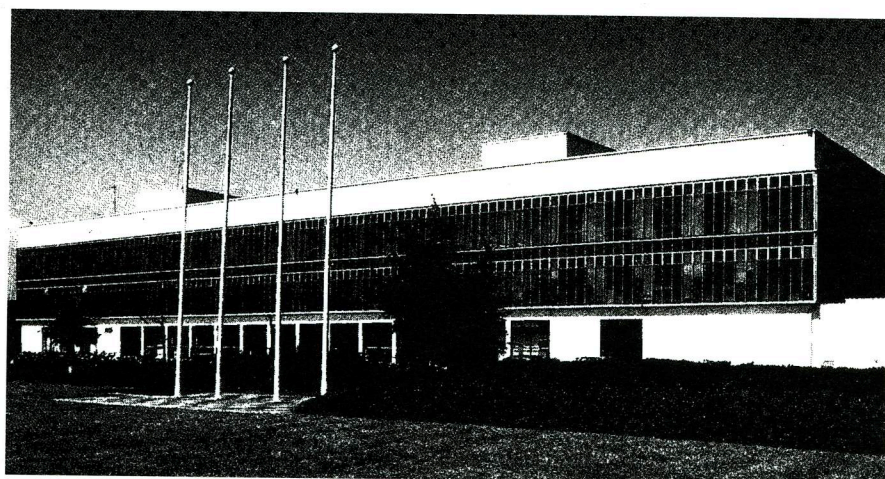


## AKSHUNARCHITECTURE:

**reclaiming the  
spaces of political  
resistance**

**Dr Jonathan Charley**



**Cardiff 1848**

**Shattering the symbols of  
oppression**

"Britain is being turned upside down - as much by new forms of social conflict as by technology. The rural poor are destroying machinery, raiding bread shops, and attacking the workhouse. They are even dismantling the fences around private land. The city is not much better. The urban 'rioter' is assaulting chapels and the homes of political opponents. In the name of Ludd, Rebecca and Captain Swing, saboteurs have smashed and burnt the property of employers and magistrates. There are even tales of spectral figures clad in women's clothes and with blackened faces conducting a nocturnal and clandestine campaign to destroy the toll-gates. Where will it end dear reader? These conflicts and grievances, far from having been resolved, seem to be escalating. As if in honour of their French counterparts, seditious soldiers, sailors and workers gathered for a drunken rally on Spa Green in the East of London with a rumoured plan to storm the Tower of London and liberate the prisons. A rumour that materialised in Wales, when on what is already being called Welsh Bastille Day, paupers destroyed the Carmarthen workhouse in 1843. A day barely seems to pass without a report of yet another workers' trade organisation involved in a dispute over wages and the introduction of new machinery. Ever fearful of threats to civic order, the Government's response to these incidents has been to increase its involvement in prescribing routes and preventing assembly, and after last week we can be sure that crowd control will become a permanent feature of our everyday life. As if terrified by the possibility of the London rally spiralling out of control, the government took no chances and dispatched 170,000 special constables to Kennington Common in order to prevent the declaration of the People's Charter. As a consequence, it is rumoured that this ancient common and meeting place is to be



appropriated, fenced off and made a royal reserve, which I would suggest is only likely to exacerbate tensions between workers and the State."

### Paris 1878 Tear down the city

"Going to Paris is always a memorable affair. But meeting Mr Kropotkin promised to make it unforgettable. We sat at the top of Montmatre where they are planning to build the basilica of Sacre Coeur. Mr Kropotkin, almost incandescent with anger, called it an act of symbolic revenge designed to crush the bones of martyred communards who lay at the foot of the hill. This was indeed a moment for reflection. I spent the rest of the afternoon being entertained by Mr Kropotkin's rather wild attitudes to urban planning. It should have been otherwise, he opined: "One can only reflect on what might have been." With glassy eyes he recalled the barricades of the Commune that artisans under the supervision of café owners had constructed to the height of a three-storey building. He talked with passion about how impromptu workers clubs were set up in theatres, about the suspension of rent payments, and about the story of a 'worker architect' who was in his opinion far more imaginative in his revolutionary zeal than Ledoux or Bouleee. He carefully explained how during the Paris Commune of 1871 as the Vendome statue lay in pieces on the ground, the Commandant carpenter, Jean Louis Pindy had set fire to the Tuilleries before retreating with other communards to Belleville, igniting buildings as a defence measure against the advancing Versaille troops. We wandered down to the river, and there can never have been such a contrast in emotions. For my part I was shocked at how this once beautiful palace had been virtually destroyed. But as for Mr Kropotkin he simply exclaimed with unbridled joy how wonderful the new vista had become with its overgrown crumbling monuments

and how fine it was that in at least one of Europe's cities the dwelling place of emperor's had become a scenic ruin. By all accounts the carpenter Pindy escaped the government's butchers, and has ended up being voted in as the Paris Construction Union's delegate to the Workers' International. Furthermore with what appears to be the full support of Mr Kropotkin, Pindy is planning to table a motion calling for the foundation of a dual federation of communes and trade unions. Bizarre though this vision is, of a society run by worker communards, it would seem to have gathered considerable support amongst other French workers."

### London 1659 Occupy the land

"The very soul of the English revolution is currently being fought over. On the right are the moderate Levellers like Lilburne. On the left the Diggers, or as they like to be called the True Levellers who fully intend to interpret things literally and once and for all, "level men's estates". The radical wing of the Digger movement like the Buckingham Levellers is broadly in sympathy with Gerard Winstanley's 'Law on the Platform of Freedom'. Published in 1652, this incendiary document makes explicit demands for the common ownership of land and labour. It includes a call to nationalise forests, fens and wasteland through out the country as part of a programme to redistribute landed property to the poor. The Diggers, driven it would appear by some diabolic force, see no reason why anyone apart from rich landowners could object to such a programme. They argue that it is perfectly in keeping with the sentiments expressed three years before in Waltham on Thames. On that spring Sunday in 1649 inspired by the foundation of other Digger's communes, a small band of revolutionary soldiers declared the abolition of the Sabbath, of tithes, magistrates, ministers and the Bible.

Proceeding to collectively dig local wasteland, they loudly proclaimed that it was not a symbolic action but a real assumption of what they considered to be their rightful ownership of common lands. It is indeed a most radical vision of the future in which neither God nor powerful property owners have a place, and in which agricultural production in areas like Enfield would be collectivised in the common interest."



**New York 1931**  
**Strike against unfair**  
**property owners**

"It is as if a single woman has travelled across continents changing her name as she arrives in the homes of the impoverished, determined to do something about their abject poverty. Olga, Francesca, Morag and now Emma. The Bronx is simply heaving with activity, slogans, banners, baton wielding police and barricades. Hundreds of tenants led mainly it seems by east European Jews are piling up furniture against the doors and windows of their homes, refusing to pay rent to private landlords. This sort of event is almost becoming common. It reminded me of the famous Glasgow rent strike of 1915 when the women prevented bailiffs from carrying out warrant sales. On that occasion direct action by thousands of tenants not only resulted in significant housing reform but acted as a catalyst for what turned about to be the closest thing in recent British history to a full-blooded worker's revolt. I doubt whether this American rent strike will escalate to anything like Red Clydeside or indeed the inauguration of any Parisian style commune in Manhattan, but judging by some of the rhetoric it is not just fair rents that these proto Bolsheviks are after, but the abolition of the whole rent system and with it wages as well!"

**Samara 1918**  
**Organise workers' councils at**  
**your place of employment**

"It is only 18 May but it is already very warm here in Samara. The All-Russian Construction Workers' Union has just met. In momentous fashion they voted to unite all the old craft unions, to support the nationalisation of the building industry and to push forward in their demands for the introduction of workers' control in all construction firms employing over thirty employees. It would

indeed be an impressive achievement if the Russians were ever to succeed in their objectives. But then almost anything seems possible at the moment. "Foreign capitalist contractors beware, it could be you next!" The discussions jogged my memories of an earlier episode in labour history, the short-lived Operative Builders' Union of 1831-1834. Based in the Birmingham area, some think of it as a hopelessly doomed utopian scheme. But others consider it to have been one of the greatest of all experiments in co-operative direct action. Construction Workers, confronted by the introduction of competitive tendering and rampant jerry-builders set about organising an autonomous community. Inspired by Robert Owen, workers organised a socialist Trade Union, and sought to create a Builders' Parliament and Builders' Guild as part of a national campaign to develop a system of co-operative production and labour exchange. It was not to survive the rapid advance of the new private contracting system. But it did succeed in throwing down the gauntlet to all future generations of militant building workers including those assembled in Samara when it announced with bravado, that the Trade Unions would not strike for less work and more wages. No, they would strike to ultimately abolish wages altogether in order to become their own masters. Labour and capital would no longer be separate but indissolubly joined together in the hands of the workmen and women. It is in retrospect extraordinary how after one hundred years, the same ideas can emerge in a completely different time and space."





**Buckingham 1658**  
**Build now for the common**  
**people**

"When I arrived at the meeting there was a heated debate ensuing as to how the idea of common wealth could be extended into other affairs such as building. Delegates grappled with the few copies that were circulating of Mr Overton's publication, 'An Arrow Against All Tyrants'. Whilst many of the assembled radicals pointed out that they did not share Overton's enduring admiration for God and property, they were happy to endorse his sentiment that all men are born equal with regards to property, liberty and freedom. There was considerable interest expressed in his 'Certain Articles', where he proposes a concrete programme for social and political reform and argues for the need to completely overhaul the system of government and law. This would include the demolition and reconstruction of prisons and more importantly a three-point programme for education, health and land, the details of which are contained in a clause named, 'Concerning Schools, Hospitals, and Commons Enclosed'. In effect, the Articles suggest that as a means of re-distributing resources the new government should publicly fund a construction programme. This would take place throughout the counties of England and Wales and would provide free public schools and hospitals for the mass of poor orphans, widows, aged and impotent persons. It also calls for the use of ecclesiastical lands for charitable purposes, and argues that common lands be made freely available to the people. The debate was rather inconclusive except to say that the overall mood seemed to have been best captured by a citizen who argued that if there was a single action that could unite the warring population, it would be the implementation of the 'Certain Articles'."

### **Anarchism**

Anarchism encompasses such a broad view of the world that it cannot easily be distilled into a formal definition. Michael Bakunin who did much to transform anarchism from an abstract critique of political power into a theory of practical social action defined it thus:

"In a word, we reject all privileged, licensed, official, and legal legislation and authority, even if it arise from universal suffrage, convinced that it could only turn to the benefit of a dominant and exploiting minority, and against the interests of the vast enslaved majority."

Lyon 1870.

Anarchism is a movement for human freedom. It is rooted in normality as opposed to eccentricity - that is anarchism is not some cult of bohemians and nihilists. Its central tenet is that the fundamental problem of human society is power and the quest for power.

Anarchism opposes both the insidious growth of state power and the pernicious ethos of possessive individualism, which, together or separately, ultimately serve only the interests of the few at the expense of the rest. In anarchist theory, the first premise is that of the sovereignty of the individual and from this follows that all human freedom and the rights of the individual are paramount.

The argument against the state is that it, and its apparatus of maintenance, the government, are everywhere in the hands of a small ruling group, a privileged body separated by its formation, status and organisation from the population as a whole. This group collectively monopolises political decision-making. In some societies it may constitute an entrenched and self-perpetuating class.

Democracy adds to the illusion of freedom and equality by proclaiming the idea of majority rule. However this is a rare occurrence in any democracy. A large percentage of the populations do not vote because they are either indifferent or frustrated.

Anarchism is both a theory and practice of life. Philosophically, it aims for the maximum accord between the individual, society and nature. Practically, it aims for us to organise and live our lives in such a way as to make politicians, governments, states and their officials superfluous.

In an anarchist society, mutually respectful sovereign individuals would exist in self-regulating non-coercive relationships with naturally defined communities in which the means of production and distribution are held in common. This may sound utopian and impossible to work, but anarchists are not dreamers obsessed with an abstract ideal. They are aware that the perfect society may never be won and that the struggle may last forever. However, the ideal provides the energy to challenge things as they are, and attempt to make them what they might be.

Ultimately only the struggle determines the outcome, and progress towards a meaningful community must begin with the will to resist every form of injustice. This means challenging all exploitation and defying the legitimacy of all coercive authority.

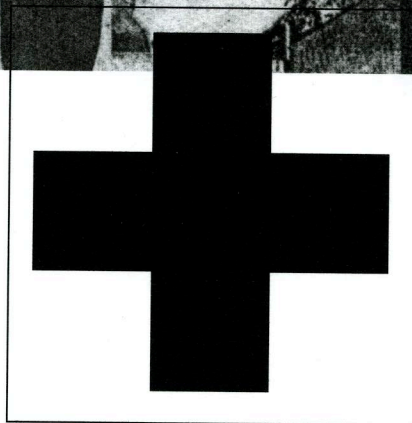
Once the habit of deferring to politicians or ideologies is lost, and that of resistance to domination and exploitation acquired, then ordinary people have a capacity to organise every aspect of their lives in their own interests, anywhere and at any time, both freely and fairly.

Anarchists do not stand aside from popular struggle, nor do they attempt to dominate it. They seek to contribute to it practically whatever they can, and also to assist within it the highest possible levels both of individual self-development and of group solidarity.

The anarchist theory of revolution holds that human society is divided, not as the Marxists contend, purely by a class struggle between property owners and the dispossessed, but also by a struggle and tension between governors and subjects, between freedom and authority. Its guiding principle - based on the experience of centuries that on every occasion when people have entrusted their fate to authority, that authority has ended up enslaving them - is the belief that 'liberty' and 'justice' cannot be upheld through state power or any authority principle, even by the most apparently enlightened and radical political leadership.

It is the fundamental and uncontainable truth of anarchism that social power held over people is a usurpation of natural rights: power originates in the people, and they alone have, together, the right to wield it.





## Moscow 1927

### Avant-Garde architects design social condensers not banks

"I have to confess to never having seen anything like it. It was strange enough just in its shape. Moulded out of reinforced concrete in a street that lacks basic amenities, it resembles some kind of flying craft. It was built to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the revolution, and is in fact a Trade Union workers' club designed by one Konstantin Melnikov. The Russakova Club stands at the cutting edge of all progressive thinking. Its three impressive cantilevers and tall columns of glass were themselves an engineering and construction triumph in what remains a technologically backward country. In fact it is one of a number of innovative club buildings proposed by the new Soviet Government that are meant to operate as incubators of communism with a library, lecture halls, and canteen. It appears that the Union members participated fully in the formation of the brief for the building, and discussed both how it should look and what it should contain. By all accounts they were enthusiastic about the modern forms of Mr Melnikov and were keen to have a building that looked futuristic. This was in marked contrast to the rather conservative tastes of the local Party Commissar who demanded unsuccessfully that the club should have the same sort of presence as the neo-classical façade of the Moscow Soviet. For the time being at least the avant-garde workers appear to have won the argument."

top: Kevin Coyne in *The Institution*, film by Ian Breakwell 1978

bottom: The Anarchist Black Cross

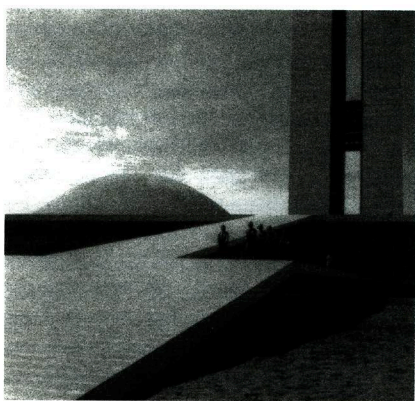
A prisoner support organisation originally set up in Tsarist Russia in the late 1800s. Later revived as an international prisoners' aid network in the late 1960s to help people imprisoned because of their resistance to fascist and authoritarian states.



## Kiev 1921

Don't wait for tomorrow,  
build the commune now

"Thousands turned out to pay their respect to Kropotkin at his funeral yesterday in Moscow. It was a tense edgy affair. The anarchist black flag has not been seen since the crack down on the communes in Moscow and St Petersburg. On the train back to Kiev I encountered Nikita who regaled me with the tale of another anarchist Prince, one Nestor Makhno, the figurehead of the anarchist movement in the Ukraine.



It would appear that a different kind of revolution took place in parallel to that led by the Bolsheviks and had culminated in an anarchist army sweeping through peasant villages, liberating a zone that at one point stretched from the outskirts of Odessa, to the Don in the east, and Kharkov in the north. Land was immediately handed to peasant communes and in some towns the factories were occupied and placed under the control of workers' councils. Nikita maintained that from November 1918 to June 1919, the peasants of the liberated zone lived without any external authority, forging free communes and councils of working people. In numerous proclamations they declared themselves free from all state power, and were reputedly disposing of themselves and of the products of their labour quite independently. It also appears that whenever the Makhnovists entered a large village or town they

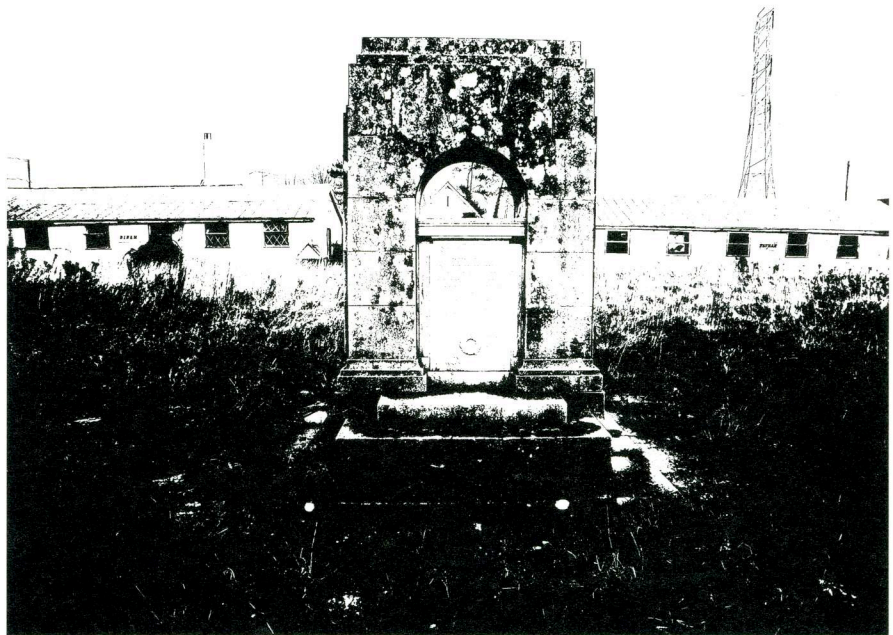
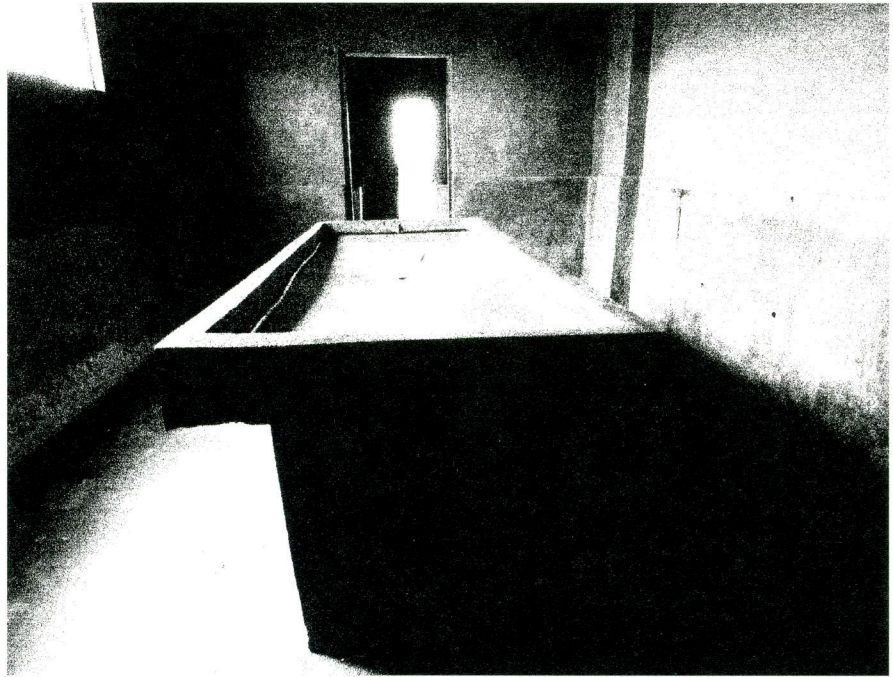
assembled an audience of cheering workers and ceremoniously blew up the prison, lifted all restrictions on the press and declared unrestricted freedom of assembly and political association. At this point Nikita became rather over enthusiastic and started talking about free theatre, self-managed schools and other fantastic arrangements including matters of a sexual nature. As we parted company he thrust a note into my hand that he said had been nailed to the posts and fences throughout the liberated districts of the Ukraine. The gist of the proclamation explained that the only role of the anarchist army was to free a region from all political parties, power and dictatorship, and to guarantee the workers' freedom of action and liberty from all exploitation and domination. Heady stuff, I think you will agree, although my friend Mr Ginzburg dismisses them as anti-Semitic lunatics, comparing them to the Krontstadt sailors who he insisted were actively undermining the authority of the new Soviet government. Whatever the truth of the matter, I will endeavour to find out."

## Barcelona 1936

Be prepared for the party

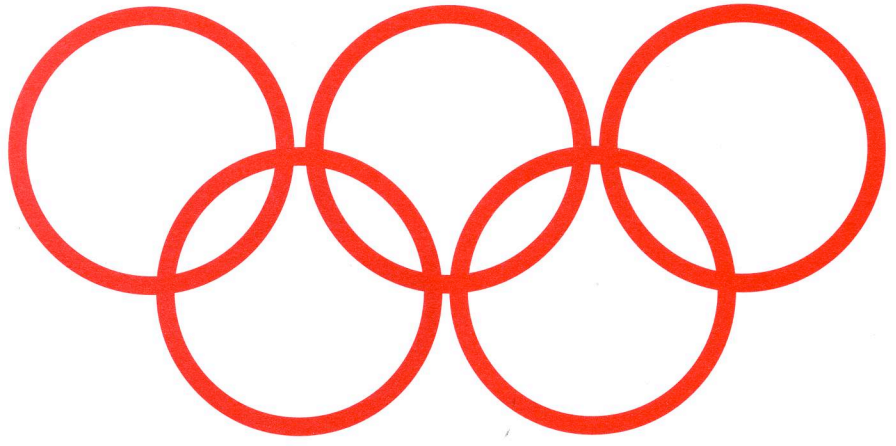
"This is an extraordinary place to be at the moment. I am deafened by a symphony of corks, songs, and gunfire. Down the road in Madrid 40,000 builders led by the CNT have gone on strike, whereas here in Barcelona the anarchist led Construction Workers' Union has become one of the headquarters of the resistance to Franco. Abad de Santillan who calls himself a libertarian communist is desperately trying to persuade other comrades of his plan for a 'mutual' and collectivised economy organised through the factory committees. There are plenty of other schemes afoot as well, and despite threats from Falangists, the city remains in festive mood. The atmosphere is a little reminiscent of the optimism that had gripped Moscow in the

first years after the revolution when manifestoes bounced around the streets calling for the complete democratisation of planning and the development of new forms of revolutionary art. Militants like Aleksei Gan promised to transform art into a spontaneous mass action that would help create an unthinkable city of perpetual festivity. All distinctions between performer and audience would be broken. And it is true that people journeyed to St Petersburg just to participate in the voluntary re-enactment of the storming of the winter palace, whilst others stayed in Moscow and listened to the steelworker standing on a roof conducting ranks of hooting factory sirens. Well, it appears that the same sort of euphoria has invaded the minds of Catalans. They are singing that the proletarian wants music made by machines and not by chamber orchestras, whilst pyromaniacs torch churches, speak of free love and an end to all discipline. Somewhat miraculously there appears to be no crime, and more practically the insurgents have begun to squat land and collectivise public services. How long the summer carnival lasts remains to be seen. It is not clear at times who is fighting who."



opp. pg: National Congress Building, Brasilia 1958  
 right: (1) Majdanek concentration camp, Lublin, Poland  
 (2) The Boys Village, Aberthaw, South Glamorgan, Wales 1930





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