

NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study

ELEC-UG 2747: Anarchism as Method
Gallatin Graduate Elective
Spring 2022

Jacob Remes
jacob.remes@nyu.edu
1 Washington Pl., Room 515
Office hours: W 10-12, Th 1-3

Th 4:44-7:25

Description

“If you put on anarchist glasses,” writes political scientist James C. Scott in his book *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, “and look at the history of popular movements, revolutions, ordinary politics and the state from that angle, certain insights will appear that are obscured from almost any other angle.” Using an “anarchist squint,” Scott argues, allows us to better understand more clearly informal order, submerged politics, informal regulation of markets and commons, resistance to the state, subversion of legal regimes, and other topics. It can show us, in other words, the ways that people have built order, regulated their lives, and resisted domination in ways outside and against the state. The idea of this seminar is to adopt such an “anarchist squint” and take anarchism as method for students’ varied work and so to test the utility of an “anarchist squint” for it. We will spend the term reading scholarship by people who do and do not identify as anarchists or as abolitionists, but who ask the sort of questions anarchists and abolitionists ask. These may include Scott, Colin Ward, Ursula Le Guin, Saidiya Hartman, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, David Graeber, and others. Familiarity or affinity with political anarchism are unnecessary but welcome.

Note: In the spirit of anti-authoritarian politics, and also because I believe graduate courses should be useful to their students, this syllabus is mostly up for negotiation. In particular, if there are books or topics you would like read that are not on our schedule, please propose an alteration. We are not, for instance, reading very much classic anarchist theory, because that is not how I came to or understand my own anarchist methodology, but I am open to altering the syllabus so as to include classic theory if students desire it. The other obvious revision we might make, if students want, is to focus more directly on methodology; that is, to look at anarchist methods, not just anarchism *as* method. We will talk about these potential revisions the first day of class.

Learning goals

- To think deeply about the state and resistance to it.
- To develop graduate-level skills in academic reading and analysis.
- To experiment with anarchism as a method for social science and humanistic inquiry.

Required texts

Please obtain the following books. They are available at the NYU Bookstore, and I also include their ISBNs so you can search for cheaper copies. (Note that cheaper editions might exist with other ISBNs.) Before you order your books, however, note that, as I write above, we might end up changing the reading list after our first meeting.

- Chris Dixon, *Another Politics: Talking Across Today's Transformative Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). ISBN 9780520279025
- Patricia Ewick and Susan S. Silbey, *The Common Place of Law: Stories from Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). ISBN 9780226227443
- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). ISBN 9780520283138
- David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2021). ISBN 9780374157357
- Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: Norton, 2019). ISBN 9780393357622
- James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009). ISBN 9780691142906
- Amanda Huron, *Carving Out the Commons: Tenant Organizing and Housing Cooperatives in Washington, D.C.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018). ISBN 9781517901974
- Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (1974; republished New York: Harper Voyager, 1994). ISBN 9780061054884
- Tina Loo, *Moved By The State: Forced Relocation and Making a Good Life in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019). ISBN 9780774861007
- Jacob A.C. Remes, *Disaster Citizenship: Survivors, Solidarity, and Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016). ISBN 9780252081378
- James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009). ISBN 9780300169171
- Harsha Walia, *Border & Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2021). ISBN 9781642592696
- Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, 2nd ed. (1973; republished Oakland, Calif: PM Press, 2018). ISBN 9781629632384

Assignments and grading

This course has three main activities: reading, talking, and writing. You need to do all three of these things to be successful.

Class participation and discussion – 20%

The purpose of class participation is not only to show that you have done the reading assigned, but also to help yourself and your classmates better understand the readings and the issues discussed in them. In addition, class participation provides practice for the skill of engaging in honest, respectful, and thoughtful intellectual discussion. The point of

discussion is quality, not quantity; you don't get points each time you open your mouth, and the person who talks once but says something brilliant that moves the discussion forward is more appreciated than the person who talks every five minutes but never says anything useful. That said, you can't participate well if you never participate, so you can't be silent; if I don't know the sound of your voice by the end of the term, you're unlikely to get a good class participation grade. Likewise, you can't participate if you're not in class, so please prioritize attendance. (See the "course policies" section below for more on the attendance policy.)

Book reviews – 15%

For your choice of three weeks in the term, you will write a review of the book we've read. These reviews should be in the style of academic journal book reviews: they should be roughly 1000 words and include both brief summaries of the thesis and each chapter and analysis and evaluation of the work. I encourage you to get into the habit of reading academic book reviews to learn the form, and I can direct you to some journals that can serve as models. You need not declare ahead of time which week you will write reviews, but I strongly encourage you to distribute them across the semester.

Reading responses – 5%

In the weeks that you do not choose to write a book review, you will instead write a short (approximately 250 words, or one page) reading response. Please email them to me by 4:30 the day before class. (This will allow me to read them before we meet.) Reading responses aren't papers, and they won't be graded as a paper. Rather, they are a way to make you think about the reading before you come to class, to get your intellectual juices flowing, and to practice writing. I leave up to you how to approach your reading responses: you might assess the argument of the book; you might consider the extent to which the book really does take an anarchist perspective, and how; you might put the book in the context of your own research. It's up to you, and you can do them differently in different weeks.

Presentation(s) – 10%

Each week, a student will take charge of starting the discussion. Briefly introduce the author and the work (Who is the author? How does this work fit into his or her broader career? For whom was this book written? When?), describe the questions the author asks and how he or she answers them, and highlight the sections of it that you think are key to our conversation. Then start us off by asking some questions that will spark discussion.

Final paper – 50%

At the end of the semester, you will submit a term paper. I am eager for your paper to be useful to you in your long-term study, and so I am flexible about the form they take. Depending on your interests and field, a historiographical essay on the topic of your choice may be appropriate; or it might make sense to write a research paper directly related to your thesis or dissertation topic. Regardless, the papers will be 20-25 pages and should contribute in some way to your long-term project. Please come to office hours (or make an appointment) to talk about your paper topic in the first few weeks of the term. You will

submit a brief proposal/prospectus and preliminary bibliography on **March 3** so that I can give you feedback before you start.

Course schedule

January 27 – Introductions

James C. Scott, *Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), ix-29.

[Preface and chapter 1; Link on Brightspace]

Peter Kropotkin, “Anarchism,” in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1911. [Link on Brightspace]

Recommended: Abigail Boggs, Eli Meyerhoff, Nick Mitchell, and Zach Schwartz-Weinstein, “Abolitionist University Studies: An Invitation,” 28 August 2019.

February 3 – Grounding ourselves in movement politics

Chris Dixon, *Another Politics: Talking Across Today’s Transformative Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

February 10 – Like a Seed Beneath the Snow

Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, 2nd ed. (1973; republished Oakland, Calif: PM Press, 2018).

Robin D.G. Kelley, “Shiftless of the World Unite!” and “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: The Politics and Pleasures of Community,” in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: New Press, 1994), 17-54. [Link on Brightspace.]

February 17 – A history of the state

James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009).

February 24 – Abolitionist geography

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

March 3 – What Would Shevek Do?

Proposal/prospectus and preliminary bibliography due.

Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (1974; republished New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

March 10 – Anarchist deep history

David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2021).

March 17 – No class (Spring Break)

March 24 – Private lives

Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: Norton, 2019).

March 31 – Decommodifying housing

Amanda Huron, *Carving Out the Commons: Tenant Organizing and Housing Cooperatives in Washington, D.C.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

April 7 – Property and citizenship

James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009).

April 14 – Modernization and the liberal state

Tina Loo, *Moved By The State: Forced Relocation and Making a Good Life in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019).

April 21 – The welfare state

Jacob A.C. Remes, *Disaster Citizenship: Survivors, Solidarity, and Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

[Note that I will absent myself from class this week so that you can have a full and unencumbered conversation without the author being present.]

April 28 – Borders

Harsha Walia, *Border & Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2021).

May 5 – Law

Patricia Ewick and Susan S. Silbey, *The Common Place of Law: Stories from Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

May 11 (Wednesday) – Final Papers Due

Please drop off a hard copy and also email me your paper by 2pm.

Course policies

Fundamentally, all the policies below can be summarized as, “Graduate students are adults who are here by choice, and you and I should both act like it.” Everything else is commentary.

Attendance. As described elsewhere in this syllabus, participation in class discussion is a key thing we do in this class. You can’t participate if you’re not in class. Therefore, attendance is required. Frequent absences will be factored into your participation grade. That said, some absences are legitimate and unavoidable, and it is up to you to decide what those are. Absences for religious observance are always permissible, but you should let me know what days you’ll be out. If an absence is unavoidable, please email me ahead of time and I will excuse your absence. In ordinary circumstances, I don’t need to see a doctor’s note; an email that you are sick will suffice. No matter why you miss a class, it’s your responsibility to find out what happened during it, so you should ask a classmate for notes.

If you are sick, I encourage you to take the day off and rest, but if you feel up to it, or if you are feeling perfectly fine but are quarantined for Covid reasons, you may zoom into class.

Please let me know ahead of time so that I know to set up Zoom in the classroom and send you a link. Having some people on Zoom and others in the classroom is disruptive and creates a bad learning environment for everyone, so please note that zooming in is an accommodation for people who are sick or quarantined and cannot be your default way of engaging in class.

Electronic devices. Electronic devices can sometimes help and sometimes hinder active participation. They can be resources for looking things up; they might have your text on them; and they can be essential to students with disabilities. But they can also be distracting to you and to your classmates (and your professor!). Texting, IMing, or otherwise playing on your devices shows a lack of respect for the others in the room. (So too, for that matter, do things that do not require electronics, like reading the newspaper or sitting at the table reading a novel.) While you are welcome to have your computer or other device for class-related work while in class, please refrain from checking your email, IMing, texting, playing games, tweeting, or otherwise using your screens for non-class purposes. The general rule is, Don't be rude.

Academic integrity. As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the university. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website at <https://gallatin.nyu.edu/about/bulletin/grad/policies/academic-integrity.html>.

Beyond the above boilerplate warning, the best rule is: When in doubt, cite. This admonition isn't just about following the rules. To be convincing, arguments must be based in fact, and in order to assess facts the reader must know from whence they came. Academic dishonesty also robs you of the education you're here for; if you don't do the work you're supposed to do, you don't get the educational experiences you're supposed to get. Plagiarism is especially egregious in a graduate program, and the penalties will be severe. If you have questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty or plagiarism, ask before it is too late.

Deadlines and extensions. By default, written work must be turned in on time and will not be accepted late. If a legitimate delay is unavoidable, we can negotiate a revised deadline, but you must ask for one no less than 24 hours before the deadline. Practically, what this means is that you should try to get your work done on time, and if you can't you should ask me for an extension and we'll work something out. But if you don't ask me for an extension first, you'll be in trouble.

Office hours and help. I encourage you to come to my office and chat about anarchism, the class, or about anything else. No appointment is necessary during office hours. If you want to meet outside my office hours, feel free to email me for an appointment and we'll make something work. You're also welcome to email me at jacob.remes@nyu.edu (but please

don't expect a fast response on weekends or evenings). Always, the rule is, if you don't understand something, or if you're having trouble, ask for help, whether in class, by email, or in office hours.

Academic assistance. What we're trying to do here is think about hard things in a supportive environment. This course is supposed to be difficult (if it's not, complain to me and we'll fix it!) but I also want to be supportive. Giving you help is my job. But I'm not the only one you can turn to for help. The general rule, whether for reading or writing or researching or life, is, ***If you're having trouble, ask for help.*** That's what I'm here for. If for whatever reason you don't want to talk to me, reach out to your academic advisor, to Hannah Gurman or Greg Erickson (the faculty directors of the Gallatin MA program) or Gwynneth Malin (the administrative director of the Gallatin MA program). (Undergraduates can speak to their class advisor; graduate students in other schools should seek out their own DGS.) The most important thing is not to suffer in silence and to make use of the many NYU and Gallatin resources that exist to help you.

General support. Beyond academic support, Gallatin has resources for you if you need help. There are many entry points: you can turn to your academic advisor; to the administrators of the MA program (Hannah Gurman, Greg Erickson, and Gwynneth Malin); to Richard Jung, the assistant director of student affairs (richard.jung@nyu.edu, xxx-xxx-xxxx(c), room 525); to the NYU Wellness Exchange (212-443-9999, 24 hours a day); or to me. If you're having difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or if you lack a safe and stable place to live, and you think it's affecting your performance in the course, I urge you to contact Richard Jung or Dean of Students Pat McCreery (patrick.mccreery@nyu.edu) for support. If you feel comfortable speaking to me, I will advocate on your behalf. When non-academic situations intrude on your academic life, you may tell me as much or as little as feels comfortable.

Disabilities. New York University is committed to providing equal educational opportunity and participation for students with disabilities. It is the University's policy that no qualified student with a disability be excluded from participating in any University program or activity, denied the benefits of any University program or activity, or otherwise subjected to discrimination with regard to any University program or activity. If you have a disability and need accommodation, the first step is to talk to the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities. You can contact them at 212-998-4980 or email mosescsd@nyu.edu; see <http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/students-with-disabilities.html> for more information. Before or after you speak with the Moses Center, I am happy to talk to you about accommodating you.

Other Books

This is a list of books that were in a previous version of this class, or that were almost on the syllabus, or that could have been on the syllabus. I list them here for your interest, in case you want to read more books like this (or in case you want to make a pitch for them to return to the syllabus).

- William C. Anderson and Zoé Samudzi, *As Black as Resistance: Finding the Conditions for Liberation* (Oakland, Calif.: AK Press, 2018).

- Gustave Affeulpin, *The So Called Utopia of the Centre Beaubourg*, trans. Luca Frei (1976; London: Bookworks, 2007).
- Nicholas Blomley, *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2018).
- David Graeber, *Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Melville House, 2015).
- Carissa Honeywell, *Anarchism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2021).
- Sara Horowitz, *Mutualism: Building the Next Economy from the Ground Up* (New York: Random House, 2021).
- Mike Konczal, *Freedom from the Market: America's Fight to Liberate Itself from the Grip of the Invisible Hand* (New York: New Press, 2021).
- Cindy Milstein, *Anarchism and its Aspirations* (Oakland, Calif: AK Press, 2010).
- Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe, UK: Minor Compositions, 2013).
- James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes To Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998).
- Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (And the Next)* (London: Verso, 2020).
- Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *Off The Books: The Underground Economy of the Poor* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).