

# **Between Games and Anarchism**

**The Strategic Potential of Games in Anarchist Organization**

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*“Praxis is the reflection and action of human beings upon the world in order to transform it.”*

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

## **Playful Cartographies in Times of Social War**

In a world where crisis seems to have become permanent, developing revolutionary strategies is not an option but an urgency. Political action—especially from an anarchist perspective—requires more than just will: it demands a concrete reading of the historical moment, collective education, simulation capacity, ideological debate, and tactical rehearsal. Faced with these needs, an unexpected resource is gaining traction among militant circles: games. Not merely as a pastime or an alternative social space, but as a strategic tool to test ideas, simulate complex situations, and prepare us to face challenges more effectively.

This idea came to me after watching the video *“Is the US planning for war by... playing games?”* by creator Johnny Harris. In it, he shows how the U.S. military and its civilian advisors use war simulations—board games and role-playing games—to think through real strategic scenarios, such as a hypothetical Chinese invasion of Taiwan. The experience, deeply immersive, shows how games activate processes of reflection, analysis, and decision-making under uncertain conditions. It’s not simple entertainment: it’s a school of strategy.

If the most powerful military apparatus in the world uses games to prepare for conflict, why shouldn’t we do the same from a revolutionary perspective—to prepare for the defense and radical transformation of our lives?

## **Simulating to Understand: From Role-Play to Ideological Rehearsal**

Role-playing games, in particular, offer singular power. They are collective exercises of structured imagination, where each participant takes on a role within a narrative governed by rules. In their anarchist version, they become a space for tactical and ideological rehearsal. Imagining conflict scenarios, embodying antagonistic political positions, and defending—or dismantling—them in fictionalized debates is not just a learning practice: it is combat training.

For example, you could design role-playing games that simulate neighborhood assemblies where anarchists interact with reformist parties, NGOs, bureaucratic unions, or even state actors. The goal: defend an anarchist position without falling into paralyzing purism or disarming concessions. In this kind of game, errors carry no direct cost—but they teach. And that makes them a powerful pedagogical tool.

These experiences resonate with the importance that *especificismo* places on ideological education within the specific anarchist organization. It’s not just about studying theory, but about knowing how to apply ideas in complex contexts. Role-playing introduces an essential layer: situated ideological rehearsal.

## Insurgent Boards: Urban Tactics and Embodied Autonomy

Games like *Bloc by Bloc: The Insurrection Game*, *Autonomía Zapatista*, or *La Batalla de Can Vies* were designed precisely with this premise in mind: simulating real social struggles to learn from them. In *Bloc by Bloc*, each player represents a collective participating in an urban insurrection. Cooperation, territorial defense, the construction of popular power, and the constant threat of state repression are core dynamics. These kinds of games allow us to work on defense tactics, understand the importance of territorial control, and debate forms of articulation between different political actors.

It's no coincidence that these games were created or promoted in anti-authoritarian circles. They are tools that condense historical experiences into a playful dynamic loaded with political pedagogy. *Autonomía Zapatista*, for instance, allows players to go through the processes of building autonomy in Chiapas, challenging them to sustain life under low-intensity warfare, organize assemblies, grow food, defend communities, and educate. *La Batalla de Can Vies*, inspired by the defense of a self-managed social center in Barcelona, puts the player in the shoes of those making collective decisions during an autonomous urban resistance.

These games don't replace praxis—but they can prepare us for it. And in the framework of a revolutionary strategy, that's vital.

## The Art of War Reinvented: Military Games and Libertarian Tactics

Libertarian leftists have been rightly skeptical of any approach resembling state or Leninist militarism. But tactical reflection must not be abandoned. As shown by the experiences of the Bulgarian Anarchist Federation, armed struggles in revolutionary Spain, or the FAU in Uruguay, combat does not mean abandoning libertarian ethics.

Games that simulate military conflicts—especially those with asymmetric scenarios, like guerrillas versus regular armies—can be used to think through logistics, mobility, fallback points, infrastructure sabotage, and territorial defense. Classic games like *Twilight Struggle*, or homebrewed anarchist adaptations of wargames, can serve this function if tailored to contexts of popular struggle. This isn't about glorifying war, but about preparing movements to survive and resist in hostile contexts.

## Bottom-Up Geopolitics: Thinking Power Without Assuming It

Another area of exploration is geopolitical simulation games. Games like *Risk*, *Twilight Struggle*, or more complex ones like *Europa Universalis* help us observe how powerful actors behave, what logics govern interstate politics, and what factors lead to the rise or fall of power blocs.

Though these games are state-centric by design, they can be used critically to understand the logics that resisting peoples are up against. They can also be adapted to rehearse decision-making in large-scale horizontal organizations. How do 2,000 people make decisions without becoming bureaucratic? What happens when two autonomous regions come into conflict? What role does diplomacy play between social movements? These questions can be dramatized, debated, and resolved in playful scenarios that later inform real strategies.

## From Simulation to Popular Power Rehearsal

The key is not the game itself, but how it's used. Game as rehearsal, as learning space, as militant education. As the FAU states, the specific organization must build a strategy that articulates ideology, program, tactics, and revolutionary ethics. Games can contribute to that articulation.

In a time when social movements are besieged by precarity, isolation, repression, and co-optation, creating playful spaces that allow us to learn, think, discuss, and project—without the pressure of immediacy—can be a key strategy. It's not about *playing at revolution*, but *playing to prepare for it*.

## Revolution as Structured Imagination

Anarchism has always been a pedagogy of action, but also a philosophy of imagination. Imagining a free society is not a utopian gesture—it's a strategic necessity. In that sense, games offer us maps, simulations, rehearsal grounds, possible narratives.

Perhaps it's time for the specific anarchist organization to systematically incorporate this resource. Not for entertainment, but to strengthen its historical project. In this context, playing can become an act of strategy, rebellion, and preparation.

Because ultimately, as Bakunin said, "*the passion for destruction is also a creative passion*." And all creation—even of free worlds—begins with imagining it's possible. Games can help us do that. And for anarchism, that means playing for real.

## Appreciating Playfulness, Imagining the Possible

Among those who have actively contributed to creating games designed for social movements and emancipatory practices, collectives like *Gall Negre* and *Outlandish Games* stand out. Their work combines creativity, historical memory, and popular pedagogy. Games like *Okupa tu També*, *Bloc by Bloc*, *La Batalla de Can Vies*, and others from these spaces not only entertain—they educate, train, and help us think. It's only fair to thank them for this immense labor, which follows not market logic, but political necessity. Every game they produce is another tool for autonomy.

But playing what's already available isn't enough. It's urgent that libertarian movements appropriate this tool and begin to create, adapt, and redesign games from an anarchist perspective. The invitation is open: let's think of mobile games that can circulate across neighborhoods without complex infrastructure; let's adapt existing games with a libertarian twist, questioning their logics of power and ownership; let's digitize physical games, create mods that insert our histories—like the Spanish Civil War mod for *Call of Duty*—and go even further: let's develop full-fledged video games, with narratives and mechanics inspired by our practices, struggles, and dreams.

A paradigmatic example of a transformative strategic tool is the ancient game of *Go*. Unlike chess—which focuses on frontal assault on centralized power—*Go* more closely reflects real-world conflict: decentralized, dynamic, distributed. *Go* teaches that the key is not to seize the center immediately, but to build from the corners, expand territory gradually, connect weak groups, and avoid useless confrontations. Its proverbs—like "*lose your first 50 games as soon as possible*" or "*don't throw an egg against the wall*"—become tactical principles for direct action, grassroots

building, and solidarity between fronts. Applying *Go*'s logic to anarchist strategy is no empty metaphor: it equips us with a language, a structure, and an intuition to read social conflict and act more effectively.

As in *Go*, in our struggles we must know when to attack, when to yield, when to connect groups, and when to build solid foundations. Games help us practice this in low-risk conditions so we're better prepared for a contested world.

To play, then, is not to escape. It is to rehearse the revolution.

<strong>The invitation is made.

*Don Diego de la Vega, militant of Liza*

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