every river I have swum in lovingly or passed by, barely noticing; every mountain I have climbed or merely glanced upon while driving; every intoxicant I have consumed; every advertisement to which I have been subjected. The habitat in which we choose to live thus becomes not merely a logistical-economical choice, but instead one of whom we fundamentally want to be.

The anti-civilization insurgency thus takes on an irredeemably personal character. We do not resist civilization because it is “innately wrong”[\[14\]](#) or because it is “the domination of nature”[\[15\]](#), we resist it because it is an absolute assault on ourselves. There is no need to mediate such a desire through

relationship with it through regular interaction. In this way, we truly inhabit our ecosystem, enriching ourselves as well as our symbiotes from whom we are inseparable. Similarly, the abolition and destruction of the homogenizing and toxifying institutions and infrastructure characterizing civilization follow from such a perspective, as they could only limit and stultify ourselves and our connections.

Anti-Civilization Egoism

The gaze of the rapacious capitalist objectifies the biosphere, treating it as an object to be plundered by whoever has the tenacity and guile to best exploit it. The paleoconservative or libertarian gaze romanticizes it, regarding it as the wide-open terrain of rugged individualism on which one might live off the fat of the land. The liberal or conservationist gaze spectacularizes it, transforms it into a thing that should be cherished and preserved for its beauty. Again, all of these perspectives are iterations of alienation predicated on reifying the subject/object dichotomy; they merely dress it in different skins. As M. Kat Anderson writes, “These seemingly contradictory attitudes—to idealize nature or commodify it—

never strives for any thing for the thing’s sake: the thing must serve him. It is egoistic to ascribe no value of its own, no “absolute” value to a thing, but rather to seek its value in me. Our weakness does not consist in this, that we are in conflict with others, but rather in this, that we are not fully so, i.e., that we are not entirely *divorced* from them, or that we are looking for “community,” a “bond,” that in community we have an ideal. One Faith, One God, One Ideal, One Hat for all! If all were brought under one hat, certainly no one would still have to remove his hat before another.

The last and most resolute conflict, that of unique against unique, is at bottom beyond what is called conflict, but without having sunk back into “unity” and consensus. As unique, you no longer have anything in common with the other and therefore also nothing divisive or hostile; you don’t seek to be in the right against him before a *third* party, and stand with him neither “on the ground of right,” nor any other common ground. The conflict disappears in complete—*divergence* or uniqueness. This could indeed be considered the new common feature or parity, only the parity here consists precisely of the disparity, and is itself nothing but disparity, being on par in disparity, and that only for one who makes a “comparison.” The polemic against privilege is a trait of

liberalism, which knocks “privilege,” because it itself appeals to “right.” It can’t take this further than knocking it; because privileges do not fall before rights fall, as they are only forms of right. But right disintegrates into its nothingness when it is devoured by the form, i.e., when one realizes what this means: “power goes before right.” So all right is explained as privilege, and privilege itself as power, as—*superior power*.

The word “*Gesellschaft*” (society) has its origins in the word “*Sal*” (hall, room).[\[240\]](#) If many people are shut up in a room, the room causes them to be in society. They are in society and at most form a salon society, to speak in traditional salon clichés. When it comes to actual intercourse, this is to be regarded as independent of society; it may arise or be absent without altering the nature of what is called society. Those who are in the room are in society even as mute persons, or when they put each other off with mere words of courtesy.

Intercourse is mutuality, it is the action, the *commercium*[\[241\]](#) of individuals; society is only the commonality of the room, and even the statues in a museum room are in society, they are grouped. People customarily say: “they hold the room in common,” but it’s rather the case that the room holds us or

non-human. One might therefore strive toward unions of egoists among the organisms in one’s habitat, maximizing mutualistic interactions and minimizing antagonistic ones through Stirner’s understanding of infinitely revisable collaborations among beings who combine their powers toward the pursuit of cooperatively achieved, but individually recognized, values. Even non-animals, surely, experience something, possess a phenomenality, and have some notion of value, one we can often infer through interspecies communication; though surely their experience of value is unspeakable and ultimately incomprehensible to us. Through such unions, we become symbiotes of one another; our sense of self expands to encompass the bodies, lives, and values of others through symbiogenetic desire.

Practically, an interspecies union of egoists would surely entail the abandonment of agriculture, a thoroughly stultifying practice that homogenizes experience and squelches the diversity of mutually co-created consciousnesses. Subsistence through some combination, varying with bioregion, of foraging and horticulture/permaculture would mean not only a richer and more diverse habitat; but also would entail an intimate

In the same vein, an immensely distant ancestor of our cells may have been formed similarly, through smaller and simpler cells fusing into larger and more complex ones. Margulis' Symbiogenetic Hypothesis posits that at least some eukaryotic cells – the complex cells that, in this case, make up plants and animals – came about through larger cells engulfing smaller cells, the latter becoming organelles of the former.

A parallel, then, can be drawn between this biological understanding of inseparability and emergence in the organic and the gestalt sense of identity - or, perhaps better, lack of identity - described above. Recognition that each of us is constituted by every other being we encounter entails a perspective of intimacy, a desire to live as deeply and vivaciously as possible. As an ecological perspective, then, reveals itself as one that treats all organisms, humans and nonhuman, as potential symbiotes, cocreators with whom we can have various relationships.

Just as one might have a close and intimate, a friendly, a cordial, a neutral, an antagonistic, or a hostile relationship with a human, one might have any of those relationships with a

has us in it. That's as far as the natural meaning of the word society goes. It comes out from this that society is not generated by me and you, but by a third factor which makes us both into associates, and that it is precisely this third factor that is the creative thing,[\[242\]](#) the thing that establishes[\[243\]](#) society.

It's very like a prison society or prison collective[\[244\]](#) (those who enjoy[\[245\]](#) the same prison). Here we get into a third factor even richer than the merely local one, the room, was. Prison no longer just means a space, but a space with express reference to its residents: it is indeed only a prison because it is intended for prisoners, without whom it would be a mere building. What gives a common stamp to the collectivity in it? Obviously, the prison, since they are prisoners only by means of the prison. So what determines the *way of life* of prison society? The prison! What determines their intercourse? Perhaps also the prison? Of course, they can only carry on intercourse as prisoners, i.e., only as far as prison laws allow it; but that *they themselves* hold intercourse, I with you, this the prison cannot bring about; on the contrary, it must take care to prevent such egoistic, purely personal intercourse (and only as such is it actual intercourse between you and me). That we collectively perform a task, operate a machine, set something in motion, a prison will provide well for this; but that I forget that I am a prisoner, and enter into

intercourse with you who equally disregard it, that puts the prison at risk, and not only cannot be brought about by it, but furthermore must not be permitted. For this reason, the saintly and morally—minded French chamber decides to introduce solitary confinement, and other saints will do the same in order to cut off “demoralizing intercourse.” Imprisonment is the established and—sacred condition against which no attempt to injure is allowed. The slightest challenge of this sort is punishable, like any rebellion against a sacred thing by which the human being is supposed to be inhibited and imprisoned.

Like the room, the prison forms a society, a collective, a community (e.g., a community of labor), but no *intercourse*, no mutuality, no *association*. On the contrary, every association in prison carries within itself the dangerous seed of a “plot,” which could, under favorable circumstances, sprout and bear fruit.

But one doesn't usually enter the prison voluntarily, and seldom voluntarily remains in it, but rather nurtures the egoistic desire for liberty. Thus, it's more easily understood here that personal intercourse acts with hostility against prison society and tends towards the dissolution of this society, this common imprisonment.

So let's look around for communities of the sort that we, as it seems, gladly and voluntarily remain in, without wanting to endanger them by our egoistic desires.

Symbiogenetic Desire

Biologists, most famously Lynn Margulis^[12], employ the beautiful term *symbiogenesis* (etymologically meaning something like *origin of life together*) to describe the phenomenon in which two or more ostensibly distinct organisms become so closely intertwined in their lifeways that they more or less merge into one creature.

By way of example, certain termites are able to digest wood through having their guts inhabited by protist (complex single-celled organisms) symbiotes who, in turn, are inhabited by bacterial symbiotes; up to one-third of a termite's weight can consist of these creatures, each of which is dependent on the others for survival. Other species of termites have their massive nests inhabited by a fungus that acts as a kind of external stomach for the insects, enabling enhanced digestion. The fungus occupies a larger volume of the nest and possesses a greater metabolism than the termites themselves, and it possibly influences the behavior of the insects through chemical signaling not unlike the kind that happens among differing organs of the same body.

experience a biotic/abiotic totality except in cases of adventurous imagining; and, to whatever extent there is one, we are surely as much a part of it as anything else, meaning our desires are its desires. It thus cannot grant to us any metric of value. Unfortunately, a pernicious desire to recapitulate this reification of the nonhuman, for "life [to be] about something bigger than ourselves",[\[8\]](#) persists in anti-civilization theory today.

The Platonic urge is strong: insofar as we put our weight in recent archaeological findings[\[9\]](#), the very beginnings of Civilization may be characterized by believing in things "bigger than ourselves", things greater than actual and particular beings or events, things vast and eternal. Whether it can be said to be an essential human characteristic is unclear, but it is certainly an urge of present human beings to reify aspects of their lives, perhaps due to a relationship with enslavement[\[10\]](#) or depression[\[11\]](#). Though some seem to think an ecological perspective entails reifying something great and beautiful and leaping into it with outstretched arms; an alternative lies in persistently refusing reification, rather than simply choosing which is ostensibly the right one.

Symbiogenetic Desire: An Egoist Conception of Ecology by Bellamy Fitzpatrick

An Unfortunate Silence

Egoist anarchism has regularly had criticism leveled against it for its relative silence on issues of ecology. This criticism is well-placed: other than a few references to how non-human animals are exemplars of egoism due to their seemingly unalienated relationship with their desires[\[1\]](#), egoist literature is sorely lacking in this regard. This lamentable absence likely has to do with the proclivities of its authorship more than anything else, as an egoist analysis is readily applicable to ecology.

The *identity eliminativism* – the denial of oneself as having an essential self, a perspective that will be defined and developed further in this piece – implied by egoism is the basis of this ecological worldview, as one's sense of self expands to subsume and be subsumed by one's habitat and symbiotes. Through such an analysis, one steers clear of the twin alienations of, on the one hand, the tiny self, that is, the self as

an independent, enclosed, free-willed subject who remains relatively stable through space and time and who interacts with a world of objects; and, on the other hand, the reification of the nonhuman world, that is, the construal of nonhuman organisms as a more or less unified whole that acts collectively for the Good and into which one can dissolve oneself or to which one can swear allegiance. Eschewing both of these alienations, one finds oneself able to experience a symbiogenetic desire that unites a love of oneself with a love of one's ecosystem.

The Expansive Self: Identity Eliminativism

An egoist conception of ecology begins with the notion of the expansive self. The expansive self regards the inner world, our thoughts and emotions, and the outer world, our phenomenality or sensory experience, as inseparable, as each reciprocally informs and defines the other. Insofar as identity can be said to exist, it is our perceptual totality, shifting from moment to moment. When we walk through the world, all that we touch and perceive is an extension of ourselves; conversely, there is no *I* that exists separately from our

Nature: The Platonic Residue

Yet the expansive self is also the very antithesis of any conception of Mother Nature, Gaia perspective [\[7\]](#), or other reification of the nonhuman — it is not advancing the notion that there is some transcendental whole we could call Life that we might dissolve ourselves into or act on the behalf of for the Greater Good. While there is certainly a great deal to draw from the observation that organisms often are deeply enmeshed symbiotically, that the niches in ecosystems are often mutually reinforcing; these phenomena are counterposed by the fact that, at times, organisms also demonstrably act inimically to the stability of the biosphere: take cyanobacteria, photosynthetic microorganisms whose evolution might have annihilated most life on Earth 2.3 billion years ago by filling the atmosphere with oxygen that was toxic to the anaerobic majority of life. Considering contradictions like this one, what can it mean to act in accordance with the biosphere?

Even were this not the case, the identification of a Gaia or Life would be yet another case of self-alienation – we do not

The expansive self is diametrically opposed to these conceptions of self that characterize the dominant culture: the Cartesian self that sees its distinctiveness as self-evident or the bourgeois self that imagines a separable entity that is self-willed and therefore morally entitled to and responsible for its economic success.

To take just one case here, as I have discussed this issue at greater length^[4] elsewhere, Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* ("I think; therefore, I am") contains, like every ideology of domination, a subtle presupposition: "I". Stirner rejects out of hand the Cartesian split by describing himself as "creator and creature [*Schöpfer und Geschöpf*] in one."^[5] – he does not presuppose himself as a separate entity of his phenomenal perception but instead recognizes that subjectivity and objectivity are simply synthetic conceptual frameworks, sometimes useful instrumental constructions that have no existence beyond our moment-to-moment imagination of them. Nietzsche similarly repudiated this atomized self as a linguistic fiction, a mode of thinking imposed on us by the subject-verb-object structure of our language.^[6]

phenomenal experience. Thus, *the self subsumes and is subsumed by the world*, annihilating this subject/object dichotomy that alienates us from other beings and places.

If our language sounds strange here, it is because we are trying to talk about the ineffable. Perception is the basis of existence, but it is also profoundly difficult to describe with words: the qualitative always eludes the symbolic; however circumspect and technical or poetic and pithy the phrase, it can never completely capture the real of our experience. The phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, while not an anarchist egoist (actually, for at least part of his life, a Marxist! *gasp*), nonetheless beautifully described how perception is neither subjective nor objective but a gestalt from which the two are artificially rendered:

"The visible about us seems to rest in itself. It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible, or as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand [...] What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the

seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them – but something to which we could not be closer than by palpating it with our look, things we could not dream of seeing ‘all naked’ because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh.”[2]

What is traditionally called the object of perception, then, is as much a part of ourselves as what is traditionally called the subject of perception – we are so accustomed to think only of the latter as being truly ourselves. With the dissolution of transitivity of identity, the importance of perception to identity becomes clearer still. David Hume is instructive on the point of identity eliminativism, when he observes that there is no essential substrate, no fixed and quintessential *I*, that exists *behind* his phenomenality or the thoughts and feelings he has about it; instead, his sensory experience and his reflections of that experience are the whole of his being. We are not merely a body, which is only part of our perception, but instead everything we perceive, everything with which we interact. And among that with which we interact are of course other beings,

meaning that our consciousnesses are inextricably intertwined.

We are therefore experiencing at all times the ultimately ineffable phenomenon of nigh-infinitely many mutually co-created consciousnesses. When we encounter one another, human or nonhuman, being or place, each becomes forever a part of the other - whatever beauty, strangeness, or upset that encounter might bring, we know, as those feelings pass from immediate intensity yet leave us permanently changed, that we have only encountered a new and stimulating aspect of ourselves with which we were previously unfamiliar.

The Tiny Selves: The Reification of Identity

To highlight my meaning with a foil, opposite to the expansive self are various conceptions of what Jason McQuinn has taken to calling “the tiny self”[3] – the self as mere body, the self as the free-willed bourgeois economic agent, the self as social role or identity, and so forth. Each of these is a reified self, an idea of who and what we are that comes from giving undue weight to one aspect of ourselves, to hypostatizing one part of our experience and imagining that it is all that we are.