Twitter Thread by Andrew Harmel-Law ■



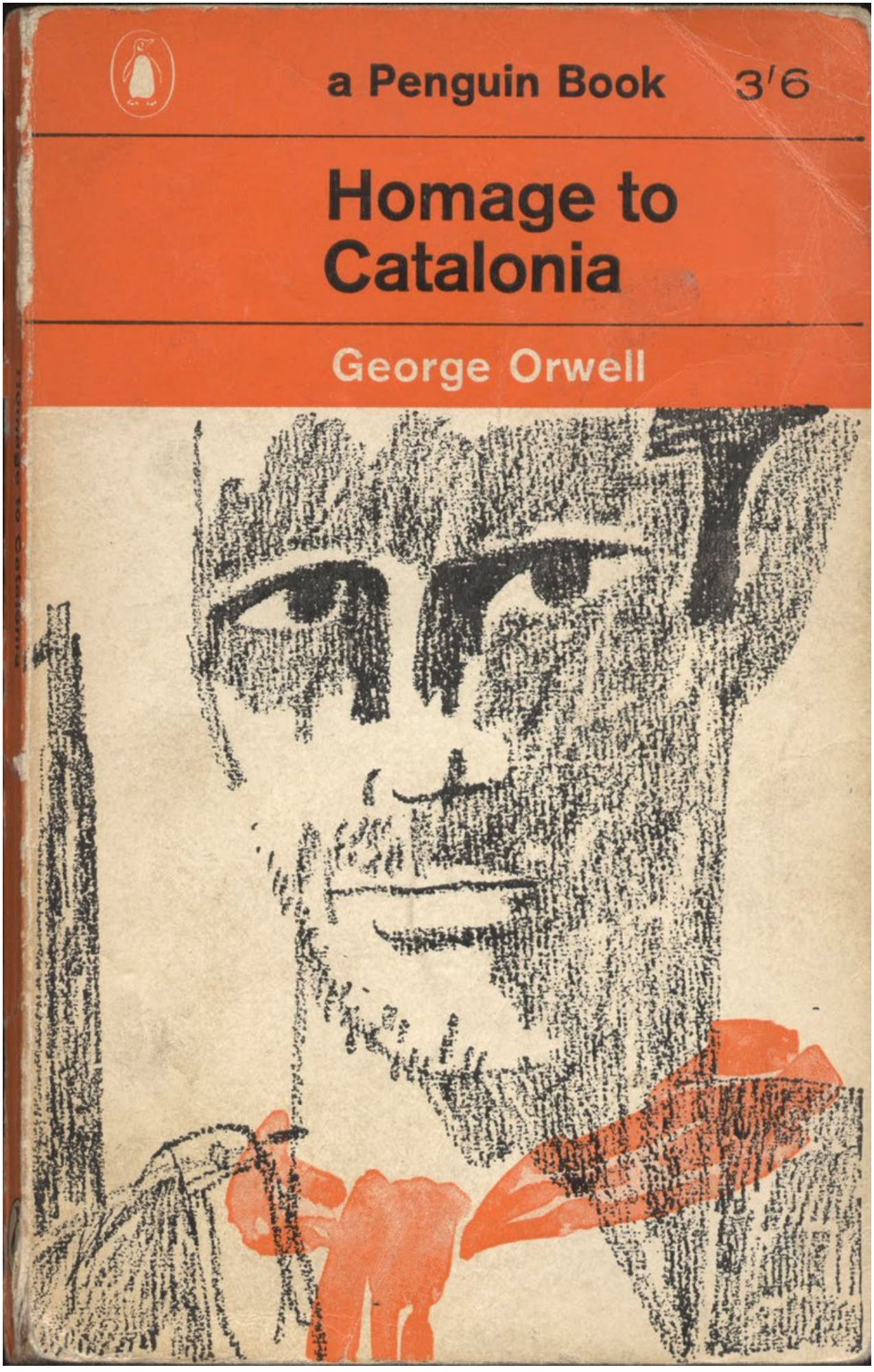
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“Patterns of Anarchy” is a collection of writings published in 1966. I came to it because a) Christopher Alexander quotes from it in “A Pattern Language” and b) because as a consultant and developer I’m interested in different patterns of organising.

Edited by L. Krimerman and L. Perry, the book brings together thinkers from across the anarchist spectrum and considers definitions of anarchism, anarchist critiques of socialism, it's philosophical foundations, and more.

There’s a lot in it, especially if like me, you don’t know much about anarchism beyond “A Homage to Catalonia”.


a Penguin Book
3'6
Homage to Catalonia
George Orwell

As this is going to be a long thread, I'm not going to waste time on a definition of "Anarchy". Trust me when I suggest you take a look at Wikipedia's because it's probably not what you thought it was: https://t.co/z9JOuzeETv

What interested me most about this book was the section "Constructive Anarchism: Alternative Communities and Programs". (pp.312) This covers the *how* of anarchist organisation.

I'm going to share some of the most interesting quotes from my perspective as a student of socio-technical organisation design. Sometimes I'll add some commentary.

PART 1: What Anarchism thinks is wrong with how we organise now.

(And the "now" in the book still very much applies today.)

"Organisation is, after all, only a means to an end. When it becomes an end in itself, it kills the spirit and the vital initiative of its members ... " Anarcho-Syndicalism by Rudolf Rocker (pp.352)

"... and sets up that dominion by mediocrity which is the characteristic of all but bureaucracies." Anarcho-Syndicalism by Rudolf Rocker (pp.352)

"Work, not wages ... Packed in that one right little phrase is all the dynamite of revolution. Men [sic] wanted work more than they wanted bread, and they wanted to be responsible for their work, which meant ownership." The Long Loneliness by Dorothy Day (pp.376)

Do these all sound familiar? To me it sounds a lot like many software development organisations (including many that I help) are aiming for. In fact, the parallels with @DanielPink 's "Drive" are striking.

PART 2: How "traditional" organisations are structured
Next up are anarchist descriptions of how organisations are "traditionally" (i.e. almost always) structured. Paul Goodman kicks us off with a description that fits as well today as it did when he penned it.

"In a centralised system, the function to be performed is the goal of the organisation rather than of any persons (except as they identify with the organisation)." On Some Prima-Facie Objections to Decentralism by Paul Goodman (pp. 379)

"The persons are personnel. Authority is top-down. Information is gathered from below in the field, is processed to be usable by those above." On Some Prima-Facie Objections to Decentralism by Paul Goodman (pp. 379)

"Decisions are made in headquarters, and policy, schedule and standard procedure are transmitted downwards by chain of command." On Some Prima-Facie Objections to Decentralism by Paul Goodman (pp. 379)

"The enterprise as a whole is divided into departments of operation to which personnel are assigned with distinct roles, to give standard performance." On Some Prima-Facie Objections to Decentralism by Paul Goodman (pp. 379)

“This is the system in Mr. Goldwater’s department store, in the Federal Government and in the State Governments, in most elementary and higher education, in the CIO, in hospitals, in neighbourhood renewal..." On Some Prima-Facie Objections to Decentralism by Paul Goodman (pp 379)

" ... in network broadcasting, and in deals that chain-groceries make with farmers.” On Some Prima-Facie Objections to Decentralism by Paul Goodman (pp. 379)

He goes on with some history:
“The system was designed for disciplining armies, for bureaucratic record-keeping, and tax-collection, and for certain kinds of mass production. It has now pervaded every field.” On Some Prima-Facie Objections to Decentralism by Paul Goodman (pp 379)

Now, at this point you're perhaps thinking this is _way_ too extreme a claim to make? Well, Drucker tells us virtually the same thing in “Management as Social Function and Liberal Art” published in (1988). (Check it out. I'll wait.)

PART 3: Meeting the same needs with different structures
While we've Drucker on our minds, lets stay outside Patterns of Anarchy for a minute more.

In the following quote we can see that Peter Drucker was as vehement as anyone in arguing that there are spaces for many _other_ types of organisational structure:

“From the very beginning more than a century ago, the study of organisation has rested on one assumption: There is--or there must be--one right organisation. ..." Peter Drucker, Management Challenges for the 21st Century (1999)

"... What is presented as the ‘one right organisation’ has changed more than once. But the search [...] has continued, and continues today.” Peter Drucker, Management Challenges for the 21st Century (1999)

So perhaps we're not on the lunatic fringe considering these ideas. They don't come much more Western-Capitalist-Establishment than Drucker.

And also, what about the elephant in the industry?: “Open source is only one way people are restructuring what they do along new organisational lines and atop different motivational ground.” from Drive by Daniel Pink (pp.23)

There's definitely mileage in investigating this...

So what can Anarchist thinking offer us?

Back to "Patterns of Anarchy" again for some more history...

https://t.co/ZaiW6Okqka

“[Anarchy's] roots go back to an earlier tradition which had been almost completely displaced in the course of the last century ...” Anarchism as a Theory of Organisation by C Ward (pp.394)

“... by the introduction of work techniques based on task segmentation, differential status, and payment and extrinsic hierarchical control.” Anarchism as a Theory of Organisation by C Ward (pp.394)

If those were (from the anarchist point of view) the motivating forces behind where we are now, what alternatives does anarchism offer?

These essays give a very clear-sighted view of the actual needs served by any type of organisation, as well as how their particular approach of decentralism might address them. First we can challenge a common misconception. C. Ward answers this from the Anarchist perspective: