

Reclaiming Agency: Anarchist Interventions in the International

To date, critical theories of international relations and security have not engaged substantively with the potentials and promises of anarchist political philosophy and practice. This article attempts to suggest the terms of how such an engagement might proceed, positing a point of entry which resists the impulse to take an overly globalist or idealist perspective, and which begins at the level of agency/practice, of grassroots direct action. It is argued that anarchist interventions in the field, theoretically and practically, may find force through a focus on democratising and localising ontologies of agency, refusing and reforming dominant, statist approaches. The argument proceeds in four sections. In the first, one of the few explicit treatments of anarchism from within IR, Thomas G. Weiss's attempt to fuse anarchism with world order theory, is examined as a means to highlighting some shortcomings of an approach which does not begin with agency. In the second, the article discusses the normative theories of anarchist direct action given by Gustav Landauer and Simon Critchley, suggesting that the tensions which emerge from their broadly incompatible positions may offer productive routes for thinking anarchism in the IR context, particularly with respect to negotiating the contested realms of positivity and negation. Following from this discussion, several illustrative examples are provided as a means to suggesting the opportunities and challenges of the preceding discussion. Finally the article engages in an extended case study of 'the Raytheon 9', a group of anti-arms trade activists who smashed/decommissioned a Raytheon office during the Israeli assault on Lebanon in 2006. It is suggested that their actions offer valuable perspectives for how we might think anarchism in the IR/security context through their performance of an agency which

undermines dominant conceptions while prefiguring a more localised and democratised set of relations.

As Alex Prichard makes clear, there has been relatively little engagement with anarchism in IR in the post-World War Two era, an absence which illuminates the ontological and normative statism of the discipline.¹ One of the few attempts to pull anarchism into the field is Weiss's 1975 article on philosophical anarchism and world order theory. For Weiss, the dovetailing of anarchism and world order theory comes through their mutual concern with the dilemma of reconciling authority and autonomy. He argues that anarchist thought can provide important value clarification for progressive theories of world politics, in a necessarily radical and non-hierarchical framework, avoiding the conventional binary between liberal reformism and Marxism. The values he highlights which can be accommodated and guided by anarchist thought are '(1) rejection of illegitimate authority; (2) ecological consciousness; (3) anti-statism; (4) the political economy of freedom; (5) the importance of life styles; (6) the dynamics of cooperation'.² In dealing with anarchist insights on these areas, Weiss acknowledges that he is engaging in a cherry-picking exercise; anarchism is treated as a heuristic device, 'it is the prospect of influence in positive directions, rather than the feasibility of anarchist solution *per se*, that makes the anarchist position highly relevant and of interest'.³ He accepts that the values to which anarchism may speak are held in other schools, citing the central contribution of anarchism as the

¹ Alex Prichard, 'What Can the Absence of Anarchism tell us About the History and Purpose of International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, forthcoming.

² Thomas G. Weiss, 'The Tradition of Philosophical Anarchism and Future Directions in World Policy', *Journal of Peace Research* 12, no. 1 (1975): 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

understanding 'that the dangers of authority are deemed so nefarious as to necessitate taking the extreme position on each of the values',⁴ a perspective he argues should be taken seriously within peace research, and which has the capacity to provide serious challenges to the 'legitimate substance of international politics'.⁵

Whilst Weiss's reading of anarchism is, in parts, detailed, and while he accords with many central tenets of anarchist thought (such as the inseparability of economic and political freedoms, the importance of prefigurative action, and a radical critique of illegitimate authority), there are important limitations to his approach which, when exposed, may help to consider alternative routes for anarchist approaches to critical theories of and approaches to the international. One shortcoming is the overly selective approach taken by Weiss. Rejecting the possibility of anarchism as 'a comprehensive and totally consistent world view', he suggests that it is better read as a 'general attitude, or action theory', overlooking the possibility that divorcing anarchistic action theory, attitude and world view from one another misses the power in the interrelation of these elements, a perspective which is taken up in more detail below.⁶ It is perhaps this selective approach which allows the article to conclude on fairly liberal terms, advocating a global negative income tax, and arguing that the anarchist 'utopia', while 'probably not realizable...helps one judge the human condition and focus upon ultimate goals'.⁷

⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁷ Ibid., 10, 12.

The article also suffers from a limited approach to the question of transformative agency. Although Weiss discusses the place of social change movements, and the importance of prefigurative action, his narration of action is restricted in two (interrelated) respects. The first is that his conception of progress, while optimistic, is expressed in terms of 'discussions', 'visions', 'dreaming', leaving the reader to wonder where more active interventions sit. The second reason concerns the brief moments in which he does discuss direct action explicitly, and his perception of its place in anarchist theories of change. He argues that direct action 'aims immediately to dissolve the existing order through alternative institutions that either prepare for an immediate social revolution, or guarantee that once it has begun it will not proceed in an authoritarian manner', and that 'counter institutions are established to give witness to the feasibility of theoretical values, as well as to provide a buffer between the incipient new order and the oppressive processes that characterize the present one'.⁸ Whilst these are indeed important aspects of prefigurative direct action, Weiss does not engage with the notion that anarchist direct action goes beyond preparation and/or example, and that counter-institutions (and counter-agencies) *are* the 'new order', that they inhere within them the world view which Weiss dismisses as irrelevant. Alongside this, his perspective suggests a clear distinction between the current order and the next, overlooking the intention of direct action practitioners to make positive interventions in the present. Direct action engages with the challenges of the current world, but with the aim of creating a new world within the shell of the current, avoiding the potentially immobilising tensions which accompany undue focus on a 'new order'.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

A third shortcoming of Weiss's approach is rooted in his overly idealistic approach to both anarchism and IR more broadly. In discussing anarchist anti-statism, he claims a crossover between peace research and philosophical anarchism, namely 'a desire to institutionalize equal opportunity for the potential self-development of all the globe's individuals',⁹ but fails to engage with the political challenges of statism as a dominant discourse of political agency, tied into powerful narratives of IR as an anarchic realm which demands the security of hegemonic actors. His criticism of anarchism as a philosophy opposed to institutions, based upon his 'interpretation of the data about the future needs of this planet',¹⁰ while arguably incorrect in its reading of anarchist theory, reinforces what Richard Ashley termed the 'heroic practice'; in invoking the need for 'guidance', for some form of totalising mediation (however democratic), Weiss performs a sovereignty/anarchy dichotomy in which a rationally ordered hegemony finds its negativity in anarchy, and in which ambiguity, contingency, chance and open-ended eventuation are banished, are treated as threats to the higher ideal of sovereignty.¹¹ Through Weiss, anarchism's contribution to the field is disciplined within dominant ontologies of agency, and its progressive potentials are limited to impossible but useful ideals and modifications within prevailing discourses.

These three criticisms centre around the absence of a concrete agentic focus, around Weiss's failure to engage with the power of anarchist approaches to challenge dominant ontologies of agency in IR. For Weiss, while power 'should' come from below, the question

⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹¹ Richard Ashley, 'Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 17, no.2 (1988): 227-262.

of popular participation in IR remains unanswered in any concrete fashion. This article will suggest that anarchist interventions may be more productive when engaged with from such an angle.

The Politics of Intervention

This section will begin discuss the potential for anarchist theory to animate a rethinking of agency in IR and security at a grassroots level. Through discussing the theories of revolution/resistance offered by Gustav Landauer and Simon Critchley, and the productive tensions which might be drawn from a comparison of their respective positions, the article begins to consider the place of anarchist interventions which move beyond the limitations of Weiss's approach.

Gustav Landauer was a German anarchist active in the late 19th and early 20th century. Whilst closely aligned in many respects with Peter Kropotkin's communist anarchism, he moved beyond his peers in arguing that radical transformation could not be achieved through the instantaneous destruction of existing institutions, nor by their slow reform. Instead, he suggested a form of hyper-positivity, advocating the creation of alternative institutions and relationships alongside, but separate from, prevailing structures and modes of organisation. This radical alternative (which has, to some extent, been taken up by contemporary forms of direct action) arose directly from Landauer's perspective on

the state.¹² He refused the prevailing Kropotkinian view of the state as a corporeal institution which can be destroyed through a revolution. Instead, Landauer argued that '[t]he State is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour'.¹³ Richard Day highlights the poststructuralist inclinations of such a theory, a link he attributes to Nietzsche's influence on Landauer. In particular, Day connects Landauer's position with Foucault's governmentality thesis, suggesting that 'Landauer grasped...that we are not governed by 'institutions' apart from ourselves, by a 'state' set over against a 'civil society'. Rather, *we all govern each other* via a complex web of capillary relations of power'.¹⁴

Landauer's analysis of the state (and indeed of other social institutions, not least capitalism) engenders his theory of revolution. If the state is a set of relationships amongst people, 'we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently toward one another...We are the state, and we shall continue to be the state until we have created the institutions that form a real community and society of men [*sic*].'¹⁵ James Horrox notes that 'Landauer savagely excoriated those more concerned with the politics of protest and demand than with creativity', and advocated the construction of 'functioning enclaves of libertarianism [as a] prefigurative framework for emancipation'.¹⁶ Horrox further observes

¹² James Horrox, 'Reinventing Resistance: Constructive Anarchism in Gustav Landauer's Social Philosophy', in *New Perspectives on Anarchism*, eds. Nathan J. Jun and Shane Wahl (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010), 189-209.

¹³ Cited in Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (New York: Macmillan, 1988 [1949]), 46.

¹⁴ Richard Day, *Gramsci is Dead* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 124-125.

¹⁵ Cited in Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: Fontana, 1993), 411.

¹⁶ Horrox, *Reinventing Resistance*, 192, 195.

that Landauer was active in advocating local, small-scale examples of such enclaves, including setting up soup kitchens, and growing food on lawns and street borders, both as a means to providing direct respite for those in need and as a way of introducing people to the merits of collective action.¹⁷ This last point is important; as Day observes, for Landauer the alternatives constructed are not solely intended as preparation for a future revolution, but as valuable *in and of themselves*, a perspective which moves him away from Weiss's interpretations.¹⁸ Day interprets the merit of this position through its attempt to overcome a central dilemma of anarchist theory, namely that '[we] cannot wait for everyone to choose to live in non-statist, non-capitalist relationships, or we will very likely wait forever. Nor can we *force* socialism on anyone, since that would violate our commitment to respecting the autonomy of individuals and groups. Hence there is no choice for those of us who desire to live differently but to begin to do so ourselves'.¹⁹ For Landauer, we destroy the prevailing system 'mainly by means of the gentle, permanent, and binding reality that we build'.²⁰ Such an approach aims to reduce the efficacy and reach of prevailing relations by withdrawing energy from them and rendering them redundant'.²¹ In short, for Landauer, we reach a better world not through seeking to destroy the existing one, but through building it ourselves.

Through his view of revolution as positive construction, it is important to understand that Landauer resisted the impulse to suggest a utopic resting point beyond current

¹⁷ Ibid., 198.

¹⁸ Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 124.

¹⁹ Ibid., 126.

²⁰ Cited in Ibid., 123.

²¹ Ibid., 124.

relationships. He was careful to point out that '[the] utopia is the sum of all aspirations in a pure and refined state...none of which can achieve its end, and all of which can only bring about a new topia'.²² Martin Buber attributes this perspective to his (and Buber's) understanding that socialism can only ever be a relative concept, the continual becoming of human community. 'Rigidity threatens all realization, what lives and glows to-day may be crusted over to-morrow and, become all-powerful, suppress the strivings of the day after'.²³ Peter Marshall frames these concerns around Landauer's view of revolution as a perpetual balancing process, whereby relationships are constantly renegotiated and renewed, resisting the stasis which serves to engender oppressive modes of organisation.²⁴ In this regard, Landauer moves beyond the conventional treatment seen in Weiss's approach, refusing the limited conceptions of direct action and strategic vision Weiss provides, in favour of a revolutionary theory based in a hyper-positivity which seeks to undermine domination through a constructive and militant non/counter-participation.

There is much of merit in Landauer's approach, particularly with regards to his analysis of the state and his corresponding view of the need for a resistance grounded in positive construction. Nonetheless, there are clear limitations to his approach, not least his general refusal to engage in a politics of confrontation, in his rejection of the politics of 'being-against-something'.²⁵ Criticism on this point has been most emphatic from Marxists, who have condemned Landauer for 'implying a withdrawal from the world of human exploitation and the ruthless battle against it, to an island where one could passively

²² Cited in Horrox, 'Reinventing Resistance', 197.

²³ Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, 56.

²⁴ Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 412-413.

²⁵ Horrox, 'Reinventing Resistance', 202.

observe all these tremendous happenings'.²⁶ Buber defends Landauer from this charge, claiming that '[no] reproach has ever been falsher',²⁷ and arguing that Landauer's position was rooted in a committed and active desire to see a revolutionary politics which avoided the tendency to self-destruct. Whilst this article is sympathetic to Buber's defence and to Landauer's sceptical attitude towards approaches grounded in confrontation, there remain ambiguities here. Simply put, it is difficult to see what Landauer could offer to those suffering through relations of domination in which they play little if any constitutive role. However well-disposed one might be to Landauer's reading of the state, it would be difficult if not impossible to extend such analysis to the victims of imperialism, whether read through statist terms (e.g., the Palestinians) or capitalist-globalist terms (e.g., the international arms trade). The intention here is not to reject Landauer, but to consider where the place of more direct resistance – impeding the flows of oppression – might sit. As will be discussed in the next section and more extensively in the case study, such interventions, while manifestly 'negative', inhere within themselves important dynamics of positivity and creativity. In an often-cited passage, Mikhail Bakunin proclaims that '[the] passion for destruction is a creative passion, too!'²⁸ There is a danger of an overly-simplistic (and non-contextual) reading of such a statement; nonetheless, one might ask whether the act of intervening in the performance of an oppressive relationship can meet the challenge offered by Landauer to engage in a creative, subversive and essentially constructive counter-relation, without falling into the trap of what Horrox takes to be 'the fetishization of

²⁶ Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, 50.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Mikhail Bakunin, 'The Reaction in Germany', in *Bakunin on Anarchism*, ed., Sam Dolgoff (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1980), 57.

values and reification of state and society' and the all-too-common 'lack of imagination' displayed by many resistance movements.²⁹ This paper will return to this question in more detail after considering Simon Critchley's discussion of anarchic meta-politics, suggesting that the tensions between his perspective and Landauer's might offer productive directions.

Critchley provides a number of observations and normative perspectives on contemporary anarchism.³⁰ Through a Levinasian view of ethics as anarchic meta-politics, where an anarchic ethics should not seek to mirror the archic sovereignty that it undermines, and instead 'remain the negation of totality and not the affirmation of a new totality', he outlines a resistance which finds value in its push to disturb the anti-political 'policing' of traditional, archic systems. This policing limits 'the radical manifestation of the people', anti-political in the sense that 'politics is the manifestation of the multiplicity that is the people, of the uncounted demos'.³¹ Such politics is anarchic in the Levinasian sense of a 'meta-political disturbance of the anti-political order of the police', and thus 'politics consists in the manifestation of a dissensus that disturbs the order by which government wishes to depoliticize society'.³² In more concrete terms, the anarchic ethical imperative

²⁹ Horrox, 'Reinventing Resistance', 199.

³⁰ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2008): 88-131. This article will not engage with the problematic uses of Laclauian conceptions of hegemony which accompany Critchley's position. Whilst it could be argued that they limit his approach, the engagement here does not rest on this aspect. For a critique of Laclau which accords with the broader perspectives offered here, see Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 70-76.

³¹ Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 128-129.

³² *Ibid.*, 129.

becomes 'the continual questioning from below of any attempt to establish order from above'.³³

These concerns lead Critchley to consider a resistance performed at an interstitial distance from the state, a distance from the state that is '*within* the state, that is, within and upon the state's territory...a distance that has to be opened from the inside'. Against the Schmittian impulse towards political closure, 'the task of radical political articulation is the *creation* of interstitial distance within the state territory'. In short, Critchley sees a politics which opens spaces for 'working independently of the state, working in a situation'.³⁴ Contra Landauer's spaces of autonomous construction, these spaces provide a level at which 'the atomizing, expropriating force of neo-liberal globalization is to be met, contested and resisted'. It is a space to work 'within the state against the state'.³⁵ Critchley argues that it is in the play of this distance that a 'true democracy', defined as the performance of 'cooperative alliances, aggregations of conviviality and affinity at the level of society that materially deform the state power that threatens to saturate them', might be enacted.³⁶ Whilst Critchley's broader discussion on this point (and on others) might be criticised for sliding either too far towards Gramscian counter-hegemony, or towards liberal reformism, the interest here lies in his moves to open spaces for a democratic/political dissensus which resists the impulse towards political closure, refusing the tendency to form a new totality by opening spaces within the existing order as a continuous meta-political disturbance.

³³ Ibid., 122.

³⁴ Ibid., 112-113.

³⁵ Ibid., 114.

³⁶ Ibid., 117.

Moving to more explicit discussions of civil disobedience, Critchley sees ‘the great virtue of contemporary anarchist practice [as] the spectacular, creative and imaginative disturbance of the state’.³⁷ Focussing on the comical tactics of groups such as Ya Basta! and Billionaires for Bush, he finds value in their politics of subversion.³⁸

[It] is the exposed, self-ridiculing and self-undermining character of these forms of protest that I find most compelling as opposed to the pious humourlessness of most forms of vanguardist active nihilism and some forms of contemporary protest...Groups like the Pink Bloc or Billionaires for Bush are performing their *powerlessness* in the face of power in a profoundly powerful way. Politically, humour is a powerless power that uses its position of weakness to expose those in power through forms of self-aware ridicule. This is why the strategy of non-violent warfare is so important. Of course, history is habitually written by the people with the guns and sticks and one cannot expect to defeat them with mocking satire and feather dusters. Yet, as the history of ultra-leftist active nihilism eloquently shows, one is lost the moment one picks up the guns and sticks. Anarchic political resistance should not seek to mimic and mirror the archic violent sovereignty it opposes. It is rather a question of the cultivation of a *pacifist* activism that deploys techniques of non-violent warfare or what we might even call ‘tactical frivolity’.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid., 123.

³⁸ In the context of the UK, one might look towards groups such as the Space Hijackers

(<http://www.spacehijackers.org>) to find similar examples.

³⁹ Ibid., 124.

What is compelling here is the refusal to emulate the practices of that which is opposed, through a self-conscious self-undermining which seeks to disturb and combat prevailing structures while maintaining and performing a continual awareness of one's powerful powerlessness, and indeed one's struggle to resist the continual impulse towards archaic practices. Critchley ties this perspective to a turn in recent years away from a resistance grounded in common theoretical doctrines, usually Marxism, to one grounded in a shared sense of outrage and grievance, 'namely that unrestrained multi-national corporate, military capitalism is wrong, that war is the wrong response to the grief of 9/11, etc.'. ⁴⁰ He argues that anarchism has moved away from its traditional concern with freedom and autonomy to a concern with 'responsibility, whether sexual, ecological or socio-economic, [flowing from] an experience of conscience about the manifold ways in which the West ravages the rest'. ⁴¹ Whilst such a perspective might sound problematic, and the invocation to prioritise between ethical responsibility and freedom may be missing the opportunity to play the two together, his presentation of contemporary anarchist practice as one which flourishes through its centeredness around an infinite responsibility to the Other, rather than one which insists upon adherence to a totalising theoretical doctrine, can be more readily accepted. Anarchist disturbance works against that which motivates anger (which Critchley takes to be the first political emotion), and is thus a deep and active expression of the politicization and democratization introduced above.

Whilst Critchley can offer valuable perspectives on contemporary anarchist practice, his approach fails to engage with the potential to engage with the direct creativity of the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 126.

⁴¹ Ibid., 125.

dissensus and resistance he advocates (which, as will be discussed below, ties him oddly to Landauer's significantly different approach). This can be seen in his criticism of David Graeber's discussions about consensus and autonomy. Criticising the 'dull and empty procedural' strand of Graeber's detailed discussions about consensus processes in radical groups, Critchley suggests that 'these techniques aim towards the goal of consensus and are rooted in unquestioned conceptions of freedom and autonomy', and even that they are 'simply liberal conceptions'.⁴² Whilst Graeber's writings might occasionally slip into this territory (although less so in his more recent *Direct Action*, published after Critchley's work), this is by no means true of other anarchist writing on these matters. An important example of the struggles inherent in moving towards a consensus process can be found in Uri Gordon's *Anarchy Alive!*.⁴³ Indeed the ubiquity of the term 'consensus process' amongst anarchists suggests that Critchley's position might at the very least be termed uncharitable. There are also countless counter-examples to the charge of displaying 'unquestioned conceptions of freedom and autonomy', notably Emma Goldman, who argued that 'finalities are for gods and governments, not for the human intellect', and that 'in the battle for freedom...it is the *struggle* for, not so much the attainment of, liberty, that develops all that is strongest, sturdiest and finesse in human character'.⁴⁴ Indeed Landauer and Buber's concern with the dangers of rigidity and the necessarily relative character of socialism serves well here.

⁴² Ibid., 127.

⁴³ Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive! Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (London: Pluto, 2008), 47-78.

⁴⁴ Emma Goldman, 'What I Believe', in *Red Emma Speaks*, ed., Alix Kates Shulman (London: Wildwood House, 1979), 35.

This correction is not intended to score a relatively unimportant point against Critchley, but to expose what is argued to be his undue focus on dissensus over consensus. Qualifying his critique of Graeber, he argues that ‘politics as an ethical practice should not assume a pre-given or taken-for-granted notion of autonomy, but is rather hetero-affectively interpellated by a demand that divides it and which impels it into political sequences whose goal would be the cultivation of autonomous spaces...a key concept in such a politics is not consensus but *dissensus*’.⁴⁵ Whilst this article accords broadly with Critchley’s positive view of dissensus as a meta-political disturbance of the depoliticizing totality of archic systems, he seems unwilling to engage in the tension between a non-totalising dissensus and the concrete normativities which occur within that dissensus, instead casting anarchy primarily as negation. In one passage, he speaks of ‘the eternal temptation of the anarchist tradition, particularly for someone like Kropotkin’ as the desire to see ‘the vertical hierarchy of the state structure...replaced with horizontally allied associations of free, self-determining human beings’.⁴⁶ The desire is dismissed as unattainable in present conditions, not unreasonably, but this should not end the discussion on concrete normative perspectives; unfortunately his apparent deployment of a dichotomy between negation and sovereignty/totality precludes such a move. More value might be found if we engage in the tension between negativity and sovereignty, asking whether the refusal to establish a new totality in the place of the old can remain normative beyond dissensus (or might at least find a productive space in the struggle to resist a new totality).

⁴⁵ Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 128.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

It is here that Landauer and Critchley might be brought against one another, not in a move to reconcile their respective positions, but to consider the productive tensions which might arise. Where Critchley sees value in a politics rooted in the meta-political disturbance of an anti-political order, a dissensus which seeks to open spaces for radical articulations within and against the state, Landauer favours a hyper-positivity which, while favourable to the opening of spaces within the state, rejects the question of working (directly) against it, focussing efforts on the immediate creation of concrete alternatives. From Critchley's position, one might argue that Landauer runs the risk of establishing new totalities, of refusing to engage in the politics of anger and responsibility to the other by his rejection of confrontation (albeit a subversive confrontation). For Critchley, impeding the flows of neo-liberal governance, working against the anti-politics of dominant systems, is the imperative of anarchist practice. From Landauer's position, Critchley must be condemned for his preference for negation and dissensus, which holds little hope for reforming the relationships which perpetuate domination. The two find common ground in their reluctance to engage in the concrete positivities of negation, albeit for different reasons; for Landauer, challenging prevailing sets of relations can only occur through the construction of alternatives away from those dominant; for Critchley, the task lies in a constant questioning, an ongoing negation as a move to 'true democracy', without place for considering the more concrete acts of creation in that negation. Here, the challenge is to engage with the potentially productive elements within the tension between the two writers, exploring the potential for an approach which engages with the struggle between the power of a negatory meta-political disturbance and the imperative to construct new relationships as a/the means to undermining those which prevail.

To engage in the tensions between Critchley and Landauer's positions is not to suggest that they can be brought together unproblematically, nor is it to imply that the warnings offered by both writers about the dangers of not taking their positions are anything but serious. Rather, it is to ask whether an approach which takes these dangers seriously, but simultaneously struggles to push against the shortcomings discussed, might find a place in how we think and practice anarchist interventions in the international context. A major part of this approach is to examine and discuss the inherent positivities within actions of dissensus. After considering some strands which might be available here, the article will move to a discussion of the 'Raytheon 9' as a case study which may provide some illumination on the challenges outlined.

Impeding Flows, Creating Flows

In the IR/security context, the concern here is with acts of limitation and resistance which nonetheless might serve to engage in concrete and self-conscious acts of creation, particularly with regards to rewriting dominant narratives of agency. This section discusses several examples offered by others as a means to considering possible sites of construction, before the article moves to the more substantive case study.

Discussing the actions of Earth First!, a radical environmentalist group, Richard Day suggests 'that most actions oriented to impeding flows have a constructive moment, precisely to the extent that they prevent or limit the havoc wreaked by industrial capitalism. Human private property will have little value once we have all died of cancer or radiation

sickness'.⁴⁷ Day gives further examples, including the Chipko movement active in the 1970's and 1980's across India, which sought to protect forests and watersheds through 'treehugging', placing their bodies between the trees and the saws which would destroy them. He also discusses the workplace sabotage carried out by the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) in the early part of the twentieth century, the US dockworkers' blockade of major ports in solidarity with the protests in Seattle in 1999, and what he takes to be the most 'spectacular example of a creative direct action to impede the flows of state and corporate power', the Black Bloc tactic.⁴⁸

By participating in a Bloc, activists offer up their semi-protected bodies to state-sponsored violence, in the hope not only of saving other protesters from physical harm, but also to provoke shock, horror and perhaps even dissent among liberal citizens who hold to values like freedom of speech and the right to legitimate protest. Also, with their balaclavas, garbage can lids and baseball bats, Black Bloc members offer a parody of the riot police, and thereby threaten the legitimacy of the monopoly of state and corporate forms on the use of violent force to attain their ends.

Perhaps most subversive of all, though, is the challenge that the Black Bloc tactic offers to the monopoly on invisibility and silence, with its active ignorance of the command not only to behave well, but to be available to be *seen* behaving well. In refusing to follow the rule of transparency which guides the societies of control, Bloc subjects represent glaring exceptions within the domesticated and privileged strata

⁴⁷ Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 26.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 27-29.

of the global North. Not only has the system of cybernetic regulation failed to modulate their behaviour properly, but they also seem to be immune to self-discipline, fear of physical punishment, and verbal and physical attacks by other activists and academics [*sic*].⁴⁹

Day finds in the Bloc a specific constructive dimension, directed both toward the immediate situation and the popular imagination, which would find little place in Landauer and Critchley, yet which engages in the struggle to resist the totalising impulse while forming (or, more properly, engaging in the ambiguous struggle of seeking to form) micro-relations of solidarity and mutuality. Indeed one might go a step beyond Day here, specifically on the question of their self-discipline; while the Black Bloc tactic is formed largely around an explicit refusal to adhere to the self-discipline demanded by the state, alongside this runs a clear enactment of an alternative relation of self-discipline which, to use Day's terminology, is founded more in affinity than hegemony. It is a self-discipline which is built through mutual understanding and discussion rather than an unproblematic acceptance of authority. As Graeber notes, contrary to media representation, Black Bloc members at Seattle were mostly 'fastidious about their dedication to nonviolence', even in the face of physical violence from other activists angry with the Bloc's window-smashing tactics.⁵⁰ Furthermore, as Graeber makes clear, this mutual understanding is not the unproblematic adherence to 'consensus' suggested in Critchley's critique above, but an ongoing process of self-reflection and contextual awareness, which, as Day shows, often for the Bloc finds its value precisely in

⁴⁹ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁰ David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2009), 497. 406-409

the absence of consensus.⁵¹ Perhaps, then, the refusal to behave, while in the context of the Bloc clearly an act of disturbance and (usually minor) destruction, inheres within itself a powerful rewriting of the politics of agency, a challenge to totalising conceptions of political action and legitimacy, and a construction of modes of intervention and self-discipline founded in affinity, in a coterminous and indistinguishable consensus and dissensus. Perhaps this refusal is an integral part of what Day takes to be a crucial element of prefigurative struggle, that '[avoiding] the quest for masters requires some experience in alternatives to slavery'.⁵²

Another potential contribution can be found in Christine Sylvester's discussion of the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, which was established in the 1980's to protest against the stationing of Cruise Missiles at the RAF base in Berkshire. Sylvester suggests that the actions at the camp over a number of years opened spaces for significant rewritings of agency in IR. She notes how the women

danced...on the missile silos under construction at the base; they blockaded the base gates when missiles were sent on manoeuvres...they domesticated the forces by sticking potatoes up the exhaust pipes of convoy vehicles. Throughout, some campers burned out, became angry, and left. Others stayed angry on, in, and around the fence – that emblematic boundary of security that could not keep them out.⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid., 406-409. See also 287-359 for a broader discussion of consensus processes.

⁵² Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 34.

⁵³ Christine Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 185.

In refusing to mimic the decision making models and security practices of traditional IR, instead engaging in consensus processes and friendly discussions with the soldiers on the base, the women engaged in what Critchley would call the performance of powerlessness in the face of power. In the traditional script, they were irrelevant: 'Peace camps do not lead us to the edge of war. They do not stockpile weapons and hurtle us into arms races. They do not have significant trade patterns with the world. They do not sit at the UN. They do not matter'.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, as they disrupted the actions of the base, they also publically challenged dominant expectations about agency in IR, most obviously with regards to the place of women, but more significantly, with respect to the place of ordinary people. By physically interacting with the tools of IR, with jeeps and missiles and soldiers, they challenged the traditional distinction between the global and the local.⁵⁵ In essence, a group of women in rural Berkshire were *doing* international politics, challenging popular imaginations of what was possible, prefiguring concrete alternatives. More expansively,

the peace camp became the bustling point of energy for a good anarchic system where in the absence of rule-governed expectations, there was room to change what and where one was properly supposed to be through actions at the fences of assigned place. Constructivist Alexander Wendt claims that "Anarchy is What State Make It." Anarchy is also what a variety of yet-to-be-heard people of international relations, and their "strange" politics and conversations and empathies, make of

⁵⁴ Christine Sylvester, 'The Contributions of Feminist Theory to International Relations', in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, eds. Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 265.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 264.

it...we might rehabilitate “anarchy” to think about the ways contemporary relations international scramble and refuse IR standards of identity and place.⁵⁶

Leaving aside the ambiguities inherent within the suggestion of a ‘good anarchic system’, Sylvester’s neat inversion of Wendt’s dictum opens the door to a perpetual rewriting of the terms of IR through the interventions of grassroots agents. The women of Greenham Common, through their disturbances, were engaged in a struggle to reimagine and recreate the boundaries of possibility for ordinary people to engage in IR, denying the global, elitist and militarist dimensions as they publically practiced and formed counter-relations of localism and anti-militarism.

The final example here comes from Polly Pallister-Wilkins and her discussion of anarchist direct action against the Wall being constructed by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.⁵⁷ She examines the approach made by the Anarchists Against the Wall (AATW), an Israeli group of activists, making the central point that their actions represent a merging of anarchist ideas of the politics of acting (as opposed to ‘asking’) with Foucauldian perspectives on networks of power. What is of more concern here is her examination of how AATW exemplify the refusal to ask, in favour of ‘doing’. As opposed to other activist groups, such as Peace Now, AATW are defined through ‘a refutation of the assumption that as a collective of people hoping to change something they will take their

⁵⁶ Christine Sylvester, *Feminist International Relations: An Unfinished Journey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 261.

⁵⁷ Polly Pallister-Wilkins, ‘Radical Ground: Israeli and Palestinian Activists and Joint Protest Against the Wall’, *Social Movement Studies* 8, no. 4 (2009): 393-407.

claim to the state'.⁵⁸ Pallister-Wilkins offers three reasons why AATW act rather than ask; the first is a fear of rendering power to institutions of oppression, reinforcing a politics of demand; the second is the more pragmatic concern that the state will not listen; the third is the 'almost impossible task of identifying all those interest groups who have converged to benefit from the separation Wall and thus cast a large and almost impenetrable network of domination'.⁵⁹ Yonatan Pollak, a prominent member of AATW, articulated these concerns when discussing the role of direct action, stating that 'we do not ask anyone to stop the constructions [of the Wall], because no one has the legitimate right to engage this construction. We simply go and try and stop the work where it is being constructed'.⁶⁰ Again, the actions of the group are most obviously rooted in a disturbance, in finding spaces of distance within the state to work against its practices. Nonetheless, in refusing to allow the state to mediate their demands, and in engaging with the dominant security network at its local and diffuse level (bringing in the Foucauldian concern with networks and nodal points of domination, rather than the traditional focus on the state as *the* pivotal point of security), AATW open spaces for a reimagination of how agency might be advanced, disrupting dominant ontologies of agency through their creation of alternative relations of intervention and practice. Uri Gordon notes the powerful impact that the actions of AATW have on the Israeli public, particularly when they act alongside Palestinians, and challenge dominant notions of identity, existential threats, fear and ethnicity.⁶¹ The activists' explicit practice of the conflict as one founded in joint struggle against authority, rather than one

⁵⁸ Ibid., 398.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 402.

⁶⁰ Cited in Ibid., 402.

⁶¹ Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!*, 156-157.

based in entrenched ethnic difference, constitutes a strong and challenging rewriting of the relations central to security practices in the region, a disturbance which is nonetheless deeply creative.

The Raytheon 9

The remainder of this article will examine one particular case study, that of the 'Raytheon 9', as a means to elaborating on the discussions above. This study is not presented as an exemplary example of the challenges posed above – indeed, the inherent ambiguities of the challenges preclude any such exemplar. Instead, it is a study which, while problematic, may help to suggest potential routes for future interventions. It is also a study which engages with an important concern for many critical approaches to security and IR, i.e., the international arms trade. In doing so, and in approaching the challenges of responding to the arms trade from an anarchist perspective, the study seeks to animate the potentials for anarchism to make concrete interventions in prevailing concerns and debates.

At 08:15 on Wednesday 9th August, 2006, around thirty members of the Derry Anti War Coalition (DAWC) assembled at the Raytheon plant on the outskirts of Derry. They had decided to try and gain access to the plant at a meeting two days before, in response to the use of Raytheon software in guided missile systems which were being used by the Israeli Air Force in its assault on Lebanon. At this point over a thousand Lebanese civilians had been killed since 12th July 2006. When the opportunity to enter the building arose, those thirty attempted to gain access to Raytheon's offices. Most were prevented from gaining access by the police, but ten were able to enter (one subsequently left for personal reasons).

'We piled desks and chairs against the doors. Documents found on the premises were thrown from the windows to supporters outside. After our supporters were moved away by the police, computers, already damaged, were also hurled out. Our main target was the mainframe: we knew that putting this out of action would disrupt Raytheon's internal ordering system and thus hamper production, including production of missiles. The mainframe was decommissioned with a fire-extinguisher.

...After about eight hours inside, a contingent of police, perhaps 40 strong, smashed through the doors wearing riot gear and stood in a semi-circle around us, many holding Perspex shields, some pointing plastic-bullet guns. Holding formation, they inched forward while the officer in command shouted orders to us to "surrender" and lie on the floor. We continued playing cards at a desk in the centre of the room.⁶²

After they were arrested, the nine were charged with aggravated burglary and affray, later amended to criminal damage and affray. On 11th June 2008, by a unanimous vote of the jury, they were found not guilty on three charges of criminal damage (the charge of affray having been dismissed by a judge prior to this). The centrepiece of the Raytheon 9's argument was that they had acted to prevent the commission of war crimes. In his statement to press and supporters following the verdict, Eamonn McCann stated that

the jury has accepted that we were reasonable in our belief that: the Israeli Defence Forces were guilty of war crimes in Lebanon in the summer of 2006; that the

⁶² Eamonn McCann, *The Raytheon 9* (Derry: Derry Anti-War Coalition), 8-9.

Raytheon company, including its facility in Derry, was aiding and abetting the commission of these crimes; and that the action we took was intended to have, and did have, the effect of hampering or delaying the commission of war crimes.

We have been vindicated.⁶³

The actions of the nine were part of a longer campaign to expel Raytheon from Derry, which had been ongoing since the plant was established in 1999, and which had employed tactics including citizens' juries, die-ins, vigils, protests and occupations.⁶⁴ The campaign also attempted to press the city council and the Northern Ireland assembly to withdraw its support and permission for the company's presence (an emotive issue for many involved, given the strong support for Raytheon provided by SDLP leader John Hume, who had recently received the Nobel Peace Prize, and was well respected by anti-war communities in Northern Ireland).⁶⁵

In beginning to discuss what the actions of the Raytheon 9 might offer in thinking about anarchism in the context of IR, it is important to note that the group itself and the broader DAWC were not an explicitly anarchist group, and was 'a loose alliance of human rights activists, radical Christians, feminists, Republicans, anarchists, socialists and environmentalists'.⁶⁶ Nonetheless their actions can offer interesting perspectives on the

⁶³ <http://www.raytheon9.org> (9th May 2010).

⁶⁴ McCann, *The Raytheon 9*, 29-31.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 18-28.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

discussions above about the ambiguities and possibilities of anarchist interventions in the politics of IR and security.

The Raytheon 9 performed an intervention which served to undermine dominant understandings about the site of security practice while concurrently practicing and proposing alternatives in a manner determined to engage with dominant public assumptions. This intervention can be read in two interrelated ways; first, through the target of their intervention; second, through the manner of their intervention. That their target was not the state, or another accepted 'political' mediator of security (such as the UN), is not insignificant. In a similar situation to that discussed by Pallister-Wilkins in the context of resistance against the Wall, the Raytheon 9 provoked a reimagination of the site of security and responsibility, engaging with a specific point in the networks of power which made possible the assault on Lebanon (a perspective resisted by politicians in Derry City Council where even Sinn Féin politicians who had condemned the violence in Lebanon refused to acknowledge the role of Raytheon).⁶⁷ In refusing the traditional site of security, the Raytheon 9 engaged in what Critchley might call a meta-political disturbance, denying the totalising conception placed on acceptable conceptions of security, and challenging the common claims of the arms trade that their role in such affairs is non-political. Through this intervention, the Raytheon 9 served to reform the relations which make up the narrow sites of security, demonstrating to the citizens of Derry that the depoliticising narrative of a security politics located in the alienated realms of the Foreign Office and the UN was not necessary, and that an alternative narrative which saw the site of security as located on the outskirts of their city was possible.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 35.

More importantly, in their refusal to adhere to the orthodoxy of statist mediation, the Raytheon 9 undermined dominant ontologies of agency. The action itself cannot be divorced from the wider campaign against Raytheon's presence in Derry, which, from 1999 until the plant eventually shut in 2010, made the case to local people that the company should not be made welcome in their city.⁶⁸ This argument was made by invoking links between Derry's own violent past and the ongoing events in Lebanon.⁶⁹ Particular ties were drawn at the time of the Raytheon 9's actions between the Bloody Sunday massacre of 1972 and the 28 civilian deaths which resulted from a Raytheon-guided 'bunker-buster' missile hitting a house in Qana, Lebanon, on 30th July 2006.⁷⁰ Feeling that an important part of the network which facilitated the Israeli assault was located nearby, the Raytheon 9 claim that they 'had a legal, moral and political duty' to 'stop or at least delay war crimes'.⁷¹ In refusing the expectation that ordinary people should limit their representation to a politics of asking, and in taking government inaction as a cue to themselves act, the Raytheon 9 might be said to be engaging in a manifestation of the opening of spaces to act against the disciplining authority of the totalising state, derived through anger and responsibility, that Critchley advocates. Nonetheless it would be limiting to deny the deeply creative aspects of the action. Whilst Landauer may have criticised the destructive and confrontational elements of the action, in this destruction they also practiced new relations of agency with regards to political practice, simultaneously refusing the mediation of their actions through totalising conceptions of agency while creating alternatives founded in affinity, in the local and in

⁶⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 43-48.

⁷¹ <http://raytheon9.org/Trial%20Updates.html> (9th May 2010).

responsibility. This might be said to have occurred both at the level of action - of what they did, of their capacity to limit the conduct of the Israeli assault, and at a broader level of provoking popular imagination about the role of ordinary people in security practice. They practiced and preached the supposedly apolitical realm of the arms trade, of security politics and of IR as the agentic concern of ordinary people (and particularly of *local* people), not solely in the traditional context of political representation (in various forms), but as a direct and practicable normative concern. In Landaueresque terms, the Raytheon 9 can be seen as overcoming the relations which make up dominant conceptions of security practice through a construction and contraction of alternative relations which seek to intervene in fundamentally different ways. The image painted in the quotation above in which, as riot police surrounded the nine, they continued to play cards, is remarkably evocative. In one respect, the men refused to take their roles in the expected performance of deference to the arrival of *the real* agents (of the police, to bring Critchley's term to the ground). In another, the riot police were forced into an unanticipated tableau of the activists' own creation, the forces and protectors of militarism rendered mockingly irrelevant, absurd and pathetic in the face of the Raytheon 9's powerful powerlessness.

The above considerations give some indication of how the broader discussions in this article might find more concrete expression. However, there are ambiguities in the Raytheon 9 example which should be examined further, as a means to engaging with the essential ambiguities which form a part of any such intervention. The following paragraphs discuss the Raytheon 9's potentially limited approach to security, and the legalistic dimensions of the Raytheon 9's actions.

As has been suggested, the actions of the Raytheon 9 served in part to destabilise dominant logics of security agency. However, it might also be suggested that, while they served to undermine one approach, they also instantiated a new absolutist discourse. The unproblematic use of slogans such as ‘War stoppers are the real crime stoppers’ and ‘Resisting war crimes is not a crime’ reifies a security founded in and secured by totalising logics, inverting dominant discourses, rather than engaging in the challenge to resist and dispel such polarities.⁷² The Raytheon 9 also made a number of concessions to a legalistic discourse through their actions. They waited to be arrested after smashing the office, and, in court, insisted that their actions were legal, that they were acting to prevent a greater crime, i.e. ‘the commission of war crimes’.⁷³ In addition to a legalistic defence of the actions came appeals to place the arms trade beyond the law, and for *heads of states* to limit Israel’s aggression.⁷⁴ There is some space to speak critically about these aspects of Raytheon 9’s action; particularly that, unlike AATW, they did in part serve to render power to an oppressive institution (or, in keeping with the concerns here, serve to reify dominant conceptions of agency even while opening spaces for new narratives). The concerns which would be raised by both Landauer and Critchley with respect to this dynamic need not be restated. To the Raytheon 9’s credit, there are rereadings of this tension which paint the situation in a more positive light. For instance, it could be argued that the importance they placed on being tried by jury transferred their appeals from the state to ordinary citizens who, as peers, were those from whom they wished to derive legitimacy. It could also be

⁷² McCann, *The Raytheon 9*, 9. This is not to deny the potential value in such statements, but to highlight their ambiguity and limited nature.

⁷³ <http://raytheon9.org/Trial%20Updates.html> (10th May 2010).

⁷⁴ <http://www.raytheon9.org> (10th May 2010).

argued that in appealing to the statist framework for 'vindication', they performed an ironic subversion, turning the system against itself as a tool for their own renarration of agency. Nonetheless there is an ambiguity here which cannot be ignored and which, to some extent, vindicates Landauer's concerns about the paucity of working 'against' the state, and Critchley's concerns about seeking any unproblematic positivity, as opposed to a continuous negation of that which motivates outrage.

A productive route might be to take these ambiguities as central to how such interventions are performed, not as a motivation to inaction, but as part of a continuous struggle to engage in the essentially compromised nature of resistance in a responsible manner; engaging in negation while maintaining a cautious awareness of its potentially limited and limiting features, and while exhibiting a sceptical but active awareness of the positive counter-narratives and counter-relations which might be offered, and indeed prioritised over those which might render power in an unproductive direction. Emphasising those elements of the Raytheon 9's actions which might be read as seeking to form alternative relations of agency with regards to security highlights both what might be seen to be the most engaging and empowering dynamic within their intervention, and provoke an imagination of how anarchism can engage with the politics of IR and security in a form which engages in the struggle to resist totalising practices while maintaining a commitment to positivity. Whilst there are problematic dimensions running through the Raytheon 9, their intervention suggests/opens more than might at first be apparent; in engaging in the play of agency, actively refusing and reforming dominant ontologies, they provoke important reflections for how we think anarchism in this context, moving away from overly globalist

and idealist approaches to one which thinks, practices and recreates the international at the local.

Conclusion

This article has argued that an anarchist approach to international relations and security studies might find force when engaging at the level of concrete, grassroots practices. Anarchist interventions have the potential to engage in counter-narrations and counter-relations which undermine and reform dominant ontologies of agency, challenging globalism and elitism by practicing both their negation and their alternatives. Engaging in the struggle between the ambiguous realms of negativity and positivity opens spaces for a negotiation which seeks to limit prevailing relations of oppression and domination while practicing and preaching the creation of new relations. Anarchist direct action is concerned with making positive interventions in the prevailing system, while prefiguring relations which look beyond the limits of that system. An anarchist intervention into IR/security should place these concerns at its heart, examining the opportunities to undermine and recreate prevailing relations of agency, seeking a fundamental democratisation of the terms and tensions of the global field.