

Coinage and early Greek thought

Richard Seaford explores the origins of tragedy, philosophy and democracy in the earliest monetised society.

Radical Anthropology:

Can you outline your ideas about the origins of coinage? Where and when did it arise and why?

on the coast to the west of Lydia. One plausible theory is that it arose out of the best possible way for the Lydian monarchy to use its abundant

electrum had a different and undeterminable proportion of gold and silver (and so a different metallic value), but numerous pieces each with exactly the same value could be created by stamping them with a mark meaning 'this is worth x'. And so from the very beginning of coinage its conventional value was different from (generally greater than) its metallic value. This matters, because the pervasiveness of coinage in the Greek city-state was a central factor in a new kind of (monetised) society and a new way of thinking, both of which are in a sense still with us.

RA: Can you sum up what it is in this earliest monetised society that is still with us today?

RS: The first ever pervasive monetisation in history (of the Greek polis) made possible for the first time various features of Greek culture that have in a



Ancient Greek coin

Richard Seaford: Coinage arose at approximately the end of the seventh century BCE, in Lydia (in what is now western Turkey), where there was an abundant supply of electrum, a natural alloy of gold and silver. But coinage was first used in everyday life in the Greek city-states

electrum to pay Greek mercenaries. Each piece of

the pervasiveness of coinage in the Greek city-state was a central factor in a new kind of society and a new way of thinking

sense persisted throughout monetised society up to the present. I confine myself here to two examples. One is the idea that the abstract is more real than the concrete, which was a basis of much ancient philosophy. Another is the absolute isolation of the individual: this is especially manifest in Greek tragedy, where, for instance, Oedipus is entirely alienated from the gods and from his closest kin. Both these features are familiar to us, but do

not occur in pre-monetary society.

RA: What are the special features of the ancient Greek polis relating to monetisation?

RS: In contrast to most ancient near-eastern societies, the Greek polis had retained sacrificial ritual that embodied the principle of communal egalitarian distribution. The fact that the Greek word for this

distribution (*moira*) came to mean 'fate' indicates the importance of the distributional imperative. Citizenship was marked by participation in communal sacrifice, which also provided a model for the egalitarian distribution of metallic wealth in standardised pieces.

RA: Can you explain the connections between ancient Greek traditions of ritual sacrifice and the origins of coinage?

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The ancient Aegean

RS: Some of the vocabulary of early coinage comes from animal sacrifice. For instance, the word 'obol', used of a coin, comes from the word for a spit. In the communal egalitarian distribution meat was distributed on iron spits, which were of standard size as well as being portable and durable, *i.e.* they could be used as money (in a limited way). With the use of more precious metal in exchange, 'obol' was transferred to a piece that was of roughly equal value and so of much smaller size (and so even more convenient).

RA: So if someone holds a spit does that imply that he

has a right to meat from the sacrifice? Is the spit – and as it develops, the ‘obol’ coin – intrinsically a kind of IOU, or debt?

women and children too, is left out. Interesting is how much money impacts such a society simply through the fact that coins can be hidden

of (problematic) ‘invisible property’, and are much concerned with (invisible) bribery, whereas the conservatively egalitarian

**On the one hand the new monetised order is egalitarian
in that everybody belongs to the same regime of value...**

**On the other hand, we find concern that the individual
desire for money is unlimited**

RS: Probably the spits were distributed with meat on them. They were dedicated in sanctuaries and placed in tombs, because they had communal prestige deriving from their role in the communally central ritual of sacrificial distribution. It was because they had this communal prestige that they could work as proto-money. Greek money (in contrast to say Babylonian silver) was not just a generally exchangeable commodity: rather, it had a conventional value that depended on communal confidence (and in that sense was a kind of IOU), and so prefigured modern money, which is merely transferable credit.

RA: For anthropologists, this ritual sharing recalls practice among highly egalitarian African hunter-gatherers such as the Hadza, where men celebrate sharing of ‘sacred meat’. Whenever large game comes into camp it has to be shared out, since everyone sees it. No one,

away and accumulated. This lets people escape sharing so rigorously. Whereas ritual sacrifice would be a highly visible event demonstrating the participation of the citizens, how quickly did coinage promote development of inequality from a beginning so rooted in commensality?

RS: Yes, it is a paradox. On the one hand the new monetised order is egalitarian in that everybody belongs to the same regime of value (in contrast to separate spheres of exchange in Homer), and, as Aristotle points out, the parties to a monetised transaction are – *qua* transactors – equal. On the other hand, from Solon onwards we find concern that the individual desire for – and individual accumulation of – money is *unlimited*: in this respect it contrasts with Homeric prestige goods such as tripods, and with the Homeric principle of reciprocity (voluntary requital). The Athenians also invent the category

Spartans for a long time rejected coinage and were said to have had money in the form of iron bars, which in high values could not be transacted invisibly.

RA: What were the political effects of the development of coinage in the process of democratization? Was democracy a stable outcome or relatively improbable? Did all the Greek city-states develop the same way, if not why not?

RS: The political effects of coinage have barely been investigated. Besides its egalitarian effects (see above), coined money also promoted individual autonomy, which would tend to dissolve the vertical lines of patronage (based on reciprocity) that we find for instance in Homer (e.g. Odysseus and Eumaios). This was, I suspect, a precondition for democracy, which at Athens arrived a mere generation or so after coinage. Moreover, control

of the central supply of money was (in contrast to now) visible and simple. It was usurped first in various cities by the 'tyrants' and then, at Athens, by the people (*demos*), and remained essential to democracy. Many of the numerous city-states minted their own coinage, and so had this potential for democracy. But

control the money supply of most of the Aegean sea.

RA: Does this then explain why it is so particularly Athenian political, cultural and scientific developments that are renowned as 'origins of Western civilization'?

RS: To a large extent, yes. Coinage arrived in

insignificant until the late sixth century BCE, by which time it finally had coinage en masse and moreover had begun to extract much silver from the mines at Laurium in south-east Attica. In a newly monetised world this silver (together with gold and silver from Thrace) was crucial for the development of festivals and of temples, for the origin



Silver mine at Laurium

Athens was a special case, not least because (almost uniquely) it had its own supplies of silver, and then came in the fifth century to

Attica later than in the cities of the eastern Aegean, where philosophy originated in the early sixth century BCE. Athens was culturally

and splendour of drama, for the building of a fleet, and eventually for Athens as a cultural centre to which (as we see in the dialogues of

Plato) philosophers were attracted from various parts of the Greek world.

RA: The origin of coinage on this account is related strongly to a ritual egalitarian ethos among citizens of the polis: Greek men. But what about those excluded – women and slaves? How was women's status and position affected by the invention of coinage? Did this materially affect gender relations and forms of marriage for example?


RS: It is difficult to tell. Money promotes the autonomy of the individual, and so may have reduced the need to make alliances with other families by marriage. This may in turn have increased the practice of endogamy, which has the advantage of keeping wealth within the family. This worsens the situation of the wife, for she has no kin to appeal (or return) to

who are not also kin of her husband. The isolation of the wife in such circumstances prompted the Athenian polis to legislate to protect her, and was a central issue of Aeschylus' *Suppliants*. It is in reaction to the effect of money on marriage that other tragedies focus on incest (the extreme form of endogamy): Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, for instance, connects incest with the autonomous accumulation of money.

At the conceptual level, Greek metaphysics, which is profoundly influenced by the relationship of money to goods, is gendered in the sense that (ontologically inferior) unformed matter is associated with the female and (ontologically superior) abstract form is associated with the male, for instance in Plato's *Timaios*.

RA: Finally, can you say something about your

upcoming project to compare Greek with early Indian thought?

RS: There are, from the sixth century BCE, striking similarities between Indian and Greek thought that are found nowhere else. For instance, we find in both cultures the counter-intuitive idea that all that exists is unitary and abstract (so diversity and change is unreal). Such similarities are almost always ascribed to influence, which is however most unlikely before Alexander crossed the Indus in 326 BCE. The fact is that in this early period northern India had urbanisation, commercialisation, and monetisation to a degree found nowhere else other than in Greece (and possibly China, which also develops 'philosophy'). The point is that the same kind of socio-economic development may produce the same kind of metaphysics. 



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Further reading:

R. Seaford 2004 *Money and the Early Greek Mind* Cambridge University Press.

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Taking Up Space: Anthropology and embodied protest

Drawing on experiences of the McGill University student occupations, **Sheehan Moore** calls for an anthropology of the body in protest.

On November 10, 2011, two students hid in a bathroom in the James Administration building at McGill University in Montreal. When they received word that an anti-tuition hike protest was reaching the campus's main Roddick Gates, they let twelve others in through the building's back door and together ascended to the fifth floor. The students, some of them masked or hooded, blocked doors with their bodies and proceeded to occupy administrative offices for a total of eight minutes before being forcibly removed by McGill Security.¹ Two days later in a letter to *The McGill Daily*, the fourteen occupiers wrote:

By crossing the boundaries that authorities have forced on us, by taking up space where our presence is prohibited and our agency denied, we triggered a response that exposes the necessary violence with which the hierarchical power structure confronting students is enforced. [...] The narratives of the corporate media, the police, and the administration will aim at a common end: a return to the status quo in which they control our spaces

*and our bodies. But we are engaged in a struggle that is far from over. We must continue to move beyond the liberal model of 'discourse' that has only served to maintain unjust power relations and control. Acting boldly and defying prescribed boundaries, we subvert the logic of submission.*²

The November 10 occupation, as well as the occupation of the same building in February 2012, can be located within a long tradition of similar protests at universities that dates back to the early 1960s. Additionally, both incidents arrived at a time when occupation loomed large in the public consciousness: from the revolutionary encampments in Cairo's Tahrir Square, to the Indignants in Madrid's Puerta del Sol, to the Occupy movement, protesters across the world began moving into spaces and refusing to leave.

Occupations differ from other forms of protest like marches and rallies primarily in their temporal and spatial persistence, and in this sense they allow for more of an explicit meditation on the role of the persisting,

protesting body. However, the majority of literature on the topic, as I outline below, tends to foreground the discursive dimensions of protests and occupations, focusing almost exclusively on demands and goals as the only "whys" for protest. Through this fairly limited analytic lens, we can easily lose sight of an important bodily dimension of protest that exceeds the stated or assumed politics of a demonstration or occupation. When we try to understand only the causes and intended effects of protest, we obscure their material nature and erase the physical bodies that enter – out of perceived necessity – into spaces that are forbidden to them. What would it mean to treat forms of protest like occupations not only as declarative – i.e., as political statements – but also as embodied and spatial practice?³

After a short overview of the rise of university occupations, the historical tactics they draw on, and the context in which they emerged as a form of protest, I turn to the two McGill occupations

during the 2011-2012 academic year, outlining the events and the general shape of the occupiers' discourse. My primary aim here is to suggest some ways an anthropology of embodiment might approach occupations theoretically and methodologically, and specifically, how the way occupiers past and present talk about bodies can point us towards a reading of occupation as a bodily practice rather than merely political discourse.

A reflection on the role of bodies persisting in spaces where they are forbidden from doing so is crucial to understanding why protesters continue to choose occupation as a tactic. To this end, I draw on theoretical work by Judith Butler and Edward Soja that locates meaningful and material bodies in contested and constructed spaces, and argue that such interventions may be thought about as opening up the 'political' or an 'alter' politics, as the terms are

used by Miriam Ticktin and Ghassan Hage, respectively.

A brief history of occupation

On December 2, 1964, approximately one thousand students and other supporters of the Free Speech Movement at the University of California, Berkeley entered Sproul Hall, then the seat of the university's administration, in what would become the first modern occupation of a university as a means of political protest on record.⁴ This was the occasion of Mario Savio's famous call to action, issued from the steps of the hall, which related the protesters' political convictions to certain political imperatives impressed on their bodies:

There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part; you can't even tacitly take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machines will be prevented from working at all.⁵

From the beginning, then, university occupations have been presented by those engaging in them as a means of intervening physically into the prescribed means of



Photo by Farid Attar Rifai.

A banner dropped by occupiers on the fifth floor of McGill's administration building on November 10, 2011.

participation and decision-making – the ‘machine’. With these traditional avenues of

by other labour organizations over the coming years for their effectiveness not

the association of sit-ins with labour and civil rights movements and with growing nationwide opposition to the war in Vietnam – as well as from the increasing diversity of the student population. During this postwar period, in the United States as well as in Canada, universities saw a massive surge in enrolment encouraged by the allocation of public funds. This ‘golden age’ of universities, full of the promises of education’s democratisation and a learned populace, saw university enrolment in Canada increase more than tenfold from 1956 to 1966, with comparable rates in the United States.⁹ In part, this meant universities became – relatively speaking – more accessible and open for many of those who historically had been excluded from the ranks of its students and faculty – including women, people of colour, and those whose class background barred them from elite campuses.¹⁰ Thus, while university protest up to this point in the North American context had focused for the most part on issues of internal governance, most often taking the form of more or less harmless pranks, the post-war student body increasingly recognized itself as connected to broader social movements beyond the campus gates – anti-war movements, civil rights, labour, and so on.¹¹ Out of this background, and with a student body growing in



Riot police confront protesters outside the occupied administration building on November 10, 2011.

democratic opposition non-functioning or foreclosed upon, dissent becomes, necessarily, an embodied action for those who decide they have no recourse except to occupy – to prevent the university machines from working at all.

In the decades leading up to the Berkeley revolt, occupations and similar tactics had gained increasing traction as a form of protest: university occupations can trace their tactical roots to the first sit-down strikes in the US in the early twentieth century. These were initiated first by workers unionised under the International Workers of the World (IWW), including General Electric employees in New York in 1906, and were quickly adopted as a tactic

only in ceasing work, but also blocking replacement workers from entering factories and continuing production.⁶ Out of this tradition, and beginning in the 1940s, sit-in protests became associated with the civil rights movement in the United States, spreading rapidly across the American South following the February 1960 sit-ins at a Woolworths in Greensboro, North Carolina.⁷ But before Berkeley, student occupations of university spaces were virtually unheard of, not yet figuring in the ‘tactical repertoires’ of student protesters.⁸

The emergence of occupation at this moment in California likely resulted from both the contemporary context of protest and activism –

its militancy, the Berkeley occupation became, in the words of former Berkeley sociologist Seymour Lipset, the 'prototype event of the student movement'.¹² A wave of university occupations followed the Berkeley revolt: the London School of Economics in 1966-67; Columbia University, McGill University, and the Sorbonne in 1968; Concordia University and City College of New York the following year; and recurrently in the decades since.

While the number of occupations has fluctuated with the political climate, a recent upsurge in the number and visibility of occupations has followed the implementation of austerity measures (most often entailing tuition hikes) resulting from the 2008 global financial crisis: students initiated austerity-related occupations of university buildings in the 2008-2009 academic year in the UK, California, and New York, multiple anti-government occupations in the UK in 2010, and occupations of University of California campuses in 2011 and 2012. Concurrent with a philosophy that went global through the Occupy Wall Street movement, recent university occupations have shown a markedly decreased interest in the formulation of specific demands that must be met

as conditions of an end to the protest. Instead, many of those occupying have rallied under the slogan, 'Occupy everything, demand nothing'.¹³

2011-2012: Occupations at McGill

In total, fourteen students occupied sections of the fifth floor of the James building on November 10, 2011. During those eight minutes before their interception by the McGill Security Team, the occupiers explored the principal's office and adjoining rooms, dropping from a window a banner that read '10 Nov. Occupons McGill' ('Let's Occupy McGill').¹⁴ After their removal they negotiated their amnesty with administrators, as well

as the amnesty of those who had subsequently and spontaneously occupied the second floor of the building in solidarity. Across campus, certain other buildings were put on card-key access only, preventing protesters and bystanders from entering buildings surrounding the square while riot police used batons, pepper spray, and tear gas to disperse the large support rally that had formed outside.¹⁵ In their letter to *The McGill Daily*, quoted above, the fourteen occupiers made it clear that their occupation had been without demands, and that it was instead a response to the deterioration of lines of communication on campus, repression of striking non-academic workers,¹⁶ the lack of student representation in

many of those occupying have rallied under the slogan, 'Occupy everything, demand nothing'



Students occupy the lobby of the administration building in solidarity with the #6party occupation happening upstairs.

Photo by Victor Tangermann.

governance, and austerity measures advocated by a Board of Governors populated by CEOs, real estate moguls, McKinsey & Co. directors and mining executives. The occupiers specifically link their actions to both the Quebec-wide student movement and to the increasing neoliberalisation of society, in which they identify the university as a key player. 'It is time to

of what the administration deems acceptable'.¹⁷

Almost exactly three months later, on February 7, 2012, twenty-three students occupied the office of Deputy Provost Morton Mendelson on the sixth floor of the James building in what would come to be known as the #6party occupation, in reference to the hashtag used for Twitter updates. Unlike

results of two referendum votes on the existence of the Quebec Public Interest Research Group (QPIRG) and Radio CKUT – both of which votes administrators had nullified the previous month – and that the Deputy Provost resign.¹⁸ As on November 10, the planned #6party occupation prompted a spontaneous occupation of a lower level of the building: upon hearing that students were on the sixth floor, a group of students, myself included, entered the building's lobby around 11:30am, but were blocked from staircases and elevators by security. Over the course of the evening, sixty to one hundred students and professors came and went freely in the lobby, teaching courses, holding informal discussions, and serving food, even after an eviction notice was served at 3:30pm. Around 8:45pm, a member of McGill's Security Services announced to those occupying the lobby that they were free to leave, but would no longer be allowed to reenter.¹⁹ Roughly twenty students spent the night sleeping on the lobby floor, forced to use bottles and eventually a cooler as toilets in the absence of accessible lobby-level washrooms. At 11:30 next morning, the remaining students chose to leave the lobby of their own accord en masse, and were greeted by a support rally and reporters. The sixth-floor occupation, meanwhile,

Image by Vincent Tao.



A poster that appeared across campus during the #6party occupation.

enter their space,' they wrote. 'Occupation is a means of expressing our dissent outside of the boundaries

the November 10 occupation, #6party occupiers issued specific demands: that the administration recognize the

continued until the morning of February 12, when the McGill administration asked Montreal police to evict the remaining nine students (the others had gradually left in the preceding days).

Neither of the occupation's demands were ultimately met. But notably, when talking with student occupiers about #6party now, the conversation is almost always about the experience of the occupation

the act of occupation, on the fact that occupation can signify – can be meaningful – *in excess* of political declarations or demands. The physical, embodied action itself is a crucial aspect of this meaningfulness. In what follows, I suggest a methodological approach to occupation that centres on the role of the body in protest, arguing that bodily practices, independent of declared demands, can work to create alternative political

*are not. In this sense critical sociology uncovers social forces and social relations that are believed to be already having a causal effect on us regardless of whether we are aware of them or not (class relations, gender relations, etc.), critical anthropology invites us to become aware of and to animate certain social forces and potentials that are lying dormant in our midst. In so doing it incites what was not causal to become so.*²¹

Among these potentials are those 'emerging social spaces

riot police used batons, pepper spray, and tear gas to disperse the large support rally that had formed outside

– nearly universally viewed as positive and exciting – rather than about its technical *failure* in terms of actual demands. This is not to say that supporting both CKUT and QPIRG was not a priority for the lobby and sixth floor occupations – there were constant negotiations with administrators, and the bulk of the discussion and media coverage at the time made it clear that the actions taken were taken to defend student organisations from administrative overreach.²⁰ But what sticks with those who occupied now, over a year later, is the act itself and not the immediate motives behind it. This could be dismissed as self-centredness on the part of occupiers, but I think it is worth lingering here on the feelings people have towards

situations.

Occupation as embodied practice

In thinking about what those alternatives may be, I want to take up some of Ghassan Hage's proposals for a *critical anthropology* directed towards the 'radical political imaginary'. To this end, Hage draws a distinction between a critical sociology and a critical anthropology:

Critical sociology invites or initiates a reflexive analytical act that induces an understanding: it invites us to see how our social world is constituted and the way it can be unmade and remade by us. Critical anthropology, appropriately enough, is more akin to the shamanic act of inducing a haunting; indeed it encourages us to feel haunted at every moment of our lives by what we are/could be that we

that lie outside the existing order of governmentality and intelligibility and requiring an imaginative politics that can think them in their difference'.²² Approaching these spaces of the radical imaginary through anthropological inquiry is in many ways a turn towards some of the discipline's originating impulses, towards alterity and alternative. Reflecting on the work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Hage writes, 'it is more than a "the Amazonians have their reality and we have our reality" argument. It does mean the latter, but it also means that their reality speaks to ours. It haunts us with the possibility that we, as well, live in multiple realities'.²³

To focus on only the demands or the lack of

demands presented by occupiers is to read these occupations as if they were simply petitions to political figures, albeit petitions signed in the flesh. We risk missing important dimensions of radical practice when our approach is limited so narrowly to the policies and practices that occupations oppose, and to weighing their chosen tactics against their demands. Yet this has taken up the majority of commentary about occupations at McGill and beyond.²⁴ We can locate this merely political discursive analysis within what Hage calls a politics of ‘anti’ – that is, a politics that is primarily deconstructive and oppositional.²⁵ ‘Anti’ politics sits on the other

to protest is, after all, almost always to oppose or to resist, and the politics of protest are, on the surface at least, ‘anti.’

But to get to try and understand occupation anthropologically requires attending to alterity, looking for the ‘otherness-within-us’ to which Hage returns repeatedly, and extending our view beyond mere politics. It is useful here to draw on the distinction Miriam Ticktin makes between politics and the political in her work on humanitarianism: the former is ‘a set of practices by which order is created and maintained’ while the latter ‘refers to the disruption of an established order’.²⁶ *Politics* – including the oppositional politics

imaginary, can help us approach occupation in a way that is attentive not only to the politics of the action – the demands, the policies or machinery being explicitly opposed, and so on – but also to the possibility of the political and to the challenges occupying bodies pose to the current parameters set on politics.

In this sense, the body is central to the work occupations do in shifting from ‘politics’ to the ‘political’. Consistently, university occupiers and their supporters frame their bodily transgression of campus spaces as being a response to the failure of available lines of communication, dissent, and participation – that is, to the failure of politics in Ticktin’s sense of the word. For instance, citing a crackdown on various forms of dissent by McGill’s upper administration – from injunctions against striking workers, to disciplinary charges brought against students engaging in peaceful teach-ins,²⁷ to security personnel filming faculty and students participating in approved forms of non-disruptive protest²⁸ – McGill professors Hasana Sharp and Will Roberts wrote on November 14, 2011, of the necessity of the occupation that had occurred four days prior:

In 1997, students occupied the same offices as last

Politics ...allows for contention within certain given parameters; the political, on the other hand, challenges the very foundations of those parameters.

end of a spectrum from an ‘alter’ politics, which addresses itself to open-ended alternative physical and political realities. And while almost any political or social movement will tend to incorporate both, providing an oppositional critique while opening up alternatives, this latter aspect is easily overlooked. Asking *why* about protest tends to mean merely *in response to what* :

of, for instance, a liberal democratic party system – allows for contention within certain given parameters; the *political*, on the other hand, challenges the very foundations of those parameters. The rough equivalencies between Ticktin’s categories here and Hage’s anti/alter politics, as well as his understanding of the open-ended ‘alter’-ness of the radical political

*week. They came with a list of demands, stayed for three days, and left peaceably when the administration refused to negotiate on the demands. The occupiers last week made no demands. Occupy everything, demand nothing. That is their watchword. This is not the frightening or confusing development people seem to think it is. If occupations do not make demands, that means they are not engaging in mercenary activity. The occupiers were not holding the Principal's office hostage. They just want to talk and be heard. They occupy to short-circuit the usual channels by which concerns get mediated and diluted, and arguments get muted to the point of inaudibility.*²⁹

Sharp and Roberts, echoing the rhetoric of occupiers at McGill and at universities in North America and Europe over the past five years or so, assert the centrality of occupation in light of the shortcomings of 'the usual channels'. By *physically* occupying a space without issuing demands, protesters intervene not through these channels, but *into* them, blocking them from operating and, in that very action, opening up a sort of free-space for the possibilities of new kinds of communication and participation in the university.

It is significant that the administration-sanctioned modes of participation at McGill are almost entirely immaterial (in both senses of the word). They take the

form of websites where questions to the principal can be up- or down-voted, live-streamed videos of Senate meetings that have limited opportunity for physical attendance or else are closed to spectators altogether, and online voting on referenda about student life. When students appear physically to protest the insufficiency of these channels by sitting in the offices in which the real decision-making is assumed to take place, it becomes crucial to direct our attention to the way their presence asserts itself against this immateriality.³⁰ Doing so

arguing that theoretical attention to matter and embodiment means situating the body as constructed, but acknowledging the conditions and lived 'realness' of this constructed body.³²

Butler has also recently suggested some ways to approach the embodiment of occupation. In a talk given in Venice in September 2011, just days before Occupy Wall Street pitched their first tents, she drew on the recent Egyptian revolution in order to propose a politics based in a shared precarity of the

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situates our methodological approach within the kind of materialism that Lock and Farquhar identify as central to an anthropological regard for the body. Unlike the dualistic or Cartesian materialism that has been theoretically dominant since the Enlightenment, or the empiricist and positivistic materialism critiqued by anthropologies of science, a materialism of embodiment is attentive to even these 'empirical' bodily practices as sites of meaning-making inextricable from human experience.³¹ Judith Butler helps to reconcile post-structuralist and feminist critiques of a supposedly pre-social materialism with this new materialism,

physical body. Butler argues here that when protests manifest and persist in space, 'the very public character of the space is being disputed and even fought over when these crowds gather':

*So though these movements have depended on the prior existence of pavement, street, and square, and have often enough gathered in squares, like Tahrir, whose political history is potent, it is equally true that the collective actions collect the space itself, gather the pavement, and animate and organize the architecture.*³³

Similarly, in 'seizing and reconfiguring the matter of material environments', occupiers make claims to the material supports of

certain aspects of life at the university – participation, political appearance, and being heard – that are otherwise perceived as being denied to them. Butler takes up and reconfigures Hannah Arendt’s notion of the ‘space of appearance’, in part as a means of understanding how ‘power operates prior to any performative power exercised by a plurality’ to structure public and private spaces in ways that make political appearance difficult to impossible for certain bodies.³⁴ In the case of the McGill occupations, we can think here about the strategies of power that constrain the parameters of politics (again, in Ticktin’s terminology) to the realm of the nonphysical. Occupations that either make no demands – or that are remembered one year later for reasons other than the failure or success of their demands – remain

Goldsmiths in London:

*[T]he symbolic meaning of seizing these buildings is that these buildings belong to the public, to public education; it is precisely the access to public education which is being undermined by fee and tuition hikes and budget cuts; we should not be surprised that the protest took the form of seizing the buildings, performatively laying claim to public education, insisting on gaining literal access to the buildings of public education precisely at a moment, historically, when that access is being shut down.*³⁵

The performative capacity of bodies that Butler draws on here is key to understanding the material aspects of occupation. It is this performativity that opens up the political by redefining, if only for minutes or days, the limits on politics at the university. In the case of the #6party, the use of the

they refused to leave, one student is quoted in *The McGill Daily* citing precisely the failure of conventional decision-making as a motive for occupation: ‘We have these discussions over and over. [...] The point is that all these decisions come to nothing. Everybody knows we’ve done this repeatedly, so we’re not going to do this again. [...] We came to have a party.’³⁶

In recognizing the way that the performative body can intervene in spaces to open them up to new sorts of political existence, anthropology is well poised to build theoretical bridges across disciplines, and particularly to a tradition of critical geography. The ‘spatial turn’ that emerged in the humanities and social sciences most notably from the work of Marxist geographer and sociologist

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We came to have a party’

meaningful for the way that the bodies involved, through their physical, spatial transgression, make political claims or demands that are inarticulable in the conventional discursive sense. Butler addresses this possibility, alluding to the then-recent occupation of university buildings at

word ‘party’ rather than ‘occupation’ to refer to their actions is in part a gesture towards the openness to a new sense of the political that those participating attempted to engage. When McGill Provost Anthony Masi tried to talk to those in the lobby during #6party about why they were there and why

Henri Lefebvre has led to a body of literature on the geographies of protest (especially in relation to urban space).³⁷ The work of geographer Edward Soja, which addresses the spatiality of social justice movements in large urban centres, is valuable in approaching occupation here for its notion

of ‘spatial consciousness’ – defined as ‘an awareness that oppression, marginality, and inequality are produced and reproduced to a significant degree through the new urbanization processes and the restructured socio-spatialities of urbanism’.³⁸ Mapping this urban geographical term onto practices of collective struggle and contention within smaller, more institutional settings like universities helps direct our attention towards the lived physical and material dimensions of protest – those aspects of protest that are inextricably linked to the politics at hand, but which may not be accounted for in a merely discursive account that aims to envelope only the ‘facticity’ of an

that politics sustain, then we need to examine, similarly, the parameters imposed on our uses of space and the ways political protest disrupts those prescribed uses. What kinds of thinking shape the parameters for what is possible within the spaces of the university? How does protest create new possibilities? These questions seem foundational to an anthropological approach that takes the embodied, ‘political’ dimensions of occupation seriously.

*

Occupation is necessary, writes former McGill student Erin Reunions in a 1998 alternative student handbook,³⁹ when students are no longer able to participate and

participate, feel, and hope differently, even if only briefly. When it is over, we might be ‘haunted’, to use Hage’s word, by what was made possible during those minutes, days, or months, even as the immediate causes of the occupation fade from memory.

I’ve attempted to outline a way of thinking about occupation that pays specific attention to the role of the bodily in collective dissent. The work of Hage and Ticktin is central here for the divisions they make between a merely contentious ‘anti’ politics and the radical ‘alter’ of the political. In the case of universities like McGill, the former is often nonphysical, and participation and dissent are

When bodies gather together in and claim space, publicly and collectively, they open up political possibilities for the future at the same time as oppose the politics of the present.

occupation. To be spatially conscious when talking about university occupations means recognizing that what stays with us about those experiences, one year later, is not always reducible to ideological talking points or to victories and defeats at the level of politics. In this way, physical space becomes very much an object of anthropological concern. If Ticktin’s ‘political’ involves challenging the very parameters of contention

express dissent through the avenues the university has established for this purpose. The prescribed channels for communication – for democratic participation in life at the university – are ignored or ineffective, and the only response is to occupy, to ‘take up space’. Occupations and similar forms of protest, as physical manifestations of bodies into the spaces of the university, rewrite the parameters of those spaces and allow us to

relegated almost exclusively to the level of discourse and to virtual spaces. Understanding the limits this immateriality imposes on political existence at the university becomes key to listening to the way occupiers frame their actions: as the McGill occupiers’ statements show, it is through physical, material protest that they feel pressed to intervene against the failures of a largely immaterial machinery. Butler and Soja help us understand

occupation as both spatial and bodily practice, not just the declaration of an oppositional position. When bodies gather together in

and claim space, publicly and collectively, they *open up* political possibilities for the future at the same time as oppose the politics of the

present. 

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30. There's a temptation here not only to equate the non-physical/-spatial with powerlessness and inefficacy, but also to establish a causal relationship between the two. Taken to its extreme, it becomes easy to argue that there can be no real democratic political participation without physical presence – a reductive conclusion that fails to consider who can and cannot 'take to the streets', where the levels of risk are differentially allocated based on gender, ability, sexuality, status, and where the levels of risk are differentially allocated based on factors like gender, ability, sexuality, status, and care responsibilities. My intention here is not to argue that occupation is the only possible response in situations like the one at McGill. Rather, the context in which these two occupations occurred – as well as the context for many occupations globally – is one in which people on all sides are grappling with these questions of physicality and the political. Anthropology, for its part, seems well-poised to take up these questions.
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St George's Eve Parade at the Dragon Cafe

Catherine Jones reflects on the joyous if fleeting experience of a spring carnival at the Dragon Café.

'We need now in the 21st century to give much more thought to how Dragon energy can be positive and transformative, if only we could learn how to harness it and help it to thrive.'

Sarah Wheeler, Creative Director of Mental Fight Club.

Walk south from London Bridge along Borough High Street and you will meet with a busy intersection

surrounded by a commercial district of brown and grey office blocks. This hurried London encompasses the quiet island of St George the Martyr Church, an ancient site that has gradually been encroached upon by the ever-looming metropolis.

Yet this April, on the eve of St George's Day, a sudden flurry of colour and music burst out of the belly of the church, and

a Dragon emerged with a troop of drums, singing and vibrantly costumed dancers. Anyone watching the church earlier that day would have suspected some sort of goings on, as people busily disappeared and re-emerged from the crypt, taking part in guided walks and creative workshops and in last minute preparation for the afternoon's parade.

The setting for our carnival is



Photo: Chris Knight

East meets west: dragon summit

well connected to the theme of St George, as is evident from various depictions of St George and the dragon hidden all around the area. The dragon symbol is also the inspiration behind the mental health initiative, Mental Fight Club, which operates from the group's own Dragon Café every Monday in the church crypt. The dragon motif is all the more captivating given

acrobatic performers from the Confucius Institute. After much applause, the gathering is invited back into the cosy underground crypt for an evening of folk music and talks on the numerous traditions that have inspired the Legend of St George and the Dragon.

It seems that almost as quickly as the excitement arises, all becomes still again

controlled, safe release of the tensions built up within hierarchical society which in turn helps to reaffirm the social order. Others highlight carnival as a fundamental form of popular culture, giving voice, body and agency to the people. There is also the view that the carnivalesque acts as a mechanism for renewal. Carnival's subversive traditions of inversion

on the eve of St George's Day, a sudden flurry of colour and music burst out of the belly of the church, and a Dragon emerged with a troop of drums

its striking prevalence in mythology, one that reaches right back into the depths of prehistory.

Quickly the Dragon is joined by tiny revellers and a small dragon brood, the entourage rapidly growing to include a female Robin Hood with Merry Men, and a Green Man and transgender Maid Marian, all cavorting along behind. A samba band begins to play and a Chinese dragon suddenly appears, gracefully sailing around Tabard St square to meet with our crypt-dwelling wyvern. Frenzied dancing ensues as the two dragons, accompanied by a battery from the brightly decorated players, encircle the church. Eventually, as the gathering begins to tire, we are wowed by Chinese

around the church, all that remains are a few colourful dragon scales being brushed about in the wind.

How quickly the liveliness dissolves and the area is reclaimed by the city's pallid hue. Can any significance be made of such a fleeting moment? Was it all quite inconsequential? Simply a pleasant day of revelry, patriotic celebration and publicity for the mental health charity. Could there be any more to it than that?

Many theorists of carnival maintain that these sorts of events serve a specific function in society. One 'safety-valve' theory contends that carnival is a time of catharsis for the workforce – 'rituals of rebellion' that allow for

and parody of the elite represent an alternative to the hierarchical world and so assist in society's transformative cycles. Yet others suggest that any such change today is ultimately sanctioned by the state and so is only ever assimilated into the existing order of society.

However, these conceptualisations are often critiqued, for the focus is restricted to dimensions of power. It conceives of those present as rather contingent on external forces and overlooks carnival's aesthetics and the people's collaborative and reflective impetus.

Cohen, looking at the development of Notting Hill Carnival up until 1992, argues that as art, culture

and politics are dynamically interrelated those present are predominantly active, conscious and often politically rebellious

masses with yet another distraction; ultimately divorcing us from our capacity to construct our own reality.

us indistinguishable from such movements. Surely the improvised spontaneity of the day; the interaction, face-to-face contact, the collective and inclusive spirit, however transitory, embraced an act of defiance against the corporate monoculture?

Such a cross-cultural community as was seen that day – the organisers, the performers, the bystanders, the mentally well, unwell and recovering, the homeless, the academic, the student, the office worker, children after school and senior citizens – were *all* invited to dance, to cheer, to be spectators to each other. Surely all participated, transiently, in a levelling off of differences and identities in a way that echoes the egalitarian precepts of such protest carnivals.

For me, as a participant at the Dragon parade, engaging with one another creatively was a strategic assertion of human autonomy, self-definition, imagination and equality. The project's mix of creative and healing resilience, supporting people with sincere warmth and acceptance, has promoted the issue of mental health and the alienation and exclusion that epitomises it, and in turn has created a space for social inclusion. In addressing our society's prejudice, this makes a wider statement of empowerment for all.

A Bakhtinian perception adds



Maid Marian

subjects. Yet even Cohen recognises the loss of Notting Hill's old-style 'organisation for the people and by the people.' He warns that 'it is likely to develop [...] into a predominantly tourist-orientated show.'¹ Carnivals such as Notting Hill or Rio, like many large public events today, be it festivals, concerts or dance clubs, are often disparaged for having become commodified and dehumanised, most people no longer collaborating in

However since the early 1990s there has been a growing phenomenon of carnivals appearing as conscious and celebratory protests in the form of unendorsed street parties or processions occupying public space.² Though there is a multitude of causes and campaigns, most are brought under the banner of 'carnivals against capitalism' in the global justice movement. Yet what of a localised event, such as the Dragon Parade? Protest carnivals are distinct in their explicitly oppositional rhetoric; their police presence; their attempts to disrupt the everyday and so interrupt state/corporate business. None of this was present during the St George and

The dragon symbol is inspiration behind the mental health initiative, Mental Fight Club

these cultural forms, but rather party to consumerism's passive spectatorship. In this way it can become easy to see carnival as just another apparatus in creating alienation and apathy; mollifying, homogenising and so depoliticising the

the Dragon and Maiden day parade. We certainly did not make any noticeable stand to the prevailing hegemony. Nevertheless our flamboyant costumes, dancing, our samba band, our banners, mascots and participatory ethos could at moments leave

yet another connection when we are heedful of those who are mentally unwell. Bakhtin delineates medieval carnival as an anti-hierarchical, folk or market-place cultural

still adhere to the Early Renaissance attitudes that first opposed the 'aesthetics of the beautiful' to the folk grotesque. We are still uncomfortable with the

all the people.'³ He posits that it was only during the later Romantic period that 'madness acquires a sombre, tragic aspect of individual isolation.' Nevertheless he affirms that madness is intrinsic to all forms of the grotesque because it 'makes men look at the world with different eyes, not dimmed by "normal", that is by commonplace ideas and judgments.'⁴ Ultimately too if the Romantic grotesque instigates fear, Bakhtin's folk carnival gives voice to the rude and real properties of ourselves that he affirms are communicated through a folk culture that is hence 'absolutely fearless'.⁵ In this sense we can apprehend the sapience of giving 'madness' a voice in society and so insist on a confidence and pride towards those stepping out into public view when society claims they are incomplete, a boldness materialised at the Dragon Parade.

But what of the Dragon Cafe carnivalists own understandings? Advocating a reinterpretation of the St George and the Dragon story, one that resounds with the charity's ethos towards mental illness, the creative director of Mental Fight Club, herself a sufferer of mental ill-health, explains that the dragon

'is actually of universal human significance... a dragon or serpent is

Photo: Chris Knight



Final pyramid

form. He conceived it as 'the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance' as it was they who still maintained the power to renew society through laughter and mockery of the elite. By humbling them through the imagery of the 'grotesque body' –the eating, defecating, copulating, natural body – they asserted their power of renewal though the expression of the 'grotesque' and its regenerative metaphor. This, he argues, is later lost and reduced to its bare crudities. Here I will simply highlight, as Bakhtin does, that we

contradictory, blemished or incomplete. This is imperfect, and so ugly to us. We wish to hide it, we become fearful of it. Those with mental ill health are treated in just such a way.

Bakhtin states that in the Middle Ages the 'unfinished' or 'grotesque' was not only associated with the hideous but also viewed positively, as it was ultimately a reflection of the cyclic changes of man's life and so the phases of nature. We had not quite become the modern, 'isolated biological individual [...]the private, egoistic "economic man" but [still acknowledged...] the collective ancestral body of

universal to all cultures worldwide[...yet] the dragon in today's conventional telling of St George is seen as repellent and destructive [...] We have looked at the story and propose a retelling where we consider how the Dragon is pacified by the Power of the Feminine [after all St George on his own does not overcome the Dragon but it is only after the Maiden gives him her girdle, once tied around the dragons neck that it is subdued] and its


creative potential.'

For those at the Dragon Café, losing one's fear of the dragon is synonymous with losing one's fear of 'the part of ourselves which we dare not face...' They maintain that

'Just like the dragon in the tale, repression and exclusion of this powerful part of ourselves is actually counter-productive. Our excluded dragon energy holds us to ransom [...] We can only be truly mentally well if we can learn to face our fears and understand that the inner resources to transform them live within each of us...'

I feel from this a deep sense of continuity. The Dragon, as an ubiquitous symbol of mankind's mythology, may stem from the earliest human cultures of the Palaeolithic over 100,000 years ago.⁶ So in this sense when holding up the existing shape of ourselves against that which formed us we can learn to recognise our ancient arcane unanimity, the creative and cooperative part of our

humanity; our primeval dragon solidarity. Repression and exclusion of it will surely hold us and everything else on the planet to ransom.

The Dragon Café, as a regular gathering of some of the most disenfranchised in society, continually reminds us of our capacity to collaboratively shape and enhance our own lives. What more apt way to celebrate this than with a Dragon Parade. Far from being an inconsequential event, it seems to me that community self-celebration can help foreground our prejudices and our reclamations of agency and solidarity. 

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Photo: Chris Knight



Baby dragons

newly peaceful form is full of creative potential! When St George slays it in front of the townspeople, he actually brings the story to a spiritual dead end, because the townspeople have not learnt to overcome their fear of the Dragon, and its enormous



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The Dragon Café materialises each Monday, from 11.30 am to 8.30 pm in the crypt of St George the Martyr Church, Borough, <http://dragoncafe.co.uk/>

Anarchism, individualism and South Indian foragers: memories and reflections

Brian Morris examines the relationship of anthropology and anarchism in reflection on his work with South Indian forest hunters, the Malaipantaram.

This article brings together two long-standing interests of mine, as reflected in two of my books, namely *Forest Traders* (1982), a study of the socio-economic life of the Malaipantaram, a group of South Indian foragers, and *Kropotkin: the Politics of Community* (2004), which offers a critical account of the political philosophy and social ecology of the Russian revolutionary anarchist Peter Kropotkin.¹ The books have one thing in common. Both have been ignored by academics.

Apart from Peter Gardner,² no hunter-gatherer specialist ever mentions, or even cites, my study of the Malaipantaram. In a paper that emphasises the heterogeneous subsistence strategies among contemporary (not modern) hunter-gatherers, and aims to mediate between the 'traditionalists' (Richard Lee) and the 'revisionists' (Edwin Wilmsen) in the rather acrimonious Kalahari debate, Nurit Bird-David argues that contemporary ethnographic inquiry should concern itself with the 'dynamics of contact' between modern hunter-



Photo: Brian Morris

Hilla Pandaram family outside their leaf shelter, Achencoil forests, Kerala, 1972

gatherers and capitalism at the *local level*.³ This was precisely what my ethnographic study *Forest Traders*, published a decade earlier, had entailed! Anyone who reads this book will recognise that I don't treat the Malaipantaram as social isolates, nor do I deny them social agency – either individually or collectively – and I certainly do not describe the Malaipantaram as an unchanging society.⁴

Likewise, apart from a review in an obscure anarchist magazine, published by the Anarchist Federation, my book on Kropotkin has

never been reviewed in any academic journal, nor mentioned in recent academic texts on anarchism. A pioneer ecologist and a renowned geographer – his portrait still adorns the library of the Royal Geographic society – Kropotkin was also an anthropologist, the author of the classic text *Mutual Aid* (1902).⁵ Yet the reviews editor of the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* did not consider a book on such an obscure Russian anarchist as having any interest to anthropologists. And given the current academic fashion with so-called post-

anarchism, which invokes the ghosts of such radical individualists as Max Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche, a book on Kropotkin seems of little relevance also to contemporary academic anarchists.⁶

The dean of Khoisan studies, Alan Barnard, once wrote a perceptive paper on primitive communism: it was aptly subtitled 'Kropotkin Visits the Bushman'.⁷ In like fashion, in this paper, I want to bring together my two books – linking the Malaipantaram ethnography to Kropotkin's social anarchism – and to address the question: are South Indian foragers anarchists, or more precisely, can the social life of the Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers be described as a form of anarchy?

Anarchy and anarchism

I begin this discussion with a confession. When I completed a draft of my Ph.D thesis

it for any grammatical or stylistic errors or indiscretions. When she returned the thesis to me she declared: 'I don't believe a word of it'. When I asked why she responded: 'It is just a description of your own anarchist politics. I think you've made the whole thing up'.⁸



Kropotkin: anthropologist and anarchist

That hunter-gatherers and tribal people, more generally, have been described as living in a state of anarchy, has long been a common theme in anthropological writings. In recent years, with the

in the relationship between anarchism and anthropology. Indeed, I long ago suggested that there was a kind of 'elective affinity' between anarchism as a political tradition and anthropology. For scholars like Celestin Bougle, Marcel Mauss and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown had close associations with anarchism: Radcliffe-Brown in his early years was a devotee of Kropotkin and was known as 'Anarchy Brown'; while anarchists such as Kropotkin, Elie and Elise Reclus, Murray Bookchin and John Zerzan have all drawn extensively on anthropological writings in developing their own brand of anarchism.¹⁰

In his classic study *The Nuer*,¹¹ Evans-Pritchard famously described their political system as 'ordered anarchy' while Marshall Sahlins, equally famously, described the 'domestic mode of production' as a 'species of anarchy'. In true Hobbesian fashion, Sahlins negatively portrayed the

the reviews editor of the *JRAI* did not consider a book on such an obscure Russian anarchist as having any interest to anthropologists

on the Malaipantaram in 1974 – *Forest Traders* was a drastically shortened version of my thesis – I asked a close friend of mine who had a degree in English literature and is a talented poet, to read the manuscript and to check

highlighting of the presence of anarchists within the anti-capitalist and Occupy movements, together with the publication of James Scott's seminal *The Art of Not Being Governed*,⁹ there has been an upsurge of interest

social organization of tribal peoples as akin to a 'sack of potatoes'.¹² But, more importantly, long before the current interest in anarchist anthropology, the Canadian scholar Harold Barclay wrote a perceptive little book *People*

Without Government, which is subtitled ‘The anthropology of anarchism’.¹³ The book affirms that ‘anarchy is possible’ and describes not only hunter-gatherers – such as the Inuit, Bushmen, Yaka Pygmies, and the Australian Aborigines – as having

twentieth century, and is still a vibrant political tradition.¹⁵

In Kropotkin’s own understanding of anarchist history, anarchism sought to actualize the rallying sentiments of the French revolution – liberty, equality

less as some fixed, benign essence. A form of existential *individualism* is then a defining feature of anarchism as a political tradition.

Secondly, there is an emphasis on equality, and the affirmation of the community

In Kropotkin’s own understanding of anarchist history, anarchism sought to actualize the rallying sentiments of the French revolution – liberty, equality and fraternity

anarchic societies, but also tribal societies more generally. Finally, we may note that Peter Gardner, in his pioneering study of the Paliyan foragers of south India, entitles one of his key chapters ‘Respect, Equality and Peaceful Anarchy’ – emphasizing the fierce egalitarianism, the high value placed on individual autonomy, and the non-violent ethos that pervades the social life of these foragers.¹⁴

A distinction needs to be made, of course, between anarchy, which is an ordered society without government (or any enduring structures of domination and exploitation), and anarchism, which refers to an historical movement and political tradition. Emerging in Europe around 1870, in the aftermath of the defeated Paris Commune, mainly among workers in Spain, Italy, France and Switzerland, anarchism as a political movement subsequently spread throughout the world in the early years of the

and fraternity (social solidarity) – and entailed a creative synthesis of radical liberalism, with its emphasis on the liberty of the individual, and socialism (or communism) which implied a repudiation of capitalism, and the development of a society based on voluntary co-operation, mutual aid and community life.¹⁶

Anarchism may be defined for the purposes of the present essay in terms of three essential tenets or principles. Firstly, a strong emphasis is placed on the liberty of the individual, for the moving spirit of anarchism entails a fundamental focus on the sovereignty of the individual, and thus a complete rejection, not only of the state power but all forms of hierarchy and oppression that inhibit the autonomy of the individual person. For social anarchists the individual was viewed, of course, as a social being, not as a disembodied ego, or as some abstract individual, still

as a ‘society of equals’. For anarchists this implied a complete repudiation of the capitalist market economy along with its wage system, private property, its competitive ethos, and the ideology of possessive individualism. Anarchism thus upheld *egalitarianism* as both a social premise, and as an ethical principle.

Thirdly, it expressed a vision of society based solely on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation, a community-based form of social organization that would promote and enhance both the fullest expression of individual liberty, and all forms of social life that were independent of both the state and capitalism. The anarchists thus believed in voluntary co-operation, not in chaos, ephemerality or ‘anything goes’, and anarchists like Kropotkin viewed both tribal and kin-based societies as exhibiting many of the features of anarchy.¹⁷ *Communism* or

what Kropotkin described as free communism, was therefore one of the defining values (or characteristics) of anarchism as a political tradition – or at least a defining feature of the kind of anarchist communism that Kropotkin advocated.¹⁸

Anarchists like Kropotkin therefore did not view anarchy as something that existed only in the distant past, in the Palaeolithic era, nor as simply a utopian vision of some future society, but rather as a form of social life that had existed throughout human history – albeit, often hidden in contemporary societies, buried and unrecognised beneath the weight of capitalism and the state. As Colin Ward graphically put it: anarchy is like ‘a seed beneath the snow’.¹⁹

India – such as the Kadar, Paliyan, Malaipantaram and Jenu Kurubu – express what has been described as an individualistic ethic or culture.²⁰

To understand what this individualism entails, an initial note of clarification seems essential. For there has been a lamentable tendency on the part of many anthropologists to set up, in rather exotic fashion, a radical dichotomy between Western conceptions of the individual – misleadingly identified with Cartesian metaphysics or the ‘commodity’ metaphor – and that of other cultures. This radical dichotomy suggests that Western culture views the human subject as an egocentric, isolated, non-social, and rigidly bounded individual, whereas in other

criticisms.²³ We need, in fact, to go back to Immanuel Kant, and to commonsense understandings of the world.

Kant famously described anthropology as the study of ‘what is a human being’, or in contemporary parlance ‘what it means to be human’. In his seminal work *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*²⁴ published in the last decade of his life, Kant suggested the understanding of the human subject in terms of a triadic ontology, viewing the individual as a universal human being (*mensch*), as a unique self (*selbst*) and as a social being, a member of a particular group of people (*volk*). Kant, of course, focussed on the individual as a universal, rational subject, while his student and later critic Johann

the key distinction has to be made between the individualism of the South Indian foragers, and the various kinds of individualism associated with capitalist economy

I turn now to the ethnography of South Indian foragers, and will address the question as to whether their social life can be described as a form of anarchy in terms of these three defining features of anarchism as a political tradition, namely, individualism, egalitarianism and communism.

Individualism

It has long been recognised that the foragers of south

cultures – specifically Bali, India and Melanesia – people have a sociocentric concept of the subject. They view people as intrinsically social beings, a ‘microcosm of relations’, who conceive of themselves in terms of their social roles rather than as unique individuals.²¹ There exists in the world, therefore, we are told, ‘two types of person’.²² This kind of dualistic approach is quite untenable, and has been subject to several telling

Herder stressed that humans were fundamentally cultural beings. Many years later the anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn expressed this triadic ontology in simple everyday terms. Critical of dualistic conceptions of the human subject in terms of the nature (biology) versus culture dichotomy, Kluckhohn suggested, in contrast, that there were three essential ways of understanding the human subject. Every person,

he wrote, is in some respects like every other human being as a species being (humanity); that they are like no other human being in having a unique personality (or self); subject, like the existentialists (but unlike Durkheimian sociologists), places a fundamental focus on the individual as an independent person. They value and psychologically and economically independent at a very early age, and to respect the autonomy of other individuals. Thus, in contrast with neighbouring caste

**strong adherence to individual autonomy, and thus
an 'intense' individualism ... has been recognised by all
researchers on South Indian foragers**

and, finally, that they have affinities with some other humans, in being social or cultural beings (or persons).²⁵

The Malaipantaram, and other foragers of South India, like people everywhere, clearly affirm this triadic ontology. They recognise that the people they encounter are human beings (*manushyan*) as distinct from, say, elephants and monitor lizards; and that they have unique personalities, and a sense of their own individuality (which ought not to be equated with individualism

Photo: Brian Morris



Pandaram hunter, Achencoil valleys, 1972

as a cultural ethos). They recognise too that other humans, both within their own society, and with regard to outsiders, are social beings with ethnic affiliations and diverse social identities.²⁶

Significantly, the Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers' conception of the human

stress the autonomy of the individual. Both in terms of their child-rearing practices and their gathering economy the Malaipantaram place a high degree of emphasis on the person as an existential being – self-reliant and autonomous. Socialisation patterns – as a dialectical process – are largely geared to making a child socially,

communities, the Malaipantaram individual may constitute a unit of both production and consumption; and to live a solitary existence is not only possible but by no means unusual for older men, and it is not portrayed negatively.²⁷ A strong adherence to individual autonomy, and thus an 'intense' individualism (as it has been described), has been recognised by all researchers on South Indian foragers.

Although clearly linked to a gathering economy, both for subsistence and trade,

such individualism is also expressed in the diversity of their economic strategies, and their individual mobility and flexibility with regard to group membership. Indeed, individualism has been interpreted as a characteristic feature of hunter-gatherer societies generally, or at least those with an immediate-return economic system.²⁸

Nobody has expressed this individualistic ethos with more cogency than Peter Gardner, who in relation to the Paliyan and several other foragers, views it as intrinsically linked to individual decision-making, social mechanisms that undermine any form of hierarchy, a non-violent ethos, in that inter-personal conflicts are generally resolved through fission and mobility, and a general absence in the formalization of culture.²⁹

In *Forest Traders*, I noted that the ethnographic data on the Paliyans, who were characterised by a 'very extreme individualism',³⁰ seemed to run counter to Louis Dumont's argument that the presence of the individual – in its modern, normative sense – was not recognised in Indian society.³¹

I have written elsewhere on this apparent paradox,³² but what has to be recognised in the present context is that not only must a distinction be made between individuality (and the agency of the individual – acknowledged in most societies) and normative or cultural conceptions of the human subject, but also the fact that there are many distinct and contrasting forms of *individualism*.³³ Dumont himself devotes a good deal of discussion to two forms of individualism, besides that of economic individualism. One is that of the ascetic 'renouncer' in Hindu society, the *Sannyasin* whose individual identity is achieved by repudiating all ties that bind a person to the caste system (society) and the world. The other form of individualism is that

associated with the concept of *bildung* or 'self-cultivation' that was particularly associated with literary intellectuals in Germany at the end of the 18th century, and was later developed by Nietzsche and by his poststructuralist devotees.³⁴

But the key distinction that has to be made is that between the individualism of the South Indian foragers, and the various kinds of individualism that are generally associated with the capitalist economy, if not with many aspects of Western culture. These range from that of Cartesian philosophy, with its notion of a disembodied ego radically separate from nature and social life;³⁵ the abstract or possessive individualism of liberal theory that was long ago lampooned by Marx and Bakunin; the methodological individualism of optimal foraging theory;³⁶ and the radical egoism of Ayn Rand which advocates a form of selfishness that has little or no regard for other humans.³⁷

All four kinds of bourgeois individualism were repudiated by Kropotkin and the early social anarchists, as all tended to deny the social nature of the human subject. The mode of individualism that Kropotkin advocated, in contrast, he described as '*personalismus or pro sibi communisticu*' – the



Distribution of foraging groups in India

kind of individuality that is inherently social.³⁸

More recently, Susan Brown has followed Kropotkin in making a clear distinction between instrumental or possessive individualism, manifested through the market, and the existentialist individualism advocated by the social anarchists – as expressed in the individuals' capacity to be autonomous and self-determining.³⁹ Clearly, the kind of individualism expressed by the Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers has close affinities with the existentialist individualism described by Brown. Indeed she defines social anarchism as combining existential individualism with free communism.⁴⁰

Making a distinction between the individualism of hunter-gatherers and the rugged individualism of modern capitalism is not saying anything new or original. Long ago, Stanley Diamond emphasised that the mode of thought expressed by tribal societies, specifically hunter-gatherers, with respect to the human subject, was one that was concrete, existential and personalistic.⁴¹

Egalitarianism

In *Forest Traders*, I emphasised that an egalitarian ideal permeated Malaipantaram society, and that this ethos contrasted

markedly from the emphasis on hierarchy in surrounding agricultural communities, particularly in relation to gender, and with regard to the higher castes.⁴² In fact, I argued that Malaipantaram society was both egalitarian and individualistic in its essential ethos.⁴³ Around the same time, James Woodburn published his seminal paper on 'Egalitarian societies',⁴⁴ although it is well to recall that as a concept 'egalitarianism' is hardly mentioned in what constitutes one of the founding texts of hunter-gatherer studies.⁴⁵ But it is generally recognised that egalitarianism is a fundamental characteristic not only of South Indian foragers, but all hunter-gathering societies with an immediate-return economic system.⁴⁶

Among the Malaipantaram and South Indian foragers egalitarianism is manifested in diverse ways, both as an ethos, as a constellation of values and normative expectations, and in their social relationships (indeed, their cultural values and social actions are inter-linked and dialectically related). We can briefly mention, with regard to such egalitarianism, three topics of interest: the emphasis on sharing, their attitude towards authority structures, and their general emphasis on equality, especially in relation to gender.

As in many other hunter-gathering societies, among

the Malaipantaram meat from wild animals is always shared within the camp or settlement and every person is entitled to a share. Although the hunting of mammals such as sambar, chevrotain and various monkeys is practised, most of the meat obtained is through eclectic foraging, and what almost amounts to the 'gathering' of small animals – specifically tortoises, bats, monitor lizards and squirrels.⁴⁷ Apart from the sharing of meat, sharing is in fact limited among the Malaipantaram, and economic exchange within the community is best described in terms of reciprocity and mutual aid.

Although in various Malaipantaram settlements there are recognised 'headmen' (*Muppan*), these are largely a function of administrative control introduced by the state via the Forest Department, in order to facilitate communication. Such headmen have little or no control over the lives or movements of other members of the local group.⁴⁸ There is, in fact, among the Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers, a marked antipathy towards any form of authority, or any form of hierarchy, whether based on wealth, prestige or power. In their everyday life the emphasis is always on being modest non-aggressive and non-competitive, engaging with others in terms of an ethos that puts a fundamental

emphasis on mutual aid and on respecting the autonomy of others, especially those with whom a person regularly associates. But as many scholars have indicated, the stress on egalitarian relationships does not simply imply a lack of hierarchy, but is actively engendered by forms of social power – diffuse sanctions or levelling mechanisms – expressed and enforced by means of criticisms, ridicule, ostracism, desertion, or by the simple, voluntary adherence to customary norms, as I am doing in writing this essay in intelligible English.⁴⁹ It seems to me that to describe this form of social power, and the diffuse sanctions that are entailed, as implying ‘reverse-dominance hierarchy’⁵⁰ or as a form of ‘governance’⁵¹ is quite misleading, for the Malaipantaram have a marked aversion to all forms of domination and governance; this, of course, does not imply that they live in the forest in a state of *anomie*.

Photo: Brian Morris



Boy with Giant Hornbill

Given this emphasis on egalitarian relations it is not surprising that gender relations among the Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers are

typically recognised as being equal. In *Forest Traders*, acknowledging the social and economic independence of women, I stressed that there was a high degree of equality between the sexes, especially when contrasted with gender relations among

has authority over the other.⁵³ But given the harassment that Malaipantaram have generally to contend with, or what Gardner described as ‘inter-cultural pressure’,⁵⁴ I never encountered a Malaipantaram woman foraging alone in the forest.⁵⁵

In a widely-acclaimed essay on Marshall Sahlins’ renowned thesis describing hunter-gatherers as the ‘original affluent society’,⁵⁶ Nurit Bird-David seems to inflate the notion of sharing, which is a key element of egalitarianism, into a rather metaphysical principle.⁵⁷ Sharing thus becomes a totalising concept that incorporates almost all aspects of

the social and cultural life of the Nayaka. By implication her model applies to all foragers with an immediate-return economic system, although interestingly she makes no mention at all of other South Indian foragers. It is of interest, too, that

**the stress on egalitarian relationships ... is actively
engendered by .. diffuse sanctions or levelling mechanisms
...criticisms, ridicule, ostracism, desertion**

They are, however, like other South Indian foragers, well attuned to the ‘art of not being governed’.⁵²

caste communities. Within the conjugal family men and women have more or less equal rights, and neither party

whereas Bird-David endorses Sahlins’ thesis of the hunter-gatherer ‘Zen road to affluence’, in *Forest Traders* I

made no mention at all of this questionable thesis.⁵⁸

There is nothing amiss with describing South Indian foragers as individualistic or egalitarian, or as having a 'sharing ethos', but Bird-David's analysis is a typical example of what Kathleen Morrison describes as typological and essentialist thinking,⁵⁹ for although this analysis obviously has a ring of truth, it gives quite a biased portrait of the social and cultural life of South Indian foragers. In following Colin Turnbull's (mis)-interpretation of Mbuti

and misfortunes, but from the maraudings of real elephants.⁶⁰ Indeed, rather than living in a 'giving environment',⁶¹ the Malaipantaram and other south Indian foragers appeal to the ancestral spirits (*chavu*) or the forest deities (*malai devi*, mountain gods) not only when there are illnesses and misfortunes, but also when there is a *lack* of food or honey, or hunting has not been successful. Through shamanistic rituals, the reasons for the lack of food or misfortunes is explained in terms of the foragers not upholding certain customary norms or moral edicts,

reduced to a single metaphor, however engaging and illuminating.

The Malaipantaram do recognise the forest as their home, and have warm feelings towards the forest as the essential source of their livelihood and well-being. It is the abode of their ancestral spirits and the forest deities on whom they can always call upon for support and protection, and thus the forest is always a place of refuge.⁶²

Likewise, although sharing is a fundamental ethic among the Malaipantaram,

an egalitarian ideal permeates Malaipantaram society, and this ethos contrasts markedly from the emphasis on hierarchy in surrounding agricultural communities

religion as a form of crude pantheism, Bird-David tends to *conflate* natural phenomena – whether mountains, rivers, rock outcrops, stones, trees or animals (especially elephants) – as well as artefacts with the spiritual beings – malevolent spirits, ancestral spirits and forest deities – that, according to the forager's religious ideology, inhabit or have their 'abode' in the forest, or are identified with certain figurines or icons. But these two aspects of the forager's life-world are distinct. Ananda Bhanu writes, for example, of the Chola Naickan calling on the spirits, represented in an elephant figurine (*aneuruva*) to protect them, not only against illness

particularly not respecting other people's autonomy, or not sharing or offering mutual aid to their close kindred. Equally, by focusing on their religious ideology, Bird-David completely ignores the empirical naturalism that is manifested in their ecological knowledge of the natural world and in their practical activities, and which is equally a part of the foragers' culture. The metaphor 'giving environment' is misleading, for, like people in all societies, the relationship of the Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers to the natural world, is one that is complex, diverse, multifaceted and often contradictory, and cannot be

one has to recognise that it is not ubiquitous. For the Malaipantaram are involved in market relations, and though they always strive to make these relationships inclusive – as Justin Kenrick⁶³ describes it – that is friendly, sharing, personal and one involving mutual aid and support, these relationships are essentially hierarchical and exploitative, and they are ones that the foragers do not control. As Mathur describes market relationships among the Chola Naickan, who are clearly related to the local group described by Bird-David, what the foragers attempt and prefer is to 'act as a generous kinsman rather than a self-seeking trader'

in contrast to the forest contractor who always seeks to control and exploit the foragers.⁶⁴

Equally important, one has to recognise that there is very little sharing between families among the Malaipantaram, and it is the family that is the key productive and commensal unit. It always struck me as unusual that after a day spent together in eclectic foraging, both for food and for minor forest produce, co-operating, conversing, and engaging in banter, on returning to the cave in the late afternoon each of

human societies engage to some degree in sharing or generalised reciprocity⁶⁵ but the relationship between such sharing and reciprocity is always dialectical. Malaipantaram men who are deeply involved in hunting, especially in the marketing of the Nilgiri langur, tend to live separately with their family, in order to avoid sharing the meat, while any individual who constantly engages in demand-sharing – without any reciprocation – is likely to find his or her own kin moving elsewhere. And among

Rexroth once wrote: 'People who hunt and gather cannot be anything but communist'.⁶⁸ There has, of course, been a long tradition, going back to Lewis Morgan and Friedrich Engels in the nineteenth century, affirming that hunter-gatherers – those 'roving savages' as Engels described them – and tribal or kin-based societies more generally, live in 'communitic communities'.⁶⁹ By communism was meant not simply the absence of private

The key idea expressed by the Malaipantaram is one of mutual aid – which includes sharing, reciprocity and an ethic of generosity

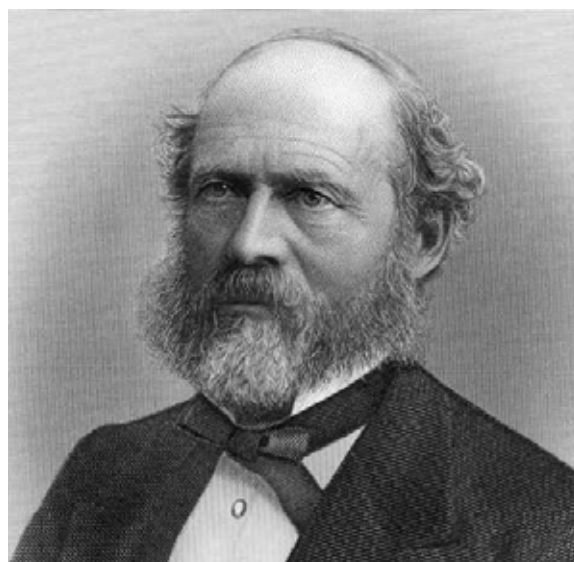
the three families would build their own fireplace, establish a distinct commensal unit and that there would be no sharing at all between the different families.

Although a distinction can be made between tribal agriculturalists and South Indian foragers like the Malaipantaram, and even between those Malaipantaram who are settled cultivators and those foragers living exclusively in the interior (on whom I focused in my research), it is misleading to set up a radical opposition between sharing and reciprocity. All

the Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers there is a clear distinction made between food gathered from the forest, and the goods – whether rice, condiments, or artefacts – that are obtained from engaging in market relations. The latter kind tend to involve a more balanced reciprocity.⁶⁶ The key idea expressed by the Malaipantaram is one of mutual aid – which includes sharing, reciprocity and an ethic of generosity.⁶⁷

Communism

The American poet Kenneth



Lewis Henry Morgan saw 'communism in living' among the Iroquois

(exclusive) property but rather a universal collective right of access to all resources necessary for life and well-being – specifically rights to land and the means of production, the only property 'owned' being of a purely personal nature.⁷⁰

In his well-known reflections on 'primitive communism', Richard Lee⁷¹ noted that the concept was not only

ignored by later Marxists – Chris Harman’s *A People’s History of the World*,⁷² for example, barely recognises the existence of tribal peoples – but was generally dismissed and belittled by most anthropologists. Lee tends to identify primitive communism with what he describes as the ‘foraging’ mode of production. He tends, therefore, to leave out of his account not only hunter-gatherers that are sedentary and non-egalitarian – such as the Ainu (Japan), Calusa (Florida) and the hunter-gatherers of the northwest coast of the Americas – but also the Iroquois. For Morgan, however, it was the Iroquois that were the prototypical primitive communists. Democratic and egalitarian, they were the exemplars of the ‘liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes’.⁷³

In several essays Lee outlines what he terms the ‘core features’ of primitive communism, or the foraging mode of production. These are the following:

- social life in the society or ethnic community is focused around a band structure with small groups of 20-30 people, highly flexible membership and an emphasis on mobility, often with patterns of concentration and dispersal.
- Land is held in common

and everyone has free or reciprocal access to resources. There is no ownership in the sense of completely withholding access.

- An ethic of egalitarianism implies strong, even if diffuse, sanctions against the accumulation of wealth, all forms of political authority, and any expression of self-aggrandisement.
- Such egalitarianism involves co-operation and mutual aid, and patterns of sharing or generalised reciprocity are strongly emphasised, especially within the band or camp. No one goes hungry if food is available.
- An emphasis on co-operation and sociality is combined with a high respect for the autonomy of the individual, especially individual choice as to who a person lives with.⁷⁴

Primitive communism or the foraging mode of production thus entails a combination

production – primitive communism – are virtually synonymous with those specified by Woodburn⁷⁵ in terms of immediate-return economic systems; by Gardner⁷⁶ in terms of the individual autonomy syndrome; and Barnard’s⁷⁷ specifications of the hunter-gatherer ‘mode of thought’.

Equally significant is that the Malaipantaram, as depicted in my study *Forest Traders*, as well as South Indian foragers more generally, can clearly be described as communists, as exemplars of the foraging mode of production (or thought), even though they may engage in a diversity of economic activities.⁷⁸

It has become rather fashionable nowadays to suggest like Ayn Rand – Margaret Thatcher’s guru – that societies do not exist, and that all we supposedly experience is sociality, social networks or lines, with the human person simply being the nodal point or intersection of various relations; though

the Malaipantaram... as well as South Indian foragers more generally, can clearly be described as communists, as exemplars of the foraging mode of production

of individualism and egalitarianism. What is evident is that these core features or attributes of the foraging mode of

nobody seems to doubt the reality of the state and capitalist organisations. It has even been suggested that the concept of society

is not applicable to hunter-gatherers, being defined, in rather Hobbesian fashion, as entailing 'structures of domination'. The concept of

regard themselves both as Yaka (or forest people) as well as a distinct society;⁸¹ and, finally, with regard to the Paliyans of South India,

and are recognised as such not only by the Indian state, but by all people with whom they come into contact. But they do not form a cohesive

People at the settlement are intimately associated with the hill forests above the settlement,.. [forming] ritual congregations in relation to the ancestral spirits (*chaval*) and mountain deities (*malai devā*) which have their 'abodes' in the same forested hills

society, of course, emerged at the end of the eighteenth century, as a relational one, in contradistinction to the nation-state, that was then asserting its hegemony. The distinction between society and the state (entailing structures of political domination or government) was not only articulated by such radical liberals as Tom Paine, but, of course, by numerous anarchists from William Godwin at the end of the eighteenth century to Kropotkin, Reclus and the social anarchists in the twentieth century.

Like other primates, all humans live in groups of various kinds, and from the ethnographic record it is quite clear that hunter-gatherers live in societies. For the Hadza have a clear and distinctive ethnic identity;⁷⁹ the Ju/'hoansi of the Kalahari recognise themselves as a society of 'real people' with a distinctive culture and language – as many scholars have described,⁸⁰ the Mbendjele of central Africa

they are described as being 'both in their own, and in their neighbours' eyes, a separate ethnic group'⁸² or, in everyday language, a society. Dismissing the concept of 'society' as a stereotype is hardly helpful to understanding hunter-gatherers.⁸³

A human society, of course, is simply a group of humans who are linked to each other by enduring social ties, who share certain values, beliefs, normative expectations and purposes, and whose members have a sense of belonging to the group. A society, as Kropotkin long ago emphasised, is essentially a moral, not a political, community.⁸⁴ To even talk about an 'egalitarian ethos', or 'mode of thought' presupposes the existence and identity of a specific hunter-gatherer society.

The Malaipantaram, and other South Indian foragers, identify themselves as belonging to a specific society or ethnic community,

political unit, but are 'fragmented', as I expressed it in *Forest Traders*,⁸⁵ into diverse, flexible but inter-related social groupings. Basically, with regard to the Malaipantaram, as a society or moral community, there exists three levels of organisation, namely the forest settlements, the conjugal family, and what I termed forest camps, the loose groupings of two or three families, who are linked essentially by affinal ties.⁸⁶

Named after particular forest locations, the dispersed *settlements* are local groups, consisting of between 18 and 36 people. They are situated in specific valleys or forest ranges. At the settlements the Malaipantaram often engage in the cultivation of tapioca or rice, as well as certain fruit-bearing trees, and often engage in casual agricultural labour on nearby estates. People at the settlement are intimately associated with the hill forests above the settlement, and have extensive knowledge of the forest environment and its diverse inhabitants. They also

form ritual congregations in relation to the ancestral spirits (*chava*) and mountain deities (*malai devi*) which have their 'abodes' in the same forested hills. The settlement or local group is rarely a cohesive unit, and is often divided into several 'clusters' or hamlets, each composed of 2-4 families.⁸⁷ Though widely dispersed over the Ghat mountains south of Lake Periyar, the settlements are by no means isolated,

do not have corporate, land-owning kin groups, is no reason to suggest that they do not live in groups! I have discussed in *Forest Traders* at some length, the forest groups of the Malaipantaram, and have suggested that although membership is often flexible and transient, and all Malaipantaram are highly mobile, acting as independent persons, such groups are in the nature of a kindred, and people are united in terms

camps.⁹⁰

Malaipantaram social life, and that of other South Indian foragers, can therefore be described, in important respects, as communistic. But many scholars have suggested that there is an inevitable tension, or contradiction, between egalitarianism (with the emphasis on mutual aid, sharing and sociality) and individualism (with stress on the autonomy of the

Anarchists like Kropotkin and Reclus always recognised that the basic principles of anarchism were characteristic of hunter-gatherers and tribal society generally

for all Malaipantaram are linked by a universal system of kinship,⁸⁸ and thus there are kinship links, particularly affinal ties, between members of the various settlements.

In contrast the conjugal family is a fairly cohesive unit, forming a distinct social and economic grouping. As noted above, the family is the basic productive and commensal unit, even though marriage ties are often transient. Conjugal relations are generally warm and affectionate, essentially reciprocal and complementary.

Between the dispersed settlements or local groups, and the conjugal family there are social aggregates that are difficult to define. But the fact that the Malaipantaram

of affinal ties. As I put it: 'Affinal links seem to serve as a guiding principle in structuring friendships and camp aggregates.'⁸⁹

People that constitute the camp aggregates are drawn together by 'dyadic bonds of affection' and express enduring relationships of mutual aid, as well as expressing an ethic of sharing and reciprocity. Malaipantaram social structure cannot therefore be interpreted simply as consisting of independent families with floating 'single persons' (mostly adolescents) giving social cohesion to the local group. All Malaipantaram act, and are expected to act, as autonomous individuals; it is affinal ties that structure their relationships and their forest

individual).⁹¹ Indeed liberal scholars like Isaiah Berlin stressed that there was an inherent conflict between the values of equality and liberty. But as anarchists have always emphasised, the two concepts are dialectically related, and necessarily imply each other. As Kropotkin put it: you can hardly be free and independent in a society based on inequality and hierarchy.

Among the Malaipantaram, and it seems hunter-gatherers more generally, an egalitarian ethos seems to co-exist with an equal emphasis on the autonomy of the individual. As I wrote long ago: 'A viable ethnographic portrait can be drawn only if we stress the co-operation and the individualism, the warm attachments Malaipantaram

hold towards each other and the fragility and ephemeral nature of these ties'.⁹²

ever envisaged a society without some form of social power, immanent within

the plains, the exactions of the Indian state bent on their development and settlement

the Malaipantaram attempted to retain their independence and cultural integrity despite being ridiculed and harassed by the caste communities of the plains

Conclusion

Having outlined above the individualism, egalitarianism and communism that is undoubtedly manifested in the social life of the Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers, can such foragers be described as living in a state of anarchy?

Judging by the ethnographies of Peter Gardner and myself the answer seems to be in the affirmative.

Indeed Jana Fortier certainly suggests that the micropolitics of both the Paliyan and the Malaipantaram can be depicted as anarchy.⁹³ Yet other scholars have balked at the idea. Christopher Boehm, for example, dismisses the whole idea that the 'egalitarian blueprint' of hunter-gathering is a form of anarchy, suggesting that anarchy implies a complete absence of power and control.⁹⁴ Apart from Stirnerite individualists, no social anarchist has

the community – power as mutuality and equality, as Barclay expressed it.⁹⁵

In my study of the Malaipantaram, written



Paliyan women from Sirumali hills, Tamilnadu

almost forty years ago, I emphasised how much of their social life and culture – their nomadism, their flexible organization, and their reluctance to take up agriculture and become a settled community – was an attempt to retain their autonomy as a forest people. Thus the Malaipantaram attempted to retain their independence and cultural integrity despite being ridiculed and harassed by the caste communities of

and the intrusions of a mercantile economy focused around the trade of minor forest products. The suggestion that in emphasising the external social factors that impinge on Malaipantaram social life, I thereby deny them social agency⁹⁶ is misleading. The whole ethnography is, in fact, about their social agency: how the Malaipantaram derive their basic livelihood; how they organise their kin relations and

forest camps, and how through their nomadism and flexible social organization – and many other ploys – they retain a sense of autonomy and independence. And I also stressed, like many other late scholars of hunter-gatherers, that among the Malaipantaram a strong emphasis on personal autonomy and independence co-existed, as I noted above, with an equal emphasis on mutual aid, sharing and egalitarian relationships. Malaipantaram social life could therefore be described

as a form of anarchy.

Anarchists like Kropotkin and Reclus, of course, always recognised and affirmed that the basic principles of anarchism – the liberty of the individual, egalitarianism and a form of social life based on co-operation, sharing and

mutual aid – was characteristic of hunter-gatherers and tribal society generally.⁹⁷ What they advocated was not a return to hunter-gathering, and the advocacy of some form of anarcho-primitivism,⁹⁸ but rather, drawing on the knowledge, technics, arts and sciences that humanity has

accumulated over the past five thousand years or so, their aim was to engender an anarchist-communist society, where productive activities and all social functions, would be organised through voluntary cooperation and mutual aid, the wealth produced being shared equally with *all*. 🐉



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4. cf. N. Bird-David 1996. Puja, or sharing with the god? On ritualised possession among the Nayaka of South India *Eastern Anthropology* 49: 260; Norstrom 2003. *They Call For Us: Strategies for securing autonomy among the Paliyan hunter-gatherers of the Palni Hills, South India*. Stockholm: Stockholm Studies in Social Anthropology 53, p.49. In fact, a decade before the revisionist controversy, I was emphasizing, while explicitly acknowledging the earlier seminal work of Richard Fox (1969 'Professional primitives': Hunter gatherers in nuclear South Asia *Man in India* 49: 139-160) and Peter Gardner (1972 *The Paliyans*. In M.G. Bichieri (ed.) *Hunters and Gatherers Today*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston pp. 404-47), that the Malaipantaram had long been incorporated into a wider mercantile capitalist economy. But in dialectical fashion, I also stressed their social agency in maintaining their autonomy and cultural integrity as a foraging community.
5. P. Kropotkin 1939 [1902]. *Mutual Aid: A factor in evolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. Essentially this text was a repudiation of the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer and Thomas Huxley that was prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century.
6. e.g. D. Rouselle and S. Evren (eds) 2011. *Post-anarchism: A Reader*. London: Pluto Press.
7. A. Barnard 1993. Primitive communism

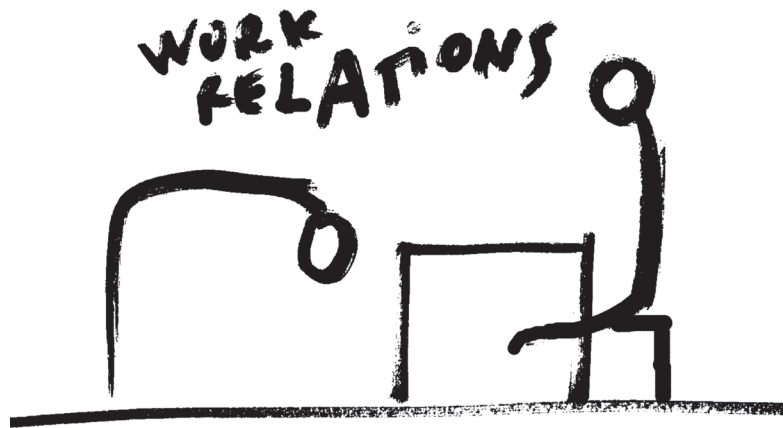
- and mutual aid: Kropotkin visits the Bushmen. In C.M. Hahn (ed) *Socialism: Ideals, ideologies and local practices*. London: Routledge pp 27-42.
8. This raises the interesting question as to what degree anthropologists, in their ethnographic accounts, impose upon the data their own epistemological and political pre-conceptions?
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15. L. Van Der Walt and M. Schmidt 2009. *Black Flame: The revolutionary class politics of anarchism and syndicalism*. Edinburgh: AK Press.
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18. Morris, pp. 69-74.
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21. C. Geertz 1975 [1973] *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays*. London: Hutchinson, pp. 360-411; R. A. Shweder and E.J. Bourne 1984. Does the concept of the person vary cross-culturally? In R.A. Shweder and R.A. Levine (eds) *Culture Theory: Essays in mind, self and emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 158-199; M. Strathern 1988 *The Gender of the Gift*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
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83. It is often said that foragers (or tribal people) do not have a concept of 'society' that matches that of the anthropologists. Why on earth should they? Foragers may not have a concept of the 'economy' or 'culture' but this does not imply that they have no economic life or no culture. Terms such as Kudumbam (family, kin group) like the English terms 'group' or 'society' have a wide range of meanings (or referents). This does not imply they have no society, or that the Malaipantaram is not a society.
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86. Morris, p.30.
87. cf. Misra 1969: 206 on the Jenu Kuruba; N. Bird-David 1983 Wage gathering: Socio-economic changes and the case of the food-gathering Naikens of South India. In P. Robb (ed.) *Rural South India*. London: Curzon Press, pp.57-88, on the Nayaka.
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90. cf. Bird-David 1987: 151-165; U. Demmer 1997. Voices in the forest: The field of gathering among Jenu Kurumba. In P. Hockings (ed.) *Blue Mountains Re-visited*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp.164-191.
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Contemporary art workers: Precarity and alternatives in Romania

Stefan Voicu examines the rhetorical confusion in the Romanian art market and the consequent material and emotional exploitation of intern workers.



Work Relations, Dan Perjovschi (2009)

In 2011, a period of acute global economic crisis, the art market was doing fine. Artprice¹ estimated that that year more than 41,000 contemporary artworks were sold in the world which generated a total profit of over \$1.26 billion, experiencing a growth since 2001, when the general revenue was estimated at \$87.7 million. In contrast, the majority of *art workers* were and still are faced with economic *precarity*. One of the most vocal groups of art workers that addressed the issues of precarity is the Arts & Labor working group from the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement. The Arts & Labor group aimed to outline the discontents of art workers and to incorporate

them into the “99%”, defining themselves as:

*artists and interns, writers and educators, art handlers and designers, administrators, curators, assistants, and students. We are all art workers [...] dedicated to exposing and rectifying economic inequalities and exploitative working conditions in our fields through direct action and educational initiatives. By forging coalitions, fighting for fair labor practices, and reimagining the structures and institutions that frame our work.*²

Romanian art workers organised similar initiatives. On March 21, 2011, a group of artists occupied The National Center of Dance – Bucharest (CNDB Ocupat)

and sent a callout to ‘artists, students, teachers, activists, sympathizers, friends and whoever is interested’. This action was a response to the uncertain relocation of CNDB after the commencement of renovation works at the National Theater of Bucharest (TNB) building, where it had resided since 2004. But, as choreographer Madalina Dan stated in an interview, ‘it was also a form of artistic resistance that militates actively for the legitimization of contemporary art in Romania.’³

That year I worked at and did research on a non-profit contemporary art and culture institution based in Bucharest, Romania. When I started

participating in their activities in February, the institution was composed of a four-member executive board and a nine-member administrative team. Nevertheless, only five persons were day-to-day

justified by the financial crisis. I argue that precarity is a position within hierarchical power relations of neoliberal politics, in a given situation, rather than a collateral effect of the 'free market'.

(ICR), from 2003.

Alternative funding came from international cultural organisations, representing nation states, like the French Institute, the Goethe Institute,

precarity is a position within hierarchical power relations of neoliberal politics...rather than a collateral effect of the 'free market'

active: the intern, the assistant director, the coordinator, the executive of the board and the director. It consisted of three so-called 'instruments for critical thinking': namely the Center for Contemporary Art and Culture, the Biennial of Contemporary Art and the Journal of Politics and Culture. The goal of the institution was, and still is, 'to produce and research the visual, the performative and the discursive', 'to know and to be active for the society, the city, and the community', 'to promote an understanding of art and cultural institutions as socio-politically involved'.⁴

In this article, focusing on my practices as a worker in this institution, I will be describing precarity in context, and the alternatives to it unraveling in the Romanian art networks. Besides the description of contemporary art associations in Romania, this article implicitly stands as a critique of the modes in which precarity is often

Market revenues, state and corporate subsidies

In Romania, the primary sources of income for contemporary art workers were state subsidies. Rațiu⁵ mentions that contemporary art has been funded by the Ministry of Culture through the artistic institutions found in its administration, like the National Museum of Contemporary Art (MNAC), open since 2004, or the National Center of Dance

the British Council, etc. More recently the Polish, Czech and Austrian institutes became active in Bucharest. Private organisations contributed as well, like the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and, very active in recent years, the ERSTE Foundation. The art workers' unions established during the communist period, like the Union of Plastic Artists (UAP), did not disappear, but received less funding and to a certain extent emerging artists were underprivileged by these. The art market was hardly an alternative source of income since, as Rațiu⁶ points out, it did not flourish. In 2007, Bucharest had only 12 commercial galleries.



Job, Dan Perjovschi (2005)

– Bucharest (CNDB); as well as through relatively autonomous organisations like the Administration of the National Cultural Fund (AFCN), from 1999, and the Romanian Cultural Institute

The institution I researched is one of the few non-profit contemporary art organisations in Romania, if not the only one, that gets funded by a corporate bank. This bank provides 50% of the annual budget, and the working facilities needed. For the other 50%, the institution has to associate with the Romanian and

What drives this intricate circulation of capital is the adoption of a *metapragmatic register*

international governmental and government-affiliated institutions and private foundations and corporations.



Be More Explicit, Dan Perjovschi (2006)

In order to form these associations, the team elaborates short-term projects with which they apply for grants.

Exhibitions, journal publications or lectures are such projects, but most of the time this endeavour is more demanding, as in the case of the Biennial of Contemporary

Art, which requires an amount of finance too big to be amortized by using the regular strategy of not paying art workers' fees. During the 5th edition of the Bucharest Biennial (BB5), which took place in 2012, a leaflet with the financial stats was distributed to the visitors, as a response to the critiques faced by the institution on behalf of Romanian art workers.

From a total budget of 124,100€, 16.1% in cash came from the bank as strategic partner. 10.4%, also in cash, was granted by the institutional partners, among which the 'traditional' ICR, but also new institutions like: BAM, the Flemish Institute for Visual, Audiovisual and Media Art; IASPIS, the International Artists Studio Program in Stockholm; the University of Bucharest; and the US and Netherlands Embassies. This budget was distributed in the following manner: 47.2% exhibition costs, 30.5% PR and communication costs, 9.2% went on publications, 4.7% curators' costs, 4.6% artist-related costs and 3.8% organisational costs.

What drives this intricate circulation of capital is the adoption of a *metapragmatic register*, i.e. an abstract set of ideas that justify actions,⁷

that considers art workers and artworks as instruments for social and economic development. The same metapragmatic justified that particular distribution of the biennial's budget.

Metapragmatic registers

Why, instead of the more popular terms of ideology, discourse or narrative, employ the concept of metapragmatic register? Because, although these analytical tools seem to describe similar things, I believe that this concept avoids the ubiquity of the habitual terms used in the humanities and social sciences. Taking for granted words like ideology, discourse or narrative leads to misunderstandings generated by the interpretations made from a certain trajectory of the term. The metapragmatic register is a relatively pristine concept. I draw its usage from Boltanski who argues that metapragmatic registers are transformations of

"the opinion that everyone can have "in their possession" into a common knowledge, such that everyone henceforth knows that what he knows (or is supposed to know) the others also know and know that he knows it, in accordance with the logic of, common knowledge on which game theory establishes the possibility of epistemic equilibria (but treating them as the result of interactive

mechanisms, without raising the question of the bodies authorized to give the judgement the character of an attested public fact').⁸

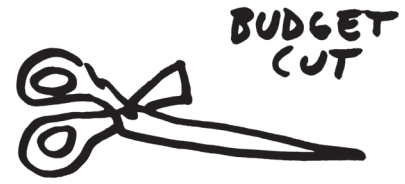
Moreover

'[t]his signifies that performances of this kind must not only be realized with others, but also in front of others, placed in the position of witnesses, and whose presence, far from being restricted to being physically actual in a certain place at a certain time, must be associated with some form or other of engagement, if only that of memorizing what has occurred – that is to say, being in a position, if necessary, to recall its factual character to a contradictor.'⁹

Metapragmatic registers do not capture the idiosyncratic characteristics of art workers' and artworks' actions, leading often to disputes over the value of art work and artworks that break associations made between different institutional entities. Moreover, institutions adopt

justification for state support of the arts in Romania. First, artworks are viewed as responsible for creating and disseminating national identity and art workers as being 'guarantors of national cultural identity'.¹¹ Secondly, artworks and art workers are seen as tools of and factors in social and economic development. Thirdly, the government conceives its actions as interventions meant to reinstate social and economic equity among art workers, as a result of art market failures. Fourthly, the intrinsic value of artworks are considered as an 'essential element of a life that deserves to be lived' and a 'human accomplishment'.¹²

Likewise, in the institution I researched there were different interchanging metapragmatic registers. One involved cultural marxism with anarchist tendencies,¹³



Budget Cut, Dan Perjovschi (2011)

made possible the associations between the institution and the Romanian government, the corporate bank and other sources of funding, the former justified disputes emerging from the idiosyncrasies of the institution's actions.

Because of this oscillation, there was a lack of rhetorical consistency in the institution's actions, perpetuated in the associations made between the institution and state, corporate, non-governmental institutions, informal groups and individuals, which had an impact on the perception of these different entities on the institution. For example,

as a worker I saw this oscillation between the two metapragmatic registers in the polarity between the emphasis on collective decision-making and top-down directives

intermittently different registers.

The postcommunist Romanian governments valued artworks and art workers according to different metapragmatic registers, depending on the *interests* of the political parties in power. Rațiu¹⁰ identified four types of

by which art workers' actions were considered to be different, but of equal value. The other was an anti-communist, neo-liberal one that emerged after 1989 in most of the former communist nation-states from Eastern Europe, with some overt nuances in the case of Romania.¹⁴ Whereas the latter

an art collective which was supposed to participate in an exhibition, but withdrew because the institution did not provide a fee, has termed this inconsistency of the institution's practices 'an a r c h o - c o r p o r a t e schizophrenia',¹⁵ stating that the apparent anarchist point of view of the institution is in

fact a mode of concealing corporate interests.

Organising art work

This inconsistency had an impact on my point of view as well, when as a worker I saw this oscillation between the two metapragmatic registers in the polarity between the emphasis on collective decision-making and top-down directives. In processes of collective decision-making, it was stressed by the director that every member of the team, the intern, the coordinator, the executive of the board and the assistant director, had equal rights to present and pursue their opinion, as in the case of my appointment as an intern, and later on in the periodical meetings we had for the purpose of evaluating and planning activities. Still, at the same time, the formal hierarchies of the team were often reinforced in moments of authority disputes, especially by the director himself.

Regardless of the relatively emancipatory position of the institution's cultural marxism, the two metapragmatics deployed within the working environment were unbalanced, with hierarchical structures of domination being frequently asserted. As such, subaltern art workers like myself were often impeded from pursuing their own interests and were being ascribed with identities that they themselves hardly

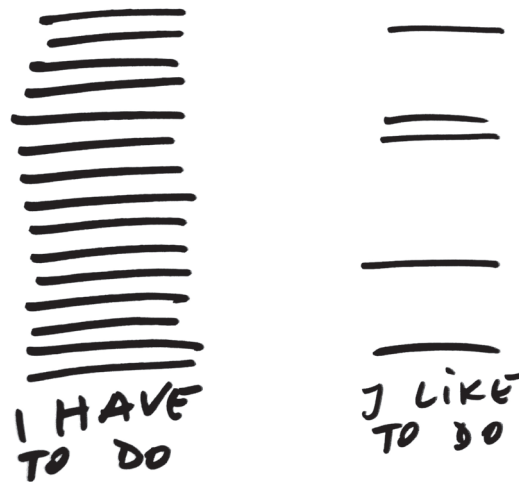
identified with.

Both the emphasis on collective decision-making and the reinforcement of the hierarchies were made within a very elusive and open ended *affective* realm, composed of actions and re-actions of the senses. According to Massumi, 'affect is synesthetic, implying a participation of the senses in each other: the measure of a living thing's potential interactions is its ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into those of another'.¹⁶ In the institution, strategies within this affective realm consisted in sensorial interactions abstracted as trust-building, in the case of the collective decision-making, and ranged from emotional blackmail to verbal abuse, in the case of hierarchy reinforcement.

The benefit of operating affectively was that, for example, uncertainties were

framed in an organising mechanism of trust-building and easily recodified in emotional blackmail or verbal abuse and *vice versa*. My fear of making mistakes or uncertainty regarding the future were either comforted or intensified accordingly to the effects it might have had on the immediate goals of the institution.

Whereas affect set the premises for the relations of work in connection with the metapragmatic register adopted, *materials* made the inconsistency between the two durable.¹⁷ The latter were artifacts as diverse as mobile phones, portable computers, business cards, books, folders, legal contracts and artworks. The inconsistency between the two metapragmatic registers was *inscribed* into these objects, fixing the associations made by the institution.



I Have To, I Like To, Dan Perjovschi (2003)

Precarious intern

The intern's work was affectively organised according to the metapragmatic registers inscribed in the job announcement made by the institution. This announcement stated that the intern had to work full time, maximum twelve weeks, but with the possibility to extend this period, and he/she would not be paid. He/she had to be 'hard-working', meticulous and interested in contemporary culture, provide assistance in crucial administrative tasks, such as dealing with correspondence, and other tasks. The intern was required to have skills and

board. In these three months, the exhibition of the assistant director was being organised, which required me to work also on the editing of the exhibition publication and its installment. During the events with public attendance, lectures, and exhibition openings, I had to take photographs and in certain cases make video recordings which later had to be downloaded on the computer and uploaded on the webpages of the institution. Often, I also had to go to the post office to send correspondence and sometimes to the bank to transfer money. Making coffee, buying food, cleaning the restroom were also on the activities list.

the institution; managing the library area and the storage space; contacting artists and institutions for collaboration; and on certain occasions being a teaching assistant for the director's course on curatorial practices held at the University of Bucharest. Like the director, coordinator and chairman of the executive board, I had my own office.

The intern was frequently recruited from among the undergraduates and graduates, with high English language skills, able to work on a computer and willing to work in cultural management/curating. In other words, this is the demographic category that has been experiencing the

The internship program affectively transformed and organised my uncertainties into and as what Marx called *labour power*

previous experience in DTP, to do research for articles, exhibitions and projects, improve the distribution and promotion of the journal, assist with production of press releases, to help find funding and install the exhibitions.

I worked for twelve months, unpaid, from Tuesday to Sunday, from 12.00 till 19.00. Throughout my internship I was responsible for the administration of the enrollments and participation in the institution's educational program, called Free Academy, organised by the chairman of the executive

After three months, I became the assistant coordinator of the institution. From this position the hierarchies in the organisation of work felt more pervasive. Even though still unpaid for my work, I was granted the opportunity to curate a year-long film programme. Besides the interns, every other member of the team curated exhibitions and film screenings, with the director and the chairman of the board putting on shows at least once a year. I was also responsible for attending to official visitors who wanted to get extra information on, or establish partnerships with

devaluation of their newly, or on the way to be acquired, academic degrees and high rates of unemployment. Announced as 'offering the possibility to examine the role, function and activity of a wide array of professionals from the cultural sector, as well as the role and function of an institution', the job appeared more as an educational program, rather than a job. Plus, unlike the academic programs, 'the accumulated experience and knowledge constitutes an informational asset that might help in the pursuit of a future career'.

The internship program affectively transformed and organised my uncertainties into and as what Marx called *labour power*.¹⁸ The institution's internship was presented as the context in which my labour power can be self-valued by framing the 'experience and knowledge accumulated' as a market asset, into something that looks good on my CV, thus rather than being paid or demand a wage I should have showed gratitude for the opportunity by working harder. But, the oscillation of the two metapragmatic registers fed the uncertainty upon which the internship was based, benefiting the institution's accumulation of labour. When adopting a cultural marxist metapragmatic register, the possibility of self-valuing my labour power seemed to be a gain in autonomy. From an anti-communist neo-liberal perspective, this self-valorification legitimated work as a mean of exploitation.

The hierarchies of the neoliberal metapragmatic registers gave rise to precarity. Nevertheless, the oscillation between the two registers was responsible for the difficulty to make a decision to withdraw from the working associations with the institution. The inconsistency of this justification made it possible to attract art workers who were then placed in a precarious state from which it was hard to escape.

Disputing hierarchies

Once my affects were transformed into labour power, precarity defined the conditions of the subaltern position I was delegated to according to the hierarchies of power installed by the adoption of a neoliberal metapragmatic. Despite the difficulties of withdrawing from the working association with the institution, because of the metapragmatic oscillation, these hierarchies and structures could have been challenged, if alternative institutions and the media had not failed to support art workers who found themselves in similar situations.

In Romania, art workers formed associations with a renewed social critique that has been addressing and received media coverage on ecological issues involved in cyanide pollution resulting from gold mining and shale

gas exploitation by means of hydraulic fracturing, urban gentrification and speculative real estate investments, and women's rights. In the ongoing protests against the gold mining project at Roșia Montană,¹⁹ that started on Sept 1, 2013, art workers acted as alternative media, organisers and commentators. Nonetheless, a workers' movement dealing with exploitation and precarity did not emerge, the traditional trade unions – often suspected of corruption – being the only ones active in this sense.

I believe that there is an absence of a workers' movement because in Romania the dominant metapragmatic register is the anti-communist neoliberal one, according to which only artists, institution directors and curators are considered to be art workers. Those subaltern workers that do not reach the top of the hierarchies are most of the times overlooked. In disputes over state, or other types of funding, they become invisible. Actions, such as CNDB Ocupat or anarchist cultural events, driven by a radical metapragmatic register, become modes of contesting funders and re-appropriating resources in the interest of a few high positioned art workers. As soon as these reach their goals, they switch to the dominant metapragmatic register in order to reinstate the 'regular' circulation of capital. The interests of these 'elite' art




Less Is More, Dan Perjovschi (2005)

workers is not to counter precarity, but to secure their high-brow social status.

The Romanian situation did not stop international commentators and activists conceptualising the *precariat*, defined by Guy Standing²⁰ as a fragmented global class ‘in-the-making’ – a cross-class coalition²¹ that puts together farmers and artists, migrants and civil servants, based on the common experience of temporary and uncertain jobs, no social security and low to no income. Highly educated young interns have been fierce proponents of the articulation of such a class.²² Yet some critical theorists and activists are skeptical regarding the possibility of not re-deploying the already existing hierarchies between these working identities into the

dynamics of the precariat.²³ And rightly so. My experience of precarity, compared with the precarity of low-skill and unskilled workers, looks like a bourgeois lament.

As a precarious worker, I do identify with certain characteristics of the precariat: low to no wages, uncertainty, and no social security. Yet, unlike in Italy, Germany and France, a Romanian precariat class did not emerge. Moreover, I do not agree with some of the solutions circulating among the precariat. Instead of their demands for a better wage, stable jobs and social security, I propose a ‘radical’ metapragmatic transformation of work – work conceived as the articulation of the ‘outside’ of capital. What would this imply?

Rather than exchanging labour power for a wage, this power should be employed in the elaboration of networks of solidarity and resistance among precarious art workers, based on consensual decision-making. In other words, it would imply the adoption of an *anarchist metapragmatic*. But, since the institution I worked with adopted at times a metapragmatic register akin to anarchism, further research should be conducted in order to understand whether in the case of Romanian contemporary art workers a ‘pure’ anarchist metapragmatic register is required, as I suggested, or if the re-establishment of a balance between two opposite modes of conceptualising actions is possible and more suitable, as artists, institutions directors and curators seem to be suggesting. 



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Dan Perjovschi is a Romanian contemporary artist who has exhibited internationally. Thanks for his permission to use these illustrations.

Notes

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