

Towards anarchy?

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Abstract

The theme of this edition on decolonisation inspired me to remember, rethink and reclaim my relationship with a philosophical and political idea and movement: anarchy and anarchism. Despite having tried to distance myself from this label in the past due to its negative connotations, I now move towards it and embrace it. Finding connections in my own history, I roughly outline anarchism's history and some of the diversity of the ideas labelled as anarchist. I will explore how these ideas, particularly the concepts of ontological and political anarchism and the idea of assemblages of power, directly influence my therapy and leadership coaching practice. I believe that some ideas within anarchism align well with systemic theory and can be an inspiring companion in our processes of decolonising our practice.

Introduction

I am a systemic practitioner, a psychotherapist and coach. I am a white western hetero cis male working in contexts where people see me as knowledgeable. So, I find myself in a privileged position almost all the time. Why would I think and write about anarchy, or even about "towards anarchy"? And how does it link with systemic practice – and particularly with my systemic practice?

In this article I account for how my systemic practice is influenced by the political and philosophical movement of anarchism. I will articulate some core ideas of anarchism and attend to some misconceptions about it. Examining the fit between the ideas of anarchy and systemic practice, I will give examples of my practice that are influenced by anarchist ideas. Although I have been thinking about the link between anarchism and my systemic practice for a while, the theme of this special issue of *Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice* about decolonising knowledges inspired me to write this article now as I see anarchist ideas being an inspiring companion in our processes of decolonising our practice.

Some personal context

I experience anarchist ideology as being suppressed, raising feelings of antipathy and aversion both in the wider discourse and within myself. Anarchism has a bad name as I will explore, and I wonder whether I have not acknowledged it as a valid core belief because of that. The title “Towards anarchy?” indicates a movement within me of accepting, acknowledging and embracing anarchism as a valid perspective. It also indicates shying away from accepting the existence of an absolute or perfect reality, which in this case, would be a complete absence of hierarchy or power in society. Such an absolutist approach would be contrary to my anarchist thinking.

To give some background to how I ended up being interested in anarchism, I need to talk about my personal experience. When I was little, I had people around me who were bigger and stronger than me and who could enforce their will on me. And in some ways that was a good thing. After all I was little and the bigger people used their power to protect me from harm – sometimes this was even the case when it infringed upon my freedom and choices. But sometimes there was a sense that the bigger people were just enforcing their will for their own benefit and then it felt just oppressive.

Later I learned that there were people even bigger and stronger – not necessarily physically so – that enforced their will on the big people around me. At around that time I started taking the bus to school. In that bus the oldest students had the right to sit the furthest back. The next oldest just before them all the way to the front of the bus and the youngest had to stand. It was nowhere written down that it had to be like this but that was how it was. When I had not quite understood this yet and there was a seat free further to the back, I sat down. At the next stop an older student demanded that seat and when I did not want to get up that older student sat on me. It was not just the physical discomfort for the rest of the bus journey. It was the humiliation and helplessness that were so painful.

A few years later I was in the position of being the older student. And when a younger student sat further at the back of the bus, I did, to my shame, the same as was done to me. I am no longer quite so sure why. Was it simply because I could? After all, sitting down is more comfortable than standing. Or was there more to it? Maybe letting go of my place in the order of things could have threatened losing all the privileges I had due to my older age. A few years after that I was studying and living in a shared house. People had equal rights and responsibilities and it worked and it was wonderful. It was also at that time that I got involved with the oldest still existing German language anarchist newspaper, *graswurzel revolution*, meaning grassroot revolution, for an acephalous non-violent society.

In this paper, through exploring my relationship with aspects of the anarchist philosophy and ideas, I account for part of my *why*: why am I doing what I am doing, and how I am doing it in my practice – maybe even how I got into this practice in the first place. How does my affinity to anarchism connect with my choice of practice, and how I practise? How is (my understanding of) anarchism resonating with (my understanding of) systemic practice? The answer is of course situated in my own personal history as well as in the history (and maybe the less official one) of my cultural European background.

There are examples in global history of people thinking and living in what I might call acephalous and egalitarian or anarchist ways. Although I am not coming from these traditions, I will nevertheless briefly point to such examples, to respond to the criticism I often hear that anarchism might be a

nice theory but not practically applicable. I will then show in what way I think anarchist thinking influences my practice and helps me attend to and challenge the many forms of domination and oppression I come across in the context of my practice and in wider contexts. I hope that as much as this article is a personal account, it will resonate with other readers and systemic colleagues.

What is anarchy (and what is it not)?

To steal, or rather recycle: close your eyes and think of the word anarchy. What comes to your mind? An egalitarian society and an absence of oppression? This is probably closer to the meaning intended by many anarchists. Or does it evoke chaos, violence and terror for you? You are not alone. In 1892 the self-proclaimed anarchist Ravachol (real name François Koenigstein) exploded what we would now call Improvised Explosive Devices in Paris, killing people in the name of anarchy and anarchism (Crossland, 2023). But was that anarchism?

Someone claiming to do something in the name of a political or religious idea or ideal does not make the claim true: think of the crusades and Jihad in the name of god, or waging war in the name of peace. Equally, someone claiming to have achieved an ideal state, does not necessarily mean it has been achieved. Doubts are warranted whether the Soviet Union under Stalin or the current state of China can be counted as communist or socialist. Doubts are also warranted as to how far most current western systems can be seen as democratic, a rulership of the people – of all people in equal measure.

Since Ravachol, the connotation of anarchy and anarchism has been negative in western mainstream media and wider discourse. And it still is. On 7th January 2021 the Daily Express used the headline “Anarchy in the USA” to describe the storming of the Capitol in Washington by supporters of Donald Trump. An article in The New Statesman by Melissa Lane (2001) suggested something similar, but defined anarchy differently. I will return to this below.

More recently (29/07/2023) Peter Hitchens used the word anarchy to describe what he fears would happen if shoplifting was to continue, in his article for the Mail on Sunday. What Hitchens’ article has in common with the article in the Daily Express is a decrying and fear of a state of lawlessness and even terror – perfectly in the tradition of how Ravachol’s bombings were reported.

Apart from these more common negative connotations, others are possible. A more neutral one brings us to the original meaning of the word anarchy, from its Greek origins. The second part, -archy, refers to rulership or origin of things. In monarchy we have one ruler (at least originally). ‘An’ is a negation, and thus anarchy can be understood as non-rulership or absence of a ruler, for example in a time period between rulers. Melissa Lane’s (2001) article indicates this when she defines anarchy as vacant office (to then argue that Trump left the office vacant during his whole term in office).

This more neutral meaning of anarchy, the absence of rulership (not necessarily lawlessness or without rules), forms the basis of a positive connotation (as also claimed by Ravachol). Anarchism in this sense is a political philosophy that favours the absence of rulership. The first person to describe themselves as an anarchist was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (Guérin, 2005). With his well-known words “Property is theft!” (Guérin, 2005, p. 48) from the book *What is property?* Proudhon might well have influenced Karl Marx, the communist manifesto and the capital. However, he was not the first to have such thoughts. Similar thoughts on property were expressed earlier by Jean-Jacques Rousseau

in 1755 (Cranston, 1984) when he wrote that someone claiming a piece of land takes it away from everyone who would naturally be entitled to it. And a critique of government is already offered by William Godwin (1793) who argues that institutions like government stifle our desire and capacity to reason freely with each other.

The histories of communism and anarchism have been intertwined, since Proudhon and Marx met, when they also split (Hoffman, 1967). Apparently, Marx replied in a dismissive way to some of Proudhon's writing. In some ways this foreshadowed what has become the split in the 'first international' (working men's association) over the disagreement of the role of the state. Marx and his followers argued for the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary step in the revolution, while Mikhail Bakunin (Shatz, 2003) and the anarchists argued for an immediate replacement of the state by federations. Later, others picked up this anarchist, anti-statist tradition. Arguing against using state or party, let alone dictatorship, to achieve socialism, Rudolf Rocker (1919) is credited with declaring that socialism will be characterised by political freedom, or it will not be socialism. The full horror of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet Union under Stalin of course only became clear later. It was also later, in the Spanish Civil War, that anarchists (and their allies) tried to defend themselves against Franco's fascists on the one side, and a republican government increasingly dependent on and influenced by Stalin (Orwell, 1938) on the other. From the perspective of this republican government, it was argued that the anarchists undermined the war effort (Preston, 2017).

But anarchism in its history is diverse, and anarchists are not beyond critique. Proudhon as the 'first anarchist' explicitly did not accord the same rights to women as to men. In fact, he was strongly anti-Semitic (Miething, 2018) and anti-feminist (Nochlin, 2007).

In contrast, Anarchism includes such figures as Emma Goldman, herself from a Jewish Lithuanian family, who is maybe the first anarcho-feminist. Often paraphrased as having said 'If I cannot dance it is not my revolution' (Goldman, 1931) she is maybe not beyond criticism for holding on to the idea of 'propaganda of the deed', effectively supporting political violence like the one described above by Ravachol, and indeed the assassination of US president William McKinley. Going into more detail about the history of anarchism would be beyond the scope of this article. A very comprehensive anthology of anarchism, quoted here liberally, is *No gods, No Masters* (Guérin, 2005), and it is freely available online.

Nice theory, but could it actually work?

I remember talking to my mother, as we were driving together when she came to visit me where I was studying. Now I was much older, and she was not quite the same big person any more who could enforce her will on me. She did not have the same power over me. Or did she? Talking passionately, I argued that real democracy would be the same as anarchy in terms of social structure and like communism in terms of the economic system. It would be worth living for that! She listened, attentively it seemed. Finally, she said with much kindness, a bit of pride and a pinch of patronising "Nice theory. But I don't think it could ever work. It is not within our human nature." I was deflated.

This episode must have impacted me more than I first realised. Now when I teach, I tell this story and show a slide with this picture:



Figure 1. A lesson in social construction?

I always explain that of course I had not slapped my mother. But I also did not have the words to tell her that the human nature she was talking about was only a social construct. I learned that later, in my first year of systemic training.

But I think I now understand where my mother was coming from when she said that. Kropotkin was criticised (Crowder, 2003) for being too optimistic about the “capacity for harmonious cooperation of ordinary people” (p. 197). If one were to accept what might seem like an essentialist premise, the various wars since his death seem to support that the capacity for harmonious cooperation of ordinary people cannot be taken for granted.

People can also be the opposite of cooperative, competitive to the point of being absolutely cruel. We have the capacity to embody many traits and sometimes simultaneously. We can engage in wonderful collaborations and also cruel ones.

So, could it work? Could there ever be an egalitarian and non-violent state of affairs?

One way of thinking about this question is with Errico Malatesta (1853 / 1899). In his article “Toward anarchism”, probably more correctly translated as “towards anarchy” (it is not just a coincidence that my article has the same title), Malatesta warns against a view that anarchy could possibly be achieved overnight, or ever be completely realised. Despite at other times advocating armed revolt and accepting the necessity of violence, he also points to the contradiction of anarchy being forced onto people. Maybe this is another important difference to Marxism that suggests a moving through the dictatorship of the proletariat to a classless society and an end of history (at least of class struggle). Malatesta suggests that any act or thought against exploitation and oppression is a step towards anarchy. Using violence is in itself an oppressive act. If non-violent anarchy is not possible as an absolute, it may be an ideal to work towards.

With regards to violence, it is worth mentioning Leo Tolstoy (1829) being a pacifist anarchist (maybe a Christian anarchist; although believing in god, he was critical of religious institutions). He influenced Ghandi and others like Martin Luther King to a non-violent form of resistance and struggle against existing orders. From them we could trace an influence further to Omer’s (2021) ideas on non-violent resistance.

There have probably been many acephalous societies, often ‘traditional’ societies without institutionalised and/or centralised authority in many parts of the world. Colonialism then introduced and enforced centralised and stable authority and domination (Sigrist, 1967). While atrocities were committed in the name of anarchy during the Spanish civil war, (Preston, 2017) there are also descriptions of productivity being maintained or even increased in collectivised agriculture and industry (Goldman, 1983).

It is worth watching a documentary by former British diplomat Carne Ross (2017a) in which he describes his own journey towards anarchism and provides examples of functioning ‘towards anarchism,’ particularly in contemporary Northeast Syria. He describes how decisions are made at a local level in a largely egalitarian society. He also describes coordination beyond the local level, for example on a regional level.

In a Ted talk (Ross, 2017b) from the same year and with the same title (freely available), he uses complexity theory and systemic ideas to make sense of his own change to become an anarchist and explains how bigger systems, like societies, can change in critical moments. In his view, change in the midst of a crisis is difficult to introduce from above. In unpredictable ways, change can be introduced or triggered by anyone independent of their position within a power hierarchy. A power hierarchy that tries to enforce change encounters what Maturana and Varela (1973) call the impossibility of instructive interaction. Extending this impossibility of instructive interaction to consider any entity, we find a good argument in Barad’s (2007) agential realism. What counts as active and influential is not a natural given; ultimately every part of a system intra-acts with other parts of the system in reconfiguring reality.

However, (some) systemic thinking and practices refer to hierarchies as necessary, whether this is with regards to families (Minuchin, 1974; Omer, 2021) or much wider systems like whole economies and ecologies (Meadows, 2009). But it seems important to differentiate different aspects of hierarchy. Arguably, complex systems will establish hierarchies as part of their self-organisation (Meadows, 2009). To steer itself, a complex system might establish a hierarchical level “above” that has a wider view so that a smaller system or sub-system can best collaborate with other parts of the system. But this coordination on a hierarchically higher level of overview or organisation or abstraction (Bateson, 1972) does not have to be a hierarchically higher level of power. So maybe while instructive interaction is impossible, cooperative action is possible.

Anarchy and systemic practice

I have already outlined some points of contact or overlap between anarchist and systemic thought and practice, and I will now outline some further links between the two, giving examples of what this might look like in my therapeutic and coaching practice. In the process, I seem to have to come back to what anarchism is not – at least not for me. Given the diversity of ideas within anarchist thinking, a universally agreeable definition might not be possible.

Anarchism is not against all forms of power. Foucault’s (1978, 1980) critique of power as potentially both oppressive and productive, that was so influential on narrative ideas (White, 1989, 2007), holds true for anarchism too. Neither is anarchism against all forms of authority. Fromm’s (1976) made a distinction between having authority or being in a position of institutionalised authority on the one hand and being an authority as having knowledge and expertise on the other. Connecting with systemic ideas, I am reminded of Barry Mason’s “authoritative doubt” (1993) and the ownership of expertise in the context of uncertainty. I maintain the idea that while the client is the expert (Anderson and Goolishian, 1992) in their own life, I have some expertise with regards to processes of change. Why otherwise would a client want my service? In Fromm’s (1976) sense I am being an authority with regard to my expertise in processes of change. I need to acknowledge and even use

this difference in expertise without giving into the temptation of the fallacy of power. I cannot instruct but I can contribute to triggering change. To summarise, in my mind anarchism is not and cannot be against all forms of hierarchy. It is specifically against institutionalised hierarchies of power and privilege.

Anarchism is not even against all forms of a 'state' when there are considerations about how society should or could organise itself and (coming from a materialist position) its production and distribution of needed goods. Examples of such considerations include ideas of federations (Kropotkin, 1902) and their practical implementation (for example during the Spanish civil war, Northeast Syria). Rather than minimise anarchism to an anti-statism philosophy, a better (negative) definition of anarchism might be that anarchism is against all forms of domination and oppression – not just the ones that come with states and capitalism. This would include (not an extensive list) sexism, misogyny (despite what Proudhon might have written) and discrimination based on gender and gender choices or sexuality and sexual preferences. It is against all forms of racism and racial exclusion (again, despite what Proudhon might have written). Anarchism is against colonialism, imperialism, militarism, as well as (the more classical) economic and class inequalities, particularly based on ownership of the means of production and land ownership. In fact, with regards to land as property, colonialism seems to be a prime example of 'property being theft' despite there not being any formal previous owner as recognised by the coloniser, but nevertheless people living on, benefitting from and possessing it. Anarchism is also against discrimination based on religion (Northeast Syria), even when it is critical of the notion of a god. I think this is an ethical stance consistent with the concept of social GRACES (Burnham, 1993, 2013; Roper-Hall 1998, 2008) which draws our attention to inequality with regards to aspects of social differences.

These considerations have influenced my practice and my focus on exploring aspects of my clients' identities, especially those aspects that might be linked to domination, oppression and colonisation. I was working with a couple in therapy: a black British woman and her white British male partner. I noticed her crying as her partner talked about her with a sense of authority. He said he could not trust her. He accused her of lying. He said that she had issues and that whenever he was sticking up for himself, she was holding it against him. I felt uncomfortable. I interrupted him. I asked, "What do you think it is like for her to hear you talk about her like this?" He answered that it might be uncomfortable, but she needed to hear this and face it. I asked, "What do you think you might not see?" When he did not answer, she told him that it made a difference to be put down by a white older male, she told him how powerless she felt, how impossible it was to prove that she was not lying and how this all reminded her of so many experiences from the first memory to now, being accused of lying more often than any other (white) child in her class without a chance to prove otherwise or even be heard.

Political and Ontological Anarchism

Thomas Nail (2019) used the slogan 'No gods, no masters' to structure an essay on the distinction between ontological (no gods) and political anarchism (no masters), in Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Both are important influences for me in the context of my practice. Ontological anarchism inspires me to challenge conventional beliefs about truth and the nature of our world while political anarchism motivates me to keep challenging the distribution of power and the organisation of

production and work. Below I will discuss my connections with the ideas of ontological and political anarchism and give examples of how they inform my systemic practice. I will first attend to the ontological anarchism and give an example from my practice before attending to the political anarchism.

Ontological anarchism takes the position that there is no absolute law or origin of being (Nail, 2019). If we prioritise becoming over being, there is no need for a universal origin or a root or for absolute “realities”. This links well to what Cecchin, Lane and Ray (1987) have described as irreverence. In my practice I find that this – together with curiosity (Cecchin, 1987) – allows me to challenge my own beliefs and, in a respectful way, the diverse beliefs that clients bring which might be self-limiting and sometimes oppressive (to themselves and others). If a client brings up a notion of god in therapy or coaching, I find myself going along with their belief and being curious to explore their notion of god in more detail. Not having myself a notion of god helps me to be curious and I feel I can help people to shape a notion of god (if they want one) that is more helpful to themselves.

As a social worker I was undertaking a home visit. A grandmother was struggling with her granddaughter. The granddaughter refused school. Together with a colleague, I introduced the grandmother to Non-violence resistance (NVR) (Omer, 2021). It did not “stick”. The grandmother was devastated. She felt unable to help her granddaughter and she felt she could not consistently maintain her presence. She also felt unable to alleviate the grief they both shared. Her son, the granddaughter’s father, had recently passed in a traffic accident after leaving the house following an argument. The grandmother believed it was all her fault: “I am receiving my punishment now from god.” I noticed I started to get a little bit angry, impatient and annoyed. I tried to use that feeling to be irreverent to my own beliefs: “Tell me a little bit more about god. Is your god a very loving and forgiving god? Or a very angry and punishing god? How would god like you to feel for the rest of your life? What would god like you to do with the rest of your life?”

Political anarchism in Deleuze and Guattari (1987), is a more complicated concept and I will briefly explore it. To speak about political anarchism, I will refer to Nail (2019) who sees Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as distinguishing four different political types of assemblages of power distribution with corresponding possibilities for social change. It is worth noting that these assemblages are not theorised as absolute essences existing in their pure form but as mixtures in their becoming.

1) A *territorial assemblage* reminds me of Barad’s (2007) concept of “boundary drawing practices” in that it divides space into smaller spaces for particular actions. This assemblage distributes power horizontally. I think of this consistent with the part of Marx’s (1867) analysis that, as far as I know, anarchists have not criticised: alienation. Increasingly people might find themselves in spaces that do not allow them to experience and use their whole self. Only a part of them is ever appropriate in a production space. In a company, or generally where something needs to be produced, this might also result in an alienation of the individual from the bigger product or project and further, in diminished motivation and productivity. It is sometimes expressed in ‘this or that department do not know what they are doing’. This directed and selective use of people’s abilities and selves according to the specific needs of a space or department can be oppressive and destructive of the potential for increased collaboration, satisfaction and productivity. Here, the response from a political anarchist philosophy point of view might be some genuine coordination, not some opaque higher instance that instructs. Genuine coordination in my view can only happen without domination.

During a coaching session a manager complained about two departments not working together well. I think the term 'department' already triggered me into thinking about territorial assemblages or divisions of space and about what might be allowed or appropriate in a particular space. I first explored if the manager had ideas for what might help:

Mark: "What do you think they need in order to work well together?"

Manager: "They need to understand each other?"

Mark: "How could they get to understand each other?"

Manager: "Maybe they would need to spend some time with each other, like visit each other and shadow each other, ideally do each other's job for a little while. That would help them see how they could work better together."

Mark: "Would that be possible?"

Manager: "Yeah, actually why not?"

Mark: "Yes, why not?"

Manager: "Maybe because they feel they are not allowed..."

That 'being allowed' triggered me to think about the second assemblage.

2) The second assemblage (Nail, 2019; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) is the *state assemblage*. It distributes power vertically and centralises. In many ways it has a coordinating effect. It might well feel initially as the logical response to the need for hierarchies of abstraction and coordination. When this then becomes institutionalised and a form of domination, it becomes particularly pertinent to anarchists. It is also pertinent for systemic 'leadership' coaching and organisational design, possibly linking to the territorial division 'from above'. Typical reflexive questions (Tomm, 1987) from a political anarchism point of view might be: "How much of a leader or what kind of leader do you want to be?" "How much hierarchy (now in the more commonly used sense) do you think there needs to be? What are the advantages and disadvantages of different levels of hierarchy?"

In the example with the manager above I continued my line of inquiry:

Mark: "Where would the permission have to come from?"

Manager: "Probably from me."

Mark: "If they have permission for this, what other things would you want them to feel are permitted?"

Manager: "Actually, much more but, you know, there is the hierarchy and management oversight."

Having this kind of assemblage in mind also helped me remember that people do not just exercise power, they are also exercised by it. There was another level of hierarchy above my coachee. Together we shifted to explore a different kind of change.

Mark: "How much change is possible there with regards to the hierarchy?"

Manager: “Actually, quite some if there is some conviction.”

Mark: “And who would need to be most convinced?”

Manager: “The senior leadership team.”

Mark: “And what would convince your senior managers?”

Manager: “Bottom line, efficiency!”

The next questions that came to my mind: “And how do you measure efficiency? In what unit?”, reminded me of the third type of political assemblage:

3) The *capitalist assemblage* (Nail, 2019; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Through a process of abstraction, it makes qualitative relations quantifiable, detached from their unique qualities. Goods and services have a quantifiable monetary value attached to them – efficiency too. I am reminded of the saying “Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing” (Wilde, 1891, p.55). In many ways that goes to the heart of my practice when it comes to values and what is important and motivates people and how relationships are valued.

Another manager once wanted to talk to me about a dilemma. In earlier sessions she had concluded that it was time for her to take the next step in her career. When we next met she started saying: “I have now two job offers. I could take this job here. Sounds really exciting. I could really have an impact. Or I could take this other job over there. It means a little more money and is also a little closer to home. More time with the family?” I asked her how she thought she would make the decision. “I have to weigh up the pros and cons for each. But how do you weigh these things against each other? You can’t!” she replied. I could imagine someone being tempted to put numbers – not necessarily monetary values – to these different qualities. And I thought in some ways that might be helpful for decision making. But I tried to steer the conversation away from a more “logical”, number-based decision-making process, so I asked her: “What would be more life giving for you and those most important to you? What would your gut instinct say?” I did realise though that my question was not as innocent and I felt like I had already decided the process of decision making for her. And with that I was not in line with a fourth assemblage.

4) The fourth type of assemblage is the *nomadic assemblage*. Nail (2019) describes it as the “...most [...] anarchist type of social distribution.” (p. 40). He speaks of “direct participation” (p. 41) and the “...maximal political inclusion, participation and collectively controlled pleasure with the least amount of exclusion, exploitation and hierarchy.” (p. 41) These seem to be good guiding principles and ethical stances for my professional and life practice. Nail (2019) quotes Deleuze and Guattari (1987) directly when he describes this assemblage as the context “when people demand to formulate their problems themselves and to determine at least the particular conditions under which they can receive a more general solution’ (p. 471). It is this kind of thinking that makes me find things like diagnoses and prescriptive therapeutic interventions more difficult. This is also maybe why narrative (White, 1989, 2007) and solution-focussed approaches (de Shazer, 1994) seem to speak to me. There is also a huge benefit when direct participation gives birth to creativity for as Nail (2019) says, nomadic assemblages “...create something new or revolutionary for their time” (p. 41).

Sometimes thinking with anarchism and having nomadic assemblages in mind, I can regain my curiosity. And quite a few times something creative and new happens. With regard to the example above where the manager was trying to decide which job to take, we started to talk about the process of decision making itself and about how I could be helpful to her; and she was able not only to decide what her dilemma was about but also to form a decision-making process for herself. I think of this as relational reflexivity (Burnham, 1993) in line with nomadic assemblages of genuine exchange.

Concluding

As indicated, Nail (2019) as well as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) point out that these assemblages do not appear in their purest form. They are patterns of organisation that appear blended together. This seems to link well to my doubt that ideal anarchy could ever be. It can only ever be a 'towards anarchy'. And it is possible to offer coaching or therapy informed by anarchist ideas, even though pricing such a service can be difficult. From within – as it is hard to imagine a space outside power assemblages – I hope I can maybe help others to use anarchist ideas and move between assemblages towards a more nomadic way of interaction. But only if they want to!

I find the idea of moving 'towards' and not thinking in absolute terms and seeking perfection, an ethical stance liberating for myself and my practice as well as for clients. For many people who come to me as well as for myself as a practitioner and person one of the biggest 'problems' I encounter is an idea of 'not good enough' - a harsh measurement against an imagined standard of perfection. The idea of a perfect anarchism or a perfect anarchy would be just as oppressive. And it would therefore not be consistent with anarchism's core beliefs. Embracing imperfection leaves space for movement and continuous becoming.

Attending to the various assemblages we are part of (while aiming at a nomadic assemblage in my practice), I also find myself attending to wider contextual factors in a different way. Gail Simon (1998) asks the question whether part of therapy needs to be an incitement to riot. Should there be more focus on a societal level of context that contributes to if not causes much suffering that therapy might try to "treat" at an individual or family level and imply pathology? Simon (1998) gives examples of how different questions might obscure or highlight this bigger context. I find that people who I meet in my practice often feel very disempowered in the face of oppressive wider contexts. They talk of the 'powers that be' whether that is within their company or in wider society as seriously limiting their choices. And maybe as practitioners we limit ourselves and our potential to be useful when we try to respond to a problem in a smaller context (a team or a family) when it was formed in or by a bigger context (whole organisation or society) or shall we say at a different level of rulership (senior leadership team or government). It can feel overwhelming. But change is possible. We can collaborate with others to achieve change and address our problems. I often find myself asking my clients questions like "With whom together do you imagine yourself having the best chance to create the change that you hope for or wish for? How do you get to collaborate with them? How can you together create something in which you all benefit?"

I hope I have not only shed some light on the political and philosophical movement of anarchism but that I have also shown how I connect anarchism with my ideas of systemic practice towards less

domination and oppression. I find thinking in assemblages of power and the anarchist critique of domination offers me a framework for thinking and helps me maintain a decolonial lens in my practice. It tasks me to move away from practices of domination especially when I am already in a position of authority due to my professional expertise. I often find myself confronted with hopelessness – my own and my clients'. There are so many forms of domination and oppression, the very material ones Proudhon had in mind when he saw property as theft and when many anarchists were critical of waged labour, or others more subject to social construction like oppression and domination around any of the social graces. But every time we wrestle ourselves a little away from any form of domination, especially the ones we create ourselves in our professional practice and in our life, we are moving towards something better. I call that anarchy. Whether you call that anarchy is up to you.

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