



**HIERARCHY OR COLLABORATION?
RETHINKING LEARNING SPACES
IN THE AGE OF *ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE* AND *CREATIVE PLAY***

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Abstract

This paper explores how learning can be reorganised when authority is not imposed from above but emerges through cooperation. As technological environments such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and digital storytelling reshape education, traditional hierarchies lose explanatory power. Drawing on classroom experiments, creative workshops, and a high school music studio practice, the study examines how knowledge can be co-created through play, shared inquiry, and collective attention. Rather than focusing on performance, it highlights experience, trust, and procedural freedom as the foundations of meaningful learning. The paper also situates these practices within broader educational theories that view autonomy, creativity, and lived experience as central to learning, and outlines how these ideas will be developed further in an upcoming, more extensive project.

Keynotes: *learning spaces, anarchist pedagogy, AI assisted pedagogy*

I did not initially set out to write about anarchist pedagogy. My scholarly work has long followed a different current: the transnational itineraries of Emma Goldman, her entanglements with European radicals, and the peculiar geography of her influence across languages, borders, and police files. But my intellectual life has never belonged solely to the archive. I am also a secondary-school teacher and form master, responsible each day for a classroom of students whose questions, hesitations, small acts of courage, and occasional rebellions demand as much interpretation as any historical document. If anything has pushed me to think more deeply about authority, cooperation, and the fragile balance between structure and freedom, it is the lived reality of guiding young people who expect not only to be taught, but to be taken seriously. It is difficult to spend your mornings navigating the improvisations and ethical micro-decisions of school life, and your evenings reading Goldman, without noticing a quiet resonance between the two. Anyone who spends enough time with Goldman and her contemporaries eventually finds themselves pulled toward a recurring theme that exceeds biography: the stubborn question of how people learn to resist, to collaborate, or simply to think without asking permission. What began for me as a historical project about networks and internationalism gradually opened a second intellectual door: anarchism not only as a politics, but as a theory of learning, of authority, and of the classroom itself.

This paper steps through that door, though not without hesitation.

1. Three clusters of literature animate the argument that follows.

First, the historical–philosophical work on anarchism and education, which challenges the assumption that order must be externally imposed (DeLeon 2012; Jun 2016; Suissa 2006). Across these studies runs a shared claim: that discipline is not the opposite of freedom, but one of its preconditions. In anarchist classrooms, „*discipline*” emerges from transparent procedures, shared rhythms, and collectively negotiated norms rather than from hierarchical command. Second, research on spatiality and alternative pedagogical cultures reveals that learning is always choreographed: by rooms, technologies, narratives, and the tacit rules governing who may speak or move (Ferretti 2015). Whether one studies Elisée Reclus or a contemporary art studio, space shapes authority long before authority is named. This sensibility resonates strongly with my own work on political exile and cross-border activism, where „*learning*” often took place not in formal classrooms but in cafés, rented halls, smuggled newspapers, and improvised communities of affinity. Third, the literature on neoliberal education exposes how evaluation, comparison, and managerial oversight have transformed learning into compliance, recoding students as consumers and teachers as service providers (Ball & Grimaldi 2022; Bunce et al., 2017; Connell 2013; Gerrard 2015; Lynch 2006; Molesworth et al., 2011). These analyses provide an indispensable counterpoint to anarchist ideas: if anarchism decentralizes authority, neoliberalism disperses it through metrics, platforms, and market logics; what Foucault would call „*the capillaries of power*.” In the digital classroom, this power often appears not as coercion, but as convenience.

The present study takes these threads and knots them into a single question: What does freedom mean in a classroom where much of the „*discipline*” has migrated from human decisions into digital infrastructures? Rather than answering with doctrinal certainty, I follow a more wandering impulse-critical, irreverent, and unconvinced that order and truth reside where institutions most confidently place them. If anarchist education once contested the schoolhouse, what might it say now to the algorithmic tutor, the gamified history simulation, or the VR headset that promises immersion while silently delimiting agency? Substantively, the paper does not call for the abolition of structure. It argues, instead, that structure should live where it is least dangerous and most democratic: in procedures that anyone can see, modify, and contest. This is the anarchist insight that animates the pages ahead. The remainder of the article unfolds in three movements.

The first revisits the historical experiments of anarchist schooling, highlighting their promise and their repeated collision with broader social and institutional constraints. The second examines contemporary narrative learning spaces: *music studios*, *game-based simulations*, *VR environments*; to show how freedom and constraint intermingle in practice. The final section turns to the rapidly expanding domain of AI-assisted learning, where the question of „*invisible authority*” becomes most acute. Here, drawing on Foucault’s analytics of power as much as on anarchist critiques, I propose a minimal, procedural framework for safeguarding autonomy in digital classrooms: few rules, stable rhythms, public justifications.

In short, the route from Emma Goldman’s networks to AI-driven pedagogy is less surprising than it seems. Both inquire: sometimes defiantly, sometimes experimentally, into who gets to decide, how authority feels, and what forms of discipline make freedom possible. If the following pages persuade the reader that anarchist pedagogy is not a relic but a diagnostic tool for the digital age, then the journey from biography to classroom will have been worth the detour.

2. Anarchist schools: Promise, procedure, and the limits of their worlds

The historical record of anarchist schooling is tempting to romanticize. It contains all the elements that educational reformers secretly long for: communities that govern themselves, children who negotiate their own rules, classrooms animated by curiosity rather than compliance.

Yet a closer reading reveals something more interesting and more challenging than pedagogical utopias. What these experiments consistently sought was not an escape from order, but a reconstruction of its foundations. Their question was deceptively simple: *what kind of discipline is compatible with freedom?* And more importantly: *how can such discipline be made visible, learnable, and shared?*

The best scholarship on anarchism and education pushes precisely this point. Judith Suissa’s analysis rejects the caricature of anarchism as anti-structure; instead, she argues that anarchist pedagogy relocates authority from hierarchical command to collectively generated practices (Suissa 2006). Authority in this tradition is not abolished but redistributed. It becomes a property of decision making,

not of office. Similarly, DeLeon's work highlights that anarchist approaches to schooling revolve around ethical relations rather than formal curriculum: students gain autonomy not by being left alone but by participating in the construction of the very norms that shape their learning (DeLeon 2008, 2012). This is why anarchist classrooms typically appear structured in unexpected places. There are meeting circles, rule forming processes, visible schedules, rotating roles and public deliberation. The freedom lies not in the absence of structure but in the transparency and contestability of it. Historical examples show that this procedural vision of freedom was never idle theory. Anarchist schools in Spain, France, the United States and parts of Latin America developed elaborate practices of shared governance, collaborative labour and project based inquiry. Their teachers tended to understand discipline as a rhythm, a tempo achieved by the group rather than imposed upon it. The aim was not to suppress conflict but to channel it into collective reasoning, where persuasion replaced punishment. Many of these practices resonate strongly with what we now call participatory or democratic education, though the anarchist models predate those terms by decades. These schools, however, did not operate in a vacuum. Their successes and limitations can only be understood in relation to the political and economic structures that surrounded them. Anarchist classrooms often thrived internally while struggling externally. They could sustain their own micro-ecologies of cooperation, but they existed inside larger systems governed by credentialing regimes, state regulations and labour markets that demanded standardisation. As a result, the promise of a self governing classroom repeatedly collided with what might be called the *law of institutional gravity*. Examinations reasserted hierarchy, funding requirements reintroduced control, and parental expectations pulled educators back toward familiar metrics of performance. Anarchist pedagogical projects were able to demonstrate proof of concept, but not always proof of sustainability. This tension is neither accidental nor a sign of failure. It marks the central insight of anarchist pedagogy: structure always exists, but the question is *where it resides*. In the mainstream educational systems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, structure lived in authorities, bureaucracies and disciplinary technologies. In anarchist classrooms, structure lived in procedures that were visible, adaptable and collectively negotiated. The contrast is not between order and disorder, but between external discipline and internalised, participatory discipline. When the surrounding society privileged the former, anarchist schools inevitably appeared fragile. When communities supported the latter, these schools became remarkable laboratories of democratic life.

The theoretical literature on space adds another layer to this diagnosis. Ferretti's work on the spatiality of alternative education, echoing the intuitive geographies of Élisée Reclus, shows how learning environments encode power long before any explicit rule is written (Ferretti 2015). The arrangement of desks, the accessibility of materials, the permeability of boundaries and the rhythms of movement all shape who may speak, who may initiate, who must wait. Anarchist schools were acutely aware of this, often redesigning their spaces to favour encounter over surveillance. Their architecture was both literal and metaphorical: a rearrangement of what was possible in the classroom and of what counted as meaningful participation. This sensitivity to space and practice gives anarchist pedagogy an unexpected relevance for the present. Today's educational landscape is dominated not by the state classroom of the early twentieth century, but by platform mediated learning, algorithmic sorting and digital architectures whose hierarchies are less visible but no less powerful. Neoliberal educational reforms have reframed learning as performance, accountability and market value (Connell 2013; Connell and Dados 2014; Lynch 2006). Evaluation is dispersed through metrics, dashboards and behaviour tracking systems that naturalise competition. Students are not disciplined by a single authority but by a distributed apparatus that rewards certain behaviours and quietly penalises others. In this environment the distinction that once separated anarchist and orthodox schooling collapses into a more fundamental question: *who or what determines the rhythms of learning?*

Seen from this angle, anarchist pedagogy does not appear quaint or antiquated. It looks diagnostic. The problems it grappled with are not historical curiosities but contemporary challenges in new technological form. The tensions that animated earlier educational debates have not disappeared; they have simply taken on new forms. Where classrooms once wrestled with the contrast between hierarchical instruction and participatory learning, today's struggles unfold inside digital architectures whose authority is quieter but more pervasive. Bureaucratic control has not vanished so much as migrated into algorithmic routines that classify, reward, and redirect without ever announcing themselves as *power*. In this landscape the procedural intuitions of anarchist educators acquire an unexpected relevance. Practices based on shared responsibility, negotiated rhythms, and public

reasoning offer a counterweight to the invisible logics embedded in platform design. They provide conceptual tools for shaping digital learning environments in which order remains visible, contestable, and collectively owned, rather than absorbed into the background operations of the systems that host them. This first section therefore serves a double purpose. Historically, it traces how anarchist educators attempted to build learning environments rooted in cooperation rather than command. Analytically, it isolates the procedural logic that made such environments work. That logic becomes the hinge between past and present. In the next sections, I shift from historical experiments to the semi structured freedom of contemporary narrative learning spaces, and finally to the hyper structured realm of AI assisted education. The question that anchors all three remains the same. *Where does discipline come from, and what kind of discipline allows learners to be free?*

3. Music, narrative play and virtual worlds: Learning in the space between freedom and design

Anarchist educators have long insisted that freedom is not a void but a practice. Reclus, Goodman and later commentators in the anarchist tradition all suggest that creativity emerges where structure does not suffocate uncertainty but invites it in small, deliberate doses (Ferretti 2015; Suissa 2006). I discovered the truth of this long before I read a single page of theory. I learned it with an instrument in my hands. I have been playing music in various formations since the late 2000s. Rehearsal rooms, garage studios, tiny stages, improvised sound systems in dilapidated community basements: these were my first laboratories of learning. Nothing teaches you the architecture of attention quite like trying to hold a bassline together while a drummer experiments with a new fill and someone's amplifier starts to die. You realise quickly that coordination is not obedience but listening; not constraint but the kind of shared discipline that anarchist pedagogy treats as foundational. You also learn that mistakes are not interruptions. They are oxygen. A wrong note can derail a phrase or open a new one. The musical line survives because the players adjust, absorb, respond and try again. In this sense, music is a living argument against the idea that discipline must eliminate uncertainty. It shows instead that discipline becomes meaningful when uncertainty remains possible.

This is the first lesson that digital simulations fail to teach. *Guitar Hero* is often held up as an accessible path into music, a way of offering the thrill of performance without the complexity of technique. And perhaps it is exactly that for those who have never touched a real instrument. But for anyone who has spent years negotiating the small agonies and accidental beauties of actual practice, the simulation feels strangely lifeless. It removes the very conditions that make musical learning what it is. There is no tension in the fingertips, no danger of slipping out of time, no unexpected resonance or feedback, no mechanical resistance, no shared breath between players. The system rewards perfect timing and punishes deviation, yet the entire point of improvisation is that deviation can be generative. Real creativity begins where control meets uncertainty. A simulation that removes the possibility of failure removes the possibility of growth. There is a reason why dilettantes enjoy these games far more than musicians do. The simulation offers them a distilled experience of competence. It gives them certainty. It never gives them risk. For those who learn the world through instruments, this feels backwards. The only exception might be the drummers, whose practice relies heavily on motor coordination and pre-patterned limb independence. Even then the simulation cannot reproduce the physical dialogue between the body and the drum skin, the rebound against the stick, the microtiming that makes a groove swing or fall flat. It reproduces rhythm but not resistance. And without resistance there is no mastery, only performance. *Music*, then, provides a powerful diagnostic framework for thinking about freedom and structure in contemporary learning spaces. The essential pedagogical insight is that learning requires room for error, and not merely as a tolerated by-product but as a condition for creative agency. This resonates deeply with anarchist pedagogy's suspicion of spaces that eliminate risk in the name of order. Anarchist educators did not seek *chaos*; they sought forms of organisation that were strong enough to withstand the unpredictable. That, after all, is the core of freedom: not the absence of limits, but the possibility of movement within them.

The same tension appears in the world of narrative digital games, especially those that attempt to teach or simulate the past. Titles like *Assassin's Creed* have become semi-official pedagogical tools in many classrooms, promising immersion, historical engagement and morally ambiguous decision making. Students frequently describe these environments as freeing, even empowering. But the freedom is choreographed by the narrative. The choices they make unfold along narrative rails laid down long before they pick up the controller. The simulation invites exploration while concealing the architecture

that governs it. As Gerrard observes, gamified learning often confuses engagement with agency: it can energise students while quietly normalising the limits within which their actions occur (Gerrard 2015). This is why reflection must accompany play. The task of the educator is to surface the invisible boundaries, to transform environmental constraints into objects of inquiry rather than background conditions. Only then can simulated freedom become genuine deliberation. *Virtual reality* intensifies this double bind. VR promises a kind of embodied learning that traditional classrooms can rarely match. Students can walk through ancient cities, navigate ethical dilemmas, manipulate spatial concepts and experiment with perspectives that would be impossible in two dimensions. Yet the experience is not limitless. It is scripted at a deeper level than the student can perceive. The body seems free, but the choreography is predetermined. And unlike the small, manageable frictions of musical performance, VR tends to overwhelm rather than invite uncertainty. Without a clear interpretive structure, immersive environments risk drowning out judgment with sensation. The pedagogical solution is not to discard VR but to restore procedure to its rightful place. Briefing, paired roles, time boxed exploration and a short reflective pitch at the end are the minimal architecture that makes meaningful learning possible. They function much like the structures of ensemble music: they coordinate attention without dictating discovery. They preserve the learner's autonomy precisely by limiting the noise that threatens to engulf it. Once again the parallel with anarchist pedagogy becomes apparent. Anarchist classrooms did not imagine that freedom could survive without form. They imagined forms that made freedom possible. Across these scenes the same pattern emerges. Whether in a rehearsal studio, a digital game or a virtual environment, learning becomes meaningful only when uncertainty is allowed to become instructive.

When everything is tightly controlled, experience collapses into repetition. When almost no structure is present, intention frays and drifts. Most of the meaningful autonomy I have seen in classrooms lives somewhere between these two extremes, where there is just enough form to hold action together, but not enough to script it in advance. It is also where the next section of this paper will turn, as algorithmic systems now increasingly occupy that space and attempt to shape it in their own image.

4. AI, *Invisible Authority* and the procedural classroom

(The algorithm is not watching, but it is measuring. And measurement becomes the new obedience.)

Educational systems have always been shaped by the technologies that sustain them. Chalk and slate once reorganised the classroom through visual hierarchy, the printing press reorganised learning through availability, and the bureaucratic timetable reorganised attention through standardised rhythms. But none of these earlier technologies ever claimed neutrality as aggressively as contemporary artificial intelligence. The modern teacher is confronted not simply with a new tool but with a new norm. AI enters the classroom not as a supplement to pedagogy but as an implicit authority, one that appears helpful, tireless, and strangely beyond dispute. What makes this situation pedagogically dangerous is not that AI is powerful, but that its *power is quiet*. Anarchist educators were always wary of quiet power. Their suspicion was not limited to governments or school boards. It extended to any arrangement of knowledge that hides its normative commitments behind a veneer of inevitability. In classic anarchist writing, domination is rarely loud. It operates through routines, expectations, rewards and little scripts of behaviour that gradually organise the will (Suissa 2006; DeLeon 2008). The most durable forms of control are those that have become habits. When students say the algorithm is *probably right*, they are not merely appealing to efficiency. They are surrendering judgment to a system whose value structure they cannot see.

Why do we accept AI so easily? There is a growing paradox in contemporary education. Teachers spend years cultivating skepticism, evaluation, and intellectual autonomy in their students, only to watch those same students outsource those very capacities to a machine that cannot explain why it offers the answers it does. The obedience is instantaneous and uncritical. A student who would never accept a teacher's claim without reason accepts an AI-generated explanation without hesitation. Part of this readiness stems from the cultural mythology surrounding AI. Modernity's faith in data-driven rationality has trained us to believe that computation is synonymous with objectivity. Speed becomes a proxy for truth; coherence becomes a proxy for authority. Yet anarchist pedagogy insists that no claim to truth is legitimate unless its conditions of production are open to examination. What we mistake for AI logic is often only AI confidence. The irony is sharp. The same systems that promise personalised learning actually normalise a single cognitive style: concise, monotone, risk-averse, conflict-free.

Students are rewarded for selecting the option the machine recognises, not the one that challenges its assumptions. Authority in these systems rarely announces itself. It works more softly, by narrowing the horizon of what seems relevant or reasonable. Nothing is forbidden outright, yet the architecture of suggestions steers attention long before anyone notices. What feels like guidance is already a form of governance.

What values do these systems encode? Artificial intelligence, particularly in educational settings, is built on normative architectures. They may not declare themselves, but they are present in every ranked suggestion, every rephrased sentence, every standardised rubric. When a student asks a generative model for help with an essay, the model does not merely supply language. It supplies a worldview. The prose it produces is orderly, syntactically smooth, emotionally neutral, structurally predictable. What we receive is not a singular voice but a kind of statistical average of many prior texts. The system leans toward what is most likely to be recognised and approved, rather than toward what might be most challenging or illuminating.

This is not a technical critique! It is a pedagogical one.

An algorithm that maximises predictability is incompatible with a pedagogy that cultivates intellectual risk. An algorithm that rewards conformity contradicts the anarchist principle that freedom emerges from self-chosen commitments rather than externally imposed templates. An algorithm that eliminates ambiguity undermines the very conditions of creativity. In other words, the machine prefers obedience.

The logic becomes clearer when we look at the typical outputs:

- They avoid contradiction.
- They avoid uncertainty.
- They avoid emotional intensity.
- They avoid unorthodox structure.
- They avoid politicised language unless explicitly prompted.

This is a kind of moral program. The system encourages clarity at the cost of originality, politeness at the cost of critique, symmetry at the cost of voice.

5. The classroom consequences: AI as an invisible disciplinarian

The teacher's authority has traditionally been visible. Students could question it, negotiate it, resent it. But AI operates on a different register: influence without presence. It is always there and never accountable. This is precisely the kind of governance that anarchist thinkers warned against. For anyone who has spent time with Foucault, there is something uncomfortably familiar in this situation. What mattered for him was not the central authority, but the subtle diffusion of norms that became internalised. Power became effective at the moment it stopped being noticeable. AI seems to push this diffusion a little further. It does not stop at guiding behaviour, but also reaches into how thinking itself is organised. It sets the tempo of thinking, the parameters of argumentation, the acceptable range of interpretations. And because its output is polished, students often mistake the absence of friction for the presence of correctness. From a pedagogical point of view, this is deeply troubling. If learning depends on encountering and working through resistance, then a system that quietly smooths away that resistance also erodes the conditions in which learning usually happens. A perfectly polished answer can start to work like a mild anaesthetic. The student is spared the uncomfortable moments of doubt and revision that so often lead to genuine insight. The system's structure becomes the student's constraint.

6. An alternative: reclaiming procedure as the source of order

Anarchist pedagogy offers a very different vision of structure. It argues that rules are not the enemy of freedom. *Invisible* rules are. In classical anarchist schools, rules existed, but they were few, explicit, publicly negotiated, and collectively enforced (Suissa 2006; DeLeon 2012). Their legitimacy came not from authority but from transparency. Their aim was not to constrain behaviour but to coordinate it. This is precisely the kind of structure the digital classroom now requires. The problem is not the presence of AI. The problem is that its decision-making logic is hidden from view. We do not need to ban the machine. We need to place it inside a human-made procedure. When artificial intelligence enters

the classroom, the anarchist response is neither rejection nor blind adoption but a deliberate insistence that order must come from procedures that everyone can see. In practice, this means making the interaction with the machine visible, discussable and therefore subject to judgment. Instead of allowing AI use to remain a private, frictionless transaction between individual students and an opaque system, the classroom becomes a space where prompts, outputs and revisions are brought into the open. Students learn to articulate not only what they asked of the model, but how they evaluated its suggestions: what they accepted, what they set aside and why. The goal is not surveillance; it is to cultivate the habit of *thinking about thinking*, to transform AI from a silent authority into an object of inquiry. Such transparency works only when accompanied by collective forms of evaluation. Anarchist pedagogy has always treated learning as a shared endeavour in which responsibility circulates rather than accumulates. Applied to AI, this means that students periodically take on roles designed to create productive friction: the critical reader who questions an assumption, the argument challenger who searches for alternative interpretations, the counterexample builder who tests the limits of a claim, and the norm auditor who examines the values embedded in the model's recommendations. These roles remind the class that intellectual autonomy is not a private possession but a cooperative practice, one that grows through challenge rather than passive agreement.

Reintroducing error is equally vital. Much of what makes AI seductive is its promise of eliminating mistakes, of smoothing out the rough edges of argument and expression. Yet as the earlier discussion of musical practice suggested, learning depends on *uncertainty and on the willingness to risk failure*. Tasks that allow for multiple valid positions, open-ended claims or unconventional solutions ensure that students cannot simply optimise for what the machine prefers. They must articulate a stance, explore options, and justify deviations. In this way the classroom restores the generative role of error, treating it not as a defect to be eliminated but as the material from which understanding is shaped. What ultimately matters is that reasoning becomes public. Instead of submitting a polished answer that hides its origins, students submit an argument that reveals its own construction: the model's output, the student's interpretation of it, the moments where they resisted or modified the suggestion, the rationale behind each decision. This is anarchist pedagogy at its most concrete; autonomy emerges not from the absence of structure but from the presence of structures that demand justification and invite revision.

AI, in this framework, becomes a co participant rather than an authority. It is no longer a benchmark or a moral compass, but an interlocutor whose value lies in its ability to provoke thought. Its suggestions are hypotheses, not truths; starting points, not conclusions. When treated in this way, the machine's presence intensifies thinking instead of replacing it. The risk, of course, is that none of this happens. If educators embrace AI without critique, the classroom slowly rearranges itself around the logic of optimisation. Over time, students may begin to prioritise getting things „right” over asking better questions, and safe efficiency over open-ended experimentation. The classroom feels smoother, but also strangely thinner. The real risk is not that students will literally think like machines, but that they will slowly lose the habit of noticing when they have stopped thinking for themselves. Anarchist pedagogy offers a reminder that this trajectory is neither natural nor necessary. Technology starts to feel coercive at the point where we can no longer see how it works on us. Once its organising principles are brought into the open, they can at least be talked about, questioned and gradually folded into shared procedures that leave room for autonomy.

7. Conclusion

The question posed in the title of this essay, *Hierarchy or Collaboration?* was never meant to be a binary. The three parts of the argument have shown that educational order is always present, whether it emerges through coercion, choreography or collective agreement.

The real task is not to decide whether hierarchy exists, but to determine where it lives and who has the right to shape it. The historical experiments of anarchist pedagogy remind us that freedom has never been the absence of structure. It has always depended on the kind of structure that privileges participation over prescription, and transparency over silent authority. These classrooms worked not because they abandoned discipline, but because they reimagined it as a shared practice. Their limits were real, yet their insights remain durable: power must be visible to be questioned, and questioned to be legitimate. The contemporary learning environments examined in the second section extend this lesson into new media. Music rehearsals, narrative games and immersive virtual worlds each reveal how autonomy and constraint coexist within the same space. Where improvisation is possible, creativity

flourishes; where pathways are prewritten, freedom becomes performative. These environments are not inherently liberating or oppressive. They become one or the other depending on whether their hidden architectures are allowed to govern silently, or whether they are brought into conversation and reworked through communal interpretation. Artificial intelligence, the focus of the third section, intensifies these challenges. Its authority is diffuse, its influence immediate and often unexamined. It organises attention with remarkable subtlety, setting the tone and tempo of thought without announcing itself as an actor. Left unchallenged, AI risks transforming learning into a process of optimisation rather than inquiry. Yet when situated within clear, collectively agreed procedures, it can become something else: a provocation, an intellectual foil, a tool that stimulates rather than standardises. The difference does not lie in the technology itself, but in the structures that govern its use.

Across all three sections, the argument returns to a single conviction: that the future of learning in the digital age depends less on technological sophistication than on the procedural imagination of educators and students. Hierarchy will persist wherever decision making is concealed: collaboration becomes possible wherever the terms of order are made public and open to revision. Anarchist pedagogy offers no blueprint, but it offers a grammar of freedom that can be adapted to new contexts. Taken together, these traditions suggest that autonomy does not simply appear on its own. It is something people build together, slowly, in the relationships and routines that make up everyday learning. This essay has traced only one path through these ideas, and necessarily a partial one. The questions raised here continue to grow in scale and urgency as digital architectures become more deeply woven into everyday educational practice. The reflections presented are part of a wider ongoing project in which I hope to explore these connections with greater depth and range. For now, the modest claim is this: that in an age of artificial intelligence and creative play, the most important decision educators can make is not whether to embrace new technologies, but how to design the procedures that ensure those technologies serve collaboration rather than hierarchy.

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