

Things that seem *sacred*—sacred for centuries and accepted by everyone—such as the “reality” of God, the economy or the State—are the very things you must learn to suspect and inquire into. In this pamphlet, the sly anti-theoretician Alejandro de Acosta exposes the State as an insubstantial shadow of the mind—an idol built of words, words, words and more words by our foes and conquerors. The overbearing domination of the State over the individual is the central menace and danger of our times (and year by year its exactions become more merciless), yet the domination of the State *begins* with our lamb-like, subjective **belief** in it.

TWO STYLES OF ANTI-STATIST SUBJECTIVITY

by Alejandro de Acosta



ENEMY COMBATANT PUBLICATIONS



NORTH BROTHER ISLAND, NEW YORK

Suggested Reading

**How To Live Now or Never:
Essays And Experiments 2005-2013**
by Alejandro de Acosta
(Repartee/ LBC Books)

The Impossible, Patience: Critical Essays 2007-2013
by Alejandro de Acosta (Ardent Press)

H.P. Lovecraft: The Disjunction in Being
by Fabian Luduena
(translated and with an introductory essay
by Alejandro de Acosta)

Max Stirner's Political Spectrography
by Fabian Luduena
(translated and with an introduction by Alejandro de Acosta.
Published by Spectral Emissions.)

**A Mestizo's Identity:
Concerning a 1929 Anarchist
Manifesto**
by Alejandro de Acosta

The Garden of Peculiarities
by Jesus Sepulveda

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18 In a manner perhaps not so different from the distinction Leibniz makes between an "apparent self" and a "real self" in the *New Essays on Human Understanding*: "The 'self' makes real physical identity, and the appearance of self, when accompanied by truth, adds to it personal identity" (237).

19 I return to this question further on. I am also working to address it at greater length in another article on Stirner, tentatively entitled "The Stirner that Eats Gods."

20 To hazard some description of the fascinating thought she has presented in her several books and articles.

21 The article (and its translation) include Luis Cusicanqui's 1929 manifesto, "The Voice of the Peasant."

22 Most importantly, perhaps, by Gloria Anzaldúa. In making this claim do not in the least wish to diminish the relevance of her thought to the North American context. To the contrary, it continues to be a vital exposure of many of the blind spots in North American political and social thought.

23 Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui indicates that this is the limit of the manifesto: it "is ideologically constructed from the point of view of opposition as the source of identity." But she claims that we can "catch a glimpse of the basically humanistic character of [its] postulates . . . the future society, in its widest and most inclusive sense, translates to this idea: no longer Indians (colonized), but human beings, equal in their rights inasmuch as they are workers, and free to build their own destiny" (Manifesto, 21).

24 What is interesting about anarchism is that its name, especially the suffix, fits it badly. I agree with David Graeber when he writes that the intellectuals who gave it its name in nineteenth century Europe "did not think of themselves as having invented anything particularly new" (Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology, 3). If anarchism had and continues to have a life as an ideology, it also had a prehistory and will have a future as something else.

NOTES

- 1 All references are to Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*. [Ego]
- 2 See my translation of "A Mestizo's Identity: Concerning a 1929 Anarchist Manifesto" by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui. [Manifesto]
- 3 The phrase "colonial difference" is borrowed from Walter Mignolo. As I use it, it refers to the fact that many apparently cultural differences are the product of colonial geohistories.
- 4 My references to imposed and learned imitation derive ultimately from Gabriel Tarde.
- 5 I am not in the least opposed to utopianism or utopian thought. Rather I am troubled by the unconscious or unconfessed utopianism of State-thought that does not seem to allow for the efflorescence of new utopian ideas (because it seems to absorb all of them).
- 6 The phrase "imaginary totality" is borrowed from David Graeber. He characterizes the ideal of the state as the "imaginary totality" par excellence." *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, 65–66.
- 7 When I write "not interesting" I intend it to replace some more predictable category of morality such as "evil."
- 8 "Uniqueness" because "ego" translates *Einzig*, "the unique one." I also use the term "singularity" for this irreducible aspect of subjectivity.
- 9 I find it a crucial and underremarked matter that in *The Ego and Its Own*, Stirner assumes that absolutely everyone is some kind of egoist. But most of us are "unconfessed" egoists, possessed by one or more Causes. "All your doings are unconfessed, secret, covert, and concealed egoism" (149). See also p. 37.
- 10 "Possessed" here implies both the political sense of belonging as the appendage of a group or institution, and the magical sense of demonic possession. In both cases I am the property, or at least the quasiproperty, of a greater, stronger entity that in many important senses defines my existence. See the section entitled "The Possessed," (35–62).
- 11 The term "existential territory" is borrowed from Félix Guattari. As I use it, it includes geographical spaces, bodily processes and dispositions, and affective knots or patterns, anything about which one could say, that it is "mine."
- 12 For example, *Ego and Its Own*, 89, 183.
- 13 This is not merely a matter of the reappropriation of public spaces or natural resources. "What I possess" here could include, for example, affective states, forms of perception, and speech genres.
- 14 As Mauss describes it: "To refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war; it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality." *The Gift*, 13. [Gift]
- 15 The overt reference, of course, is to Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." But I am also gesturing to the many other texts of ideology and cultural critique that make derivative or similar arguments.
- 16 See also 227.
- 17 This has not gone unnoticed by those anarchists who include Stirner in their tradition.

Two Trajectories (Introduction to the 2016 Edition)

This pamphlet reproduces the first piece I wrote on Stirner—recovers it, in fact, since I daresay it will find more and friendlier readers at book fair tables and other Enemy Combatant sorts of encounters than in the pages of *International Studies in Philosophy*, the peer-reviewed journal where it first appeared about ten years ago. As I wrote the article, I was enjoying the inherently paradoxical task of teaching Stirner's book in college philosophy classes. I was exploring from (*away* from) leftist anarchism, as some of the confused language around civilization and barbarism will show (though one could do much worse than old Kropotkin and Graeber's smart little book!). So I was of the mind to present anarchist ideas in an academic setting, as part of the curriculum. I was still somewhat of that mind when I wrote the Stirner section of an article called "Anarchist Meditations." I was not of that mind when I wrote an essay called "How the Stirner Eats Gods" for *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*, and I have not been of that mind since then. My reading of Stirner, and my estimation of his reception, continued to change as my sense of where and when it made sense to discuss his thought changed; the most recent approach is in the introduction (with spectral theses) to my translation of Fabián Ludueña's *Stirner's Political Spectrography*.

That is more or less my trajectory with respect to Stirner. The other style discussed in the article is that of Luis Cusicanqui. Here the crossing went in a different direction: I had studied and taught Latin American philosophy, focusing on questions of indigenous and popular knowledge, in the academic setting; but my translation of Silvia Rivera C.'s article on Luis C. appeared, not in an academic journal, but in *Perspectives in Anarchist Theory*, published by the Institute for Anarchist Studies. (As chance would have it, that translation is also being reprinted this year, by Oplopanax Publishing.) It's certainly the case that one hears more about indigenous knowledges and something called decolonization in universities these days, but I am not convinced it is not another form of pacification. As Graeber wrote elsewhere in the booklet I cite in the article, "one would imagine being an openly anarchist professor would mean challenging the way universities are run—and I don't mean by demanding an anarchist studies department, either"—the same must be said *a fortiori* of any demand or plan for decolonial studies. Thus I think the contrast I invoke on the first page merits repetition, merits being dramatized again, in search of new spaces, old lands, or another—probably artificial—earth.

My response to the impossibility of anarchy or 'decolonization' in both spaces, the academic *and* the political, has been to experience the political from a greater distance (psychic disidentification, the place of 'egoism'), and

to treat the academic space with greater circumspection, aiming to remain focused on what it can and cannot do as I enter and leave it. To some degree this varies by institution, and to some degree it does not, if one takes seriously the idea that the university is in ruins. Therefore I often remain silent and listen there instead of speaking, read it instead of writing for it—and with respect to Graeber's challenge, I am neither open nor exactly an anarchist there, while not exactly becoming someone else. As with other institutional sites, the most radical gesture in the contemporary university—*that leaves it standing*—is to study there (the searching I just invoked is study's strange double, and the other way around as well).

In any case, I don't regret that for a time I inhabited these spaces, and the tension between them, differently, perhaps more optimistically, or perhaps simply with a different grasp of theory and practice—long enough to document or rewrite that tension in this modest little article on two styles that are, after all, still available in some mutant form or another, and not only as knowledge. And I remain, more than ever, concerned with style and escape.

A. de A.

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Education," we find this thought: "man's supreme role is neither instruction nor civilization, but self-activity" ("False," 12). Perhaps we can now finally view Stirner's process through Cusicanqui's discovery: the State, at least the Euromodern imagination of the State, is not ultimately the issue. Any program of acculturation, any way of upholding knowledge separated from unique life as superior to that life, its self-activity (the only "truth," according to Stirner) must be opposed or escaped if self-affirmation is the truest desire.

In any case, for some time now, one has been hearing that the nation-state is increasingly not the pivot of global geopolitics (for my part, I'm not sure that it ever was, in its Euromodern form, anyway), and that our political theories of citizenship and human rights have exhausted their relevance. It does not seem to me that Max Stirner or Luis Cusicanqui would have much concern with this shift: it is a matter of understanding what the new imaginary totality to come is, the one that stands or will stand in the place of State, as the utopian excrement of the new alliances of power, and to begin once again the process of disengagement and self-activity or self-affirmation.

What I have tried to dramatize here is some sense or dimension of subjectivity as self-constituting. Without presupposing a common, universal subject who then adopts this or that political ideology (without presupposing even anarchism, therefore) the individual or collective self can, sometimes *must*, design or diagram for itself a psychology, an ethics, a way of life. Its expression is what I call a style. What offends or insults that way of life can, sometimes *must* be resisted: refused or struggled against, or again, in a possibility that enters into neither Stirner nor Cusicanqui's texts, escaped.

But did the possibility of escape never enter into their lives, whatever their texts might say? I am not sure. Perhaps the process and the discovery presuppose an escape from identity. Escape, as subjectivity, from identity: that would be to start the imaginary identification process again from zero. That is, from self. Perhaps identity is most interesting when it seems to be nothing: a creative nothing, raw impulse to imagine, desire to create.

7. STYLE

Style is the excessive expression of what singularizes me. It should be unmistakable: a revolutionary philosophical thesis may encapsulate it, but so could a revolutionary manifesto. I have characterized Max Stirner's process and Luis Cusicanqui's discovery as *styles* of anti-statist subjectivity, and not ideologies or discourses, for precisely this reason. Ideologies and discourses ultimately tend, perhaps, in the direction of gregariousness; a *style*, must be singular. An ideology or a discourse possesses a self, leads it to conceive one or more imaginary totalities. A style is the mark of dispossession. It cannot be imitated without innovation. To further explain this, I return to the question I raised about Stirner's Union of Egoists: how do we understand the existence of such a group as one in which no one is subordinated to a collective Cause? I am still not sure how to answer this question. But it may be the case that this question is prominent for Stirner (and for me) because of the way in which selves are produced for those who are asked to accept the State as their own history, their own inheritance, their own civilization. In terms of this essay, this is the Euromodern anarchist question.

Luis Cusicanqui, more or less unconsciously (Stirner would tell him: it matters not) discovers a subjectivity, a "we" beyond the bypassed limit of liberal or reformist politics. We may conclude that his affirmation of that broader "identity" (that it is broader in being more territorially/historically situated matters) is an attempt to locate what can be affirmed beyond the sense of "identity" inscribed by the State in its process of *mestizaje*. In terms of this essay, this is the Latin American anarchist question.

Each is in a sense a variant of the same simple question: "what can I affirm?" This question seems to replace or at least complicate the more familiar one of "Who am I?" But they are asked and answered in each case differently. In this contrast we might rediscover the significance of the colonial difference. Stirner can find no existential territory to begin from other than himself, so, absurdly, philosophically, he imagines the invention of self and community as egoism and as the Union of Egoists. Luis Cusicanqui does indeed find a territory to begin from, the countryside, finds there a people who fit badly into the State, and discovers himself among them.

8. TO ESCAPE THE STATE

From both sides of the colonial difference, the State is revealed as the "barbarian alliance" it is: Luis Cusicanqui mocks the notions of rights and citizenship, showing how meaningless they are for the most dispossessed—and by extension for all who would ally with them. Glancing at Stirner's scathing take on the question of education in "The False Principles of Our

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1. INTRODUCTION

Broadly, I am interested in the subjective disposition to reject the insistence of certain sorts of imaginary totalities in thought and action. The cases I will analyze have to do with styles of anarchist subjectivity insofar as it rejects the State. The relevance of these dispositions, these styles, is, however, much broader. I will discuss two cases of anti-statist subjectivity, each of which expresses a particular style. The first is that of Max Stirner, German egoist of the nineteenth century, sometimes included in histories of political thought between Hegel and Marx, sometimes acknowledged as an ancestor by contemporary anarchists.¹ The second is that of Luis Cusicanqui, Bolivian anarchist of the early twentieth century, one of countless nearly unknown Latin American agitators.² What interests me about them as a pair is precisely the *contrast* between their forms of anti-statist subjectivity, which I will diagram across the colonial difference.³ In this case the colonial difference manifests itself in terms of two modes of psychic relation to the State. Cusicanqui rejects the State through access to a geo-history that he discovers and affirms as an alternative, while Stirner rejects the State as an apparently omnipresent reality, without references to other geo-histories. I am interested in what this contrast may tell us about the possibilities for subtracting reality from the State in our individual and collective imaginations. I will present the main outlines of this contrast, but primarily I will stage it, dramatize it in philosophical terms. Of necessity, then, my presentation will be somewhat schematic.

Stirner and Cusicanqui, each in his own way, make clear that the State, whatever else it is, is an offense to their sense of themselves—an insult, even. Insults typically involve a dimension of caricature, exaggeration, reductive mockery, or distortion of the insulted person or people. The State has the resources to impose some or all of the insult's content, that is, to reduce the insulted person or people to that which the insult accuses them of being. To the degree that there is a State, that there is an imposed imitation, or a learned imitation, of the habits of thought and action by means of which the State as imaginary totality is replicated, each of these two writers feels less than what he imagines he could be.⁴

2. THE STATE

Since I am dealing with two anarchist authors, it is probably fair to invoke here the words of Peter Kropotkin: the State is not to be confused with society or with government ("State," 160–1). That is rather how we are invited or compelled to think through its "pseudo-philosophy." To whatever degree we separate ourselves from such thought and action, we can learn what the state is in practice: a "barbarian alliance" between military, legal, and moral-religious powers ("State," 178). It survives in the psyche not because of the inherent legitimacy of any of these powers but rather through the repetition of narratives concerning their alliance that conceal its origins and present. These narratives entail the construction and preservation of a certain utopian ideal.⁵ It is a kind of imaginary totality that is held up as the promise of a possible solution to every social, economic, and cultural problem.

But the State is not just *an* imaginary totality. Its utopian reach perhaps makes it the ultimate imaginary totality,⁶ enacted in vast series of imitations. The imitations may be forced with the threat and reality of violence: physical subordination. They may arise in forms of institutional training: disciplinary power. But I would like to hazard the anarchist hypothesis here that above all the power of the State is paradoxically that of an imaginary ideal, affirmed more or less consciously: that of the sum total of possible solutions to a great variety of practical problems of life. To say the State is imaginary is not to subtract it from reality. But it is, hopefully, to indicate one way to do so. I am interested in tracing the quasi-existence of the State in the imagination because it seems to me that is one of the ways in which we can subtract some of its reality from it, or modify its reality, with the aim of relegating it to a series of imaginary solutions that we regard as *not interesting*.⁷ In this regard, Stirner's process is a case in point.

3. STIRNER'S PROCESS

Throughout *The Ego and Its Own* we see the same reasoning used with respect to a series of imaginary absolutes or, in Stirner's practical-political terms, "Causes": religion (God's cause); society (the cause of the people); man (the cause of humanity). I call the reasoning a "process" because in moving through it each interested reader is called upon to make his or her uniqueness a problem.⁸ In each case I, the unconfessed egoist, am told I belong to some imaginary totality.⁹ I feel that I am possessed by it.¹⁰ I am to some extent not my own; I am owned. The process is to resist this Possession and discover what it is in fact that I truly do own—my "ownness," to what extent I am truly myself. That is what I am: it is the only sense of the word ego or unique one (the distinction conscious/unconscious seems irrelevant to Stirner, as do those between reason/emotion, memory/imagination). What I own is

What did Luis Cusicanqui discover in this "invasion of Indian logic" into anarchist ideology? ("Manifiesto," 21). Another possibility for affirmation. Unlike Stirner's, his uniqueness is immediately that of a community. It is defined negatively, out of suffering, but it could actually be defined positively.²³ This community could be the Indian community, split between the acculturated and those still struggling for communal land and lifeways; or it could ultimately be the imagined community of struggle, including anyone "Indian" enough to reject the State's false vision. Something like that is what Cusicanqui reached towards. He may not have known it other than by cultural or unconscious memory—and here I return to the question I asked of Stirner. It is often assumed that unconscious or latent imaginary contents are ideological or at least impulsive and unreasoned aspects of ourselves, that in which we are most "animal," most infantile, or again most gregarious and conformist, and thus that in which we are the least what we would like to affirm of ourselves. Supposing that, for at least some of us, precisely the inverse was the case?

Indeed, what does it mean that community could be born of the commonality of revolt? In this case it is not simply a matter of gregariousness, of *esprit de corps*. In that commonality Luis Cusicanqui restructured, and reconstructed something that points to a uniqueness he could call his own: precisely his unconscious discovery. "We the eternal martyrs feel the rawness of the scars that you opened on our ancestors" ("Manifiesto," 19). Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui points out several times that if this connection is possible, it is because of the emphasis on everyday life and experience that characterized the thought of the anarchist autodidacts of Cusicanqui's circle. Indeed, in the manifesto, references to everyday humiliations appear side by side with a sense of territorial belonging. "Shared experiences" of "discrimination and exclusion" ("Manifiesto," 20) suggested a new singularity from which Luis Cusicanqui rejected the imaginary totality of the State in the name of another imaginary construct and reconceived the State as an imposition at every level. That new singularity is the collective "we" of urban anarchists and rural Indians.

Thinking Cusicanqui's words, then, through Stirner's process: the "we" he gives to the countryside is not paternalistic. It is his own fellows he addresses, yes, but with a gift whose consumption leads back to the property of the dispossessed. That the State does not belong to some out of "culture" and "history" and to others as "politics" and "ideology" ceases to seem so significant. All of these are perhaps so many wheels in the head: what matters are the terms on which a singular union can be made, an affirmable and affirmed uniqueness be constructed.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui proposes an analysis based on this manifesto to oppose the acculturating mission of the Bolivian state and the mainstream Left's complicity with it. In the U.S. and elsewhere, certain forms of *mestizaje* have been held up as subversive new forms of subjectivity.²² But Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui reminds us that in Bolivia, and by extension many other "post-colonial" states, the process of *mestizaje*, or more generally the hybridization of subjectivities, has been and continues to be controlled by the State, programmed by its institutions as part of the long-term destruction of indigenous knowledges and cosmologies. Nevertheless, there is a role for mestizos and others of mixed cultural backgrounds to play in political struggles: her article and the manifesto included with it are a significant gesture in that direction.

We would expect Luis Cusicanqui to speak as an urban, acculturated mestizo, and thus to pose his identity in the purportedly racially unmarked terrain of political ideologies. Anarchism would appear as one of several available political ideologies for a dispossessed and exploited handicraftsman. But in his manifesto, to put it in Stirnerian language, he consumes his own identity—precisely that acculturated identity offered to him by the State as the gift he (one would have thought) could not refuse. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui points out that in the manifesto he has moved from a narrow sense of "we" to a broad and inclusive one ("Manifesto," 20). An "ideological bridge" was always theoretically possible between anarchist anti-statism and that of indigenous communities. Whereas the anarchists rejected the State based on a doctrine of "a moral law incarnate in free individuals," indigenous communities did so based on a historical memory that understood the State as a colonial imposition. Its promise of citizenship and rights under law had always been a "deception" ("Manifesto," 20). The long historical memory recovered by speaking as an Indian is an excessive gift, the identity that cannot be subordinated by the State (because it summons another lineage and reinstates another imaginary).

It seems to me that Luis Cusicanqui discovered more than just a synthesis of indigenous and anarchist perspectives on the State; he discovered or invented a new way of expressing himself. An exemplary case of the new enunciation expressive of this shift in the sense of self (the "wide, inclusive" Indian identity) is a fusion of anarchist and indigenous perspectives on time and progress. In his manifesto, Luis Cusicanqui writes: "we are reduced to returning to the primitive era, called, by our governors, legislators, a savage era[.] Why do you, the civilized, make us regress to the savage era?" ("Manifesto," 19). What we have here is a chronological entanglement, a reversal or simple undoing of accepted chronologies. As anarchists know, the State is not civilization; it is the organization of "barbarians." As every indigenous community knows, the real or apparent savagery of communal life is not a deficient cultural trait in need of further management, but rather the effect of colonial usurpation.

my property—what singularizes me, how I make myself the unique one. What Stirner calls "my uniqueness" is singularity: the irreducible existential territory or territories of psyche.¹¹

I fear that this remains abstract. Two other renderings might better illustrate the process. The first is Stirner's: the imaginary absolute consumes me, eats me alive, and continually digests me to enter me into its organism, its bowels. (Alimentary imagery appears repeatedly in *The Ego and his Own*.¹²) The process reverses this operation: I become consumer and consummator; *I eat my way out or through* the organism; I consume what I deem necessary, what I wish to possess.¹³ In this imaginary redescription, what I come to own is what I have thusly processed. But at the same time (pushing perhaps past Stirner) I am more the process than the processed; my property is the excrescence of the process, or, more literally, its shit.

A third rendering of the process might be inspired by Marcel Mauss: the imaginary totality presents me with me a gift I supposedly cannot refuse: freedom or life, political or moral identity in the form of citizenship, personhood, etc. I refuse it, return the gift, and break the pact.¹⁴ I declare war on the imaginary totality or escape from the imposed relation. Or again, now using the alimentary imagery of the second rendering, I consume the gift excessively, according to another economy: I reinstate the potlatch, "total prestation of the agonistic type," (Gift, 7) increase my own prestige by giving the counter-gift of an ego that cannot be consumed. It will never be given to me to be this indigestible ego.

In each case, the process shows that much or most, perhaps all of what I usually take to be myself is not ego. That is, it is not that in which I am unique. What I take to be myself may well not be my own. It may be a "spook," the product of "wheels in the head" (Ego, 40–43, 43–46). Yes, all of this goes on for Stirner first and foremost in the psyche—or whatever we wish to call the terrain of the imagination, of the constitution of subjectivity. "Body" and "soul" are equally good terms for it, but "self" or "subject" probably are not, because any positing of a self or subject returns to the ego-question: what in fact belongs to me? How am I possessed? What have I consumed? The process consists of actively subtracting from my sense of self everything I do not wish to affirm, everything I have not consumed, affirmed or willed as mine.

One destiny of this sort of idea is the theory of ideology: the "ruling ideas" become, in the history of ideology theory, the very constitution of the subject. Subjectivity itself ends up seeming, for many, to be an effect of something like an Ideological State Apparatus.¹⁵ With certain subjectivities, this may be the case; but Stirner asks us to think of this less as a necessary factor of constitution than as an unwise or unhappy affirmation.

It may nevertheless turn out that “ego” is nothing—that there is nothing left that is not my own, marked by my uniqueness—nothing that I am not powerful enough to consume or to make the most excessive return gift of. Even so, that nothing is more interesting than the spookish something ground out by wheels in the head: “I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but I am the creative nothing out of which I myself as author create everything” (Ego, 7). This potential for creation of another resolution, another arrangement, another association is psyche, or imagination. Thus this infamous zero degree affirmation: “Nothing is more to me than myself” (Ego, 8).

4. TO IMAGINE THE STATE

Stirner writes: “we two, the State and I, are enemies” (Ego, 161).¹⁶ Once I disentify my will from the ruling will (Ego, 174), I can affirm, at least as a psychic disposition, a preference, something like the following: “I sacrifice nothing to it, I only utilize it; but to be able to utilize it completely I transform it into my property and my creature; that is, I annihilate it, and form in its place the Union of Egoists” (Ego, 161). Stirner usually renders uniqueness as that of an individual. But throughout *The Ego and its Own* we find several references to a “Union of Egoists” that seem to me to be pivotal: it is a singularity of singularities, a unique voluntary association.¹⁷ I take these references seriously: I do not think that the received understanding of Stirner as an “individualist” is really all that coherent. If we uphold that understanding, Stirner ends up seeming rather ridiculous, unconsciously parodying the liberal state’s emphasis on a certain form of responsible individuality. If we do not, the empty place of “ego” can be occupied by one or many bodies. Speaking politically, at least, the composition of the disparate elements of myself that I affirm should be no different than the union of egoists. There may be some difference at other levels, in terms of the source and nature of affirmation. There may be, for example, biological grounds for thinking of the individuation of the psyche as experience.¹⁸ Since Stirner says so little about the Union, it is difficult to know how he saw this question: are all the affirmations of the Union the composite of individual affirmations?¹⁹

I will set this question aside for now. But, however one answers it, it is clear that the Union is not a voluntary form of the State, the finally realized true form of the social contract, the apex of liberal individualism. Stirner writes that the State “cannot endure a direct relation between men” (Ego, 226). But this is fundamentally the same statement as the one that avers that the State “does not let individuals play” (Ego, 201). What is put in the place of the State, what annihilates the State, replaces it first and foremost psychically, in terms of the utterly voluntary character of relations. As such, voluntary relations are not only non-statist; they are of necessity non-static. They are entered into and out of freely, in a kind of play. In this play, there is imagination, but no imaginary totality (or, there may be imaginary totalities, but not a/the ultimate

one). The egoist as well as the Union can only respond to the State as Diogenes did to Alexander: “get out of my sunshine” (Ego, 208).

5. IMAGINATION

The activity of the psyche-ego, imagining, and its product, “the imaginary,” are inseparable from a process of self-affirmation and self-constitution, the invention and discovery of our uniqueness. The question that most often arises for me with respect to Stirner is: what of that which is unique to us but unknown? What of the unconscious, if there is such an aspect of psyche? What of the thick imaginary layers of our thought and action that we simply have no time or energy to disentangle? My sense of a Stirnerian response is as follows: when we do encounter that material, we attempt some version of the process. We cannot guarantee that the encounter will happen, or that the process will work. But it is not a reason not to begin. Perhaps Luis Cusicanqui’s discovery tells us why.

6. CUSICANQUI’S DISCOVERY

I was able to learn something of the life and thought of Luis Cusicanqui thanks to Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, a contemporary sociologist, oral historian, and subaltern theorist.²⁰ One of the concerns that she shares with many anarchists is the possibility of the unity of two forms of anti-statist struggle: in her case, mestizo and indigenous peasants struggling to retain or regain communal lands and the traditional collectivist economic form of the *ayllu*; and mestizos, *cholos*, and *criollo* citizens working as handicraftsmen and struggling in anarchist unions. In one significant article, “A Mestizo’s Identity,” Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui documents and analyzes an attempt by Luis Cusicanqui to propose the unity of the two struggles.²¹ She shows that, as an urban *cholo*, his indigenous background produced an identification with peasant struggles that was lacking in many of his companions, and which made it possible for him to propose this otherwise unlikely alliance.

Luis Cusicanqui was an acculturated mestizo who struggled in anarchist unions in La Paz. In a manifesto entitled “The Voice of the Peasant” (1929) he calls for justice for peasants and Indians, threatening a bloody revolt. What prompts special attention is that this call and this threat, made from the city to the country, are written from the country to the country. In his manifesto Cusicanqui breaks with centuries of acculturation and forced assimilation imposed by the Bolivian state: the “we” of the text is no longer merely that of the anarchists (existing or to be converted), but rather, “Indians.”