

## Editorial — Post-anarchism Today

Lewis Call\*

Welcome to Post-anarchism Today. This is certainly not *USA Today*, et ce n'est certainement pas *Aujourd'hui en France*. Indeed, it is a refreshing antidote to all such discourses of modern state capitalism. During its short but colourful existence, post-anarchism has always been *libertarian* and *socialist* in its basic philosophical outlook: that's the *anarchism* part. But post-@ has also maintained its independence from modern rationalism and modern concepts of subjectivity: that's the *post-* part. As I survey post-anarchism today, I find to my surprise and delight that *both* parts are stronger than ever. It's now clear that post-@ is a part of anarchism, not something that stands against it. It's equally clear that post-@ has changed anarchism in some interesting and important ways.

I speak of post-anarchism today because I believe that we are living through a post-anarchist moment. I know, I know: the owl of Minerva flies only at dusk, so how can I claim to understand the moment I'm living in? But one of the many great things about post-@ is that it means we can be done, finally, with Hegel. Minerva's owl needs to get a job. We need a new bird, faster, more intuitive, more open source: something more like the Linux penguin. Things happen faster than they used to, and the rate of change is accelerating. Our ability to comment on these things must also accelerate. Thus I maintain that we may, in fact, study our own political and intellectual environment. Indeed, I feel that we *must* do this, or risk being overtaken by events. Post-anarchism waits for no one.

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When I speak of post-anarchism today, I also imply that there was post-anarchism *yesterday*. Here I invoke the peculiar, powerful alchemy of the historian: I declare that there is an object of study called post-anarchism, and that this object already has a history. An outrageously brief narrative of that history might go something like this: post-@ was born in the mid-1980s, in Hakim Bey's 'Temporary Autonomous Zone'. Throughout the 90s it grew and prospered in that era's distributed, rhizomatic networks, the Internet and the World Wide Web. Post-@ went to school in the pages of journals like Britain's *Anarchist Studies* and Turkey's *Siyahi*. Todd May gave it a *philosophy*. Saul Newman gave it a *name* and an interest in *psychology*. I encouraged post-@ to take an interest in popular culture (and vice versa). Richard J.F. Day introduced post-@ to the newest social movements: the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Thoughtful critics like Benjamin Franks developed intriguing *critiques* of post-anarchism (Franks, 2007). Duane Rousselle and Süreyya Evren gave post-@ a *Reader*. And now, here we are! Using this crazy little thing called post-anarchism to inaugurate a bold new journal, one which promises to examine the cultural environment of our postmodern age through an anarchist lens!

But wait just a minute. May, Day, Newman and Call sounds more like a law firm than a revolution. Indeed, early post-@ was justly criticized as another ivory tower phenomenon for white, male, bourgeois intellectuals. Luckily, post-anarchism today is nothing like that. It's transnational, transethnic and transgender. It speaks in popular and populist voices, not just on the pages of academic journals like this one. Post-anarchism today is a viral collection of networked discourses which need nothing more in common than their belief that we can achieve a better world if we say goodbye to our dear old friend the rational Cartesian self, and embrace instead the play of symbol and desire. All the kids are doing it these days: the Black Bloc, the queers, the culture jammers, the anti-colonialists. Post-anarchism today is a set of discourses which speaks to a large, flexible, free-wheeling coalition of anarchist groups: activists, academics and artists, pervers, post-structuralists and peasants. As Foucault once said, 'don't ask who we are and don't expect us to remain the same'. We are the whatever-singularity that lurks behind a black kerchief. We might look like Subcommander Marcos, or Guy Fawkes, or your weirdo history professor. We are everybody and we are nobody. We can't be stopped, because we don't even exist.

When I review the brief but exciting history of post-anarchism in this way, it suddenly seems that post-@ might possess everything it needs to constitute not merely a *moment*, but an actual *movement*. Franks (2007) has suggested that such a movement might be emerging. In the past I have hesitated to agree. After all, one doesn't like to be accused of overblown, breathless revolutionary rhetoric. But the existence of this journal, *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies*, has convinced me that the time to hesitate is through. A decade into the third millennium, post-anarchism has become a self-realizing desire, a kind of Deleuzian desiring machine. According to the Deleuzian theories which inform most of the essays in this volume, such machines actually produce reality (Deleuze, 1983). Like all good desiring machines, post-@ operates by *multiplicity*. In these pages, scholars of many different nationalities, languages, ethnicities, genders, sexualities and theoretical perspectives have come together to talk about post-anarchism, its promise, its potential, its problems. This journal contains thoughtful, passionate defences of post-anarchism, and equally insightful, equally passionate critiques of it. Some of the essays in this volume are not particularly post-anarchist in their outlook or method, yet even these share certain concerns with post-@: concerns, for example, about architecture, territories, the organization of space. These essays follow lines of flight which sometimes intersect with post-anarchism, and these points of intersection are rich with potential.

At least four of the articles in this issue occupy the terrain of anarchist political philosophy, which suggests that post-@ has by no means abandoned the central concerns of traditional anarchism. Saul Newman's essay examines one of the most serious obstacles to any anarchist revolution: self-domination, or the desire we feel for our own domination. Drawing on the radical psychoanalytic tradition, Newman argues compellingly that any effective anarchist politics must directly address our psychic dependence on power. Newman's critical project is vitally important, in that it motivates us to seek strategies by which we may overcome our complicity with political and economic power. Thus I have argued, for example, that the practices of BDSM or "kink" might satisfy our need for power without reproducing statist or capitalist power structures (Call, 2011b).

Thomas Swann's essay extends an intriguing debate about moral universalism. Post-@ undeniably includes a dramatic critique of such universalism. Benjamin Franks (2008) has responded to this

critique by deploying a “practical anarchism,” but Swann suggests that such an anarchism must either appeal to universalism or risk collapsing into moral relativism. Franks and his colleagues may yet find a third way, but Swann’s critique provides the important service of identifying the current limits of practical anarchism.

Thomas Nail’s remarkable essay argues that, having already established itself as a valid political philosophy, post-@ must now find a way to engage with the *actual* post-capitalist and post-statist society which is already coming into existence before our very eyes! Nail interprets Zapatismo as another kind of Deleuzian machine, the “abstract machine.” This machine is a self-initiating political arrangement which requires no preconditions other than itself. As Nail convincingly argues, such machines indicate that the post-anarchist revolution has already happened.

Simon Choat performs the extremely valuable task of reinterpreting post-anarchism from a Marxist perspective. As he correctly points out, early post-@ was theoretically fragmented. May, Newman and I all had different names for this thing we now call post-anarchism. Newman recognized the importance of Lacanian psychoanalysis, while I, at first, did not. (I have since tried to correct that oversight; cf., Call, 2011a.) Choat demonstrates that opposition to Marxism was fundamental to the original articulation of post-anarchism. But he also shows the danger of such opposition. It may be that there is a kind of anti-essentialist Marxism which is compatible with post-structuralism and therefore with post-anarchism as well. So while Choat is right to say that ten years ago I feared the colonizing tendencies of Marxist theory, I don’t fear Marxism any more. Post-anarchism today is too mature and too strong to be threatened by Marxism, and we should welcome theoretical allies wherever we can find them.

I am especially happy to see that this issue contains a couple of queer interventions. Mohamed Jean Veneuse offers a groundbreaking account of transsexual politics in the Islamic world. Veneuse makes it clear that the figure of the transsexual can radically destabilize essentialist concepts of gender; what’s more, Veneuse identifies the benefits which this destabilization might offer to anarchism. The rejection of fixed identities and binary concepts of gender suggests that gender might be better understood as a project of becoming. By viewing gender more as a verb than a noun, we avoid the authoritarianism of stable subject positions. This project has clear affinities with post-@.



Meanwhile, Edward Avery-Natale offers a very different kind of queer anarchism. Avery-Natale shows how Black Bloc anarchists who might normally identify themselves as straight can temporarily and tactically embrace a queer subject position. This suggests that “queer” has become much more than a sexuality. “Queer” now names a subject position so flexible that it threatens to reveal the emptiness of subjectivity itself. Subjectivity then collapses into what Avery-Natale, following Giorgio Agamben, calls the “whatever-singularity.” Queerness here refers to the negation of identity itself. Again, this project is entirely compatible with post-@. Post-anarchism shares with the “queer” Black Bloc the goal of destroying not just capital and the state, but the “anarchist subject” as such. In the words of Alan Moore’s anarchist freedom fighter V, “Let us raise a toast to all our bombers, all our bastards, most unlovely and most unforgivable. Let’s drink their health [...] then meet with them no more” (Moore & Lloyd, 1990: 248).

In the long run, the interdisciplinary focus of *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* may well turn out to be its strong suit. I am delighted to see that this inaugural issue contains both anarchist architectural theory and anarchist film criticism. Alan Antliff gives us a fascinating study of Adrian Blackwell’s “anarchitecture.” Blackwell’s architecture attempts to engineer a radical perspective shift which might render static power relations more open and fluid. The result, as Antliff compellingly argues, is a unique form of anarchist architecture which refuses to remain trapped within the cultural logic of capitalism.

Meanwhile, Nathan Jun offers a very ambitious anarchist film theory, one which undertakes to reveal the “liberatory potential of film.” Echoing (once again) Gilles Deleuze, Jun argues that a “genuinely nomadic cinema” is not only possible but inevitable, and that such a cinema will emerge at the juncture between producer and consumer, while blurring the distinction between the two. One need only look at the viral proliferation of quality amateur video productions on YouTube and other sites for evidence that this is already happening.

That just leaves three wild essays, one of which contains within itself (in proper fractal fashion) “Three Wild Interstices of Anarchism and Philosophy.” Alejandro de Acosta suggests that anarchism “has never been incorporated into or as an academic discipline” — though I would hasten to add, it’s certainly not for lack of trying. De Acosta makes anarchism’s apparent theoretical weakness into a virtue, arguing that anarchism really matters not as a body of abstract theory,

but as a set of concrete social practices. De Acosta offers provocative examples of these practices: the meditative affirmations of the “utopians,” a speculative anthropology of geographical spaces, and a Situationist psychogeography.

These last two “wild styles” dovetail nicely with the concerns of Xavier Oliveras González, who gives us a dramatic critique of statist metageography, and simultaneously suggests an alternative. Oliveras shows the power of the high-level assumptions we make about geographic space and the ways in which it can be organized. Whoever controls metageography controls the territories it defines, and so far the state has controlled these things. But anarchist geographers like Kropotkin have been critiquing this statist metageography for over a century now. As Oliveras demonstrates, it is now possible, at last, for us to imagine a metageography which will be liberated from statist assumptions.

Finally, Erick Heroux offers us a very useful “PostAnarchia Repertoire.” Heroux thinks through the implications of today’s postmodern networks. These networks feature extensive cooperating techniques which directly implement the anarchist principle of mutual aid. Shareware, freeware and open source software represent clear alternatives to the economic logic of capitalism. Like Thomas Nail, Heroux suggests that we are no longer anticipating a future post-anarchist revolution. Rather, we are studying the emergence of “an actual postanarchist society.”

So this is post-anarchism today. We offer no more visions, no more predictions, no more half-baked utopian dreams. Post-anarchism today describes the world we actually live in. It offers innovative, effective strategies for us to understand that world and engage with it. For a philosophy that was built, in part, on the renunciation of reality, post-anarchism has become surprisingly real. So use it and re-use it. Apply it and deny it. Revise it and recycle it. Let it speak to you, my fellow anarchists, and make it listen to you. Post-anarchism may not be here to stay, but it is here now, and anarchism is richer for that.

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# PostAnarchia Repertoire

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## Abstract

"PostAnarchia Repertoire" is a set of discrete propositions about post-anarchism. These can be read either as stand-alone units in any order, or also as a linear development that unfolds from beginning to end. The essay attempts to articulate the implied principles, themes, and concepts from across a range of contemporary postanarchist writing. Themes here include: transversality across acentric and polycentric networks; the tension between the three revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, and solidarity; the potential consequences of taking equality seriously; how the anarchist criticism of representation has been complicated by the paradoxes of deconstruction; the necessity of dissensus and the appeal of paralogy and the dialogical; and finally why a polythetic definition of anarchism is more suitable than an essentialist definition.

*We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation. We lack resistance to the present. The creation of concepts in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist [...] This people and this earth will not be found in our democracies. Democracies are majorities, but a becoming is by its nature that which always eludes the majority*

— DELEUZE & GUATTARI

How did we get so sad? The 20<sup>th</sup> century is the story of failed revolutions against both capitalism and empire; that is, of the communist and anticolonialist revolts. Instead, capitalism has never been so widely embraced and embracing, meanwhile the empire re-insinuates itself in neocolonial exploitation and postcolonial nationalist

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regimes that grotesquely abuse their own citizens. The century was a trap. When it wasn't fascist violence that destroyed anarchism as in Spain, then it was totalitarian violence. When it wasn't colonial violence, then it was postcolonial violence. When it wasn't nationalism, then it was terrorism. When it wasn't overt violence, it was an even more insidious, because covert, form of control: an economic and technical control of populations and of individuals that was difficult to name, much less to resist. We are sad because we were seduced and abandoned, forlorn lovers of humanity. This last century was not one of conspiracy, though many conspiracies succeeded. The only conspiracies allowed to succeed were those that conformed to and furthered the total drift into global capital. In an era of economic hierarchy, only the violence of the economy is permitted.

Past, present, future. Anarchism, it is often said, has passed. It was a 19<sup>th</sup> century ideology that found expression in a few bombs and assassins, the "propagandists of the deed." Its fullest communal expression was in Spain before the fascists violently overthrew the Republic in that ultimate prelude to WWII. Hence, all anarchism has is a past, a hopeless cause in a mature world of democratic states. So goes the managed folklore. Nevertheless, an awkward present throws in with a certain return of anarchism, the "new anarchists", the "black blocs", the intentional communities, the temporary autonomous zones, the experimental social centers, the resurgence of publishing anarchist anthologies, classics, rereadings, and the startling reappearance of the symbol of anarchy everywhere: asserting that true order grows from anarchic liberty. It is no small irony, historic irony, that the status quo system of welfare state plus capitalism is the only one to have announced its own lack of a futurity: this has been called the "end of history" and "the end of ideology". The present is the ultimate attainment of human abilities, the wisest compromise is conveniently located nearby: the status quo turns out to be unsurpassable, an eternal present that would be useless to oppose, since all competing alternatives have failed. Yet like an uncanny ghost, anarchism then reappears to announce that reports of its demise are premature. On the contrary, it now is reinvented as "post-contemporary theory", calling attention to a "coming community" (Agamben) a "democracy to come" (Derrida) a "people that do not yet exist" (Deleuze & Guattari) in a paradoxically "unavowable community" (Blanchot) in which the rising "multitude" consists not of identities but instead of "singularities" (Hardt & Negri). These theories of libertarian communalism do not name themselves as

anarchist — or at least only obliquely as can easily be shown in particular allusions and footnotes. But they everywhere reanimate the supposedly dead anarchist themes and rearticulate an older lexicon in neologisms for new emerging conditions. Postanarchism, therefore, asserts its future; while welfare state consumerism never tires of asserting its eternal present without any future development, in complete denial of history.

The people to come, those evoked by the great visionary artists, poets, philosophers — and here I refer to the likes of Blake, Whitman and Nietzsche — will not be clones of the proletarians, or preservations of beleaguered working class culture, or back to the severed roots of native tribes, or any essentialist identity (or foundationalist identification) whether masculine or feminine, black or white, true or false. These contemporary stylizations of radical imagery are rejected in postanarchist theory (and indeed essentialism was most often rejected in classical anarchism too). Instead, the new accent in all postanarchism is on neither preserving nor returning, but rather on becoming. The pure image of authentic proletarians or aboriginals or precolonial subalterns is now transformed and opened up to future “becoming minor”. Neither majority nor purity; but of vital concern here is the endlessly open process of becoming different from what one already was, *creating* a singularity rather than *being* an individual, branching outward rather than digging for roots. Singularities are unique clusters formed of both pre-individual elements and trans-individual elements, making up their own spaces and times. Nevertheless, what is affirmed and carried forth from the various marxisms, anti-colonialisms, and classical anarchism is what Deleuze and Guattari have listed as the source of the people to come: “an oppressed, bastard, lower, anarchical, nomadic, and irremediably minor race”.

Where are we today? Caught like pawns between the two dominant and dominating institutions that have competed with each other and cooperated with each other for access to our domination: the State and the Corporation. Our political alternative will not be to take over and become the corporation, nor the state. But rather to sidestep these institutions by way of decentralization, which undercuts both. Both of these dominating institutions operate as hierarchies. More and more they also appear to operate like networks, a diffuse power that seeps into the fabric of society itself as “governmentality” or a “biopower” that subjects us not through discipline or conformity to norms, but rather through suffusing its model of our

supposed “interests” deeply and seductively into our own dreams and desires. This network power collapses the boundaries between public and private, between work and play, between home economics and the Economy. But this power, insidiously effective, is merely a contingent strategy, a screen that maintains the quite obvious hierarchies that it supports. Our alternative operation is networks too, but networks that are not screens but rather redistributions of power. Who speaks, who can be heard, who can see, who can be seen, who can decide, what is allowed to be decided upon — all of these are redistributed in genuine networks.

Networks. All kinds of networks for different purposes, using different kinds of connectivity. Oddly, network studies have shown that not every node on a network is equally decentered. Networks are potentially acentric, but in fact they evolve as *polycentric*: where some nodes are much more used and useful than others. The completely acentric interconnectivity is virtual, is available to be enacted; however in practice, most interconnections go through a smaller number of major hubs. The larger number of other nodes become relatively marginal, even though they are still connected to every other node, and are still potentially capable of becoming more “central”. The result is a hybrid of hierarchy and equality: both/and yet neither/nor vertical and horizontal: something *in between*. A new concept is called for. A diagonal, or better, *transversal* interaction. Networks instantiate the hybridity and the equality and the liberty and the mutual interconnectedness and the dialogical polyphony of the key postanarchist transvaluation of all values. The coming community is networked and it arrives through networked structures, and it enacts a network: polycentric when it wants to be, and yet always already decentered or acentric if wants to be. The network both enables and results from the self-organizing system of singularities in mutual connectedness.

Multinational conferences, held to official fanfare in cities named Kyoto, Seattle, Genoa, Copenhagen, etc., have repeatedly shown the failure of elite managers to come to any viable agreement about how best to partition the spoils, how to preserve privileges, how to guarantee the sustainability of capitalism, how to make power seem appealing, in sum how to save the status quo from its own poisons. This remarkable series of failures has been met by an equally remarkable series of forgettings in the muddle minded media. Whether amnesia or a wilful malice, the result has been that only an inspired group of protesters has called for an awakening from this stupor,



albeit protesters usually depicted while being kicked and sprayed by the various national guards of the world, now indistinguishably attired in the uniforms of the stormtroopers from *Star Wars*. (The new Empire is not subtle in its symbolism.) The official negotiations attempt to preserve the status quo while making deals to cover the contradictions between nationalisms and global governance. It is only the protesters who have been able to propose an alternative to these failed negotiations: an alternative world to the business as usual model of globalization. The most acute analysis shows that another world is not only possible, but that another world is necessary. This necessary alternative is aligned with the principles of postanarchist governance.

Anarchism inspired and is inspired by that old revolutionary trinity of equality, liberty, and solidarity (I prefer this latter term to the patriarchal “brotherhood” of fraternity). Anarchism is never fully realized, but is the political ideal to be worked toward continually, more democratic than “democracy” as currently established in systems of state representation. As an ideal, it is never fully present but always a potential to bring out the best in forms of free sociality. Even amid our current States, it is anarchistic practices that thrive between the cracks of failing systems. Anarchism as a theory and praxis has been the most faithful to the old ideal trinity, and has worked to evolve practices of everyday life that cultivate a viable community — one that can negotiate the very real tensions between the three: when equality violates liberty or vice-versa; or where liberty violates solidarity, and so forth. Anarchism at its best was never just about “freedom” nor about “equality” nor about “mutual aid” in and of themselves, but rather about affirming all three despite the tensions. Acknowledging that the tension will always remain between these three revolutionary ideals, and affirming this tension as productive and valuable, is the revolutionary tense of postanarchism.

Classical anarchism radically rejected representation, that is, representatives who speak in place of others. Poststructuralist theory adds a few layers of critique to this. Postanarchism will continue to read the anarchist rejection with/through/against the poststructuralist complication of representation. The issue of representation will never be settled once and for all, as we discover that language itself is representation, and as such cannot simply be discarded, but only seen through as a construct even as it is necessarily employed. There is no pre-given natural presence that guarantees the ultimate truth of a re-presence of representation; nevertheless this also implies

that all we have in terms of meaning are representations. Presence we can assume is indeed there, but the meaningfulness of this or that meaning is always a re-presentation. And representations have consequences. So far, this is Derrida in a nutshell, and begins with his point that there is no transcendental signifier, yet signification is always already underway in an interminable system of differences, where each difference that makes a meaningful difference can only do so in this very relational distinction to all the adjacent differences — which are themselves not present and not presences, but rather also relational differences. This will be a postanarchist topic, inexorably corrosive of all naturalist assumptions about identity and the proper place of my property. Representations are always de-naturalized, non-natural. Even *mimesis* as the direct mirroring of nature has proved to be historical instead of natural, as the history of the arts and sciences has shown. Collingwood's history of *The Idea of Nature*, alongside Auerbach's study of *Mimesis* in the history of literary representation come to mind as decisive illustrations of my theme: "nature" is given diverse meanings, the representation of nature slides over a range of equivocations, connotations, contradictions, modes, epistemes, genres, and does this *ad infinitum*. The consequence is a range of diverse meanings.

My mirror, my self. There is no essential guarantee that an authentic subject will give the true representation of that position from that position. Self-representations are just as susceptible to self-deception as are representations of the Other, and the Other's representations of myself. Misrecognition is sometimes a projection of one's disowned characteristics onto some other, as in Jung's metaphor of "the shadow"; but also to misrecognize is a mirror experience. That is, to see yourself and yet not to see at all what others see when they see you. A dramatic example of the mirror as misrecognition, literalized too much no doubt, is in the Taiwanese film *Yi-yi* (translated as *A One and a One*) by the late director Edward Yang. In the film, a little boy snaps dozens of photographs of persons "behind their backs" so to speak — literally photos of their backs. The boy then presents these photos to each person as an uncanny gift. Late in the film, he is asked about this peculiar hobby. Speaking like a true artist, the boy's answer is both precocious and yet innocent; he explains that he wants people to see a side of themselves that they normally cannot see. We don't know what we look like to others from behind. The boy's representations are the Other's point of view, unavailable in the mirror. This too explains the creepiness of the famous painting

by the Surrealist, Magritte, in which a man stares into a mirror and is stunned to find that he can only see his backside, but in a typically surrealist reversal, not his face. The wit here is in the implication that the real situation in everyday normality is simply a reversal of this maddening blind-spot. So likewise, cinema has the potential, sometimes fulfilled, to represent ourselves better than we have been able to see ourselves without this apparatus and without this Other perspective.

We must be suspicious of representation, even against it — but the paradox, probably the *aporia*, is that we cannot exist without representation. Anarchism was right to take sides against representation, and it should be emphasized that this is still important. In politics, equality and representation are in a contradictory tension, as too are liberty and representation. We must reaffirm the principle of open participation in decision making, especially enabling those who will be most affected by a decision to have the most participation in making that decision. Nevertheless, the issue of representation remains unresolved. Every representation is partial at best, distorted, perverse — including self-representation. We do not always give the best or rather only representations of ourselves. Representation itself is indeed a vexing problem — above all for anarchism — in that it isn't a psychological or aesthetic phenomenon merely, as my allusions so far have suggested, but also an enormous political problem. I propose that we experiment in thinking further about these problems of representation by bringing in the notion of *equality*, from behind so to speak, to supplement the notions of individual liberty and solidarity. My emphasis on equality may seem oddly perplexing, unless you have read Rancière, who I am nominating as a postanarchist, in my representation. “Equality” is the keyword to his many works, and is the principle by which Rancière proposes to rethink democracy, education, art practice, literary interpretation, and so on. He has insisted several times that equality is not an ontological claim, nor it any kind of normative, biological, or essentialist assertion. This is a political principle, not ontological. Instead, *égalité* is a theoretical hypothesis to be tested: What if we, regrettably for the first time, began to take seriously the principle of equality in as many situations as possible. What if for instance, we assumed that students really are equal to their teachers — just as a thought experiment and then perhaps as praxis. We might be surprised, as Rancière's book on the 18<sup>th</sup>-century educator, Jacotot, shows us (*The Ignorant Schoolmaster*). The political and pragmatic

assumption of equality can lead to classroom experiences where this equality is manifested, that is, where students can teach themselves just as much as the teacher.

What if we assume that the reader is equal to the writer? What if the viewer is equal to the artist? What if everyone had in principle the same fundamental capacity to understand, to speak, to interpret? Representation, thence, would nevertheless remain problematic, but it would become, as if for the first time in history, a game of equals. Your representation of me, let us assume at the start of this game, is equal to my representation. One's representation of one's self-interest is equal to, not always better than, the other's representation of that interest. Both enter the game or contest as assumed equals, vying for attention. Again: this is not a claim about truth or eternity or reality or ontology. Being none of those, it is a political claim to think and to practice democracy. There shall be no hierarchy, and not even an overturned hierarchy in which the free individual is the monarch of his castle. Instead, we live together in a world of inevitable conflicts and competing representations. The merit of any claim informing our decision will be based on other criteria but not on the origin of that argument, whether from the subject or from the other.

Consensus or dissensus? What I have argued so far does not propose that all opinions are equal, as is sometimes said by college sophomores. Equality is a political strategy, not pure relativism. Dissenting opinions, however, are now presumed to have equal capacity and equal rights to expression as are those by established experts. Dissensus is affirmed, neither as a noble end, nor as a means to some other end such as consensus, but rather more immediately as a necessity that follows upon equality in a world of alterity. A better name here is dialogue — and not simply any old dialogue, but following Bakhtin, "*the dialogical*," a logic of polyphony that includes dissonance. Moreover, in postmodern science this dissensus-as-polyphony becomes what Lyotard called "paralogy" — in which scientific models and paradigms pursue paradoxes and proliferate a broad array of theories, approaches, objects; branching out and away with innovative modes of representation, multiple epistemologies and discourses. Lyotard saw the value of dissensus not only for avant-garde scientific knowledge, but also for justice. In a world of alterity, of proliferating identities, of fluid subjectivities, of incommensurable worldviews, then how are we to arrive at justice. Which language game ought to decide this? Which epistemology ought to

dominate? Lyotard and Bakhtin agree with the anarchist approach to this problem: none ought to dominate. Incommensurability is not the problem; domination is the problem. The problem that modernity bequeathed to us is the hegemony of a single way of thinking, of talking about truth, goodness, and beauty. The monolithic monologue of technocracy, mass production, mass media, disenchantment, Weber's iron cage of rationality and materialism, the reduction of peoples to *homo economicus* delimited as a competitive self-interest, and so forth. But within this all-too-familiar modernity was a potential postmodern opening outward, sometimes activated as an oppositional modernism. The upshot is that Lyotard points out how today we could make all information equally available, and then let the games begin. The monological condition of postmodernity bears the seeds of an alternative postmodernism, a dialogical anarchism manifested on the Internet — that vast virtual world without a State, comprised of cooperating techniques and shareware, of free content freely contributed by anyone equally. The Internet is the clearest manifestation of spontaneous cooperation cutting across nations, above and beneath nations, a manifestation of the dialogical and of dissensus. The net and its world wide web do not so much prefigure a postanarchist community to come, but rather is today the planetary communicational commons of an actual postanarchist society.

How does postmodern dissensus avoid the still serious charge of careless relativism? To assume in principle the equality of potential is not to conclude in haste that this potential is automatically realized, much less that everyone's opinion is "equally correct" or even "equally incorrect". Although this latter negation is very tempting, it too misses the mark badly. Let us assume more precisely that everyone has the equal potential to arrive at a better view or fuller view — you and me, experts and novices, minorities and majorities, host and guest, male and female, both Kant and Hegel, Darwin and Kropotkin, Marx and Bakunin, and at the far limits of our ability to imagine even Sarah Palin and Osama bin Laden have after all is said and done, the same potential to develop an adequate representation of themselves and others. This is very far from the careless claim that all of these representations are equally true, good, or beautiful. Neither are they equally false, bad, and ugly. Again this is a great temptation that must be overcome. The principle of a politics of equal representations necessarily affirms also the value of dissensus. To the degree that this is an uncomfortable or disappointing conclusion reflects the degree of one's mistrust in equality itself. Alternately, to

the degree that this becomes acceptable, personally and politically, is the degree of trust in postanarchism.

Polythetic set: or, how to define anarchism? As a tradition, anarchism was never simply one thing. It too has a history of disagreements and even sectarian splits and at least varying emphases on any number of issues. Certainly anarchism is against domination — but then some anarchists believe in god or in the benefit of parental authority over their children. Others do not. Certainly anarchism is anti-State. Still, some anarchists argue that since transnational corporations are in many cases more powerful than the State, it would then behoove us to modulate this anti-state position to be more practically tactical in approaching social crises where the State can regulate and ameliorate some of the abusive practices of capitalism. The main tradition of anarchism was anti-capitalist and even communal. Yet some anarchists support free enterprise and even individualism. Most are modernist, but some are primitivist. Some anarchists are pacifist, while others practised “propaganda by the deed” with Molotov cocktails and more. Among the latter, some believe that violence is only to be applied against property but not against persons, while others traditionally practised assassination. Some anarchists believe in gradual reform, others in sudden revolution, while others reject both reform and revolution in favour of rebuilding the social fabric from an outside position, or perhaps inside out with alternative services, groups, and practices. These many differences are extensive and perennial, despite the occasional attempt to gather an ecumenical all-embracing “Anarchism without Adjectives” as Fernando Tarrida del Mármol called for in Cuba and also Voltairine de Cleyre in America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Post-anarchism obviously re-attaches an adjective. This adjective upsets some anarchists. Nevertheless, it is the *noun* “anarchism” not the adjective that has traditionally required this or that modifier: individualist, social, syndicalist, green, libertarian, communal, activist, pacifist, nonwestern, and so forth. I propose to think this controversial issue of definition by way of the scientific approach called “polythetic classification”. A polythetic definition is not monothetic, as in Aristotle’s approach to defining a category by its properties, which must be both necessary and sufficient. There is no monothetic definition of anarchism, since some of the aspects above are necessary but not sufficient, while others might seem sufficient, but they are not necessary. Rather than disciplining the tradition of anarchism to make it fit an essentialist definition, I suppose we could

use an anarchist approach to definition, one that is non-essentialist, more inclusive, and that deflates authority. Polythetic classification appears helpful, and it is used rigorously in several branches of biology. The approach is not difficult. One notes a set of characteristics or qualities that pertain, in our case to anarchism. We then agree that so long as something has a certain number of those qualities, probably most of the qualities though not all, then it is by definition anarchism. But the set of qualities are all equal in a specific manner: none is necessary in itself. Any might be absent, but the definition would still apply if most of the characteristics applied — in any possible combination. Rather than an anarchism without adjectives, this is an anarchism with many possible adjectives.

Depending on the number of qualities or aspects of anarchism one would include in this polythetic set, the possible permutations would be either few or many, delimited and strict, or extensive and lax. Here again we encounter one of the open secrets of deconstruction: on the one hand, definitions are not set in stone, while on the other hand, they are not meaningless. Definitions do things in the real world even though they are not given as commandments on Mount Sinai. Definitions frequently slide as if slippery to our cognitive grasp. We ourselves frequently equivocate in discussion, not to mention the way definitions change in debates among the multitude. The representation of anarchism itself should be an anarchist representation, as it will have consequences. Even if we put a term under erasure in our discussion (Derrida used the Latin *sous rature*), even when we cross out an essentialist ~~definition~~, it continues to function in a way, so that we are forced to mark its consequences for our thought. Or, it continues to be necessary even as we acknowledge that it is inaccurate. So for example, the signifier “race” might be marked as unhappily as ~~raee~~ because even though it has been deconstructed (in effect showing that its social construction is not fundamentally grounded in any biological signified but is rather based on binary oppositions and hierarchical social formations), still the inadequate term continues to be necessary even if only in some newly distanced manner. In contemporary science, “race” is a very loose polythetic category. There is no monothetic definition for race at the level of DNA, since the necessary and/or sufficient genes don’t correspond to any social definition. Instead there is a surprising range of variation in clusters that are more polythetic. No one today really believes in race as a reified thing-in-itself, some essentialist noumenon, and yet race continues to operate with genuine

consequences: sometimes as self-affirmation for ethnic groups (or what Gayatri Spivak calls “strategic essentialism”) and other times used to oppress those groups. Sometimes race is used to identify actual clusters of genetics that make a real difference in the medical treatment of disease, but always polythetically. The clusters tend to be much smaller specific populations inside of the larger groups we have learned to think of as “racial”.

In terms of the problem at hand, my suggestion is that a polythetic definition of anarchism is consonant with what anarchism aims at. This slippery yet consequential sensibility about “anarchism” itself is partly what is meant by the signifier “postanarchism”. And it should be of further interest to anarchists that this approach is itself faithful to an *post*-anarchist epistemology, wherein most of the set of characteristics that variously define anarchism are now retroactively shown to be applicable to an epistemology: how do we know, and how do we adequately represent our reality? Well, without authoritarianism, domination, or monologue; but with liberty, equality, and solidarity. In sum, with genuine respect for the dialogical principle, for participation, for the equality of potential, for innovation, proliferation, dissensus, paralogy, polycentrism, transversality of connections, and openness to the sharing of information by all, from all, to all, without limits. With this as our repertoire, let the games commence.



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# Voluntary Servitude Reconsidered: Radical Politics and the Problem of Self-Domination

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## Abstract

In this paper I investigate the problem of voluntary servitude — first elaborated by Etienne de la Boétie — and explore its implications for radical political theory today. The desire for one's own domination has proved a major hindrance to projects of human liberation such as revolutionary Marxism and anarchism, necessitating new understandings of subjectivity and revolutionary desire. Central here, as I show, are micro-political and ethical projects of interrogating one's own subjective attachment to power and authority — projects elaborated, in different ways, by thinkers as diverse as Max Stirner, Gustav Landauer and Michel Foucault. I argue that the question of voluntary servitude must be taken more seriously by political theory, and that an engagement with this problem brings to the surface a counter-sovereign tradition in politics in which the central concern is not the legitimacy of political power, but rather the possibilities for new practices of freedom.

## Introduction

In this paper I will explore the genealogy of a certain counter-sovereign political discourse, one that starts with the question 'why

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do we obey?’ This question, initially posed by the philosopher Etienne de la Boétie in his investigations on tyranny and our voluntary servitude to it, starts from the opposite position to the problematic of sovereignty staked out by Bodin and Hobbes. Moreover, it remains a central and unresolved problem in radical political thought which works necessarily within the ethical horizon of emancipation from political power. I suggest that encountering the problem of voluntary servitude necessitates an exploration of new forms of subjectivity, ethics and political practices through which our subjective bonds to power are interrogated; and I explore these possibilities through the revolutionary tradition of anarchism, as well as through an engagement with psychoanalytic theory. My contention here is that we cannot counter the problem of voluntary servitude without a critique of idealization and identification, and here I turn to thinkers like Max Stirner, Gustav Landauer and Michel Foucault, all of whom, in different ways, develop a micropolitics and ethics of freedom which aims at undoing the bonds between the subject and power.

### The Powerlessness of Power

The question posed by Etienne De La Boétie in the middle of the sixteenth century in *Discours de la servitude volontaire, ou Le Contr’Un*, remains with us today and can still be considered a fundamental political question:

My sole aim on this occasion is to discover how it can happen that a vast number of individuals, of towns, cities and nations can allow one man to tyrannize them, a man who has no power except the power they themselves give him, who could do them no harm were they not willing to suffer harm, and who could never wrong them were they not more ready to endure it than to stand in his way (Etienne De La Boétie, 1988).

La Boétie explores the subjective bond which ties us to the power that dominates us, which enthralls and seduces us, blinds us and mesmerizes us. The essential lesson here is that the power cannot rely on coercion, but in reality rests on our power. Our active acquiescence to power at the same time constitutes this power. For La Boétie, then, in order to resist the tyrant, all we need do is turn our backs on him,

withdraw our active support from him and perceive, through the illusory spell that power manages to cast over us — an illusion that we participate in — his weakness and vulnerability. Servitude, then, is a condition of our own making — it is entirely voluntary; and all it takes to untie us from this condition is the desire to no longer be subjugated, the will to be free.

This problem of voluntary servitude is the exact opposite of that raised by Hobbes a century later. Whereas for La Boétie, it is unnatural for us to be subjected to absolute power, for Hobbes it is unnatural for us to live in any other condition; the anarchy of the state of nature, for Hobbes, is precisely an unnatural and unbearable situation. La Boétie's problematic of self-domination thus inverts a whole tradition of political theory based on legitimizing the sovereign — a tradition that is still very much with us today. La Boétie starts from the opposite position, which is that of the primacy of liberty, self-determination and the natural bonds of family and companionship, as opposed to the unnatural, artificial bonds of political domination. Liberty is something which must be protected not so much against those who wish to impose their will on us, but against our own temptation to relinquish our liberty, to be dazzled by authority, to barter away our liberty in return for wealth, positions, favours, and so on. What must be explained, then, is the pathological bond to power which displaces the natural desire for liberty and the free bonds that exist between people.

Boétie's explanations for voluntary servitude are not entirely adequate or convincing, however: he attributes it to a kind of denaturing, whereby free men become effeminate and cowardly, thus allowing another to dominate them. Nevertheless, he raises, I think, one of the fundamental questions for politics — and especially for radical politics — namely, why do people at some level desire their own domination? This question inaugurates a counter-sovereign political theory, a libertarian line of investigation which is taken up by a number of thinkers. Wilhelm Reich, for instance, in his Freud-Marxist analysis of the mass psychology of fascism, pointed to a desire for domination and authority which could not be adequately explained through the Marxist category of ideological false consciousness (Reich, 1980). Pierre Clastres, the anthropologist of liberty, saw the value of La Boétie in showing us the possibility that domination is not inevitable; that voluntary servitude resulted from a misfortune of history (or pre-history), a certain fall from grace, a lapse from the condition of primitive freedom and statelessness into a society

divided between dominators and the dominated. Here, man occupies the condition of the *unnameable* (neither man nor animal): so alienated is he from his natural freedom, that he freely chooses, *desires*, servitude — a desire which was entirely unknown in primitive societies (Clastres, 1994: 93–104). Following on from Clastres' account, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari explored the emergence of the state, and the way in which it relies not so much, or not entirely, on violent domination and capture, but rather on the self-domination of the subject at the level of his or her desire — a repression which is itself desired. The state acts to channel the subject's desire through authoritarian and hierarchical structures of thought and modes of individualization.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the Situationist Raoul Vanegeim showed, in an analysis that bears many a striking likeness to La Boétie's, that our obedience is bought and sustained by minor compensations, a little bit of power as a psychological pay-off for the humiliation of our own domination:

Slaves are not willing slaves for long if they are not compensated for their submission by a shred of power: all subjection entails the right to a measure of power, and there is no such thing as power that does not embody a degree of submissions. That is why some agree so readily to be governed (Vanegeim, 1994: 132).

### Another Politics. . . ?

The problem of self-domination shows us that the connection between politics and subjectification must be more thoroughly investigated. To create new forms of politics — which is the fundamental theoretical task today — requires new forms of subjectivity, new modes of subjectivisation. Moreover, to counter voluntary servitude will involve new political strategies, indeed a different understanding of politics itself. Quite rightly, La Boétie recognizes the potential for domination in any democracy: the democratic leader, elected by

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze and Guattari point to the mysterious way that we are tied to State power, something which the term 'voluntary servitude' both illuminates and obscures: "The State is assuredly not the locus of liberty, nor the agent of forced servitude or capture. Should we then speak of 'voluntary servitude'?" See Deleuze & Guattari (2005: 460).

the people, becomes intoxicated with his own power and teeters increasingly towards tyranny. Indeed, we can see modern democracy itself as an instance of voluntary servitude on a mass scale. It is not so much that we participate in an illusion whereby we are deceived by elites into thinking we have a genuine say in decision-making. It is rather that democracy itself has encouraged a mass contentment with powerlessness and a general love of submission.

As an alternative, La Boétie asserts the idea of a free republic. However, I would suggest that the inverse of voluntary servitude is not a free republic, but another form of politics entirely. Free republics have a domination of their own, not only in their laws, but in the rule of the rich and propertied classes over the poor. Rather, when we consider alternative forms of politics, when we think about ways of enacting and maximizing the possibilities of non-domination, I think we ought to consider the politics of anarchism — which is a *politics of anti-politics*, a politics which seeks the abolition of the structures of political power and authority enshrined in the state.

Anarchism, this most heretical of radical political philosophies, has led for a long time a marginalized existence. This is due in part to its heterodox nature, to the way it cannot be encompassed within a single system of ideas or body of thought, but rather refers to a diverse ensemble of ideas, philosophical approaches, revolutionary practices and historical movements and identities. However, what makes a reconsideration of anarchist thought essential here is that out of all the radical traditions, it is the one that is most sensitive to the dangers of political power, to the potential for authoritarianism and domination contained within any political arrangement or institution. In this sense, it is particularly wary of the bonds through which people are tied to power. That is why, unlike the Marxist-Leninists, anarchists insisted that the state must be abolished in the first stages of the revolution: if, on the other hand, state power was seized by a vanguard and used — under the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ — to revolutionize society, it will, rather than eventually ‘withering away’, expand in size and power, engendering new class contradictions and antagonisms. To imagine, in other words, that the state was a kind of neutral mechanism that could be used as a tool of liberation if the right class controlled it, was, according to the classical anarchists of the nineteenth century, engaged as they were in major debates with Marx, a pure fantasy that ignored the inextricable logic of state domination and the temptations and lures of political power. That was why the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin

insisted that the state must be examined as a specific structure of power which could not be reduced to the interests of a particular class. It was — in its very essence — dominating: “And there are those who, like us, see in the State, not only its actual form and in all forms of domination that it might assume, but in its very essence, an obstacle to the social revolution” (Kropotkin, 1943). The power of the state, moreover, perpetuates itself through the subjective bond that it forms with those who attempt to control it, through the corrupting influence it has on them. In the words of another anarchist, Mikhail Bakunin, “We of course are all sincere socialists and revolutionists and still, were we to be endowed with power [. . .] we would not be where we are now” (Bakunin, 1953: 249).

This uncompromising critique of political power, and the conviction that freedom cannot be conceived within the framework of the state, is what distinguishes anarchism from other political philosophies. It contrasts with liberalism, which is in reality a politics of security, where the state becomes necessary to protect individual liberty from the liberty of others: indeed, the current securitization of the state through the permanent state of exception reveals the true face of liberalism. It differs also in this respect from socialism, which sees the state as essential for making society more equal, and whose terminal decline can be witnessed in the sad fate of social democratic parties today with their authoritarian centralism, their law and order fetishes and their utter complicity with global neoliberalism. Furthermore, anarchism is to be distinguished from revolutionary Leninism, which now represents a completely defunct model of radical politics. What defines anarchism, then, is the refusal of state power, even of the revolutionary strategy of *seizing* state power. Instead, the focus of anarchism is on self-emancipation and autonomy, something which cannot be achieved through parliamentary democratic channels or through revolutionary vanguards, but rather through the development of alternative practices and relationships based on free association, equal liberty and voluntary cooperation.

It is because of its alterity or exteriority to other state-centred modes of politics that anarchism has been largely overshadowed within the radical political tradition. Yet, I would argue that currently we are in a kind of anarchist moment politically. What I mean is that with the eclipse of the socialist state project and revolutionary Leninism, and with the devolving of liberal democracy into a narrow politics of security, that radical politics today tends to situate itself increasingly outside the state. Contemporary radical activism

seems to reflect certain anarchist orientations in its emphasis on decentralized networks and direct action, rather than party leadership and political representation. There is a kind of disengagement from state power, a desire to think and act beyond its structures, in the direction of greater autonomy. These tendencies are becoming more pronounced with the current economic crisis, something which is pointing to the very limits of capitalism itself, and certainly to the end of the neoliberal economic model. The answer to the failings of neoliberalism is not more state intervention. It is ludicrous to talk about the return of the regulatory state: the state in fact never went away under neoliberalism, and the whole ideology of economic 'libertarianism' concealed a much more intensive deployment of state power in the domain of security, and in the regulation, disciplining and surveillance of social life. It is clear, moreover, that the state will not help us in this current situation; there is no point looking to it for protection. Indeed, what is emerging is a kind of disengagement from the state; the coming insurrections will challenge the hegemony of the state, which we see increasingly governing through the logic of exception.

Moreover, the relevance of anarchism is also reflected at a theoretical level. Many of themes and preoccupations of contemporary continental thinkers for instance — the idea of non-state, non-party and post-class forms of politics, the coming of the multitudes and so on — seem to invoke an anarchist politics. Indeed, this is particularly evident in the search for a new political subject: the multitudes of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, the people for Ernesto Laclau, the excluded part-of-no-part for Jacques Rancière, the figure of the militant for Alain Badiou; all this reflects an attempt to think about new modes of subjectification which are perhaps broader and less constraining than the category of the proletariat as politically constituted through the Marxist-Leninist vanguard. A similar approach to political subjectivity was proposed by the anarchists in the nineteenth century, who claimed that the Marxist notion of the revolutionary class was exclusivist, and who sought to include the peasantry and *lumpenproletariat* as revolutionary identities.<sup>2</sup> In my view, anarchism is the 'missing link' in contemporary continental political thought — a spectral presence which is never really acknowledged.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Bakunin's notion of the revolutionary mass as opposed to the Marxist category of class (Bakunin, 1984: 47).



## The Anarchist Subject

Anarchism is a politics and ethics in which power is continually interrogated in the name of human freedom, and in which human existence is posited in the absence of authority. However, this raises the question of whether there is an anarchist subject as such. Here I would like to reconsider anarchism through the problem of voluntary servitude. While the classical anarchists were not unaware of the desires for power that lay at the heart of the human subject — which is why they were so keen to abolish the structures of power which would incite these desires — the problem of self-domination, the desire for one's own domination, remains insufficiently theorized in anarchism.<sup>4</sup> For the anarchists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries — such as William Godwin, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin — conditioned as they were by the rationalist discourses of Enlightenment humanism, the human subject naturally desired freedom; thus the revolution against state power was part of the rational narrative of human emancipation. The external and artificial constraints of state power would be thrown off, so that man's essential rational and moral properties could be expressed and society could be in harmony with itself. There is a kind of Manichean opposition that is presupposed in classical anarchist thought, between human society which is governed by natural laws, and political power and man-made law, embodied in the state, which is artificial, irrational and a constraint on the free development of social forces. There is, furthermore, an innate sociability in man — a natural tendency, as Kropotkin saw it, towards mutual aid and cooperation — which was distorted by the state, but which, if allowed to

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the relevance of classical anarchism and contemporary radical political philosophy, see my paper (2007) 'Anarchism, Poststructuralism and the Future of Radical Politics Today', *Substance* (113)36/2.

<sup>4</sup> This acknowledgement of the desire for power at the heart of human subjectivity does not endorse the Hobbesian position affirming the need for a strong sovereign. On the contrary, it makes the goal of fragmenting and abolishing centralized structures of power and authority all the more necessary. Surely if, in other words, human nature is prone to the temptations of power and the desire for domination, the last thing we should do is trust a sovereign with absolute power over us. A similar point is made by Paolo Virno (see the essay 'Multitude and Evil'), who argues that if we are to accept the 'realist' claim that we have as humans a capacity for 'evil', then, rather than this justifying centralized state authority, we should be even more cautious about the concentration of power and violence in the hands of the state (cf., Virno, 2008).

flourish, would produce a social harmony in which the state would become unnecessary (cf., Kropotkin, 2007).

While the idea of a society without a state, without sovereignty and law is desirable, and indeed the ultimate horizon of radical politics, and while there can be no doubt that political and legal authority is an oppressive encumbrance on social life and human existence generally, what tends to be obscured in this ontological separation between the subject and power is the problem of voluntary servitude — which points to the more troubling complicity between the subject and the power that dominates him. To take this into account, to explain the desire for self-domination and to develop strategies — ethical and political strategies — to counter it, would be to propose an anarchist theory of subjectivity, or at least a more developed one than can be found in classical anarchist thought. It would also imply a move beyond some of the essentialist and rationalist categories of classical anarchism, a move that elsewhere I have referred to as postanarchism (Newman, 2010). This is not to suggest that the classical anarchists were necessarily naïve about human nature or politics; rather that its humanism and rationalism resulted in a kind of blind-spot around the question of desire, whose dark, convoluted, self-destructive and irrational nature would be revealed later by psychoanalysis.

## Psychoanalysis and Passionate Attachments

So it is important to explore the subjective bond to power at the level of the psyche.<sup>5</sup> A psychological dependency on power, which was explored by Freudo-Marxists such as Marcuse and Reich<sup>6</sup>, meant that the possibilities of emancipatory politics are at times compromised by hidden authoritarian desires; that there was always a risk

<sup>5</sup> This is similar to what Jason Glynos refers to as the problem of self-transgression (see Glynos, 2008). The argument here is that conceptualization and practice of freedom is often complicated by various forms of self-transgression, where the subject engages in activities which limit his or her freedom — which prevent him or her from achieving one's object of desire, or achieving a certain ideal that one might have of oneself — because of the unconscious enjoyment (*jouissance*) derived from this transgression. Thus the limitation to the subject's freedom is not longer *external* (as in the paradigm of negative freedom) but *internal*. This might be another way of thinking about the problem of voluntary servitude through the lens of psychoanalysis.

<sup>6</sup> See also Theodore Adorno's study [et al] *The Authoritarian Personality* (1964).

of authoritarian and hierarchical practices and institutions emerging in post-revolutionary societies. The central place of the subject — in politics, philosophy — is not abandoned here but complicated. Radical political projects, for instance, have to contend with the ambiguities of human desire, with irrational social behaviour, with violent and aggressive drives, and even with unconscious desires for authority and domination.

This is not to suggest that psychoanalysis is necessarily politically or socially conservative. On the contrary, I would maintain that central to psychoanalysis is a libertarian ethos by which the subject seeks to gain a greater autonomy, and where the subject is encouraged, through the rules of ‘free association’, to speak the truth of the unconscious.<sup>7</sup> To insist on the ‘dark side’ of the human psyche — its dependence on power, its identification with authoritarian figures, its aggressive impulses — can serve as a warning to any revolutionary project which seeks to transcend political authority. This was really the same question that was posed by Jacques Lacan in response to the radicalism of May ’68: “the revolutionary aspiration has only a single possible outcome — of ending up as the master’s discourse. This is what experience has proved. What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a master. You will get one” (Lacan, 2007: 207). What Lacan is hinting at with this rather ominous prognostication — one that could be superficially, although, in my view, *incorrectly*, interpreted as politically conservative — is the hidden link, even dependency, between the revolutionary subject and authority; and the way that movements of resistance and even revolution may actually sustain the symbolic efficiency of the state, reaffirming or reinventing the position of authority.

Psychoanalysis by no means discounts the possibility of human emancipation, sociability and voluntary cooperation: indeed, it points to conflicting tendencies in the subject between aggressive desires for power and domination, and the desire for freedom and harmonious co-existence. As Judith Butler contends, moreover, the psyche — as a dimension of the subject that is not reducible to discourse and power, and which exceeds it — is something that can explain not only our passionate attachments to power and (referring

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<sup>7</sup> According to Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of groups implies “something like a ‘revolt or an uprising against the hypnotist’s unjustifiable power’ (1988: 148).

to Foucault) to the modes of subjectification and regulatory behaviours that power imposes on us, but also our resistance to them (Butler, 1997: 86).

## Ego Identification

One of the insights of psychoanalysis, something that was revealed, for instance, in Freud's study of the psychodynamics of groups, was the role of identification in constituting hierarchical and authoritarian relationships. In the relationship between the member of the group and the figure of the Leader, there is a process of identification, akin to love, in which the individual both idealizes and identifies with the Leader as an 'ideal type', to the point where this object of devotion comes to supplant the individual's ego ideal (Freud, 1955). It is this idealization that constitutes the subjective bond not only between the individual and the Leader of the group, but also with other members of the group. Idealization thus becomes a way of understanding voluntary submission to the will of authoritarian leaders.

However, we also need to understand the place of idealization in politics in a broader sense, and it is here that, I would argue, the thinking of the Young Hegelian philosopher, Max Stirner, becomes important. Stirner's critique of Ludwig Feuerbach's humanism allows us to engage with this problem of self-domination. Stirner shows that the Feuerbachian project of replacing God with Man — of reversing the subject and predicate so that the human becomes the measure of the divine rather than the divine the human (Feuerbach, 1957) — has only reaffirmed religious authority and hierarchy rather than displacing it. Feuerbach's 'humanist insurrection' has thus only succeeded in creating a new religion — Humanism — which Stirner connects with a certain self-enslavement. The individual ego is now split between itself and an idealized form of itself now enshrined in the idea of human essence — an ideal which is at the same time outside the individual, becoming an abstract moral and rational spectre by which he measures himself and to which he subordinates himself. As Stirner declares: "Man, your head is haunted [. . .] You imagine great things, and depict to yourself a whole world of gods that has an existence for you, a spirit-realm to which you suppose yourself to be called, an ideal that beckons to you" (Stirner, 1995: 43).

For Stirner, the subordination of the self to these abstract ideals ('fixed ideas') has political implications. Humanism and rationalism become in his analysis the discursive thresholds through which the desire of the individual is bound to the state. This occurs through identification with state-defined roles of citizenship, for instance. Moreover, for Stirner, in a line of thought that closely parallels La Boétie's, the state itself is an ideological abstraction which only exists because we allow it to exist, because we abdicate our own power over ourselves to what he called the 'ruling principle'. In other words, it is the *idea* of the state, of sovereignty, that dominates us. The state's power is in reality based on our power, and it is only because the individual has not recognized this power, because he humbles himself before an external political authority, that the state continues to exist. As Stirner correctly surmised, the state cannot function only through repression and coercion; rather, the state relies on us *allowing* it to dominate us. Stirner wants to show that ideological apparatuses are not only concerned with economic or political questions — they are also rooted in psychological needs. The dominance of the state, Stirner suggests, depends on our willingness to let it dominate us:

What do your laws amount to if no one obeys them? What your orders, if nobody lets himself be ordered? [...] The state is not thinkable without lordship [*Herrschaft*] and servitude [*Knechtschaft*] (subjection); [...] He who, to hold his own, must count on the absence of the will in others is a thing made by these others, as the master is a thing made by the servant. If submissiveness ceased it would be all over with lordship (Stirner, 1995: 174–5).

Stirner was ruthlessly and relentlessly criticized by Marx and Engels as 'Saint Max' in *The German Ideology*: they accused him of the worst kind of idealism, of ignoring the economic and class relations that form the material basis of the state, and thus allowing the state to be simply *wished* out of existence. However, what is missed in this critique is the value of Stirner's analysis in highlighting the subjective bond of voluntary servitude that sustains state power. It is not that he is saying that the state does not exist in a material sense, but that its existence is sustained and supplemented through a psychic attachment and dependency on its power, as well as the acknowledgement and idealization of its authority. Any critique of

the state which ignores this dimension of subjective idealization is bound to perpetuate its power. The state must first be overcome as an *idea* before it can be overcome in reality; or, more precisely, these are two sides of the same process.

The importance of Stirner's analysis — which broadly fits into the anarchist tradition, although breaks with its humanist essentialism in important ways<sup>8</sup> — lies in exploring this voluntary self-subjection that forms the other side of politics, and which radical politics must find strategies to counter. For Stirner, the individual can only free him or herself from voluntary servitude if he abandons all essential identities and sees himself as a radically self-creating void:

I on my part start from a presupposition in presupposing myself; but my presupposition does not struggle for its perfection like 'Man struggling for his perfection', but only serves me to enjoy it and consume it [. . .] I do not presuppose myself, because I am every moment just positing or creating myself (Stirner, 1995: 150).

While Stirner's approach is focused on the idea of the individual's self-liberation — from essences, fixed identities — he does raise the possibility of collective politics with his notion of the 'union of egoists', although in my view this is insufficiently developed. The breaking of the bonds of voluntary servitude cannot be a purely individual enterprise. Indeed, as La Boétie suggests, it always implies a collective politics, a collective rejection of tyrannical power by the people. I am not suggesting that Stirner provides us with a complete or viable theory of political and ethical action. However, the importance of Stirner's thought lies in the invention of a *micropolitics*, an emphasis on the myriad ways we are bound to power at the level of our subjectivity, and the ways we can free ourselves from this. It is here that we should pay close attention to his distinction between the Revolution and the insurrection:

Revolution and insurrection must not be looked upon as synonymous. The former consists in an overturning of conditions, of the established condition or *status*, the state or society, and is accordingly a *political* or *social* act; the latter has indeed for

<sup>8</sup> See my reading of Stirner as a poststructuralist anarchist in *From Bakunin to Lacan* (2001).

its unavoidable consequence a transformation of circumstances, yet does not start from it but from men's discontent with themselves, is not an armed rising but a rising of individuals, a getting up without regard to the *arrangements* that spring from it. The Revolution aimed at new arrangements; insurrection leads us no longer to *let* ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and sets no glittering hopes on 'institutions'. It is not a fight against the established, since, if it prospers, the established collapses of itself; it is only a working forth of me out of the established (Italics are Stirner's; Stirner, 1995: 279–80).

We can take from this that radical politics must not *only* be aimed at overturning established institutions like the state, but also at attacking the much more problematic relation through which the subject is enthralled to and dependent upon power. The insurrection is therefore not only against external oppression, but, more fundamentally, against the self's internalized repression. It thus involves a transformation of the subject, a micro-politics and ethics which is aimed at increasing one's autonomy from power.

Here we can also draw upon the spiritual anarchism of Gustav Landauer, who argued that there can be no political revolution — and no possibility of socialism — without at the same time a transformation in the subjectivity of people, a certain renewal of the spirit and the will to develop new relationships with others. Existing relationships between people only reproduce and reaffirm state authority — indeed the state itself is a certain relationship, a certain mode of behaviour and interaction, a certain imprint on our subjectivity and consciousness (and I would argue on our *unconscious*) and therefore it can only be transcended through a spiritual transformation of relationships. As Landauer says, “we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently” (in Martin Buber, 1996: 47).

### A Micro-Politics of Liberty

Therefore, overcoming the problem of voluntary servitude, which has proved such a hindrance to radical political projects in the past, implies this sort of ethical questioning of the self, an interrogation of one's subjective involvement and complicity with power. It relies on the invention of micropolitical strategies that are aimed at a disengagement from state power; a certain politics of *dis-identification*

in which one breaks free from established social identities and roles and develops new practices, ways of life and forms of politics that are no longer conditioned by state sovereignty. This would mean thinking about what freedom means beyond the ideology of security (rather than simply seeing freedom as conditioned by or necessarily constrained by security). We also need to think what democracy means beyond the state, what politics means beyond the party, economic organization beyond capitalism, globalization beyond borders, and life beyond biopolitics.

Central here has to be, for instance, a critical interrogation of the desire for security. Security, in our contemporary society, has become a kind of metaphysics, a fundamentalism, where not only is it the impetus behind an unprecedented expansion and intensification of state power, but also becomes a kind of condition for life: life must be secure against threats — whether they are threats to our safety, financial security, etc — but this means that the very existential possibility of not only human freedom, but politics itself, is being negated. Can the law and liberal institutional frameworks protect us from security; can it counter the relentless drive towards the securitization of life? We must remember that, as Giorgio Agamben and others have shown, biopolitics, sovereign violence and securitization are only the other side of the law, and that it is simply a liberal illusion to imagine that law can limit power in this way. No, we must invent a new relationship to law and institutions, no longer as subjects who are obedient, nor as subjects who simply transgress (which is only the other side to obedience — in other words, transgression, as we understand from Lacan, continues to affirm the law<sup>9</sup>). Rather, we must transcend this binary of obedience/transgression. Anarchism is more than a transgression, but a learning to live beyond the law and the state through the invention of new spaces and practices for freedom and autonomy which will be, by their nature, somewhat fragile and experimental.

To take such risks requires discipline, but this can be a kind of ethical discipline that we impose on ourselves. We need to be disciplined to become undisciplined. Obedience to authority seems to come easily, indeed ‘naturally’, to us, as La Boétie observed, and so the revolt against authority requires the disciplined and patient elaboration of new practices of freedom. This was something that

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<sup>9</sup> See Lacan’s discussion of the dialectic of law and transgression in ‘Kant avec Sade’ (1962).



Foucault was perhaps getting at with his notion of *askesis*, ethical exercises that were part of the care of the self, and which were for him indistinguishable from the practice of freedom (cf., Foucault, 1988). The aim of such strategies, for Foucault, was to invent modes of living in which one is ‘governed less’ or governed not at all. Indeed, the practice of critique itself, according to Foucault, is aimed not only at questioning power’s claim to legitimacy and truth, but more importantly, at questioning the various ways in which we are bound to power and regimes of governmentality through certain deployments of truth — through power’s insistence that we conform to certain truths and norms. For Foucault, then: “Critique will be the art of voluntary *inservitude*, of reflective indocility” (emphasis added; Foucault, 1996: 386). Foucault therefore speaks of an interrogation of the limits of our subjectivity that requires a “patient labour giving form to our impatience for liberty” (Foucault, 2000: 319). Perhaps, then, we can counter the problem of voluntary servitude through a radical *discipline of indiscipline*.

### Conclusion: A Politics of Refusal

Voluntary inservitude — the refusal of power’s domination over ourselves — should not be confused with a refusal of politics. Rather it should be seen as the construction of an alternative form of politics, and as intensification of political action; we might call it a politics of withdrawal from power, a politics of non-domination. There is nothing apolitical about such a politics of refusal: the politics of refusal is not a refusal of politics as such, but rather a refusal of the established forms and practices of politics enshrined in the state, and the desire to create new forms of politics outside the state — the desire, in other words, for a politics of autonomy. Indeed, the notion of the ‘autonomy of the political’, invoked by Carl Schmitt to affirm the sovereignty of the state — the prerogative of the state to define the friend/enemy opposition (Schmitt, 1996) — should be seen, on my alternative reading, as suggesting a politics of autonomy. The proper moment of the political is outside the state and seeks to engender new non-authoritarian relationships and ways of life.

A number of contemporary continental thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, have proposed a similar notion of refusal or withdrawal as a way of thinking about radical politics today. Indeed, the recent interest in the figure of

Bartleby (from Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*) as a paradigm of resistance to power, points to a certain realization of the limits of existing models of radical and revolutionary politics, and an acknowledgement, moreover, of the need to overcome voluntary subjection to power. Bartleby's impassive gesture of defiance towards authority — "I would prefer not to" — might be seen as an active withdrawal from participation in the practices and activities which reaffirm power, and without which power would collapse. In the words of Hardt and Negri, "These simple men [Bartleby and Michael K, a character from a J.M Coetzee novel] and their absolute refusals cannot but appeal to our hatred of authority. The refusal of work and authority, the refusal of voluntary servitude, is the beginning of liberatory politics" (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 204).

In this paper I have placed the problem of voluntary servitude — diagnosed long ago by La Boétie — at the centre of radical political thought. Voluntary servitude, whose contours have been sharpened by psychoanalytic theory, might be understood as a threshold through which the subject is bound to power at the level of his or her desire. At the same time, the idea of voluntary servitude also points to the very fragility and undecidability of domination, and the way that, through the invention of micro-political and ethical strategies of de-subjectification — an anarchic politics of voluntary inservitude — one may loosen and untie this bond and create alternative spaces of politics beyond the shadow of the sovereign.

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# Postanarchism from a Marxist Perspective

Simon Choat\*

## Abstract

Postanarchists have tended to portray Marxism as an anachronism, taking the alleged redundancy of Marxism as a starting point for their revitalization of classical anarchism via post-structuralism. Critical assessments of postanarchism have so far failed to interrogate this portrayal of Marxism. This is unfortunate, I argue, because Marxism plays an important function within the postanarchist project, and because it allows postanarchist characterizations of Marxism and post-structuralism to go unchallenged. The first part of this paper delineates the role of Marxism in postanarchism, before examining connections between post-structuralism and Marxism: I argue that Marx's work anticipates post-structuralist concepts of power and subjectivity. The aim of the paper is not to offer a Marxist critique of postanarchism but to establish equal relevance for both anarchism and Marxism to contemporary political thought and practice.

## Introduction

The postanarchist attempt to revitalize classical anarchism by rereading it through the lens of post-structuralism has not gone unchallenged. Critics have raised questions concerning both the relevance of post-structuralism to anarchist thought and the accuracy of postanarchist readings of classical anarchism — questions which in turn bring up broader issues about the impact of post-structuralism, the direction and significance of contemporary anarchism, and

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the relations between theory and practice. One element that has remained largely unquestioned, however, is the place of Marxism within postanarchism. This is perhaps understandable: it is to be expected that not everyone will welcome a Marxist perspective on postanarchism; in fact, it is possibly the last thing that some anarchists want. When Marxists have intervened in debates around anarchism, they have often adopted the condescending and hectoring tone that Marx himself used when dealing with Bakunin, Proudhon, et al: anarchism has been derided by Marxists as a naive or utopian creed that fails to understand present conditions and is forced to resort to a crude voluntarism as its basis for political action. It is not my desire, however, to extend this patronizing dismissal of anarchism to cover postanarchism: to the contrary, it is my contention that postanarchists have been too quick to dismiss Marxism.

The lack of attention that has been given to Marxism's role within postanarchism is troubling for at least two reasons. First, it effaces the extent to which — as I shall argue below — opposition to Marxism is a key component of the postanarchist project. Thus Marxism is not being introduced here as an alien perspective from which postanarchism can be measured, but elicited as a significant but underdiscussed element of postanarchism itself. Second, uncritical acceptance of postanarchist assessments of Marxism obscures the fact that Marxism still has much to offer: Marxism, I argue, has been unfairly represented by postanarchism. This challenge to postanarchism's understanding of Marxism should not be confused with a Marxist critique of postanarchism. There is much to respect in postanarchism, and its attempt to link contemporary post-structuralist theory with radical nineteenth-century currents of thought is admirable: the problem is that postanarchism's reevaluation of classical anarchism comes at the expense of Marxism. My aim is not to prolong or revive the dispute between anarchists and Marxists that now stretches across three centuries, but rather to stake a claim for the importance of *both* anarchism and Marxism to contemporary political thought and practice. This is therefore a Marxist engagement with a current of anarchism that is offered in the spirit of reconciliation rather than denunciation. What follows is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis of the relations between postanarchism and Marxism: it is intended to open up an area of study that hitherto seems to have been closed, and is thus offered as a preliminary investigation rather than the final word. Drawing on postanarchism's own characterization of post-structuralism as a theory that reconceptualizes power

and subjectivity, I shall re-examine these concepts as they appear in the work of Marx, challenging postanarchism's dismissal of Marxism and its reading of post-structuralism. I begin, however, by examining the place of Marxism within postanarchism, delineating three key functions that the critique of Marxism performs for postanarchism.

### The Place of Marxism within Postanarchism

Although the number of writers and activists who identify themselves as postanarchists is relatively small, it is a surprisingly varied current of thought. The basic coordinates are clear enough: 'the central contention of postanarchism is that classical anarchist philosophy must take account of new theoretical directions and cultural phenomena, in particular, postmodernity and poststructuralism.' (Newman, 2008: 101) According to postanarchists, post-structuralism can be understood as a radicalization of classical anarchism — meaning both that post-structuralism is in the tradition of classical anarchism and that post-structuralism can act as a remedy to the faults and flaws of classical anarchism without betraying its spirit and aims. But this begs two obvious questions: what is meant by 'post-structuralism' and what is meant by 'classical anarchism'? It is not insignificant that the leading representatives of this project have all given it a different name: Saul Newman refers to postanarchism, Todd May to post-structuralist anarchism, and Lewis Call to postmodern anarchism. These different labels in part reflect disagreement about who can be termed a 'post-structuralist'. To take only one example: Jacques Lacan plays an important part in Newman's postanarchism, but he is not discussed by May or Call. Similar problems greet attempts to define 'classical anarchism', itself a notoriously elusive category. Who were the classical anarchists, and what did they believe? For Newman (2005: 3), Max Stirner is a 'sort of "proto-poststructuralist"', whereas Call and May barely mention Stirner.

These disagreements over definitions and personnel are of course not specific to postanarchism: it is difficult to draw the boundaries of any intellectual movement, but particularly ones as fluid as post-structuralism and classical anarchism — difficulties that anyone will face, whether they are a postanarchist or not.<sup>1</sup> In turn, this fluidity is



not a flaw of either post-structuralism or classical anarchism: one of the great strengths of both currents of thought is their variety and depth. Nor do I mean to suggest that the postanarchist project is incoherent from the start, or that postanarchists fail to define their terms adequately: on the whole they are all careful to explain what they mean by post-structuralism and classical anarchism, and themselves draw attention to the difficulties I have outlined. All I wish to argue here is that it is hard to define a movement in reference to intellectual currents as nebulous as post-structuralism and classical anarchism — or, at least, hard to define it only in reference to these. To say that postanarchism is (for instance) classical anarchism filtered through post-structuralism does not actually tell us much about what it is to be a postanarchist. Of course, this missing content is fleshed out in the detailed studies undertaken by the postanarchists — but these detailed studies differ from one postanarchist to the next. If we are to attribute any kind of unity to postanarchism, then we must look to other factors — one of which, I contend, is a common opposition to Marxism.

This, then, is the first function of Marxism within postanarchism, of three roles that I shall identify: it helps provide coherence to the postanarchist project. Though they may draw upon different thinkers and seek to combine anarchism and post-structuralism in varying fashions, the postanarchists are united in their rejection of Marxism. It might even be said that it is the (alleged) failure of Marxism that is the main motivation behind the entire postanarchist project. Marxism, it is claimed, is in terminal decline: the problems of exploitation and oppression that Marxism sought to address, however, have not gone away (and have if anything intensified). Hence there is a need, according to postanarchism, to rediscover and develop alternative avenues for radical thought and practice. The problem with Marxism, according to postanarchism, is not so much that it is no longer able to provide the appropriate critical resources, but that it was never able to do so: it is not that Marxism is outdated or took a wrong turn somewhere, but that from the start Marxism was on the wrong path. In May's terms, Marxism is a 'strategic' rather than a 'tactical' philosophy: its analysis focuses on a central problematic and it aims at a single goal. For Marxism, 'there is a single enemy: capitalism.' (May, 1994: 26). Like all strategic

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<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding these difficulties, for the purposes of consistency and clarity I shall refer throughout this essay to 'post-structuralism' and 'postanarchism'.

philosophies, Marxism is reductive: there is one source of oppression (capitalism), only one theory that can accurately understand this oppression (Marxism), and only one possible agent of struggle (the proletariat, guided by a vanguard party). Tactical philosophies, in contrast, recognize that there is no single site of oppression, and that resistance must take the form of specific, local analyses and interventions. Marxism is thus reductive in two senses, postanarchists argue: it reduces the scope of political analysis by focusing only on capitalist economic relations, and it reduces politics to economics, effectively effacing politics altogether. In terms that May borrows from Jacques Rancière, Marxism is a form of 'metapolitics': the real truth of politics lies in economic relations, and political institutions and ideologies merely conceal that truth (May, 2008: 44–5).

Postanarchists claim that to an extent classical anarchism shares these problems with Marxism, though in a different way: whereas the reductionism of Marxism manifests itself as an urge to interpret everything in terms of economic relations, anarchism performs a statist rather than an economic reduction, tending to lapse into an analysis that focuses on the state as the primary locus of power. But in anarchism this tendency is in tension with another trend: anarchism wavers between strategic and tactical thought. Although it focuses on the state, classical anarchism recognizes that there are many other sites of power, and advocates diverse and specific small-scale struggles of resistance against power wherever it manifests itself. This ambivalence marks the advantage of classical anarchism over Marxism: despite its flaws, classical anarchism has advanced the analysis of power, making it a more suitable avenue for contemporary politics than Marxism. This leads us to the second role of Marxism within postanarchism that we can identify: the rejection of Marxism offers a link to classical anarchism.

As we have seen, classical anarchism is itself a diverse and fluid current of thought: in many ways it is easier to define it by reference to what it opposes rather than what it advocates. Newman (2005: 33), for example, suggests that anarchists are united 'by a fundamental critique and rejection of political authority in all its forms.' It is the rejection of political authority and representation (especially but not exclusively in the form of the state), rather than any positive political programme outlining an alternative vision of society, that is perhaps the key characteristic of classical anarchist thought. This is not to say that anarchists have failed to think about how a stateless society should be organized: to the contrary, they have offered an

incredibly diverse range of visions for how stateless societies might be organized. But it is the very diversity of these visions that makes them poor candidates if we are looking for what *unites* classical anarchists. The thread that binds anarchists is not a uniform political programme but a common opposition to political authority.<sup>2</sup> Classical anarchism can be defined not only in terms of an opposition to authority, but also in opposition to other political ideologies, in particular Marxism. Anarchists are anarchists, we might even say, because they are not Marxists. This is not to denigrate the originality of anarchist thought — to suggest that it can only ever be a pale shadow of Marxism and defined in terms of the latter — but only to highlight the fact that one way to isolate the identity of anarchist thought is to distinguish it from Marxism. There is much common ground between Marxists and anarchists in the fight for a stateless society free from economic exploitation and political oppression, and historically most anarchists have been communists (with obvious and important exceptions such as Stirner). But anarchists have distanced themselves from Marxism's organizational and revolutionary strategies: for classical anarchism, Marx is one those 'doctrinaire revolutionaries' identified by Bakunin (1990: 137), 'whose objective is to overthrow existing governments and regimes so as to create their own dictatorships on their ruins'. Classical anarchists have argued that Marxism's economic reductionism is dangerous in at least two ways. First, because it posits the state as a mere reflection of economic relations, it does not recognize that the state is a source of power in its own right, and so even a so-called 'workers' state' will be oppressive. Second, the identification of the economic realm as the key site of oppression facilitates the emergence of a vanguard party distant from the oppressed masses — a point well made by May in some critical comments on Marxism: 'If the fundamental site of oppression lies in the economy, it perhaps falls to those who are adept at economic analysis to take up the task of directing the revolution' (May, 2008: 80).

These classical anarchist objections to Marxism anticipate those formulated by the postanarchists, who in turn have identified the strengths of classical anarchism in explicit contrast to Marxism.

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<sup>2</sup> Many anarchists have defined themselves in these terms. Think of Proudhon's response to the question 'What will you put in place of the state?': 'Nothing' (Proudhon cited in Rocker, 1937).

Whereas Marxism is supposedly economically reductionist, viewing all power as merely an expression of class domination, postanarchists argue that classical anarchism correctly saw that power must be analysed in its own right: irreducible to the workings of the economy, power relations exist throughout society and need to be analysed in their specificity, without reference to a uniform model of domination. While Marxism (it is claimed) privileges certain political actors — identifying the industrial working class as the sole possible instrument of political transformation, because of its unique place within the only kind of power relations that really matter for Marxism, namely the relation of exploitation between labour and capital — classical anarchism, in contrast, does not limit revolutionary potential to a single class, instead supporting agents dismissed by Marx, such as the peasantry and *lumpenproletariat*. If Marxism privileges not only a particular revolutionary actor, but also a particular path to revolution, supporting an authoritarian party and proposing a dictatorship of the proletariat, classical anarchism on the other hand consistently opposes all state forms and all hierarchies, including those of the party. To a great extent, therefore, the postanarchist attitude towards Marxism replicates the standard anarchist criticisms of Marxism, centred on its supposedly reductive analysis of the political situation and its authoritarian organizational structures. Rejection of Marxism places postanarchism firmly in the anarchist tradition.

Where postanarchism goes beyond these standard criticisms, it draws its weapons from post-structuralism, which brings us to the third role that Marxism plays within postanarchism: it provides one point of engagement with post-structuralism. The postanarchists see in post-structuralism a model for their own anti-Marxism. Post-anarchism identifies two key characteristics of post-structuralism. First, is anti-humanist: rather than taking the human subject as something that is given, it reveals the textual and material practices that constitute the subject. As May (1994: 75) puts it: 'If poststructuralist political thought could be summed up in a single prescription, it would be that radical political theory, if it is to achieve anything, must abandon humanism in all its forms.' Secondly, it is argued that post-structuralism rethinks the concept and analysis of power: the aim is no longer to establish the legitimate boundaries of power, placing limits between the individual and the state, but to demonstrate that power is coextensive with social relations, acting not merely to suppress a pre-existing subject but also and more fundamentally

to constitute subjects in the first place. Power and subjectivity are thus intimately linked within post-structuralist thought. This is contrasted by postanarchists with Marxist thought, where power and subjectivity are also linked, but in a very different way: instead of a productive power that is constitutive of subjectivity, Marxism conceives of a repressive power that constrains our essential nature as human subjects.

This view of power and subjectivity, argue postanarchists, is not unique to Marxism: it is shared by many of the philosophies that developed out of the Enlightenment, including classical anarchism. 'Like Marxism and most other forms of nineteenth-century radical thinking, classical anarchism purports to liberate some kind of authentic human essence which has supposedly been repressed by capitalism and/or the state' (Call, 2002: 14–15). Although it may broaden the scope of power, classical anarchists still see subjectivity as given and power as oppressive: like Marxism, postanarchists argue, classical anarchism posits a notion of human nature that both acts as a standard by which forms of power can be criticized and explains the existence of resistance to power. In classical anarchism (it is argued), the relation between subject and power is formulated as an opposition between two poles, with the naturalness of the human subject within an organic community on one side and the artificial power of the state on the other. According to postanarchists, then, post-structuralism moves beyond both Marxism and classical anarchism. But classical anarchism, because it at least begins to rethink power — broadening the scope of analysis beyond both the state and the economy — retains its contemporary relevance where Marxism does not. A shared 'anti-authoritarian *ethos*' (Newman, 2007: 194) makes classical anarchism and post-structuralism appropriate partners, while Marxism is dismissed as incompatible with post-structuralism. Indeed, it is argued that to a great extent post-structuralism developed *against* Marxism: 'thinkers in this tradition — including Foucault, Lyotard and Deleuze — were all deeply influenced by the political experience of May '68, and they became critical of what they saw as the totalizing and universalizing logic of Marxist theory' (Newman, 2007: 3). Whereas anarchism still has something to teach us, Marxism 'is not nearly radical enough to confront adequately the exigencies of the postmodern condition' (Call, 2002: 6). An opposition to Marxism therefore provides postanarchism with a point of contact with post-structuralism. It is true that this portrayal of post-structuralism as an anti-Marxist theory is often an implicit

or undeveloped assumption within postanarchist writings — but this is perhaps because there is little textual support for the claim: as we shall see next, if one actually looks at what the post-structuralists say about Marx then one can see that they are very far from being anti-Marxist.

## **Post-Structuralism and Marxism**

The critique of Marxism thus plays a key function in postanarchism: it lends the whole project coherence, it provides continuity with classical anarchism, and it helps connect postanarchism to post-structuralism. Given this, it is noticeable how little attention has been paid to the postanarchist critique of Marxism. The reason for this lack of attention, I think, is because although post-anarchist thought has generated some lively discussion, this discussion has so far largely been confined to the anarchist community. An anarchist is unlikely to question postanarchism's critique of Marxism because — as we have seen — that critique largely echoes standard anarchist charges against Marxism. The accusations of reductionism and authoritarianism that postanarchism levels at Marxism are effectively the same as those directed at Marxism by nineteenth-century anarchists: they have long been received as self-evident truths within the anarchist community, and thus in need of no further discussion. But what of the additional accusations that postanarchism brings against Marxism? These supplement the standard anarchist critique of Marxism with a critique of Marxism's Enlightenment essentialism. It cannot be claimed that anarchists have remained silent on these because they merely reproduce classical anarchist criticisms of Marxism. Why then has so little comment been passed? The answer is clear: it is because when these charges of essentialism are introduced, the terms of the debate shift entirely, for they apply equally to classical anarchism. More than this, it can be said that they are directed primarily by postanarchists at classical anarchism, and in a sense apply only secondarily to Marxism (which has already been condemned for separate reasons). Anarchist commentators have therefore been far more interested in the application and relevance of this critique of essentialism to anarchism — partly because they have no interest in defending Marxism against charges of essentialism and every interest in defending anarchism, and partly

because these charges are directed by the postanarchists themselves principally at anarchism.

The outcome is that critical discussion of postanarchism has so far focused on its understanding and interpretation of classical anarchism. A number of commentators have argued that the anarchist tradition has been unfairly and misleadingly represented: anarchism, it is argued, is a far more varied tradition than post-anarchism claims, and far less beholden to essentialist and humanist philosophies. This has led some to conclude that anarchism already has more in common with post-structuralism than has been acknowledged, and even that post-structuralism might have something to learn from anarchism.<sup>3</sup> With very few exceptions, however, there is silence on post-anarchism's representation of Marxism.<sup>4</sup> Yet if this neglect is understandable, it is also unfortunate. In light of the analysis offered above, it can be said that the effect is threefold: it effaces what is a key element of postanarchism; it allows its criticisms of Marxism to go unchallenged; and it mischaracterizes post-structuralism. I have already tried to counter the first of these, by demonstrating the place of Marxism within postanarchism. It remains to challenge the remaining two effects. I shall begin this task by briefly considering the place of Marxism within post-structuralism, before looking in more detail at the work of Marx himself.

One reason why we might be suspicious of the alignment of anarchism and post-structuralism at the expense of Marxism is that even the most cursory glance at the work of the major thinkers of post-structuralism suggests that they were far more involved with the Marxist tradition than with the anarchist tradition. It is a struggle to find any references to classical anarchist thinkers anywhere in the writings of post-structuralist authors. Where classical anarchists are mentioned, the references are not usually favourable. In his book *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, for example, Deleuze offers modest praise for Max Stirner. But ultimately Deleuze concludes that Stirner is the thinker who reveals the nihilism at the heart of dialectical thinking. Given that dialectics is the central target of *Nietzsche and Philosophy*,

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<sup>3</sup> For arguments of this type, see Cohn (2002), Cohn and Wilbur (n.d.), and Antliff (2007). For critical assessments of post-anarchism from a position much more sympathetic to post-structuralism, see Jun (2007) and Glavin (2004).

<sup>4</sup> One such exception is Benjamin Franks (2007), who while reviewing some of the common anarchist critiques of post-anarchism also offers a short defence of Marx and class politics.

this hardly amounts to an endorsement of Stirner's position: 'precisely because Stirner still thinks like a dialectician, because he does not extricate himself from the categories of property, alienation and its suppression, he throws himself into the nothingness which he hollows out beneath the steps of the dialectic' (Deleuze, 1983: 163).<sup>5</sup> Stirner also makes an appearance in Derrida's *Specters of Marx*. In a subtle and intriguing analysis, Derrida argues that Stirner and Marx are united in a common polemic against 'the spectre' (a figure used by Derrida to indicate that which cannot be accounted for in classical ontology). Derrida deconstructs both Stirner and Marx, trying to show that both remain wedded to a metaphysical ontology. But the focus of this analysis — which, after all, is found in a book on Marx — is the critique of Stirner found in *The German Ideology*: Stirner is only discussed to the extent that he can throw light on Marx. We would find much the same if we looked at the writings of other post-structuralists: where classical anarchist thinkers appear, it is only in passing; certainly there is no sustained engagement with the anarchist tradition.

There are two potential objections here that can be anticipated. First, it might be argued that the absence of references to classical anarchist thinkers in post-structuralist thought does not invalidate the postanarchist attempt to link classical anarchism and post-structuralism: the postanarchists do not need to claim that post-structuralism has been directly influenced by classical anarchism — only that a potential alliance might be formed between the two, on the basis of theoretical affinities rather than explicit citation. I accept this argument, but in a sense it is not relevant to my own thesis: I am not claiming that the attempt to link post-structuralism with classical anarchism is misguided — rather that it is misguided to attempt to pursue this link at the expense of Marxism. If it is worth investigating connections between classical anarchism and post-structuralism even though no explicit connections already exist — because the post-structuralists have little to say about classical anarchism — then it seems to me that it is certainly worth investigating potential connections between Marxism and post-structuralism

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze's conclusions are in stark contrast to postanarchist attempts to reclaim Stirner as a forerunner of post-structuralism: see Koch (1997) and Newman (2001, chapter 3; 2005, chapter 4). It is true that in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* Deleuze is somewhat ambiguous about Marx's relation to the dialectic — but his use of Marx elsewhere surely demonstrates that he finds something beyond dialectics in Marx.



— precisely because the post-structuralists have quite a lot to say about Marx. This brings us to a second potential response, however. It might be argued that the presence of Marx in post-structuralist writings, far from indicating a fidelity to Marx amongst post-structuralist thinkers, is testament only to a critical attitude: Marx is cited only in order to reject him. This argument has some validity. It is clear that post-structuralism in many ways developed in opposition to Marxism. In part this was a response to the concrete political situation. The French Communist Party had at best a mixed political record: rigidly pro-Moscow, it provided qualified support for French imperialism in Asia and Africa and failed to support the worker-student uprisings of May 1968. In attempting to formulate new modes of theory and practice, post-structuralist thinkers therefore tended consciously to distance themselves from the institutional forms of Marxism that existed in France in the mid-twentieth century. Moreover, this distancing was a result not only of pragmatic political exigencies: it is clear that there were substantial theoretical reasons for moving away from Marxism. The post-structuralist subversion of reductionist, teleological, and dialectical forms of thought necessarily involved subverting certain versions of Marxism, not least the version propounded by the PCF.

But although post-structuralism developed in opposition to certain forms of Marxism, this opposition should not be confused with an outright rejection of all Marxisms, still less of Marx himself. Again, even a cursory glance at the works of the major thinkers of post-structuralism would indicate how far they were from rejecting Marx. It is well known that Deleuze's final (unfinished) book was to have been on the *Grandeur de Marx* (Deleuze, 1995: 51), and the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* that he co-authored with Félix Guattari are saturated with Marxian concepts. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida does not stop affirming Marx's contemporary relevance; more than simple recognition of Marx's profound influence upon the present, Derrida's call is for a *political* Marx, 'to prevent a philosophico-philological return to Marx from prevailing' (Derrida, 1994: 32).<sup>6</sup> Even Foucault, who often seems to go out of his way to disparage Marxism, is careful to emphasize that while much of

<sup>6</sup> Whether Derrida is successful in his aim, or whether he himself only reproduces a 'philosophico-philological' Marx, is a separate issue: the point is that far from rejecting Marx, Derrida explicitly affirms his contemporary political and philosophical relevance.

his work subverts traditional Marxist concepts, he nonetheless continues to draw upon Marx himself: 'I quote Marx without saying so, without quotation marks, and because people are incapable of recognizing Marx's texts I am thought to be someone who doesn't quote Marx' (Foucault, 1980: 52). These brief excerpts are of course no substitute for a detailed analysis of the place of Marxism within post-structuralism, which is beyond the scope of the present work. But they do begin to complicate the postanarchist narrative. Rather than trying to establish beyond doubt that all post-structuralists are indebted to Marx, however, I want instead to think about what it is that post-structuralism might have seen in Marx. To do this, we shall draw upon postanarchism's own characterization of post-structuralism, and interrogate Marx's views on power and subjectivity. We shall focus on Marx not because he is the touchstone of 'true' Marxist theory, but because his is the most innovative and important thinker within Marxism.

### **Power and Subjectivity in Marxism**

As postanarchists have correctly claimed, post-structuralism offers a radically new way of understanding power. There are perhaps two key elements to the post-structuralist reconceptualization of power. First, rather than emanating from a single central source (like the state or the bourgeoisie), power is everywhere, because we are all involved in relations of power. This means that power relations must be analysed in their specificity, at a local level, and without reference to a homogeneous model. Second, rather than repressing a given essence, power constitutes the very subject to which it is applied. In their search for forerunners of post-structuralism within the classical anarchist tradition, postanarchists have tended to focus on the first of these elements: although classical anarchists viewed power as repressive rather than constitutive, they nonetheless made great advances in undermining the idea that power springs from a single source. Postanarchists acknowledge that there is a tendency in classical anarchist thought to focus on the state as the centre of power. But in the first place this is seen as an advance on Marxism, for it unmasks political power in its own right rather than subordinating it to the economy. In addition, this tendency is in tension with a recognition amongst classical anarchists that there are numerous sites of power (clerical, educational, familial,

etc.) that need to be criticized on their own terms. It is in this light that Marxism's own theory of power is viewed by postanarchism: Marxism is judged according to the extent to which it can follow classical anarchism's recognition of the decentred and autonomous nature of political power. For May, the story of Marxism in the twentieth century is the story of a current of thought that offered ever more refined accounts of power, but could ultimately never escape its own reductionist premises. In this way, 'Marxism, in dealing with successive disappointments, kept reformulating itself in ways that edged ever closer to — but never entirely coincided with — the perspective embraced by anarchism' (May, 1994: 18). Newman, on the other hand, sees in Marx's own work the potential for a non-reductionist account of power: in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* we can find the beginnings of a theory of the specificity of political power, irreducible to economic factors. Like May, however, Newman suggests that Marxism remained tied to its own limits: 'within [Marx's] theory of Bonapartism lay the theoretical foundations for an "epistemological break" with Marxism itself'. In other words, Marxism itself could never fully realize its own conceptual potential: it was classical anarchism that 'took the theory of Bonapartism to its logical conclusion, and was able to develop a concept of the sovereign state as a specific and autonomous site of power that was irreducible to capitalist economic relations' (Newman, 2004: 37). Thus according to postanarchism, classical anarchism is, so to speak, halfway between Marxism and post-structuralism: it broadens and deepens the analysis of power beyond that which Marxism is capable of, but it does not yet achieve the insights into power developed by post-structuralism.

This analysis by postanarchism is not wholly incorrect: from a post-structuralist perspective, there are clearly a number of flaws with the Marxist concept of power. In Marxist theory 'power' tends to refer to a property that is used by one class to oppress another class: under capitalism power belongs to the bourgeoisie and is exercised repressively via the state. It is no wonder that Foucault, for example, decries the 'economism' of Marxism's view of power: it appears that in Marxism power is never analysed in its own right but only to the extent to which it maintains economic relations of domination (Foucault, 1980: 88). But the picture is more complicated than this, for we can find in Marx's work an analytics of power much closer to post-structuralism. Like the postanarchists, Marx thinks that the classical anarchists focus too much on the state. Whereas for

postanarchism this focus on the state is to the neglect of other forms of power in society, for Marx it is to the neglect of economic conditions (he berates Bakunin for this fault, for example [Marx, 1989: 506]). But by emphasizing economic conditions over the state, Marx is not *reducing* political power to the economy, in a move equivalent to classical anarchism's tendency to reduce political power to the state. Marx's move is quite different: he is *broadening* the scope of political power, politicizing areas of life that had previously been characterized as apolitical. Classical political economists saw the market as an apolitical realm of natural harmony opposed to the artificialities of the state — a stance not dissimilar to the distinction made by classical anarchism between the natural order of society and the artificial order of the state. Marx, in contrast, demonstrates that the supposedly neutral fields of production, distribution and exchange are permeated by relations of domination, thereby at once expanding the analysis of power into realms hitherto thought to be outside politics, and undermining the naive distinction between naturality and artificiality. In this way it could be said that it is Marx rather than classical anarchism who appears a forerunner of post-structuralism. There is a further way in which Marx seems to anticipate the post-structuralist view of power, however. In arguing that classical anarchism comes closer than Marxism to the post-structuralist view of power, postanarchists focus on one element of that view of power: the idea that power is everywhere rather than restricted to a single site. But the most novel aspect of the post-structuralist view of power is the second element identified above, namely the idea that power is constitutive — and it is here in particular that Marxism anticipates post-structuralism. For Marx does not merely broaden the scope of power, he initiates a reconceptualization of 'power' itself. To appreciate this conceptual revolution properly, we need now to turn to the other feature of post-structuralism highlighted by postanarchism: its decentring of subjectivity.

Just as Marx in many ways remains tied to a conventional concept of power, so in many ways he remains tied to a conventional view of subjectivity. This is nowhere more evident than in Marx's early writings, in which there is an alienated human nature that requires liberation: there is no doubt that works like the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* operate within a humanist problematic. Whether or not we agree with Althusser's postulation of an 'epistemological break' in Marx's work, however, it is clear that from about 1845 there is a shift in Marx's work: at the very least, after 1845 we can

find in Marx's work the resources for an alternative reading — the possibility of a Marx who is not tied to humanism. As early as the 'Theses on Feuerbach', 'the essence of man' is displaced into 'the ensemble of the social relations' (Marx, 1976b: 4): in effect, there is no human essence, because what was taken as essential is shown by Marx to be mutable and historically contingent. Marx goes further than this, however. Newman (2001: 14) correctly argues that one way to distinguish post-structuralism from structuralism is that whereas the latter dissolved the subject into a determining structure, for the former the subject is *constituted* rather than merely dissolved or determined. This is precisely what Marx also demonstrates: the subject for Marx is not the empty, shifting centre of a network of social relations; the subject for Marx is *produced*. In order to appreciate this aspect of Marx's work, we should turn not to *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, or other works usually designated as 'political writings', but to the very book that is so often dismissed as 'economistic', namely volume one of *Capital*.

The vast bulk of this book is dedicated to a concrete analysis of the operation of capitalism within manufacture and large-scale industry — to what actually goes on in workshops and factories. A central focus of this analysis is the manner in which capitalism creates the very subjects that it needs in order to operate: capitalism as it is portrayed in *Capital* does not repress a given essence (such as the human capacity for creative labour), but must constitute the subjects over whom its power is exercised. One of the essential preconditions of capitalism is a propertyless mass that has nothing to sell but its labour-power. The final part of *Capital*, on primitive accumulation, details the various ways in which such a mass of potential workers was produced: the enclosure of land, the seizure of Church estates, the clearing of the Highlands, and so on. But this expropriation in itself was not enough, for at first it merely created masses of 'beggars, robbers and vagabonds' (Marx, 1976a: 896). These masses then needed to be *disciplined* in order to be utilized as wage-labourers. Marx's section on primitive accumulation outlines the 'grotesquely terroristic laws' (Marx, 1976a: 899) that were necessary initially to force the expropriated into wage-labour, by preventing them from making a living from begging or petty theft and thereby leaving them with no choice but to sell their labour-power. But once the capitalist mode of production is established a different kind of discipline — the 'barrack-like discipline' (Marx, 1976a: 549) of the factory — is needed.

It is not enough that the proletariat is forced by economic circumstances to sell its labour-power to the capitalist: the worker needs to be shaped and moulded in certain ways, so that there develops 'a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws' (Marx, 1976a: 899). Moreover, as capitalism advances, the type of subject that is required continues to change. In capitalism's early stages, there exists only what Marx calls 'formal subsumption', in which the capitalist production process 'takes over an *existing labour process*, developed by different and more archaic modes of production' (Marx, 1976a: 1021). Only later do we arrive at what Marx calls 'real subsumption': 'there now arises a technologically and otherwise *specific mode of production — capitalist production — which transforms the nature of the labour process and its actual conditions*' (Marx, 1976a: 1034–5). Real subsumption refers not only to an increased use of an ever-growing range and number of machines, but to the development of a different kind of worker. The aim for the capitalist cannot be to repress a natural essence, nor even simply to accommodate the worker to the requirements and rhythms dictated by the machine — but rather in a sense to create a new subject out of both worker and machine, *augmenting* the power and capacities of the worker rather than repressing them.

The use of disciplinary power to create a subject with augmented capacities: a description that could of course apply just as much to Foucault as to Marx. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Foucault explicitly and repeatedly cites *Capital Volume One* in *Discipline and Punish*, and that certain passages in both books are practically interchangeable.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to postanarchist claims, we find in Marx something much like what we find in post-structuralism: not a repressive power that denies an essential human nature — as we find in classical anarchism — but a power that operates by generating different subject positions. This does not mean that Marx is some kind of proto-post-structuralist, or that the post-structuralists were really Marxists in disguise: key differences remain. Newman (2001: 14) suggests that post-structuralism can be distinguished from structuralism not only by the fact that the former views the subject as constituted and not determined, but also because 'for the post-structuralists, the forces which constitute the subject do not form a central structure

<sup>7</sup> For Foucault's references to Marx in *Discipline and Punish*, see Foucault (1977: 163–4, 175, 221).

— like capitalism, for instance — but remain decentralized and diffused’. This claim cannot so readily be accommodated to Marx, who analyses the constitution of subjectivity not only just within capitalism but, even more narrowly, primarily within the factory. Indeed, the decentralized and diffused nature of power is better captured by classical anarchism. But this only serves to reinforce my central point: a contemporary politics informed by post-structuralism will be at its strongest if it draws upon *both* Marxism and anarchism.

## Conclusions

I have argued that the neglect of postanarchism’s attitude towards Marxism is damaging, because it overlooks the key role that Marxism plays within postanarchism and because it perpetuates misunderstandings of both post-structuralism (characterized as anti-Marxist) and Marxism (characterized as a dangerous anachronism). To counter this damage, I have sought to elucidate the place of Marxism within postanarchism, and to show that if we are looking for forerunners of or partners for post-structuralism then Marxism is just as viable a candidate as classical anarchism. This should not be taken as a Marxist attempt to colonize other fields of thought — a possibility that some postanarchists clearly fear: ‘Just as it thoroughly eclipsed anarchism during the struggle for control over the First International during the nineteenth century, Marxism now attempts to eclipse postmodernism as well’ (Call, 2002: 7). My purpose has not been simply to reverse the postanarchist position, demonstrating that it is Marxism that has contemporary relevance and anarchism that should be condemned as an anachronism. Instead I have tried to show that Marxism deserves an equal hearing alongside anarchism. This is not an uncritical endorsement of Marxism in which we take it as it is and incorporate its insights as they stand. On the contrary, just as postanarchists argue that post-structuralism can offer a rereading of anarchism, so it is to be hoped that Marxism can be transformed by an encounter with post-structuralism. This will necessarily mean that many elements of Marxism are discarded, as we pick and choose from the Marxist tradition. But this should not be a problem; after all, this selective approach is exactly the approach that postanarchists themselves take to classical anarchism: rejecting the residual essentialism in classical anarchism, postanarchism nonetheless finds much else that is valuable in this tradition.

Moreover, it is an approach that fits well with post-structuralism. When the post-structuralists read Marx — or any other thinker, for that matter — they do not treat him as a homogeneous whole to be accepted or rejected *en bloc*, but as a heterogeneous resource that can be used in many ways: as Derrida (1994: 91–2) says, any reading of Marx must be an ‘active interpretation’, ‘a critical, selective, and filtering reaffirmation’. In its straightforwardly dismissive attitude towards Marxism, postanarchism risks contravening the spirit of post-structuralism. Moreover, it risks placing itself in a rather strange position whereby it values classical anarchism in spite of classical anarchism’s failure to recognize the productivity of power and the decentring of subjectivity, while simultaneously rejecting Marxism even though Marxism does recognize these things. The very reasons that postanarchists give for needing to supplement classical anarchism are in fact good reasons for turning to Marxism.

In the end, I do not think that my defence of Marxism is incompatible with postanarchism. At the end of his critical review of the history of Marxism, May (1994: 44) states: ‘It is [...] possible that there are as yet untraveled paths within Marxism that might yield more benefit than those which have been taken.’ Despite its own intentions, it may be that postanarchism can help us find those paths.



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# Constructivism and the Future *Anterior* of Radical Politics

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## Abstract

This article argues that radical theory in general, and post-anarchism specifically has spent so much effort deconstructing and analyzing power that it has largely overlooked the important task of examining the constructive and prefigurative dimensions of the political alternatives coming to the fore. Drawing on the post-anarchist thought of Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas this article offers the beginnings of a corrective to this trend by outlining three strategic contributions located in their political theory and practice: (1) a multi-centered strategy of political diagnosis, (2) a prefigurative strategy of political transformation, and (3) a participatory strategy of organizing institutions.

*It is in concrete social fields, at specific moments, that the comparative movements of deterritorialization, the continuums of intensity and the combinations of flux that they form must be studied*

— DELEUZE, Dialogues

## Introduction

Radical politics today faces a two-fold challenge: to show the problems and undesirability of the current structures of exclusion and power, and to show the desirability and coherency of various alternatives that may take their place. This paper argues that over the

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last 15 years, in particular, radical politics have been vastly more attentive to the former than to the latter and that what is now required is an appropriate shift in practical and theoretical efforts toward more constructive and prefigurative activities. In particular, the politics of difference, often associated with post-structuralist political theory and contemporary radical politics would do well to attend more closely to some of the more productive and promising political experiments emerging today. Not merely by exemplifying them as instances of a general potential for political transformation, as is more often the case, but to concretely clarify their field of struggle, the types of political subjects they create, what makes them desirable as alternatives, and the dangers these experiments confront. That is, radical political theory can no longer be satisfied with the mere critique of various forms of representation and essentialism in favour of difference and the affirmation that “another world is possible.” It has been ten years since this admittedly important slogan was adopted by the World Social Forum, but it is time that radical theory and practice begin to create a new praxis adequate to the world that will have been emerging: our political future anterior.

To be clear, I am not arguing that radical political theory does not engage contemporary political events. I am arguing that it has disproportionately favoured the practice of critiquing of them, and insufficiently engaged political events that propose inspiring alternatives to the present. For the most part it has merely exemplified them in name: the No Borders Movement, Zapatismo, the Landless Peasants Movement, etc. These events are understood as parts of a new revolutionary sequence demonstrating the *possibility* of another world. A shift in radical political theory toward a clarification, valorization, and prefiguration of these events that are currently drawing an outline of the future would thus have the following advantages: (1) It would prove, against its critics, that post-structuralism (in particular) is not merely an abstract theoretical discourse, but has analytical tools adequate to contemporary struggles; (2) It would help clarify the structure and importance of radical political events, not only for those subject to the event, but for those who do not yet understand its consequences; (3) Finally, it would show the intelligibility and desirability of promising alternatives to present authoritarian phenomena.

But since the analytical category of “radical political theory” is perhaps too broad to address in this paper, I would like to focus my argument on what I think is one of the more prominent efforts to connect

radical theory to contemporary political struggles: post-anarchism. Post-anarchism is the explicit conjunction between post-structuralist political philosophy and anti-authoritarian politics. Here one might expect to see a relatively high degree of theoretical analysis of concrete political struggles with an attention to their prefigurative capacity to create a new future in the present. But for the most part this has not been the case, although there are some recent notable exceptions.<sup>1</sup> Post-anarchism has often been criticized for being either a purely scholastic critique of humanist essentialism in classical anarchism (Kropotkin, Bakunin, Proudhon) or being a purely theoretical effort with only speculative relation to the political field. But while I too remain so far unconvinced by articulations of post-anarchism's applicability to the political field, I also believe that it does have the ability to offer a host of constructive analytical tools that other political theories lack. In this paper, I aim to vindicate this capacity.

Post-anarchism is perhaps too large of an analytical category to digest. Todd May has drawn on the work of Deleuze, Foucault, and Rancière, while Saul Newman has focused his own on that of Lacan, Derrida, and Badiou. These are all very different thinkers and it would be a mistake to conflate them into a single post-anarchist position. But distinguishing them all or attempting to re-synthesize their "anarchist" inclinations is perhaps equally indigestible. Thus, I would like to make a more modest intervention into this discussion in a way that not only provides support for my thesis, that the political philosophy of difference (adopted by post-anarchism) is insufficient for understanding the positive contributions of anti-authoritarian struggles, but also motivates a turn to a more constructive analysis of contemporary events. By constructive analysis, I mean a theoretical focus on the degree to which political struggles offer or inspire alternative modes of social organization.

To do this I will draw on two figures associated with post-anarchism who I believe articulate an overlooked potential for a more constructive theoretical contribution: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari are particularly useful for three reasons: (1) they are post-structuralist philosophers who explicitly reject the representational politics of the state, party, and vanguard and (2)

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<sup>1</sup> See Todd May, *Contemporary Political Movements and the Thought of Jacques Rancière: Equality in Action* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

who, according to Todd May, supposedly affirm a political philosophy of difference. But more importantly, (3) Deleuze and Guattari also propose three positive political strategies often expressed in anti-authoritarian experiments that I think have been overlooked in post-anarchist readings of these philosophers. I think these strategies are able to show the unique analytical strength of post-anarchism's contribution to concrete struggles. Additionally, and following my own imperative to examine more closely positive political experiments offering alternatives to the present, I want to look at the often touted, post-anarchist political event of Zapatismo.<sup>2</sup> Zapatismo has achieved a relatively high degree of success, or stability over the past 15 years, and I believe it corroborates at least three of the transferable political strategies found in the post-anarchism of Deleuze and Guattari: (1) a multi-centered strategy of political diagnosis, (2) a prefigurative strategy of political transformation, and (3) a participatory strategy of organizing institutions. These strategies are both inventions specific to Zapatismo but also consonant with several political-theoretical structures in Deleuze and Guattari's work.

## I. Post-structuralist Anarchism's

Before I begin with an analysis of these three post-structuralist or post-anarchist strategic insights located in Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas, I want to be clear of precisely what I find so insufficient in post-anarchist political theory and why I think it would benefit from engaging in more prefigurative political analyses. My criticisms are by no means meant to capture all of post-anarchism, but only a specific formulation of it I find particularly insufficient.

While there are of course many anarchists writing under the proper name of post-anarchism, there are, I think, two distinguishing features that unite the particular formulation I want to focus on: (1) the critique of all forms of authoritarianism and representation (statism, capitalism, vanguardism, essentialism, identity politics, etc.) and (2) more positively, the affirmation of difference. Unlike classical anarchism, Newman and May claim, post-anarchism does not rely on naturalism or humanist essentialism, but rather affirms difference as the radical horizon of politics as such. According to

<sup>2</sup> See [http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Jason\\_Adams\\_Post-Anarchism\\_in\\_a\\_Nutshell.html](http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Jason_Adams_Post-Anarchism_in_a_Nutshell.html)

Newman, it is “the infinite demand that will remain unfulfilled and never grounded in any concrete normative social order” (Newman, 2007: 11). Todd May accordingly defines post-anarchism by two central commitments: the “anti-representationalist principle” and the “principle of promoting differences” (May, 1994: 135). This is the formulation of post-anarchism that I find most inadequate and ill-equipped for theorizing constructive alternatives to contemporary forms of political domination and exclusion.

Given this commitment to anti-authoritarianism and the promotion of difference, understood positively as the radical possibility “to create new, non-statist forms of communal association and direct democracy that would make the state irrelevant,” how are we to understand the relationship between, on the one hand, this radical possibility freed from the constraints of authoritarianism, and on the other the concrete practices of direct democracy that may or may not come to realize the “infinite demands” of post-anarchism (Newman, 2007: 8)? Not only does post-anarchism reject any concrete practices that would seek to centralize power but, according to May and Newman, it also rejects institutions themselves as forms of coercion and authority (Newman, 2007: 4).<sup>3</sup> How then are we to understand, positively, the kinds of organizations post-anarchism is proposing as alternatives to the coercive ones currently in place? In an anarchist society how will decisions be made on global issues like climate change, border issues, and pollution? How will the fair exchange of goods and services take place and how will we negotiate conflicts among community groups without centralized authority, either socialist or market? Or is Frederic Engels correct in his common criticism that anarchists have no idea how an anarchist society would function? “[H]ow these people [the anarchists] propose to run a factory, operate a railway, or steer a ship without having in the last resort one deciding will, without single management, they of course do not tell us” (Engles, 1978: 728–9).

Insofar as post-anarchism and contemporary radical politics share a similar commitment to “political contingency” and “radical possibility” they also share a similar uncertainty regarding the true alternatives they are proposing. But why is this? The post-anarchist position, that all of politics emerges from the inconsistent void of being, (from Greek: ἀναρχία, *anarchía*, “without ruler” or “without

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<sup>3</sup> “Importantly, these movements are anti-authoritarian and non-institutional.”



origin") unfortunately does not seem to tell us anything about the kinds of political distributions that seem to emerge from this void and how they should be reorganized. With no certain ground (it is after all, an-archic) for determining the revolutionary object (seizer of state power, etc.), the revolutionary subject (the proletariat, etc.), the just society, or its future organizations, there is really no way to tell whether or not a particular group or organization has really articulated the "difference" post-anarchism aims to be promoting. Political action must be understood instead as "aporetic" or "preformatively contradictory" because "difference" is nothing other than the unconditioned and inconsistent unground for the emergence of radical politics as such, not any particular actual difference we may encounter.

But if this is the case and "the only ontological ground is the void," according to Newman's paraphrase of Alain Badiou, on what condition or criteria do we say that a given political experiment is radical, reformist, authoritarian, capitalist, etc. (Newman, 2007: 14)? And what is the structure or order particular to actual radical organizations (not just possible ones) that distinguishes them from authoritarian ones? As political phenomena they have always already fallen from their radical possibility into the realm of concrete effectuation and are no longer purely possible. This does not mean, of course, that post-anarchism is unable to define radicalism as such, but merely that it has difficulty defining radicalism outside the affirmation of difference, in this account. Post-anarchist radicalism is, strictly speaking, the degree to which the phenomena defends its "possibility of becoming-other," or "difference." Thus, direct action groups like Peoples Global Action (PGA), the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), or even the anti-globalization movement may be considered radical political groups because they are defenders of a "political potentiality" foreclosed by global capitalism, but not because of the particular way in which they are positively ordered or distributed in themselves.

The politics of the possible, in this case, has occluded a politics of the actual. The "multitude," according to Hardt and Negri, or the "counter-hegemony," according to Laclau, are the *potensia* or "constituent power" of the people to rise up and defend their *capacity* to create a new world in the shell of the old. The slogan, "another world is possible" thus seems to articulate post-structuralist and radical politics well insofar as both valorize the possibility of the people to come and criticize the authoritarianism of the present. But what is to

be said of the actually existing infrastructure of worker cooperatives, free schools, local exchange trading systems, equalitarian kinship models, consensus community councils, land trusts, etc. beyond the monological affirmation of their ontological “difference” in a possible “world to come?” What *kinds* of concrete practices are they effectuating in their decision-making, self-management, exchange, and conflict resolution and how do such practices *work*? What are the new conditions, elements, and agencies that are emerging and how are they viable alternatives to parliamentary capitalism?

Richard J.F. Day, in his essay, “From Hegemony to Affinity: The Political Logic of the Newest Social Movements” has advanced a similar concern. While Hardt and Negri’s concept of “constituent power,” he says “thus appears to be strongly identified with constructing concrete alternatives to globalizing capital here and now, rather than appealing to state power or waiting for/bringing on the revolution,” “ultimately it is not at all clear how they perceive the practical political logic of the project of counter-Empire” (Day, 2004: 735; 736). Thus despite Hardt and Negri’s claim that, “[o]nly the multitude through its practical experimentation will offer the models and determine when and how the possible becomes real,” the question of *how* these *real* political effectuations function as actual existing alternatives to Empire is left completely unanswered (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 411). So while it may be true that the *when* of a singular political emergence is in some sense contingent and nomadic, the concept of the multitude ultimately says nothing about the *how* of alternative political organizations as they are ordered and distributed in reality. Thus it says nothing of actually existing radical politics.

Day’s response to this problem is a move in the right direction but in his essay he offers only a glimpse of the post-anarchist alternatives. Instead of being satisfied with Hardt and Negri’s account of the vaguely creative power of the multitude, or Gramsci’s logic of hegemony that would centralize these heterogeneous and anarchistic social movements, Day argues instead that several of these newest social movements like Food Not Bombs, Independent Media Centers, and Reclaim the Streets offer new post-anarchist strategies of affinity and direct action: (1) grassroots organization; (2) autonomy from state centralization and instrumentalist accumulation, and; (3) a move away from strategies of demand and representation to strategies of direct action and participation. Instead of demonstrating at NBC’s news headquarters to demand that they more accurately

represent race relations in the area, for instance, activists are instead creating their own independent media networks as an alternative to mainstream media.

While I agree with the three characteristics Day mentions, as well as his support for a general strategy of disengagement and reconstruction (drawn from Gustav Landauer), I would like to suggest the additional importance of a few uniquely post-anarchist strategies I think can be found in Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas. My motivation in this analysis is to supplement what I believe is an insufficient vision of post-anarchism based on the political philosophy of difference with an analysis that focuses instead on the more constructive alternatives offered by contemporary political struggles.

The problem of radical politics today is thus not that it lacks resistance to all of the many forms of hierarchy and oppression (sexism, racism, ecological destruction, etc.), but that such resistance groups form no organizational consistency or cohesion by which to put in place a viable alternative network to replace the present systems of power. The problem of the anti-globalization movement is not a new one. Resistance movements faced a similar difficulty in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in their struggle against industrial capitalism. How to organize, whom to organize with, to what degree such decisions were binding, the positive demands that would be made politically, and the specific practices that worked in the interest of the struggle and those that didn't. These were central questions debated then, just as they are now among movements at the World Social Forum, for example. What can post-anarchism, in particular, contribute to these questions?

## II. The Post-anarchism of Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas

The following analysis of Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas develops three specific political strategies that I believe are relatively unique post-anarchist contributions to understanding some of the more positive political alternatives emerging today, poorly understood according to the philosophy of difference. The following analysis is broken down into three sections corresponding to each of the three political strategies: (1) a multi-centered strategy of political diagnosis, (2) a prefigurative strategy of political transformation, and (3) a participatory strategy of organizing institutions. The following

analysis is by no means an exhaustive account of these strategies. Rather it is just the beginning of a more sustained engagement.

### *A Multi-centered Strategy of Political Diagnosis*

The first strategy is one adopted by Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas in order to positively grapple with the consequences that today political struggles are, as Richard Day says, “interlinked [in a way] that no particular form of inequality — be it class, race, gender, sexuality or ability — can be postulated as *the* central axis of struggle.” This observation is absolutely, although not exclusively, a post-anarchist one according to Day, but what are the productive consequences of this? What alternative strategies does it propose to us in theory and action?

For Deleuze and Guattari, unlike Day, the thesis that there is no central axis of struggle is not a matter of groundlessness, lack, or infinite responsibility, rather it indicates a *positive multiplication* of axes of struggle requiring a new kind of multi-centered political analysis. If political reality has multiple intersectional axes, we can no longer employ diagnostic methods that reduce them all to a single plane (economics, culture, or gender, etc.). But what does Deleuze and Guattari’s post-anarchism offer us as a political-theoretical strategy to respond to this? I argue that they propose a topological theory of diagnosis. “It was a decisive event when the mathematician Riemann uprooted the multiple from its predicate state and made it a noun, ‘multiplicity,’” Deleuze and Guattari say, “It marked the end of dialectics and the beginning of a typology and topology of multiplicities” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 482–3). Thus, taken from mathematics, the concept of a topological field is a single surface with potentially infinite dimensions created by foldings or morphisms (like a piece of origami). Independent of linear contiguity or succession it moves and changes by folding itself into new relations. Sierpinski’s sponge, Von Koch’s curve without tangent, and Mandelbrot’s fractals are examples of iterated topological fields in geometry.

The concept of a specifically “political” topology thus provides a new way to consider political events as having several political tendencies at once, each to a greater or lesser degree, and not as a matter of lack. For example, perhaps a political struggle has a strong anti-capitalist tendency but also a strong territorial or religious tendency toward patriarchal norms. Topologically speaking there is no central

axis or “essential political ideology” operating here. There is only a relative mix of political tendencies to be determined without the aid of evolutionary succession or explanatory reductionism. Rather, each of these political tendencies instead, according to Deleuze and Guattari, acts as the “loci of a topology that defines primitive societies here, States there, and elsewhere war machines” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 430). Thus topologically, these political tendencies or types are really distinct insofar as they occupy different dimensions of a struggle and yet they also coexist simultaneously insofar as they occupy a single political event that holds them all together under the same name. Thus, instead of succession (presupposing separate taxonomic categories) political tendencies change and merge as they cross the different thresholds immanent to the struggle under consideration. For example, Deleuze and Guattari say,

The appearance of a central power is thus a function of *a threshold or degree* beyond which what is anticipated takes on consistency or fails to, and what is conjured away ceases to be so and arrives. This threshold of consistency, or of constraint, is not evolutionary but rather coexists with what has yet to cross it (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 432).

The Zapatistas, contrary to centrist or vanguard analyses that revolve around a privileged method/science, site or dimension of struggle, similarly offer an inclusive intersectional analysis that does not necessarily privilege any single method, front, or site of struggle. Revolution, according to Marcos:

is about a process which incorporates different methods, different fronts, different and various levels of commitment and participation. This means that all methods have their place, that all the fronts of struggle are necessary, and that all levels of participation are important. This is about an inclusive process, which is anti-vanguard and collective. The problem with the revolution (pay attention to the small letters) is then no longer a problem of THE organization, THE method, THE caudillo [dictator, political boss]. It becomes rather a problem which concerns all those who see that revolution as necessary and possible, and whose achievement, is important for everyone (Marcos, 2004: 164).

Marcos, in *Beyond Resistance* (2007) describes precisely the practical labour of this task in *La Otra Campaña* (The Other Campaign). To mobilize the population of the excluded and marginalized in Mexico was not a matter of discovering the evolutionary, dialectical, or single explanatory cause of oppression, it was a matter of listening and surveying all the multiple folds/fronts in the topological field. It was to create, as Marcos says, “a diagnostic of suffering” in all its dimensions (Marcos, 2008: 11). These folds, “the criminalization of youth, the oppression of women, environmental pollution, etc” are all coexisting and intersecting dimensions of the same struggle (Marcos, 2008: 11). During this time the Zapatistas also began diagnosing their own internal dangers. “[T]here are two mistakes,” Subcomandante Marcos says:

which seem to have persisted in our political work (and which flagrantly contradict our principles): the place of women, on the one hand, and, on the other, the relationship between the political-military structure and the autonomous governments.<sup>4</sup>

The Zapatistas have tried to address this problem by allowing women *insurgentas* and *comandantas* into the EZLN political-military structure (by no means entirely egalitarian). The Zapatistas allowed “young indigenous women [to] go to the mountains and develop their capacities more, [creating] consequences in the communities,” and gave them “the right to choose their partner and not [be] obliged to enter into marriage,” to “occupy positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces,” as well as other rights detailed in the EZLN’s *Women’s Revolutionary Law*<sup>5</sup> (Ramírez, 2008: 312). These laws are being increasingly implemented in the Autonomous Townships through new women’s alliances (craft cooperatives, women’s councils, etc.). However, the decoding of certain patriarchal traditions comes at the risk of creating a new set of vanguard military codes. Hence the second mistake or danger.

<sup>4</sup> (From the mountains of the Mexican southeast. Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos Mexico, August of 2004. 20 and 10.) Originally published in Spanish by the EZLN Translated by irlandesa. See: <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/2004/marcos/flawsAUG.html>

<sup>5</sup> EZLN — Women’s Revolutionary Law. See <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/womlaw.html>

These groups operate through detachment, election, and residual selection: they detach a supposedly expert avant-garde; they elect a disciplined, organized, hierarchalized proletariat; they select a residual sub-proletariat to be excluded or reeducated. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004: 198)

As Deleuze warns (and the EZLN is well aware of) the detachment of EZLN commanders living in the mountains (particularly from 1983 to 1993) that elects/recruits *campasin@s* from the villages to be disciplined, organized, hierarchized into the EZLN, and then creates a residual selection of *campasin@s* to be excluded/reeducated in ever widening circular segmentations, risks creating new military codes that undermine the autonomy and self-management of the Zapatistas. As Marcos says,

The idea we had originally was that the EZLN should accompany and support the peoples in the building of their autonomy. However accompaniment has sometimes turned into management, advice into orders and support into a hindrance. I've already spoken previously about the fact that the hierarchical, pyramid structure is not characteristic of the indigenous communities. The fact that the EZLN is a political-military and clandestine organization still corrupts processes that should and must be democratic.<sup>6</sup>

Patriarchy and militarism in Zapatismo are two examples of what Deleuze and Guattari call micro-fascism: "everything that [Zapatismo] dismantles [at the level of the state] it reassembles on its own level: micro-Oedipuses, microformations of power, microfascisms" (1987: 205). It is no small task to liberate all these dimensions at once as the Zapatistas have shown us. But to liberate them all thus requires a topological (not a chronological or dialectic) and multi-centered diagnostic.

### *A Prefigurative Strategy of Political Transformation*

This second strategy is one adopted by Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas in order to positively grapple with the consequences that

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/2004/marcos/flawsAUG.html>

today political struggles like Food Not Bombs, Independent Media Centers, and Reclaim the Streets are moving away from strategies of demand and representation to strategies of direct action and participation (Day, 2004). This observation too is a post-anarchist one. But again, what alternatives to the present does this propose? Food Not Bombs hardly provides an alternative to corporate food distribution. If anything, it relies on it. What is required is a theory of how direct action becomes prefigurative of a future alternative, and an analysis of some compelling examples of how this is really being done. In Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas we find both.

How are political transformations accomplished? Opposed to achieving revolutionary transformation by an evolutionary process of transition, progress, and reform in representation, or achieving it simply through a spontaneous rupture with the present, Deleuze and Guattari argue that prefigurative political transformations take place in the future anterior. That is, future anterior political struggles aim to construct a new political present *within and alongside* the old. Prefigurative struggles are neither reducible to the reform of the past or the revolution of the future, they are the committed political belief that one *will have been* laying the groundwork for a better world “now.”

Revolutionary political transformation thus occurs as the prefigurative emergence of a particular new present (from within the old) that both “rewrites and reinterprets the totality of potentials that already existed in stratified form,” as well as creates “an action of the future on the present,” and “the present on the past” (Guattari, 2008: 252; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 431). This is what Deleuze and Guattari call “reverse causalities.” More than a break or zig zag in history, they argue, what is to come already acts upon “what is” before the future can appear, insofar as it acts as a limit or threshold continually being warded off by the past’s attempt to preserve itself. But once a new present emerges it is seen to have been on its way the entire time (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 431). If, from the perspective of the plane of organization, revolutionary novelty may seem to emerge “out of nowhere,” this is only because it was unable to see or represent the prefigurative labor of deterritorialization before it had transformed the political conditions under which it could be seen and understood as such. However, from the perspective of the revolutionary struggle, the emerging event appears entirely consistent and intelligible as that which will have been. This prefigurative labor, according to Guattari,



consists in detecting the outlines, indicators, and crystals of molecular productivity. If there is a micropolitics to be practiced, it consists in ensuring that these molecular levels do not always succumb to systems that coopt them, systems of neutralization, or processes of implosion or self-destruction. It consists in apprehending how other assemblages of the production of life, the production of art, or the production of whatever you want might find their full expansion, so that the problematics of power find a response. This certainly involves modes of response of a new kind (Guattari, 2008: 339).

The new revolutionary present thus emerges from strategic sites of struggle that draw it “in negative outline,” Deleuze and Guattari say. “But for it to be realized there must be a whole integral of decoded flows, a whole generalized conjunction that overflows and over-turns the preceding apparatuses” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 452). That is, it must “cause the other elements to cross a threshold enabling a conjunction of their respective deterritorializations, a shared acceleration. This is [...] absolute, positive deterritorialization.” It is not only an escape but the creation of new weapons, “the creation of great machines of struggle” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 142; Deleuze, 1987: 136; Guattari, 2008: 210).

However, less we risk arguing in favor of a purely subterranean and imperceptible form of revolutionary transformation, we should highlight, because some often forget to, that the purpose of absolute positive deterritorialization, for Deleuze and Guattari, is not simply to become-imperceptible in relation to the plane of organization for the sake of doing so. This has too much fascist potential. The purpose of prefigurative revolutionary interventions are to render everything “fragment by fragment” imperceptible from the plane of organization to create “the plane of consistency, which is nevertheless precisely where the imperceptible is seen and heard (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 252). The task is not to relish the theory of an impossible and invisible revolution, but rather to “bring the imperceptible to perception” by changing the dominant conditions for visibility (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 267). It is neither by oppositional destruction or by *ex nihilo* creation but “by conjugating, by continuing with other lines, other pieces, that one makes a world that can overlay the first one, like a transparency (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 280).

The Zapatistas have also deployed a prefigurative revolutionary intervention in two ways. First, the only way one could possibly say

that the Zapatistas “burst onto the scene of Mexican politics out of nowhere” is if they had not been aware of the ten years of prefigurative revolutionary activity, training, and indigenous mobilizations sustained in the jungles of the Lacandon since 1983. Marcos and three others began as Che-inspired military vanguardists living outside indigenous communities and slowly earning the trust of, and radicalizing the indigenous population. Far from appearing out of nowhere, there was a long and ultimately collective decision by the assembly of indigenous campesin@s to go to war. During this time the event of Zapatismo certainly existed as a new present connected to a specific historical legacy (emerging from Emiliano Zapata’s peasant revolution) with a determinate future (leading to the democratic transformation of Mexican politics). During these ten years Zapatismo existed as a form of invisibility that *will have been* visible. Not only retroactively visible but visible as a real historical sequence resurrected from Zapata and drawn into a future overthrow of the Mexican government.

The second example, and perhaps the most original one, is the scale on which the Zapatistas have refused to “take power” and have instead continued their revolution by creating in the present the world they want to see in their own autonomous municipalities. They began in August of 2003 to create the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno*: directly democratic institutional frameworks for collective and autonomous decision making. One JBG was created in each of the *Caracoles* (regional communities, or snails) to

promote and approve the participation of *compañeros* and *compañeras* [...] to mediate conflicts which might arise between Autonomous Municipalities [...] to monitor the implementation of projects and community work in the Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities [...] to serve and guide national and international civil society so that they can visit communities, carry out productive projects, set up peace camps, carry out research, etc (Marcos, 2004: 619).

Currently over 2,200 communities (over 100,000 people) are federated into 32 autonomous municipalities each grouped into five local self-governments (JBGs). Today the Zapatistas remain committed to, among other things, autonomy, participatory self-government, consensus decisions making, respect for nature and life without the

use of pesticides, dams, or unnecessary logging, and the inclusion of “everybody without distinctions of party, religion, sex, or color.”<sup>7</sup>

By forming a specific block of becoming through rotational self-government, the federation of their communes, and ultimately their solidarity with an international network of shared social struggle, the Zapatistas continue to make political interventions and alternative institutions that prefigure the kind of democratic and equalitarian world they and their allies want to live in. Opposed to directly declaring war on the Mexican government and instituting a regime change in the state, or simply affirming the radical possibility that “another world is possible,” the Zapatistas are building, to what degree they can, another world from inside the old: “one that can overlay the first one, like a transparency,” as Guattari says.

### *A Participatory Strategy of Organizing Institutions*

This third strategy is one adopted by Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas in order to positively grapple with the consequences that representational politics is structurally unable to account for the voices of the marginalized (and often produces their marginalization in the first place). This particular critique is so abundant in post-anarchist literature I will not duplicate it here. But what has not been sufficiently grappled with however, are the possible political alternatives this thesis entails. Should we reject all political institutions as such or just some kinds of them? If the latter, what kinds of institutions do post-anarchists propose to put in their place? In Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas I believe we can find a response to this question.

Deleuze and Guattari offer a participatory theory of institutions that does not aim to offer new conditions for political life based on a “more just” sphere of political action whose foundational principles are still held independently from the constituted sphere where such principles are deployed. Nor do participatory institutions merely aim to establish anti-, or counter-institutions, whose sole purpose is to undermine all forms of representation and await the possibility that something new, and hopefully better, may emerge. Rather,

<sup>7</sup> Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), trans. irlandes, *Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*. See <http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/auto/selva6.html>

participatory institutions are built and sustained through an expressive process whose founding conditions are constantly undergoing a high degree of direct and immanent transformation by the various practices and people who are effected, to varying degrees, by its deployment. In particular, this participatory “feedback loop” can be located in Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “consistency,” found in *A Thousand Plateaus* and *What is Philosophy?* and in the Zapatista’s political practice of Governing by Obeying (*Gobernar Obedeciendo*). In order to understand the structure and function of this consistency and governing by obeying in revolutionary institutions, we need to understand how their conditions and elements work differently than in representational and counter-representational institutions. To show this I want to look at two concepts in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy that correspond to the conditions and elements of consistent participatory institutions: what they call the abstract machine, and the concrete assemblage.<sup>8</sup> Just as these two concepts immanently transform one another in a relationship of “order without hierarchy,” according to Deleuze and Guattari, so does governing by obeying provide the equalitarian frame-work for the participatory institutions of the Zapatistas (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994: 90).

For Deleuze and Guattari, the abstract machine is a shared condition for action and evaluation only insofar as it is *immanently transformed* by the concrete elements that realize and differentiate it. There is thus a “coadaptation” or “reciprocal presupposition” of the two that allows for their participatory transformation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 71; 1994: 77). The institution thus *changes in nature* each time there are “*reconversions subjectives actuelles*” (actually occurring subjective redeployments) of it (Deleuze, 2006: 236). Subsequently, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the abstract machine is absolutely singular and unable to be deduced from either history or introspection (Deleuze, 2006: 233). The abstract machine is not deducible because it is the condition for deduction, description, and prescription itself: it is a more primary evental commitment. It is abstract in the sense that it is not a thing among other things, but it is also *real* (*vrai-abstrait*) insofar as it is a condition that allows for the appearance of “new space-times” and new subjectivities antagonistic to representation and power (Deleuze, 1997: 172). However, while

<sup>8</sup> There are several types of abstract machines according to Deleuze and Guattari. The concept abstract machine and concrete assemblage as I use them here should be understood as referring only to the “consistent type” of machines.

it may not be a thing, the abstract machine is still marked by a singular and asignifying proper name, date, and image like the names of military operations or the names of hurricanes, as Deleuze and Guattari say (1987: 28; 264). These names do not represent, symbolize, or refer to anything at all. Rather, they are spoken *through*. As a self-referencing and autonomous event independent from political representation, the abstract machine allows for the shared *expression* and conjunction of the various heterogeneous elements that speak and exist *through* it (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 142).

Accordingly, the elements of the institution or concrete machinic assemblage cannot be considered as “normative” or “goal-driven” actions, since they are continually transforming the conditions or goals that are supposed to normalize and direct their actions. But such mutual institutional transformations should not be mistaken for a kind of pragmatic “revisionism” where a hypothesis is “tested,” found to work or not work, and then rationally (or otherwise) revised accordingly in order to ground a narrative of political “progress.”<sup>9</sup> Rather, political problems themselves transform and are transformed reciprocally by those who effectuate them and who are effected by them (without knowing ends in advance). “When people demand to formulate their problems themselves,” as Deleuze and Guattari say “and to determine at least the particular conditions under which they can receive a more general solution,” there is a specifically *non-representational* form of self-management and democratic participation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 471; Deleuze, 1968: 158). Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the machinic assemblage is thus a purely affective or expressive political procedure. Affective decision-making is a procedure whereby the collection of the institution’s capacities to affect or be affected by its other elements are determined. Each machine may certainly have different capacities to be affected, but there is no single machine or affect that is independent from or in charge of representing the others. One must “count its affects,” (*on cherche à faire le compte de ses affects*) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:

<sup>9</sup> John Dewey “Beliefs and Realities” in *Philosophical Review*, 15 (1906): 113–29. “Belief, sheer, direct, unmitigated personal belief, reappears as the working hypothesis; action which at once develops and tests belief reappears as experimentation, deduction, demonstration; while the machinery of universals, axioms, a priori truths, etc., is the systematization of the of the way in which men have always worked out, in anticipation of overt action, the implications of their beliefs with a view to revising them in the interests of obviating the unfavorable, and of securing the welcome consequences” (ibid., 124).

257). The procedure of counting the affects of the institution thus decides what can or will be done in the assemblage. There are no universal ends or values that inhere in the institution itself, only its immanent capacity to be assembled and reassembled in a continually renegotiated and expressive machinic assemblage of consistency.

Similarly, Zapatismo's practice of "Governing by Obeying" has resulted in non-representational political institutions based on highly modifiable political conditions: those in positions of articulating the people's will obey and express that Will or they are recalled. What is most interesting about the Zapatista communities is that they do not legitimate their revolution strictly by presupposed norms based on identity (requests for "rights," the overthrow of the state, universal religious claims, a new ethnic nationalism, or reference to any principles outside their own collective determination), but rather they affirm a self-reference or autonomy. What does this mean? Instead of simply valorizing their difference and counter-institutional un-representability as such to the State, as Simon Tormey has argued, the Zapatistas have created a new form of political evaluation that better allows them to realize the (self)management of their institutions through the use of rotational governance (delegates rotate every 14 days) and common property (neither private nor public) (Tormey, 2006: 138–154). The condition of being part of the workers coops, common agricultural efforts, and judicial administrations is a shared and constantly modified condition where members directly express their will through consensus decision making and recallable delegation, not through representation. The distance or "mediation" between the spirit of their economic, political, and cultural institutions and the consequences of the practices is thus minimal. This allows for maximum participation and feedback within the institution. Participation is not based on race, class, gender, etc. but rather one participates to the degree one is affected by the decision. The consensus, rotational, and recallable delegation process thus offers a third way between normative institutions based on static constitutions and the rejection of institutions as such: it offers a highly mutable and continually renegotiated theory and practice of the institution.

## Conclusion

Drawing on the post-anarchist thought of Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas I have aimed to demonstrate the relevance and potential strength of attending to some of the more constructive alternatives emerging in radical philosophy and politics. I think that the three political strategies analyzed above can be used to understand and connect to similar political theories and events, ultimately outlining a larger emerging consistency of what only appear to be heterogenous struggles, but are in fact the outline of a counter-Empire underway. It is my contention that radical theory in general, and post-anarchism specifically, has spent so much effort deconstructing and analyzing power that it has overlooked the important task of examining the prefigurative dimensions of these political alternatives coming to the fore.

I must admit however, that this analysis has only been able to scratch the surface of a much deeper theoretical and practical project that would be required to fully develop both Deleuze and Guattari's radical political theory and the detailed implications of the Zapatista's political experimentations. Such a project is unfortunately beyond the scope of the present paper. What I have been able to argue in this paper though is that the formulation of post-anarchism as the rejection of representation and the affirmation of difference offers little or no theoretical tools for pursuing a more prefigurative investigation like the one I have begun here. Instead I have proposed three theoretical-political strategies that I think might be useful for locating and clarifying new future anterior political events: (1) a multi-centered strategy of political diagnosis, (2) a prefigurative strategy of political transformation, and (3) a participatory strategy of organizing institutions. I have aimed to show how these three post-anarchist insights can be positively developed and enriched through a more constructive engagement with both post-structuralist thinkers like Deleuze and Guattari, and political militants like the Zapatistas. My hope is that more efforts in radical political theory, and post-anarchism in particular, will be made to attend to inventions and experiments in the concrete political field and *vice versa*. If we are going to change the current political situation, its going to require a more constructive and prefigurative theory and practice.

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# **‘We’re Here, We’re Queer, We’re Anarchists’:**

## **The Nature of Identification and Subjectivity Among Black Blocs**

**Edward Avery-Natale\***

### **Abstract**

At the G20 protests in Pittsburgh in 2009 a popular chant included the phrase, “We’re here! We’re queer! We’re anarchists, we’ll fuck you up.” However, it is virtually impossible that every member of the black bloc using this chant self-identified as queer in their day-to-day life. In this article, I argue that the presentation of self among black bloc participants, especially the masking of the face with a black bandana and the wearing of black itself, allows for the destruction of a previously held identification and the temporary recreation of a new identification. I emphasize theories developed by Deleuze & Guattari and Giorgio Agamben. I also analyze a zine produced by the organizers of the resistance to G20 in Pittsburgh to show that my interpretation of the black bloc subjectivity is reflected in the claims of black bloc participants.

### **Introduction**

During the protests of the G20 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 2009, black bloc groups took to the streets to disrupt the meetings and the functioning of the city, as is often the case at trade summit protests. During at least one of these protests, a chant developed: “We’re here! We’re Queer! We’re anarchists, we’ll fuck you up!”

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What is fascinating about this chant is the phrase “We’re Queer,” as there were clearly far too many anarchists participating in the black bloc to actually be made up only of those who would self-identify as queer.<sup>1</sup> Instead, there were a number of individuals who would not have maintained a queer identification in their day-to-day lives that nonetheless engaged in a chant that involved taking on that identification, at least momentarily.

This momentary identification as queer during the black bloc demonstrates the postmodern fluidity of identitarian subjectivities. The subject is capable of embracing a multitude of subject positions for identification, and then equally capable of casting any one of these same identifications away when it no longer serves the individual. This is, in fact, why the term ‘identification’ is itself superior to the term ‘identity.’ Brubaker and Cooper (2000) emphasize that the term identification forefronts the fluid and always-shifting nature of the self. This is represented by the shift from the noun ‘identity,’ which implies a singular thing that exists in the world to the verb ‘identification,’ which emphasizes the act of taking on a self.<sup>2</sup> Though this multiplicity and fluidity of identification fits the nature of our understanding of subjectivity in the contemporary postmodern age in which humans are “to be understood as multiple and without center” (Call, 2002: 130), it remains the case that people regularly attempt to maintain the illusion of a singular identity. In other words, while we may know that identification is partial, fluid, and multiple, individuals usually attempt to present the fantasmatic imagining of a single identity to the outside world. This is often done through narrativity, a process in which we tell stories about ourselves, complete with antagonists, plots, and characters (Vila, 2000). These stories structure what would otherwise be our chaotic identifications into the illusion of stable identity.

So, then the black-bloc’s adoption of a ‘queer’ identification raises the following question: why is it that these individuals at this time were capable of presenting a queer self when some of them would not self-identify as queer in their daily lives? What was it about this

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<sup>1</sup> If it were, this would mostly likely have then been a pink bloc, which did emerge during the University of Pittsburgh riots at night.

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘identification’ resolves Alberto Melucci’s concern in *Challenging Codes* where he claimed, “the term ‘identity’ is conceptually unsatisfactory: it conveys too strongly the idea of the permanence of a subject. At this moment, however, no other designation seems in possession of the capacity to replace it in its purpose” (1996: 72). I put forward that ‘identification’ is just such a designation.

moment that produced this possibility? If individuals normally strive for consistency through the creation of an illusory stable identity, what changed in the black bloc? In this article, I argue that the nature of black bloc aesthetics, and specifically the nature of the mask, allows this to occur. I argue that the black bloc presentation allows for a negation of the illusion of identity and the temporary possibility of a Deleuzian deterritorialized being, which I relate to the concept of the *whatever*-singularity developed by Giorgio Agamben.

Finally, a methodological note: a number of the authors used in this article have theoretical differences between them that are not addressed as a part of this article, as their similarities are more important to my goals here. For the purposes of this paper, I am more interested in the effects of the ideas developed by these authors and their similarities (which I believe are many) than with the contradictions between them that may span their many important works. This is not to downplay the significance of these differences, but only to state that for the purposes of the analysis developed here their similarities are more salient.

## What are Black Blocs?

Black blocs have become common at protest actions, especially in the West. Though first developed by activists in Germany in the early 1980s, black blocs did not gain more widespread notoriety until the World Trade Organization (WTO) riots in Seattle in 1999 (Highleyman, 2002). Today, they are most commonly seen at anti-globalization mobilizations, such as the G20 in Pittsburgh, and other actions against neo-liberalism and capitalism, such as the Olympic riots in Vancouver and the ongoing insurrectionary activities in Greece, where anarchists take to the streets to protest, riot, fight the cops, and ostentatiously present their discontent with capitalism and the state. The aesthetic of a black bloc primarily includes wearing black pants, black boots or sneakers, a black hooded sweatshirt, and a black bandana with which to cover one's face. These bandannas operate as masks, tied around the lower half of one's face, so that the wearer's eyes and forehead are still visible, but the nose, mouth, cheeks, and chin are covered. This creates an image not dissimilar from that of the bandit in presentations of the early American 'frontier.' Many black bloc participants will also sometimes wear gas masks and goggles to protect themselves from tear gas.

Black bloc tactics most often involve a combination of property destruction, such as smashing the windows of corporate stores like Starbucks and McDonald's, and carnivalesque performances. These strategies are often used to do as much damage as possible and to be as disruptive to the normal functioning of the host city's businesses and government while aiming to do no harm to people, with the possible exception of police who may be seen as the enemy in an ongoing class- or social-war. David Graeber (2002) describes the black bloc tactics as follows:

Black Blocs [. . .] have all, in their own ways, been trying to map out a completely new territory [. . .] They're attempting to invent what many call a 'new language' of civil disobedience, combining elements of street theatre, festival and what can only be called non-violent warfare — non-violent in the sense adopted by, say, Black Bloc anarchists, in that it eschews any direct physical harm to human beings (Graeber, 2002: 66).

The most obvious goal of property destruction is to drain city and corporate money, or at least to inconvenience them. This property destruction is not unfocused, but emphasizes specific targets that are seen as representing the neo-liberal hegemonic order. For example, "Banks and oil companies often become targets, as do retail outlets that sell sweatshop merchandise and fast food chain restaurants that contribute to the global monoculture" (Highleyman, 2002).

The goal of these activists is not to make demands on capital or the state but instead to "demand nothing" (for example, see Anonymous, 2010 and Schwarz, Sagris, and Void Network, 2010: 192–4). Alberto Melucci, predating the Seattle riots but recognizing the growing trends among activists, pointed out the anarchic trends among social movements, including the lack of demands, in his 1996 book, claiming that activists, "*ignore the political system and generally display disinterest towards the idea of seizing power*" (1996: 102). Richard J.F. Day (2005) has also noted this trend in what he calls the newest social movements, of which black blocs would be one part.

These movements relate to the politics of boredom articulated by the situationists during May 1968 in which activists maintained a desire for a moment of perpetual 'festival.' This festival is a moment of political 'play,' of constant shifting and performance, which can be described as a politics of the 'gesture.' Lewis Call describes the

importance of this political development in his book *Postmodern Anarchism*:

Indeed, the concept of the gesture was part of the definition of Situationism itself [. . .] These gestures might be artistic or overtly political, satirical, or subversive. Above all, they were meant to be playful [. . .] The Situationist ‘play ethic’ was meant as an antidote for the quasi-Puritan work ethic endemic to both capitalism and institutional communism. And the gestural praxis of the Situationists was meant to take the revolution into the strange and unexplored terrain of the symbol (Call, 2002: 102).

This lack of demands on the system combined with the attacks on private property and the playfulness of some of the tactics results in a series of protest movements that aim to be virtually impossible to incorporate into the systems of control. This latter point is particularly important. Because “the best way to ensure the exclusion of a radical social force is to ensure its *inclusion*” (Day, 2005: 29), the only way to avoid being made impotent is to refuse inclusion, and one way to do this is to make no demands on the system and to step outside of the traditional boundaries of activist discourse through festival and carnival.

Black blocs also emphasize acting out and representing, or temporarily creating, the world in which they want to exist, without closing off the possibility of different acts in the future. In other words, while one lives, to the best of one’s ability, as a representation of the yet-to-come, this is done without assuming that this is stable or permanent, as the yet-to-come must always remain open. Alberto Melucci has emphasized the importance of this way of acting, claiming that contemporary movement participants believe, “If I cannot become what I want to be starting today I will not be interested in that change” (1996: 184). This relates to the lack of demand-making, as these activists articulate a desire for *creating* the new world in which they wish to exist rather than simply asking the state or capital to reform themselves into something less vile. Furthermore, the way Melucci phrases the claim indicates that these activists do not see themselves as having achieved or aiming to achieve some sort of permanence in their acts, but that it is a matter of becoming and starting, which can be permanent and ongoing.

Black blocs, then, represent one counterpoint to capitalist hegemony. They are something that precludes incorporation into the systems of capitalism and the state by refusing to make demands of that system. Black blocs are meant to represent the future possibilities of the better world in which the anarchists are fighting for but that they are also building alongside the continued existence of this world. As I will show later, this performance of something other than the system under which we live is particularly important.

I also believe, however, that the masks worn by black bloc activists offer an extra possibility not yet fully developed in the literature. While black bloc gear allows for the camouflaging of one's identity, I believe that there can be more to this point than simply hiding one's face from the police, FBI, and other authorities. As I explore below, I believe that the masks worn by black bloc activists particularly allow for the adoption and rejection of a variety of identifications (in the sense of subjectivity, not in the sense of one's official name, address, and so forth) one may wish to take on. Furthermore, I will show that literature which emerged out of the G20 protests in Pittsburgh indicates that at least some of the participants in these actions also think of black bloc in this way.

## The Black Mask

*Get ready to blend in, to put it on and disappear [...] I could be anyone, anywhere [...] To have a brand new identity [...] or to be no one at all this time [...] Just give me a black mask.*

— THE (INTERNATIONAL) NOISE CONSPIRACY: BLACK MASK

As stated above, masks are a consistent part of the black bloc aesthetic, allowing the anarchist to both avoid external identifying by recording devices and also granting at least some small amount of protection from tear gas. However, I believe that there is more to the function of the mask. The opening quote to this section includes lyrics from the song "Black Mask" by the anarchist-punk band "The (International) Noise Conspiracy". The lines I selected from the song emphasize the point I want to make about what a black mask allows the black bloc participant to do. As I will show here, the mask allows for the erasure of identification, for the participant to become



anyone or no one, to have a brand new identification, such as the queer identification at the G20 protests in Pittsburgh.

A mask, of course, covers at least part of one's face. The face itself, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is that which represents the signification of the subject; that "the form of the signifier has a substance, or the signifier has a body, namely the Face (the principle of the faciality traits, which constitutes a reterritorialization)" (1987: 117). This aspect of faces can be traced to the origin of the word face itself, which comes from *facies* in ancient medicine. This term meant a surface appearance that characterized a type, which connected not directly to anatomy but to the world around the *facies* as well as a relationship between subjects (Calefato, 2004: 68). Thus, the face is the signification of the self in relation to others, and, according to Deleuze and Guattari, it is upon the face that one will reterritorialize after having deterritorialized into a rhizomatic line of flight. In short, this means that once one has [always temporarily] rejected subjectivity, thus entering into a line of flight, one will always reterritorialize in some way, meaning that one will regain subjectivity, and this reterritorialization is always onto a 'face.'

However, the face-as-subjectivity includes the possibility for the face to be a metaphor for the representation of one's subjectivity. Thus, the face or faciality is not limited to the frontal presentation of the head. Instead, the face can expand or reach out to other parts of the self, turning other aspects of the individual into a faciality. This too relates to the ancient *facies*, as the face was a "moveable territory, whose signs Hippocratic medicine [. . .] scrutinized, not in terms of anatomy, but in their connection with the surrounding world and with one another, in that state of otherness and oneness intrinsic to every living being" (Calefato, 2004: 68). This expansion of the face can occur, for example, through fetishization, when one allows another portion of the body to represent the self. In other words, the face is the signification of one's subjectivity, and as such other aspects of this representation can obtain 'face-ness.' Deleuze and Guattari articulate this idea as follows: "The face is a surface [. . .] if the head and its elements are facialized, the entire body can also be facialized" (1987: 170). But, of course, the face often facializes on the frontward-facing head in our culture, and we often experience the other's subjectivity here first. This is, of course, not inherently true and could be otherwise, but it is often the case.

Thus, to focus on the face-qua-face of the forward facing head for a moment, if we can make the broad statement that this is where

we expect facialization and subjectification to occur most readily for many people, then what occurs when one masks this surface, as is done during a black bloc? According to Deleuze and Guattari, when masking the face,

Either the mask assures the head's belonging to the body, its becoming-animal, as was the case in primitive [sic] societies. Or, as is the case now, the mask assures the erection, the construction of the face, the facialization of the head and the body: the mask is now the face itself, the abstraction or operation of the face. The inhumanity of the face. Never does the face assume a prior signifier or subject [. . .] The face is a politics (1987: 181).

Thus, "the face holds within its rectangle or circle a whole set of traits, *faciality traits*, which it subsumes and places at the service of significance and subjectification" (ibid., 188). In other words, the face is that which signifies subjectification and the mask itself comes to represent this subjectivity; the mask erases the old subject and represents the new subject.

The nature of masking as the erasure of the initial subject that allows for the becoming of something else is also that which shows human subjectivity to be multiple and fantasmatic. In other words, by using the mask to erase a subjectivity, one is also showing the imaginary nature of stable subjectivity itself. This is recognized by Slavoj Žižek in his recent brief piece, "The Neighbor in Burka":

From a Freudian perspective, face is the ultimate mask that conceals the horror of the Neighbor-Thing: face is what makes the Neighbor *le semblable*, a fellow-man with whom we can identify and empathize [. . .] This then, is why a covered face causes such anxiety: because it confronts us directly with the abyss of the Other-Thing, with the Neighbor in its uncanny dimension. The very covering-up of the face obliterates a protective shield, so that the Other-Thing stares at us directly [. . .] What if we go a step further and imagine a woman 'taking off' the skin of her face itself, so that what we see beneath her face is precisely an anonymous dark smooth burka-like surface with a narrow slit for the gaze? 'Love thy neighbor!' means, at its most radical, precisely the impossible-real love for this de-subjectivized

subject, for this monstrous dark blot cut with a slit/gaze (Žižek, 2010).

In other words, from a psychoanalytic perspective, the face is itself a mask which conceals the nature of subjectivity as a nothing disguised as a something; we are never a single unified self, but only imagine ourselves as such in order to fulfill the Lacanian empty signifier. The elimination of the face as the representation of subjectivity through masking, in Žižek's case the Burka, confronts the subject with the subconscious experience of their own lack — it makes the lack of the reality of a single unified self obvious by presenting the other with a desubjectified other. In the case of the black mask worn during black blocs, we may say that this same thing occurs. However, the difference is that the black bloc participant wants this lack to be embraced, while Žižek's neighbour is horrified by the confrontation with the subject of the lack.

Thus, when one blocks the face through masking, one halts the experience of the previously existing subject-hood, allowing for the subject to take on a new subjectivity of choice, assuming that they are embracing this lack.<sup>3</sup> This is what Deleuze and Guattari mean when they say, "the mask is now the face itself," the mask allows for something similar to a becoming-*whatever* in Giorgio Agamben's language. For Agamben, this whatever is the whatever-singularity:

WHATEVER is the figure of pure singularity. Whatever singularity has no identity, it is not determinate with respect to a concept, but neither is it simply indeterminate; rather it is determined only through its relation to an *idea*, that is, to the totality of its possibilities (Agamben, 1993: 68.7).

It is, then, not the case that the masked whatever-singularity cannot become a something (in the case above, a queer-anarchist), it is only the case that this something must be both temporary and partial, but also in relation to an idea that is equally temporary and partial. The mask itself allows for this temporality and partiality as it

<sup>3</sup> This matter of choosing to embrace the erasure of subjectivity is particularly important. While Žižek shows us that any hiding of the face might expose one as the Other-Thing, erasing assumed identity, it does not seem to be the case that through this hiding one always *necessarily* creates a new subjectivity. Instead, it is the matter of making this choice during the black bloc that allows for this, a choice that is often not made, for example, by a veiled bride.

erases subjectivity and allows the subject to take on other subjectivities. One adopts the identification that is useful for the action, but this identification can itself be temporary and may be rejected when another one is useful or when one un.masks. In any case, this is in relation to an idea, anarchism, and the totality of possibilities, meaning *possible* identifications: one could be many different possible somethings, but often only obtains specific identifications.

David Graeber points out this nature of the mask when discussing a black bloc at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City where a number of anarchists wore masks with the following inscribed on the margins:

We will remain faceless because we refuse the spectacle of celebrity, because we are everyone, because the carnival beckons, because the world is upside down, because we are everywhere. By wearing masks, we show that who we are is not as important as what we want, and what we want is everything for everyone (as cited in Graeber, 2009: 148).

Here we see both the importance of the erasure of identity — remaining faceless, becoming everyone, refusing the spectacle of celebrity — and also the importance of the carnivalesque nature of black bloc. Also interestingly, this was inscribed on the sides of masks that were themselves printed with the image of a face that was not the face of the participant wearing the mask, thus literally creating a new face for the de-faced black bloc subject.

Additionally, while I will reflect more on the concept of ‘demanding nothing’ later, here I must address the apparent tension between the idea of refusing demands and the apparent fact that anarchists nonetheless express desires, represented above by the claim that they want everything for everyone. The important point here is not that anarchists have no desires or have no ideas of what they hope to achieve. If that were the case it would be impossible for them to even identify as anarchists or anti-capitalists, as each of these identitarian labels implies a desire or want. What must be understood is that demanding nothing means refusing to make demands on capital and the state, instead aiming to create something entirely new themselves.

The black bloc aesthetic then is an erasure of identification; it allows for the masked anarchist to become the whatever-singularity,

and as such to become anything, such as the queer of the aforementioned chant. The black bloc erases the prior facialization, but as Deleuze and Guattari tell us, the facialization spreads across the entire body, the entire body can become a face. Thus, the erasure of the previously existing identity can also spread across the entirety of the body: the black bloc activist is dressed in black from head to toe, creating the entire body as the face of the anarchist, who in the case of the chant above is also capable of taking on the identification of 'queer.' That the subject wears black when doing this is not a coincidence, but relates to the very nature of blackness as a style of clothing that "makes explicit an obliteration of meaning, a kind of physical absorption of all light rays that transforms the body dressed in black into a transparent, or invisible, entity" (Calefato, 2004: 110).

However, Deleuze and Guattari also tell us that deterritorializations, the obliteration of meaning and subjectification, are always partial and never wholly accomplished. So while the deterritorialization of the masking is a line of flight away from subjectivity and toward rhizomatic becoming, "Deterritorialization must be thought of as a perfectly positive power that has degrees and thresholds (epistrata), is always relative, and has reterritorialization as its flipside or complement" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 54). In other words, a deterritorialization always necessitates a reterritorialization, one can never become completely and permanently rhizomatic, while one may reject subjectivity, one will always become re-subjectified.

The erasure of subjectification performed by the black bloc aesthetic then always necessitates a returning to identity. The subject will first reterritorialize onto the anarchist subjectivity and then, in this case, onto the queer subjectivity. In fact, the black bloc cannot prevent a reterritorialization onto the identification of the anarchist because this subjectivity is necessary for the progression of the black bloc; the subjectivity of 'anarchist' is necessary for the goal of insurrection and revolution, thus the erasure is partial until after the insurrection; the mask erases subjectivity, but because the mask itself is a signifier of the anarchist, one will always reterritorialize onto an anarchist subjectivity, even if that subjectivity is a hyphenated one, such as with the queer-anarchist. It is, then, the queer that is the secondary reterritorialization in this case, and the face becomes a queer-anarchist face.

This inability to permanently deterritorialize away from all subjectivity, including that of the anarchist, is the truest meaning of the statement by Jean Genet in Paris 1968, "C'est triste à dire, mais je ne

pense que l'on puisse vaincre sans les drapeaux rouges et noirs. Mais il faut détruire après [Unfortunately, I don't think we can win without the red and black flags. But they will be destroyed afterwards]" (CrimethInc, 2008: 11). Red and black flags are a frequent signifier of anarchist-communism, black signifying anarchy and red signifying communism. However, the very existence of the flags also promotes external subjectification as a singular identity, anarchist, rather than the liberation of becoming *whatever*.

The same could be said of the black masks — they are necessary for contemporary anarchists, but afterwards we must take off and destroy these masks. The black masks remain necessary because they allow for the anarchist to become the representation of the post-hegemonic yet-to-come, that future which we fight to obtain. The whatever of the black bloc then is a *manner* in Agamben's language, in that it is "a *manner of rising forth*; not a being that is *in* this or that mode, but a being that is *its* mode of being, and thus, while remaining singular and not indifferent, is multiple and valid for all" (Agamben, 1993: 28.8). This validity relates back to the idea of refusing demands. The anarchists in the black bloc do not wish to have the state meet their demands, instead they represent that which could be and which all could become. This is represented in a phrase from the Greek riots of the winter of 2008, where black blocs and masks were prevalent, and later the title of a recent book on these riots, *We Are An Image From The Future* (Schwarz, Sagris, and Void Network, 2010); they represent that which may be but is not yet here.

### Do Black Bloc Participants See It This Way?

In order to properly understand black blocs we must not only understand the aesthetic, but also how some of those participating in a black bloc see themselves during the act. Might participants in black blocs believe that identification can be erased and adopted freely through masking and the wearing of black? Did some of the participants from G20 in Pittsburgh believe this when taking on the queer identification? Do they see their presentation as that which predates the yet-to-come? And do they believe that they are demanding nothing? And, in the end, will they have to destroy the anarchist subjectivity just as they destroy all others? In order to describe this, I will look to a zine titled *The Enemy of Mankind Speaks Power* that came out of the organizers of the G20 resistance

in Pittsburgh.<sup>4</sup> As I will show, I believe that this communiqué does in fact indicate that a number of the other participants in the G20 black blocs in Pittsburgh may see masking in the way that I have described above.

In the section of *The Enemy of Mankind Speaks Power* titled “My Preferred Gender Pronoun is Negation” that deals most specifically with queerness and the relationship between queerness and black blocs the author(s) recount(s) a conversation with a friend. The friend commented, “What is so queer about that? People just wore black and burned things in the street.” The author(s) respond(s), “The practice of wearing black and destroying everything may very well be the queerest gesture of all.” They claim that “to queer is to negate,” that the becoming whatever of the black bloc was itself a gesture of queerness as it negates not only the boundaries of gender and sexuality, but the act of black bloc resistance also negated subjectification itself. They go on to say:

Without hesitation, queers shed the constraints of identity in becoming autonomous, mobile and multiple with varying difference. We interchanged desires, gratifications, ecstasies and tender emotions without reference to the tables of surplus value or power structures [. . .] If the thesis is correct that gender is always performative, then our performed selves resonated with the queerest gender of all: that of total destroy. Henceforth, our preferred gender pronouns are the sound of shattering glass, the weight of hammers in our hands and the sickly-sweet aroma of shit on fire. Address us accordingly.

Here we see that at least some of the rioters in the black blocs in Pittsburgh did see the black bloc as a negation of their previously existing identifications. Additionally, we see that the destruction of identification through the masking of the face is perceived of as erasing the self across the entire body, as they do not just say that masking is the queerest gesture of all, but that the act of wearing

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<sup>4</sup> *The Enemy of Mankind Speaks Power* has no author(s) associated with it, thus erasing the identitarian subjectivity of authorhood. Additionally, the zine is not available anywhere on the internet. The goal of the producers of this zine was to show that the human-to-human networks of sharing are still valuable, and thus they never created a web-accessed version. In the name of keeping with this tradition, if any reader would like a copy of this zine they can contact the author of this article to have a physical copy mailed.

black, of completely blacking-out the self, is the queerest gesture of all. Furthermore, we can more deeply problematize the phrase, "We're here! We're queer! We're anarchists, we'll fuck you up!" While the identification must, to some degree, indicate queer sexuality, as is indicated by the references to gender, pronouns, sexualities, and ecstasies, it also references something else. As the author(s) state(s), queerness in this case also means negation itself; it means the negation or obliteration of an existing identification and the freedom to become whatever. Destruction comes to include the destruction of identification. This destruction of identification also requires that participants move beyond solidarity in the sense of traditional social network theories. Instead, this destruction moves into the realm of what McDonald (2002) has called "fluidarity." Fluidarity emphasizes the process of creation and change during struggles rather than the construction or maintenance of a coherent singular movement with public leaders and a coherent singular identity such as 'Marxist' or 'Proletariat.'

Furthermore, this same zine also indicates that some did see themselves as representing the yet-to-come. However, they do not do so by attempting to obtain the status of hegemony. Instead, in Richard J.F. Day's (2004; 2005) language, they represent an anti-hegemonic future. We see this when they claim that the goal is not the "Production of anarchist militants with a proper ideology" but instead the spreading of insurrectionary practices as a way of being. Here they claim a clear victory: "The riotous practices that were earlier limited to a tiny subset of anarchist discourse spread across political, racialized, gendered, and sexual categories, even taking hold of a portion of the student population" (*ibid.*, 13–14). In other words, as I stated above, they aimed to represent a new way of being in the world, a way of being "total destroy." This representation was at least temporarily successful as those who would not have previously participated in such actions took on this way of being.

Thus, I do believe that the participants in Pittsburgh saw themselves as representing a manner that was valid for all, but this is not done in a paternalistic way. Instead, by representing a manner of destruction and fluidarity, they represent the possibility of becoming whatever. Unlike, for example, a Marxist Vanguard that defines the limits of the possible for the proletarian masses, the black bloc whatever simply represents the possibility of becoming whatever. This manner is that which Melucci describes as the "subject of action" (1996: 91). He tells us that unlike previously existing social



movements, which “were more deeply rooted in a specific social condition in which they were embedded, so that the question of the collective was already answered from the beginning,” (ibid., 84) contemporary subjects of action reject this preconceived subjectivity. Thus, the truest meaning of the ‘action’ in “subject of action” would be the act of becoming the subject one wishes to be and ceasing that becoming when the subject sees fit — in other words, becoming the whatever-singularity. Thus, the destructive urge of the black bloc is the destruction of everything, and this is countered by the creative urge of creating a new identification in that moment, thus fulfilling Bakunin’s claim that the urge to destroy is also a creative urge; the whatever will destroy subjectivity in order to create new multiple selves.

But is this urge also an urge to destroy the anarchist subjectivity? The authors of *The Enemy of Mankind Speaks Power* claim that,

If we know that the trade summit is an image of itself, and we know that the protester is also an image of itself, then both must be confronted if we aim to destroy spectacular society [...] even the most ideological of anarchist-activists became complicit in the collective becoming-ungovernable. It was through this becoming — this *losing my self* — that both the terms set by the impoverished discourse of activism and the terms set by the state were practically defeated.

This claim emphasizes the goal of not just destroying the G20 and global capital, but also ultimately destroying the activist and the anarchist subjects. When they claim that the most ideological of anarchist activists “became complicit” in the act of “becoming-ungovernable” we most clearly see the desire to destroy the anarchist subjectivity. The most ideological anarchist is itself subject to the outside force of anarchist ideology; the force of ideology limits the subject. However, in the act of the black bloc even this ideologue became whatever and engaged in the destruction of subjectivity through the loss of the self. Thus, at least for that moment, the subject obtains whatever-ness and enters into a line of flight. However, as I said above, this whatever has to reterritorialize, and this was always back onto the anarchist, and in some cases onto the queer. Reterritorializing onto the anarchist is essential, as it is the anarchist that must destroy everything, but in the end the subject will also have to destroy the anarchist.

Finally, this absence of a strict ideological position is also that which prefigures the demanding of nothing. While the authors recognize that some individuals have raised concerns about the lack of a clear strategy or ideology underpinning actions such as those described here, they instead see this as an advantage that allows them to refuse incorporation. They claim, "In a political climate lacking any real Left, adopting a strategy with specific demands and tactics to achieve our objectives would only solidify anarchists as the loyal opposition." First, here we see that they do continue to see themselves as anarchists, they have reterritorialized. Though the long-term goal is to destroy even this, in this quote we see that they maintain an anarchist subjectivity. If this was not the case, they could not see anarchists as facing a threat of being incorporated as the "loyal opposition" because they would not be anarchists. Second, we see here that they do demand nothing; they refuse to make demands that might be met by the system, thus incorporating their resistance. By becoming the "loyal opposition" they would only be that which could be appeased by meeting some demands. By refusing to make demands, by engaging in an act of total destruction, they refuse this incorporation.

Thus, I argue that the rejection of subjectification and the becoming of whatever is exactly what some participants in the black bloc at G20 saw themselves as doing. They saw themselves as representing the manner of the yet-to-come. Furthermore, they seem to believe that in this yet-to-come the subjectivity of 'anarchist' will have to be destroyed along with all others. However, they also continue to see themselves as anarchists in the here and now. Though they may obtain deterritorialization, it is necessary to reterritorialize onto the anarchist in order to 'win.' Finally, we see here that they are queer not only in the sense of being queer sexual subjects, but in the sense of being subjects of total destruction. If queerness means negation, then their sexual identifications become that of negation, which must be the most significant meaning of their claim that their preferred pronoun is the sound of shattering glass. This, then, creates the most clear reason for the aforementioned chant's equation that being here and queer will equate to fucking things up — to be queer is to negate and destroy, it is to be anti-hegemonic, it is not just to fuck, but also to fuck things up.

## Conclusion

Anarchists participating in black blocs (as well as in other projects that anarchists are a part of) represent a libratory future. These subjects exist as anarchist subjects until they destroy the black and red flags and take off their masks, until they can become the queerest of all by negating queerness itself. Deleuze and Guattari call this future that *we* represent the 'outside,' the place to which the lines of flight escape. However, should we win, we cannot be complacent in this future. Richard J.F. Day (2005) emphasizes that the outside must always be a passage rather than a place, lest we risk hegemonizing the outside and oppressing not-yet-known Others. Thus, in Agamben's language, "The *outside* is not another space that resides beyond a determinate space, but rather, it is the passage, the exteriority that gives it access" (Agamben, 1993: 68.8).

The possibility for this passageway of the outside is unique to our contemporary postmodern age. The "era in which we live is also that in which for the first time it is possible for humans to experience their own linguistic being" (Agamben, 1993: 82.3). In other words, it is today that we can be aware of the constructed nature of our own subjectivity. That we can recognize this method of subjectivity today, rather than in the past, was also recognized by Laclau and Mouffe:

This is not a fortuitous discovery that could have been made at any point in time; it is, rather, deeply rooted in the history of modern capitalism. In societies which have a low technological level of development, where the reproduction of material life is carried out by means of fundamentally repetitive practices, the 'language games' or discursive sequences which organize social life are predominantly stable. This situation gives rise to the illusion that the being of objects, which is a purely social construction, belongs to things themselves [. . .] It is only in the contemporary world, when technological change and the dislocating rhythm of capitalist transformation constantly alter the discursive sequences which construct the reality of objects, that the merely historical character of being becomes fully visible (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987: 97).

Thus, now that we can be aware of the fractured, unstable, and constructed nature of subjectivity, some are trying to turn this into ways of being in the world. But what might a future built around the

image presented here, of whatever-singularities and lines of flight, constantly deterritorializing and reterritorializing, look like? If the anarchists participating in black blocs are an image from the future, what is that future? The most obvious way to answer this question is to refuse to answer it. The reason for this is that rhizomatic communities of *whatevers* would not have a singular form or type, which would simply recreate hegemony. Instead, contemporary anarchists are fighting for the freedom of difference. By saying what the future would be, one would run the risk of making a demand that might be incorporated.

However, Agamben, unlike Deleuze and Guattari, does at least give us some ideas about what might bring us to this future. He claims that those who are willing to carry the rejection of subjectivity to its end result “will be the first citizens of a community with neither presuppositions nor a state” (Agamben, 1993: 82.3). He claims that the struggle for the coming politics will “no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the State, but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity), an insurmountable disjunction between whatever singularity and the State organization” (ibid., 86.5). Richard J.F. Day develops Agamben’s ideas further, claiming,

Just as the rejection of coercive morality need not necessarily lead to a passive nihilistic relativism, so the rejection of Hegelian community need not necessarily lead to an anti-social individualism. In poststructuralist theory, it leads to something quite different that can be approached via the concept of *singularity* [ . . . ] it breaks down the hard-and-fast distinctions between the individual and the community, the particular and the universal (Day, 2005: 180).

This is Day’s anti-hegemonic yet-to-come. However, he also tells us that in these coming communities, we must never allow ourselves to conclude that we have reached a teleological end. Instead, these communities and those who make them up must always be open to “hear another other” (Day, 2005: 200), an Other who does not yet exist but may yet exist in this yet-to-come. These coming communities must not imagine that they have eliminated all points from which subjugation might occur or that all potentially subjugated subjects have been liberated, but must instead always be open to the new.

Beyond the temporary adoption of *whatever*-ness at black blocs, who might bring about this yet-to-come? Agamben’s answer to this

question is problematic. Richard J.F. Day points out that Agamben seems to believe that it is those who are most entrenched in consumer capitalism that will be able to bring about this future, as it is these individuals who will prove most aware of the postmodern nature of subjectivity. However, Day disagrees:

The coming communities are more likely to be found in those crucibles of human sociability and creativity out of which the radically new emerges: racialized and ethnicized identities, queer and youth subcultures, anarchists, feminists, hippies, indigenous peoples, back-to-the-landers, 'deviants' of all kinds in all kinds of spaces (Day, 2005: 183).

We see this represented in black blocs whose subjectification is temporarily erased by the nothingness of the masked face spread across the body. However, here we see that it is not only the black bloc activists who make up the representation of this yet-to-come, nor might they only do so during the black bloc. All those who Day mentions, *some* of whom may at times be black bloc participants, are also potential (non-)citizens of this future non-State. They represent the coming communities<sup>5</sup> and are living examples of their possibility for becoming.

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<sup>5</sup> While Agamben's uses the term 'the coming community,' I prefer to follow Richard J.F. Day (2005) in calling them the coming communities. As Day points out, Agamben's language of 'community' is problematic because it implies a singular thing in the world rather than a multiplicity of possibilities. It seems to imply that in spite of everything, we will all be the same and all part of one community, thus reproducing hegemony.

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# Anarchist Meditations, or: Three Wild Interstices of Anarchism and Philosophy

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## Abstract

Philosophers allude to anarchist practices; philosophers allude to anarchist theorists; anarchists allude to philosophers (usually in search of theory to add to the canon). What is missing in this schema, I note with interest, is anarchists alluding to philosophical practices. These are the wild interstices: zones of outlandish contact for all concerned.

*Todo está ya en su punto, y el ser persona en el mayor.  
Conocer las cosas en su punto, en su sazón, y saberlas  
lograr.*

— BALTASAR GRACIÁN

## Failure and the Third

I dare to call certain turbulent interstices of anarchy and philosophy *wild*. I feel that there is a lot of activity there, but not (yet) along predictable lines. For some time now, those interested have been hearing about several other such interstices: tamer ones, from my point of view. Or at least more recognizable. So let us play the familiar game of theory and practice, that game in which we presuppose

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them as separate and seek to claim them reunited. From within the play of this game, the tame interstices are variations on the following moves: philosophers allude to anarchist practices; philosophers allude to anarchist theorists; anarchists allude to philosophers (usually in search of theory to add to the canon). What is missing in this schema, I note with interest, is anarchists alluding to philosophical practices. These are the wild interstices: zones of outlandish contact for all concerned, I think.

But there are other games to play, even if they are only innocent games of exposition. I think it is important and interesting to stop presupposing separation, to dissolve its painful distribution of thinking and action. That is, we might hazard the risky game (which is also an experience, an exercise) in which *there are no theories, no practices*; just more or less remarkable enactments of ways of life, available in principle to absolutely anyone, absolutely anywhere.<sup>1</sup>

Anecdotally, these reflections have a double genesis. The first occurred some years ago, when I was asked at an anarchist gathering to participate in a panel on “anarchism and post-structuralism.” It was around the time some began speaking of and writing about post-anarchism. The conversation failed, I think, in that no one learned anything. Of the four speakers, two were roughly in favour of engaging with post-structuralism and two against. I write *roughly* because we seemed to agree that “post-structuralism” is at best an umbrella term, at worst a garbage term, not acknowledged by most of the authors classed within it, and not particularly helpful in conversations such as that one. As if there really were two massive aggregates on either side of the “and” we were being asked to discuss! Indeed, the *worst* possible sense that something called post-anarchism could have would be the imaginary collusion of two crudely conceived imaginary aggregates. During the discussion, a participant asked the panel a question: “how do post-structuralist anarchists organize?” Of course the question went unanswered, though some of us tried to point out that there just aren’t, and cannot be, post-structuralist anarchists in the same sense that there are or may be anarcho-communists or anarcha-feminists or primitivists, etc. The operative reason was that our interlocutor seemed to be (involuntarily?) imagining post-structuralism as a form of theory, and anarchism primarily

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<sup>1</sup> I feel strongly about those last two phrases. But I would add that such experiments should interest us in philosophy outside of universities and anarchism — better, anarchy — beyond activist groups.

as a form of practice with no spontaneous or considered theory of its own. This is a variant of the familiar schema of separation, in which theory offers the analysis that informs practices, a.k.a. "organizing." No go.

That night, I also posed a question, one that went unanswered: "is there a third?" I meant to ask both about the status of anarchism and post-structuralism as massive, clumsy imaginary aggregates, and also about the presupposed separation in their implicit status as forms of practice and theory. Or perhaps merely to hint at the unacknowledged efficacy of the *and*, its silent labour, its gesture towards possible experiences. What I have to say here is my own attempt to answer that question as provocatively as possible. I will begin with this claim (which I think does not presuppose separation): it is precisely the apparent political failures of what I am now glad to have done with referring to as post-structuralism that could make certain texts and authors interesting. And it is precisely the supposed theoretical failures of what it is still a little silly to call anarchism that could make its peculiar sensibilities attractive.

Indeed, the great and continuing interest of anarchism for philosophers (and for anarchists, if they are willing to learn this lesson) could be that it has never successfully manifested itself as a theoretical system. Every attempt at an anarchist system is happily incomplete. That is what I suppose concerned our interlocutor that night: he was worried, perhaps, about the theoretical insufficiency of anarchism compared with what appeared to be an overwhelming array of theories and concepts on the other side. In this anxious picture, the array seeks to vampirically attach itself to whatever practice, interpreting, applying itself to, *dominating*, ultimately, its motions. "Theories without movements: *run!*" I would prefer to invert the terms and claim the apparent theoretical weakness of anarchism as one of its greatest virtues. For its commonplaces (direct action, mutual aid, solidarity, affinity groups, etc.) are not concepts but forms of social practice. As such, they continually, virally, infect every even remotely extra-parliamentary or grassroots form of political action. And, beyond politics, they compose a kind of interminable reserve of social intelligence. In all this they neither require a movement to become manifest nor compose one by default of tendentially existing. In this sense, what anarchism offers to philosophers (to the philosophers any of us are or might be) is that it has been and remains primarily a way of life. Its asystematicity and its persistent recreation as a way

of life probably account for the fact that anarchism, as theory, has never been incorporated into or as an academic discipline.<sup>2</sup>

Anarchism acts as an untimely echo of how philosophy was once lived, and how, indirectly and in a subterranean fashion, it continues to be lived. And, paradoxically, we might learn something about how it is lived by reference to philosophical practices.

### Dramatization: Wild Styles

Practices, or simply philosophy as a way of life: that is the second genesis of what I have to say here. This idea crystallized in studying, of all things, the ancient Stoics. Seeking to give a (pedagogical) sense to Stoic logic, physics, and ethics as a lived unity and not as components of what they already called a “theoretical discourse,”<sup>3</sup> I had recourse to the elaboration of the practice of spiritual exercises by Pierre Hadot. He describes them as follows: “practices which could be physical, as in dietary regimes, or discursive, as in dialogue and meditation, or intuitive, as in contemplation, but were all intended to effect a modification and a transformation in the subject who practised them” (Hadot, 2005: 6).<sup>4</sup> Or, again: “The philosophical act is not situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that of the self and of being. It is a progress which causes us to *be* more fully, and makes us better. It is a conversion which turns our entire life upside down, changing the life of the person who goes through it” (Hadot, 1995: 83). Briefly, it’s that every statement that is still remarkable in

<sup>2</sup> Cf., David Graeber’s remarks in *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (2004: 2–7). One might also consider here Lacan’s theory of the four discourses, proposed, among other places, in *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*: first, in his problematization of the status of psychoanalysis in its relation to the university discourse (there are interesting parallels with what I have written about anarchist theory); secondly, in light of the connections he implies between the hysterical discourse, the master’s discourse, and revolutionary movements. To show the singular status of the analyst’s discourse, Lacan often provoked his audience by wondering aloud if there were any analysts. My way of adopting this humorous provocation would be to ask if there are any anarchists. Finally, I recall here Monsieur Dupont’s text on experience: “Nobody can be an anarchist in the sense that the ideology of anarchism proposes” (*Nihilist Communism*, 2009: 202).

<sup>3</sup> That is, philosophical *logos*. See Diogenes Laërtius, in *The Stoics Reader*, 8. I was trying to teach that these spiritual exercises cannot be taught, only modelled and perhaps imitated.

<sup>4</sup> The discursive and intuitive senses indicated in the definition are the most relevant here.

the fragments and doxographical reports is so in light of its staging (dramatization, theatricalization) as part of a meditative practice that might have been that of a Stoic.

Hadot offers several examples from the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius demonstrating that logic and physics, the purportedly theoretical components of Stoicism, were already and immediately part of ethical practice. Logic as a “mastery of inner discourse” (Hadot, 2005: 135): “always to define or describe to oneself the object of our perception so that we can grasp its essential nature unadorned, a separate and distinct whole, to tell oneself its particular name as well as the names of the elements from which it was made and into which it will be dissolved” (Aurelius, 1983: III, 11). Physics as “recognizing oneself as part of the Whole” (Hadot, 2005: 137), but also the practice of seeing things in constant transformation: “Acquire a systematic view of how all things change into one another; consistently apply your mind to, and train yourself in, this aspect of the universe” (Aurelius, 1983: X, 11).

I contend that such spiritual exercises are theories *dramatized* as subjective attitudes. As the pivot of the whole system or at least of its comprehensibility as such, the role of logic and physics for the Stoics must have been precisely that of a training for ethical thought and action. But in some sense the converse is even more compelling: subjective attitudes, their theatre, seem to secrete theory as a detritus in need of being taken up again — precisely in the form of a new or repeated exercise, a renewed dramatization. Setting aside the labyrinthine complications of the entanglement with what is still badly understood as Fate, I would like to retain this much of Stoic ethics in my anarchist meditations: to find if there is anything to affirm in what confronts us, what we encounter. Concluding a recent essay, I shared a desire “to affirm something, perhaps all, of our present conditions, without recourse to stupid optimism, or faith” (de Acosta, 2009: 34). I would like to speculatively expand on the practice of such affirmations. As Gilles Deleuze once put it: “either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us”<sup>5</sup> (Deleuze, 1990: 49). What we encounter cannot but provoke thought; if it can, meaning, if we allow it to, there is something to affirm, and this affirmation is immediately joyful. How we might thoughtfully allow

<sup>5</sup> Or, more obscurely: “not being inferior to the event, becoming the child of one’s own events” (Deleuze, 1987: 65).

events, places, actions, scenes, phrases — “what happen to us,” in short — to unfold in the direction of joy is the explicit or implicit question of every spiritual exercise.

I propose, then, an interlinked series of fantastic spiritual exercises: meditations for anarchists — or on anarchy. They have, I suppose, been implicit in every significant anarchist discourse so far (including, of course, the many that have not called themselves anarchist) (cf., de Acosta, 2009). They have been buried, indirect, assumed but unstated, in these discourses. Or at least in much of their reception. In each of these three forms (or styles) of exercise what is pivotal is some use of the imagination — at least the imaginative-ideational uptake, Stoic *phantasia* or *phantasma*, of written or spoken discourse, and of what is given to thought in experience.<sup>6</sup> So, we are concerned here with experiential dispositions, attitudes that at first seem subjective but are ultimately prior to the separation of subject and object, and perhaps even of possible and real.

Whatever happens, these exercises are *available*. I will not opine on their ultimate importance, especially not on their relevance to existing movements, groups, strategies, or tactics. In what fashion and to what degree any of these exercises can be applied to another activity — if that is even possible — is ultimately up to any of us to decide upon in the circumstances that we find ourselves in, or through situations that we create. The status of these meditations is that of a series of experiments, or experiences, whose outcome and importance is unknown at the outset and perhaps even at the conclusion.

I will have recourse in what follows to texts and authors that preceded what is now called anarchism, or were, or *are*, its difficult contemporaries, so as to underline that what matters in anarchist meditations are the attitudes that they make available, not any actual or possible theory or group that they may eventually secrete. The secret importance of anarchy is the short-circuit it interminably introduces between such attitudes and action, and back — what is badly conceived as spontaneity. (Or worse, “voluntarism,” in the words of our enemies. . .)

<sup>6</sup> On *phantasia* and *phantasma*, see Inwood & Gerson (2008: 12). As will become evident further on, there is also some question here of the madness/ordinariness of *speaking to oneself*, silently or aloud, and of a concomitant recognition of familiar and unfamiliar phrases, with their differends. I will take this up in a future essay.

Perhaps, then, the truly compelling reason to call the three forms of meditation *wild styles* is that anarchists have no *archon*, no school, no real training in or modelling of these activities outside of scattered and temporary communities and the lives of unusual individuals. *But* they can and do happen: interminably, yes, and also informally, irregularly, and unpredictably. That is their interest and their attraction.

### First Wild Style: Daydream

A Daydream may take the form of a *meditative affirmation* that informs how we might read so-called utopian writers. Of these I will discuss the absolutely most fascinating. It is Fourier, with his taxonomy of the passions; with his communal phalansteries; with his tropical new earth, *aigresel* oceans, and kaleidoscopic solar system; ultimately, with his Harmonian future. What are we to do today with such a discourse? A version of this first wild style is beautifully laid out in the following remarks by Peter Lamborn Wilson:

Fourier's *future* would impose an injustice on *our present*, since we Civilizees cannot hope to witness more than a foretaste of Harmony, if it were not for his highly original and somewhat mad eschatology. [. . .] One of the things we can do with Fourier's system is to hold it within our consciousness and attention in the form of a mandala, not questioning whether it be literally factually true, but whether we can achieve some sort of "liberation" through this strange meditation. The future becoming of the solar system, with its re-arrangement of planets to form dances of colored lights, can be visualized as a tantric adept uses a yantra of cosmogenic significance, like a Sufi meditation on "photisms" or series of visionary lights, to focus and integralize our own individual realization of the potential of harmony within us, to overcome our "prejudices against matter, which is represented to us as a vile principle" by philosophers and priests (Lamborn, 1998: 17–17).

From which I would like to retain at least the following: first, we can affirm nothing in the present unless we acknowledge that the future is unthinkable, unimaginable. Fourier did write, after all, that if we sorry Civilizees could grasp the ramifications of the entire Combined Order, we would be immediately struck dead (Fourier,

1996: 67). (This, by the way, seems to be why he was more given to examples about Harmonian banquets than ones about Harmonian orgies.) So, with respect to direct action, his intention is clear enough: one does not build Harmony as such, because it is unimaginable; one builds the commune, the phalanstery. (That is why so much of *The Theory of the Four Movements*, for example, is dedicated to a discussion of transitional phases, e.g. "Guaranteeism").<sup>7</sup> This practice is focused, however, through a contemplation in which we are not planning for a future that is, after all, unforeseeable; we are dreaming, fantasizing, but in a peculiarly concentrated way, acting on ourselves in the present.

Secondly, setting aside the future, one can somehow meditate on Fourier's system. And not just the system as totality; perhaps the most effective form of this meditative affirmation that I can report on is that which focuses on one single and exceptionally absurd element of Fourier's speculations: for example, the *archibras*, a prehensile tail he claims humans will develop, good, as Lamborn Wilson notes, for fruit-picking as well as orgies. Or the sixteen kinds of strawberries, or the lemonade ocean, or the anti-giraffe.<sup>8</sup> Fourier is as dumbfounding when he describes the industrial armies of Harmony as he is when he suddenly reveals one of these strange Harmonian monads to his audience.

It seems to me that Lamborn Wilson suggests an entirely different mode of reading and experiencing Fourier's writings than either the impatient critique of so-called scientific socialism or the predictably tolerant pick-and-choose of the other socialists and anarchists. To focus on what is systematic, or appears to be so, in Fourier, is to try to recreate for ourselves his precise derangement, to train our thinking in the paths of his mad logic, the voice of his desires, without for all that believing in anything. Especially Harmony. As he wrote: "passionate attraction is the interpreter of nature" (Fourier, 1996: 189). I will accept this only if it can be agreed that interpretation is already an action, on ourselves first of all. (For example, it might

<sup>7</sup> Compare, in this light, the delirious foldout "Table of the Progress of Social Movement" spanning 80,000 years with the utterly practical propositions of the "Note to the Civilized Concerning the Coming Social Metamorphosis."

<sup>8</sup> See (Fourier, 1996: 50n, 284). The anti-giraffe is one of the new animals of Harmony, "a great and magnificent servant whose qualities will far surpass the good qualities of the reindeer."



be a healthy use of the same imaginative faculties that many of us squander on video feeds of one sort or another.)

A similar meditative affirmation could allow one to make good use of “P.M.’s” infamous zerowork tract *bolo’bolo*. The text opens with a short predictive narrative about the “substruction of the planetary work machine” by the construction of small autonomous communes or *bolos* networked together into the global *bolo’bolo*. We are, by the way, twenty-two years too late; *bolo’bolo* should have emerged in 1988. The bulk of this tract, however, is taken up by a series of systematic elements that may become themes for Daydreams. It is the ideographic sign language of *bolo’bolo*, *asa’pili*, the series IBU, BOLO, SILA, TAKU . . . each coupled with an invented ideograph. As with the hexagrams of the *Classic of Changes*, each heading encapsulates and illustrates a concept with a simple sign. Imagine the use of this artificial *lingua franca*: the ideographs and odd bisyllabic words could aid a certain meditative translation. IBU is and is not an ego; NIMA is and is not beliefs; TAKU is and is not private property; YAKA is and is not a duel. And so on. Confronted, then, with egos, beliefs, private property, or duels, I may always perform an exercise that translates them to *asa’pili*. This means asking, speculating on, the question: and what would do we do with all this in *bolo’bolo*? This language is said to be of a future and yet we are already using it, making new sense or even new worlds of sense with it.

The second systematic series occurs only once: it is an incredible list of sample *bolos*. “In a larger city, we could find the following *bolos*: Alco-bolo, Sym-bolo, Sado-bolo, Maso-bolo, Vegi-bolo, Les-bolo, Franko-bolo, Italo-bolo, Play-bolo, No-bolo, Retro-bolo, Thai-bolo, Sun-bolo [. . .]”<sup>9</sup> It is again a linguistic operation at first, which is obvious since so many of these are puns. Once we are amused, the imagination begins its playful reverie. Once the suffix takes on consistency, we are dreaming other dreams. Imagine, not just

<sup>9</sup> “[. . .] Blue-bolo, Paleo-bolo, Dia-bolo, Punk-bolo, Krishna-bolo, Taro-bolo, Jesu-bolo, Tao-bolo, Marl-bolo, Necro-bolo, Pussy-bolo, Para-bolo, Basket-bolo, Coca-bolo, Incapa-bolo, HighTech-bolo, Indio-bolo, Alp-bolo, Mono-bolo, Metro-bolo, Acro-bolo, Soho-bolo, Proto-bolo, Herb-bolo, Macho-bolo, Hebro-bolo, Ara-bolo, Freak-bolo, Straight-bolo, Pyramido-bolo, Marx-bolo, Sol-bolo, Tara-bolo, Uto-bolo, Sparta-bolo, Bala-bolo, Gam-bolo, Tri-bolo, Logo-bolo, Mago-bolo, Anarcho-bolo, Eco-bolo, Dada-bolo, Digito-bolo, Subur-bolo, Bom-bolo, Hyper-bolo, Rock n’-bolo, etc. Moreover, there are also just good old regular *bolos*, where people live normal, reasonable and healthy lives (whatever those are)” (P.M., 1985: 80–1).

Sado-bolo and Maso-bolo, but the relations between them. What are the parties in Dada-bolo like? The art of Tao-bolo? The dialect of Freak-bolo? As with the punctual things, events, or practices denoted by the terms of *asa'pili*, we have some initial sense, but our imagination is pushed to a new and more voluptuous level of complication and creation in conceiving each *bolo*, its inner workings, and the interrelations, or lack thereof, among *bolos*.

In neither case is there anything to believe in. Certainly not *bolo'bolo*! I maintain rather that to gather and concentrate one's thought process using these signs or examples is to accept their provocation, to undertake a deviation, *détournement*, of the imaginative flux. In so doing we find, paradoxically, that we have names for otherwise unimaginable relations. We are in an even better position to do so than when the book first appeared since, according to its chronology, *bolo'bolo* should have already come about. So the more credulous among us, those unhappy souls awaiting some anarchist version of 2012 or the Apocalypse of John, will be stumped and disappointed. It can no longer be read as a book concerning (do please laugh here) 'the current conjuncture.' Two mostly unhappy decades have returned it to its fetal form: a wish, a mad dream, that models its madness in an exemplary fashion, precisely by drawing us into its codes. Each ideogram, each *bolo's* name, is a monad. To meditatively grasp it is to attain a perspective on the otherwise impossible: to be a witness to *bolo'bolo*. It is only when we hopelessly use these monads that they can have an effect on our thinking-in-the-event: a healthy use of what Bergson called *la fonction fabulatrice*, perhaps even what Freud conceived as the wish-fulfillment involved in dreams.

Another sort of Daydream, the *meditative negation*, manifests in a similar way, as a summoning up of powerful, almost unthinkable images of destruction, specifically of consumption. I consider this strange passage by Max Stirner to be paradigmatic:

Around the altar rise the arches of the church and its walls keep moving further and further out. What they enclose is *sacred*. You can no longer get to it, no longer touch it. Shrieking with the hunger that devours you, you wander around about these walls and search for the little that is profane. And the circles of your course keep getting more and more extended. Soon that church will embrace the whole world, and you will be driven out to the extreme edge. Another step and the *world of the*

*sacred* has conquered: you sink into the abyss. Therefore take courage while there it is yet time, wander about no longer in the profane where now it is dry feeding, dare the leap and rush the gates into the sanctuary itself. If you *devour the sacred* you have made it your *own*. Digest the sacramental wafer and you are rid of it (Stirner, 1995: 88–9).<sup>10</sup>

This is perhaps the most excessive of many such passages in *The Ego and its Own*. What is the status of this discourse? Just who is speaking here? What I is addressing me, presenting its ideas as my own? What is the altar, the church, its walls? What is the *sacred* exactly? What is the *hunger* referred to here? The *courage*? What does this apparently metaphorical act of eating entail in practice? As I have posed them, abstractly, these questions are unanswerable. I propose rather that the interest of passages such as these, their significance in Stirner's text, is that, functioning as a model, they allow one to project a parallel thought pattern onto one or more given sets of circumstances. This meditation could help me to divest myself of my allegiance to a stupid political group that I have made the mistake of joining; or it could save me from a noxious commonplace of sexual morality. In each case I would find the sacred element, identify its will to power, feel my impotence for a moment ("hunger") and then strike with courage, undoing the sacrificial logic that has possessed me.

The difference between meditative affirmation and negation is that in affirming I actively imagine a future that I do not take to be real; I explore its details to act on my own imagination, on my thought process, to contract other habits. In negation, as in affirmation, there is no future, just this present I must evacuate of its meaning. This meditation is a voiding process, a clearing of stupidities. It is what I do when I can find nothing to affirm in the present.

That is not the only form a meditative negation can take. Throughout *The Ego and its Own*, Stirner also deploys countless brief, pithy phrases that are not imagistic, but rather almost speech acts, cases of a kind of disruptive *direct action* in discourse: "I do not step shyly back from your property, but look upon it always as my property, in which I need to 'respect' nothing. Pray do the like with what you call my property!" (Stirner, 1995: 220). "I do not love [the world],

<sup>10</sup> I have already commented on this passage, with reference to related alimentary imagery in Nietzsche, in my "How the Stirner Eats Gods" (de Acosta, 2009).

I annihilate it as I annihilate myself; I dissolve it" (ibid., 262). I do not know what could possibly follow such statements, though something must. These phrases could be ironically spoken aloud to a coarse interlocutor as the mark of a necessary distance; they could also be thought silently to oneself, as so many available elements of an egoist *tetrapharmakon* that could recall us to ourselves in even the most alienating moments.<sup>11</sup> The I that speaks in Stirner's text is more often than not offered as a common property, that is to say, not a property at all. It is a model, a case. It is there to be taken up, imitated, if we have the courage to be the confessed egoists we could be. Stirner was not describing the world, he was acting on it; so we too might act if we study and train ourselves in such imaginary and discursive exercises. Like anarchism, egoism cannot be taught, only modelled and perhaps imitated.

## Second Wild Style: Field Trip

Although careful and generous acts of reading are vital to anarchist meditations, the exercises I am describing could also take the form of concentrations of thought developed not through engagement with written or spoken discourse but with the materiality of places. In affirmative or negative meditations, the question is that of another attitude, another tone of thought, another voice. And reading bizarre books is only one way to achieve it. A second form of exercise, the Field Trip, is a kind of *speculative anthropology of geographical spaces*. I will elaborate it through a detailed examination of one example, both for its richness and because I suppose many of my readers are unfamiliar with its source, a recent text from the sometime proponent of a "nihilist communism." In a tone sometimes echoing Bakunin, sometimes Bataille, "Frere Dupont," the pseudonymous author of *species being*, proposes that revolt is a sort of anthropological constant. It corresponds not so much to the organizations that seek to bring it about, or at least stimulate and channel it, but rather to an existential dimension of the human. Borrowing from another lexicon, I would say that for Dupont revolt is anthropogenetic. "The untheorized and non-included aspects of human existence is [*sic*] our platform" (Dupont, 2007: 47). I suppose

<sup>11</sup> I am referring, of course, to the Epicurean *tetrapharmakon* or "four-part cure," the briefest epitome of their philosophy.

the term “platform” is used here with tongue fully in cheek. What is this ironic project, then? “Our purpose is to develop a feral subject [...]” (ibid.). Very well: how is this subject *developed*?

Setting aside, perhaps even ignorant of, the procedures of scientific anthropology or archeology, Frere Dupont enters an archeological site in the East of England and reports:

It is noon on the Tenth of May. The year is Two Thousand and Six. I am crouching, my hands on the floorstone, in Pit One of Grime’s Graves, a retrieved neolithic flint mining complex in Norfolk’s Breckland. I have chosen this place to begin my investigation into the tendency within society to modify itself through the chosen activities that it undertakes in response to the perceived limits of itself. I have asked myself whether this tendency of transformation out of stability is explicable in terms of a motivational sense of lack and/or a sense of abundance (ibid., 48).

The question Dupont is asking could be understood to belong to political philosophy, ethics, anthropology, or any number of other disciplines. It is also, of course, a variant of the old anarchist question about the inception of the State-form and authoritarian politics: the institutionalized concentration of power.<sup>12</sup> This text bears with it the rare sense of a situated thought (“I have chosen this place”), the unusual idea that it matters *where* one is when one thinks; or, again, the fantastic intuition that one can conceive of the activities that have unfolded in a place, *even thousands of years later*:

I am crouching in Pit One of the complex. It is dark because the custodians of the site have put a roof over the site, but four thousand years ago, at midday, on a day like today in bright summer light, the chalk walls would be dazzlingly intense. To increase this effect the miners built angled walls from the chalk spoil at the surface of the shaft to further reflect light down into the galleries. My first impressions are of the miners’ appreciation for the actual process of mining as an activity in itself, which they must have valued in their society above the flint that was mined. Also, I felt an awareness of their creation of

<sup>12</sup> The “centripetal” social organization, that is, whose emergence Pierre Clastres tried to understand in the essays collected in *Society Against the State* (1989).

an architecture, their carving out of underground spaces, and the separations and connections between these and the world above. Somewhat self-consciously, I crouch at the centre of the shaft and announce my short, prepared thesis, “organization appears only where existence is thwarted” (Dupont, 2007: 51).

The three key components of this exercise seem to be location in an unfamiliar and significant place (“I am crouching”), affective engagement with the history and arrangement of the space (“My first impressions [...] I felt an awareness [...]”), and the conscious, explicit introduction of what would otherwise be an abstract “thesis” into that experience (“I [...] announce”). I suggest that in so doing an aleatory element is introduced into thought, a tendency that unfolds, at least in this case, in solitude. Perhaps the place and its intuitive reconstruction act as a sort of externalized primary process on speculation, inflecting or declining it. It is an analytic moment. Not: what does this thesis mean? But: what does it mean that *I* said it *here*? Dupont offers up the thesis to the mute walls of the pit. And then something happens: new thought. The “thesis” thickens, taking on a new consistency.

Organization appears only where existence is thwarted [...]  
And existence appears only where organization is thwarted.  
But is this because the appearance of existence-in-revolt is a negatively constituted movement (a mere inversion of what is, a substantiation of the possibilities of the form), or is it an indication of a crisis within organization, the breakdown of the holding/defining of the scene — or rather, is the recurrence of existence-counter-to-present-structure an intimation of organization yet to come? The question here concerns capture, and return — the possibility of getting back to a previous stage where the problems of any given structure, or structure itself, have yet to appear (ibid., 56).

What Dupont discovered, perhaps, is some way to imaginatively recreate precisely what is lost of prehistoric peoples — their anarchy: a kind of vanished attitude modelled anew. Dupont does not claim to speak the truth of those peoples. Who could ever claim to know what they thought? Or even if they experienced thought as a relatively autonomous faculty, the presupposition, by the way, of all our amusing contentions about “theory”? Rather, speculating

in a place that is still somehow theirs, and letting the speculation remain what it is — a hallucination, ultimately — she or he moves to a speculative or archeological reconstruction of our own problems. Dupont is able to speculate on some Neolithic transformation from existence to organization (whatever else this means, I suppose it has to do with the stabilization of proto-states, ritual structures, divisions of labour, etc.) insofar as she or he locates, imaginatively, analogous or even genealogically related elements in our present. Namely, the vast, unthought but available, background of the thesis! I might encapsulate that background by reference to a feeling: the terrible sense that the group one is in is becoming rigid, static, that a hierarchy, hierogamy, or hierophany is developing where initially only some sort of kinship or friendship existed. The place (here, the pit) concretizes, materializes, or grounds thought in a provisional, momentary, but remarkable way. Could this be the birth of the feral subject?

Elsewhere in the book Dupont quotes Krishnamurti: “Meditation is to find out if there is a field which is not already contaminated by the known” (ibid., 114). Whatever this statement could have meant in its original context, I understand Dupont to be suggesting that we always need new practices of thought, new contemplations, that habituate us to overcoming our profoundly limited common sense about what is human, what the human or its societies can do and be. The *field*, then, in this example is both the pit *and* the attitude or wishes one brings there — though the latter may only become evident in the pit.

There is, in short, a tentative anthropology here<sup>13</sup>, and it is overtly speculative and intuitive. The interest of its statements lies not in their truth-value but in their importance, their success — their felicity, as one says of a performative utterance. They are felicitous if they can meditatively restage some or all of a fantastic anthropogenetic moment in a present itself rendered fantastic.

### Third Wild Style: Psychogeography

A third wild style bears as its name a Situationist term, which they defined as follows:

<sup>13</sup> That someone can speak to a wall is already a marvelous and irreducible fact of a future anarchist anthropology! This magical speech, the natural converse of speaking to oneself, also belongs to a future essay.

Psychogeography: the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behavior of individuals (Knabb, 2006: 52).

I mean it somewhat differently, however, since the question is not merely to understand effects, but to act on them, to generate other effects inasmuch as one becomes capable of experiencing places and spaces differently.<sup>14</sup> One could view this style as a complex combination of the first (affirmation especially) and the second (though the speculative anthropology here refers not to the past but to a perspective on our world). A first simple form of Psychogeography could take up, for example, the long lists Kropotkin made of what in his present already manifested mutual aid: public libraries, the international postal system, cooperatives of every sort (Kropotkin, 1955: Chapters 7 & 8, *et passim*). Kropotkin argued that mutual aid is an evolutionary constant, as generic and vital as competition, or what was called the struggle for existence. But we would be mistaken if we thought his books, essays, speeches, etc. had as their only rhetorical mode the one perhaps most evident on a first reading, that of scientific proof. His *examples*, his repeated and lengthy enumerations of actual *cases* of mutual aid, offer up an entirely new world, an uncanny symptomatology of a familiar world. It is our world, seen through a new and clear lens.<sup>15</sup> One could then travel to the places revealed in this new world, buildings or events, and meditate on the activity there so as to eventually grasp what is anarchist about them immediately and not potentially. I am referring to what is colloquially called “hanging out.” Going to the public library, for example, for no other reason than to witness what in it is anarchic — or, again, to a potluck. This practice involves another way of inhabiting familiar spaces. It brings out what in them is uncannily, because tendentially, anarchic. It multiplies our sites of action and engagement and could shape our interventions there.

<sup>14</sup> I might note here that the definition, in French, seems to be ambiguous as to whether it is the effects or the study of the effects that acts on our affective life. But the conjoined definition of “psychogeographical” makes clear that it is a question of the “direct action” of the milieu on affectivity. Compare *Internationale Situationniste* (1997: 13).

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps then a more relevant reference is not science but science fiction. As Deleuze wrote of Hume’s empiricism: “As in science fiction, one has the impression of a fictive, foreign world, seen by other creatures, but also the presentiment that this world is already ours, and these creatures, ourselves” (Deleuze, 2001: 35).



Those interested could expand the range of this exercise, making the goal not only arrival at the sites of mutual aid (or other anarchic activities), but also the journey. Here again a Situationist term is relevant: the *dérive*, that “experimental behaviour” (Knabb, 2006: 52) of wandering across an urban space with no determinate destination. I suppose that if one has begun to master the affirmation of certain places as anarchic, one could begin expanding the range of the exercise, meditating as one walks or rides a bicycle or bus, affirming now forms of movement, escape, or evasion, as well as creative flights of fancy. Soon many places in urban space will emerge, detached from their everydayness, as remarkable: places of intensity, or of *virtual anarchy*. (I think here, for example, of the great significance some friends put on visiting certain garbage dumpsters.)

Indeed, it is likely that Fourier's preferred examples may have emerged in just this way. Reading his finest descriptions of Harmony, we find innumerable *parades*. He plans Harmonian processions: “Parade Series: In a societary canton all the members of the industrial phalanx [...] are divided into 16 choirs of different ages; each choir is composed of 2 quadrilles, one of men and one of women, making a total of 32 quadrilles, 16 male and 16 female, each with its distinctive banners, decorations, officers and costumes, both for winter and summer” (Fourier, 1996: 293). It is strange and lovely to suppose that all of this began with the solitary tradesman Charles Fourier looking on as a military parade passed by, spontaneously inventing his version of this exercise by asking himself: what can we do with the passions set to work in this array? It seems these people like costumes, display, fanfare, and ordered group movements. How do these passions fit in Harmony, given that the constraint in thinking harmonically is to affirm every passion? Once the question is asked, our experience reveals the details to be meditatively rearranged. For Fourier, parades are not only great fun; they also presage the serial organization of the Combined Order. “All this pomp may be thought unnecessary to the cultivation of flowers and fruits, wheat and wine, etc., but baubles and honorific titles do not cost anything, and they are incitements to greater enthusiasm in the work of the Series” (ibid., 299). “You will come in the end to recognize that there are no bad or useless passions, and that all characteristics are good in themselves, that all passions must be intensified, not moderated” (ibid., 303). Psychogeography could show us where each passion, intensified, may bloom.

One night in the mid-nineties I had dinner with Peter Lamborn Wilson. We spoke about Fourier and he told me of a group of friends who had set off from New York into Canada in an expedition that had as its goal to trigger the birth of the Northern Crown, that “shining ring of light,” which, in Fourier’s system, “will appear after two centuries of combined order” (ibid., 33–4). I do not remember all the details, but, since it has been fifteen years, and the Northern Crown has yet to emerge, I am led to wonder what this journey could have meant for its participants. I am reminded here of the great and catastrophic Tupi migrations of the sixteenth century documented by Hélène Clastres: ambiguous wanderings of whole peoples who abandoned a sad and sedentary way of life and danced off (literally!) in search of a land of immortality that they expected to find in the Andes or across the Atlantic (Clastres, 1995: 49–57). Or so it is said. We read of such journeys and perhaps conceive of them as pointless – fanatical, even. We suppose, perhaps, that they were primarily religious, missing what is remarkable about the absolute desertion of agricultural labour, marriage customs, etc. Religion might be the operative discourse, and prophetism the power mechanism, but the lived practice seems like something else entirely: “The quest for the Land-Without-Evil is [...] the active denial of society. It is a genuinely collective asceticism” (ibid., 56). Should we say the poor Tupi were duped by their own prophets? What if the journey were its own reason? How did the Tupi experience what Clastres calls the “auto-destruction” of their own societies? What could the wanderers Lamborn Wilson told me of have felt and thought as they made their way north?<sup>16</sup>

## Interstices

Let me return to the question, “how do post-structuralist anarchists organize?” I have suggested that what perhaps went unthought in it was the presupposition of separation. In this case that meant that the prized goal of the game, the theory-practice intersection, ought to be (to embody or resemble) organizing or an organization. Here I recall Dupont’s thesis: *organization appears where existence is thwarted*. Could we rewrite that last word with the phrase *separated from itself*?

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<sup>16</sup> Would it be going too far to write that they perhaps felt the Earth anew?

Indeed, my three wild styles concern forms of existence that are more and less than organizations, or, to be direct, *organisms*, since in the unconscious hylomorphic background of the schema, theory is the soul, practice is the body, and progress is the organism's health. To maintain that anarchist meditations are interstitial is to propose that something or someone thrives and swarms ahead of, behind, among, inside of, and between the slow-moving theory-practice compounds that we call organizations. The vital question is: do organizations ever do anything at all? Or are they something like remnants, the clumsy carapaces of what has been and is already being done? David Hume wrote: "The chief benefit which results from philosophy arises in an indirect manner, and proceeds more from its secret insensible influence, than from its immediate application" (Hume, 2008: 104). *A secret insensible influence*: that is all I would claim for my wild styles. They are good practices, and good practice. They do not dictate action; action is its own reason and its own model. But they have had a long-standing, indirect, and insensible influence on what anarchists and many others in fact do.

Unlike a theory that purposely or accidentally posits an ideal state or a goal, they have no implicit or explicit teleology. I have long felt, and remain convinced, that there is nothing to be gained by positing a goal for action other than in the most irreducibly local sense (and even then!). Although I have my reasons for maintaining this near-metaphysical proposition, I will restrict myself here to underlining the contemporary phenomenon of non-ideological political actions, which could nearly all be called *tactics without strategies*. Or even: punctual acts in the course of detaching themselves from the tactical realm of militant and militarized politics. I prefer not to think such actions as practices in need of theoretical interpretation. If there is anything to praise in them, it is that these actions are wild experiments: 'what happens when we do *this*?' They install themselves, impossibly, I admit, on the side of *existence*, and attempt to remain there.

These wild styles ought, eventually, to put into question every political project — first, as project, and, again, as political.<sup>17</sup> That is their virtue, or at least their contribution to virtue. Whatever effects they may or may not have, they exemplify *in thought* that aspect of anarchist practice called *direct action*. The famous and pathetic

<sup>17</sup> It is no coincidence that some anarchists and communists have recently posed the problem of what they provocatively call "anti-politics."

theses of the innate goodness of humans or of a future utopia have perhaps no value other than their role as themes for meditation and affirmation in the present. Hume, again: "The chief triumph of art and philosophy: it insensibly refines the temper, and it points out to us those dispositions which we should endeavour to attain, by a constant *bent* of mind, and by repeated *habit*" (ibid., 105). This sort of direct action, as it infuses our lives, may succeed or fail. To the extent that it succeeds, we are on the way to anarchy. To the extent that it fails, it succeeds as well, though in a more local way. We have bent our mind, as Hume wrote, and made life "amusing" (ibid., 113).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Perhaps amusement is the only thing worth hoping for.

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# Toward an Anarchist Film Theory: Reflections on the Politics of Cinema

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## Abstract

Cinema, like art more generally, is both an artistic genre and a politico-economic institution. On the one hand there is *film*, a medium which disseminates moving images via the projection of light through celluloid onto a screen. Individual films or "movies," in turn, are discrete aesthetic objects that are distinguished and analyzed *vis-à-vis* their form and content. On the other hand there is the *film industry* — the elaborate network of artistic, technical, and economic apparatuses which plan, produce, market, and display films to audiences. Since its inception, both the aesthetic and political aspects of cinema have been subject to various forms of theoretical analysis which have been subject to critique in turn. In this paper I offer a brief survey of these analyses and critiques followed by a sketch of an alternative approach to film theory. Drawing upon the ideas of Foucault and Deleuze, this "anarchist" film theory seeks to present a viable critical methodology while at the same time elucidating the liberatory potential of film.

## I. The Politics of Film Theory: From Humanism to Cultural Studies

Prior to its emergence as a distinct academic discipline in the 1970s, film studies could be roughly divided into two distinct but closely-related camps: humanism, which analyzed cinema in terms

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of its promotion of, or opposition to, classical Enlightenment values (e.g., freedom and progress), and various schools of formalism, which focused on the formal, technical, and structural elements of cinema in general as well as of individual films.<sup>1</sup> As Dana Polan notes, humanist critics frequently vacillated between skepticism toward cinema and profound, even hyperbolic adulation of it (Polan, 1985: 159). To some, film represented “the death of culture for the benefit of a corrupt and debasing mass civilization” (ibid.).<sup>2</sup> To others, film did not kill culture so much as *democratize* it by destabilizing the privileged, elite status of art (cf., Cavell, 1981). Ultimately, however, “the pro and con positions merge in their common ground of originary presuppositions: they understand art as redemption, transport, utopian offer” (Polan, 1985: 159).

Like the pro-film humanists, formalist critics emphasized the artistic depth and integrity of cinema as genre. (This is especially true of *auteur* theory, according to which films are expressions of the unique ideas, thoughts, and emotions of their directors; Staples, 1966–67: 1–7.) Unlike humanism, however, formalism was centrally concerned with analyzing the vehicles or mechanisms by which film, as opposed to other artistic genres, generates content. This concern gave rise, in turn, to various evaluative and interpretive theories which privileged the *formal* elements of film (e.g., cinematography, editing, etc) over and above its *narrative* or *thematic* elements (cf., Arnheim, 1997, 1989; Bazin, 1996, 1967; Eisenstein, 1969; Kracauer, 1997; Mitry, 1997).

In contrast to the optimistic humanists and the apolitical formalists, the Marxist critics of the Frankfurt School analyzed cinema chiefly as a socio-political institution — specifically, as a component of the repressive and mendacious “culture industry.” According to Horkheimer and Adorno, for example, films are no different from automobiles or bombs; they are commodities that are produced in order to be consumed (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1993: 120–67). “The technology of the culture industry,” they write, “[is] no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of work and that of the social system” (ibid., 121). Prior to the evolution of this industry, culture operated as a locus of dissent, a buffer between

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent overview of formalism in film theory, see (Andrews, 2000: 341–51).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Leavis (1952). On Leavis’ dismissal of cinema and mass culture more generally, see Mulhern (1979).

runaway materialism on the one hand and primitive fanaticism on the other. In the wake of its thoroughgoing commodification, culture becomes a *mass* culture whose movies, television, and newspapers subordinate everyone and everything to the interests of bourgeois capitalism. Mass culture, in turn, replaces the system of labour itself as the principle vehicle of modern alienation and totalization.

By expanding the Marxist-Leninist analysis of capitalism to cover the entire social space, Horkheimer and Adorno severely undermine the possibility of meaningful resistance to it. On their view, the logic of Enlightenment reaches its apex precisely at the moment when everything — including resistance to Enlightenment — becomes yet another spectacle in the parade of culture (*ibid.*, 240–1). Whatever forms of resistance cannot be appropriated are marginalized, relegated to the “lunatic fringe.” The culture industry, meanwhile, produces a constant flow of pleasures intended to inure the masses against any lingering sentiments of dissent or resistance (*ibid.*, 144). The ultimate result, as Todd May notes, is that “positive intervention [is] impossible; all resistance [is] capable either of recuperation within the parameters of capitalism or marginalization [...] there is no outside capitalism, or at least no effective outside” (1994: 26). Absent any program for organized, mass resistance, the only outlet left for the revolutionary subject is art: the creation of quiet, solitary refusals and small, fleeting spaces of individual freedom.<sup>3</sup>

The dominance of humanist and formalist approaches to film was overturned not by Frankfurt School Marxism but by the rise of French structuralist theory in the 1960s and its subsequent infiltration of the humanities both in North America and on the Continent. As Dudley Andrew notes, the various schools of structuralism<sup>4</sup> did not seek to analyze films in terms of formal aesthetic criteria “but rather [...] to ‘read’ them as symptoms of hidden structures” (Andrew, 2000: 343; cf., Jay, 1993: 456–91). By the mid-1970s, he continues, “the most ambitious students were intent on digging beneath the commonplaces of textbooks and ‘theorizing’ the conscious machinations of producers of images and the unconscious ideology of spectators” (*ibid.*). The result, not surprisingly, was a flood of highly influential books and essays which collectively shaped the direction of film theory over the next two decades.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This position receives one of its fullest articulations in Marcuse (1964).

<sup>4</sup> For example, Barthesian semiotics, Althusserian Marxism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

One of the most important structuralists was, of course, Jacques Derrida. On his view, we do well to recall, a word (or, more generally, a sign) never corresponds to a presence and so is always “playing” off other words or signs (1978: 289; 1976: 50). And because all signs are necessarily trapped within this state or process of play (which Derrida terms “*differance*”), language as a whole cannot have a fixed, static, determinate — in a word, *transcendent* meaning; rather, *differance* “extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely” (ibid, 280). Furthermore, if it is impossible for presence to have meaning apart from language, and if (linguistic) meaning is always in a state of play, it follows that presence itself will be indeterminate — which is, of course, precisely what it *cannot* be (Derrida, 1981: 119–20). Without an “absolute matrical form of being,” meaning becomes dislodged, fragmented, groundless, and elusive. The famous consequence, of course, is that “*Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” (“There is no outside-text”) (Derrida, 1976: 158). Everything is a text subject to the ambiguity and indeterminacy of language; whatever noumenal existence underlies language is unreadable — hence, unknowable — to us.

In contrast to Marxist, psychoanalytic, and feminist theorists, who generally shared the Frankfurt School’s suspicion towards cinema and the film industry, Derridean critics argued that cinematic “texts” do not contain meanings or structures which can be unequivocally “interpreted” or otherwise determined (cf., Brunette & Wills, 1989). Rather, the content of a film is always and already “deconstructing” — that is, undermining its own internal logic through the play of semiotic differences. As a result, films are “liberated” by their own indeterminacy from the hermeneutics of traditional film criticism, which “repress” their own object precisely by attempting to fix or constitute it (Brunette & Wills, 1989: 34). Spectators, in turn, are free to assign multiple meanings to a given film, none of which can be regarded as the “true” or “authentic” meaning.

This latter ramification proved enormously influential on the discipline of cultural studies, the *modus operandi* of which was “to discover and interpret the ways disparate disciplinary subjects *talk back*: how consumers deform and transform the products they use to construct their lives; how ‘natives’ rewrite and trouble the ethnographies of (and *to*) which they are subject. . .” (Bérubé, 1994: 138; see also

<sup>5</sup> Of particular importance are Baudry (1986: 299–319), Heath (1976: 68–112), Metz (1973: 40–88; 1974), Mulvey (1975: 6–18).

Gans, 1974, 1985: 17–37; Grossberg, 1992; Levine, 1988; Brantlinger, 1990; Aronowitz, 1993; During, 1993; Fiske, 1992; McRobbie, 1993). As Thomas Frank observes,

The signature scholarly gesture of the nineties was not some warmed over aestheticism, but a populist celebration of the power and ‘agency’ of audiences and fans, of their ability to evade the grasp of the makers of mass culture, and of their talent for transforming just about any bit of cultural detritus into an implement of rebellion (Frank, 2000: 282).

Such a gesture is made possible, again, by Derrida’s theory of deconstruction: the absence of determinate meaning and, by extension, intentionality in cultural texts enables consumers to appropriate and assign meaning them for and by themselves. As a result, any theory which assumes that consumers are “necessarily silent, passive, political and cultural dupes” who are tricked or manipulated by the culture industry and other apparatuses of repressive power is rejected as “elitist” (Grossberg, 1992: 64).

A fitting example of the cultural studies approach to cinema is found in Anne Friedberg’s essay “Cinema and the Postmodern Condition,” which argues that film, coupled with the apparatus of the shopping mall, represents a postmodern extension of modern *flaneurie* (Friedberg, 1997: 59–86). Like Horkheimer and Adorno, Friedberg is not interested in cinema as an art form so much as a commodity or as an apparatus of consumption/desire production. At the same time, however, Friedberg does not regard cinema as principally a vehicle of “mass deception” designed by the culture industry to manipulate the masses and inure them to domination. Although she recognizes the extent to which the transgressive and liberatory “mobilized gaze” of the *flaneur* is captured and rendered abstract/virtual by the cinematic apparatus of the culture industry (ibid., 67), she nonetheless valorizes this “virtually mobile” mode of spectatorship insofar as it allows postmodern viewers to “try on” identities (just as shoppers “try on” outfits) without any essential commitment (ibid., 69–72).

This kind of approach to analyzing film, though ostensibly “radical” in its political implications, is in fact anything but. As I shall argue in the next section, cultural studies — no less than critical theory — rests on certain presuppositions which have been severely challenged by various theorists. Michel Foucault, in particular, has demonstrated the extent to which we can move beyond linguistic

indeterminacy by providing archeological and genealogical analyses of the *formation* of meaning-producing structures. Such structures, he argues, do not emerge in a vacuum but are produced by historically-situated relations of power. Moreover, power produces the very subjects who alternately affect and are affected by these structures, a notion which undermines the concept of producer/consumer “agency” upon which much of critical theory and cultural studies relies. Though power relations have the *potential* to be liberating rather than oppressive, such a consequence is not brought about by consumer agency so much as by *other* power relations which, following Gilles Deleuze, elude and “deterritorialize” oppressive capture mechanisms. As I shall argue, the contemporary cinematic apparatus is without a doubt a form of the latter, but this does not mean that cinema as such is incapable of escaping along liberatory lines of flight.

## II. Foucault and Film Theory

Tidy generalizations about Foucault are neither easy nor particularly worthwhile to make. Yet if there is a single pithy aphorism that captures the spirit of his project, it is Bacon’s “*Ipsa scientia potestas est*” — knowledge itself is power. Foucault’s perspective is of course very different from — indeed, in radical opposition to — the proto-Enlightenment scientism of Bacon, for whom knowledge is always *power to do*. As we shall see, knowledge for Foucault is rather *power to say*, on the one hand, and *power to be said*, on the other. This distinction underlies the metaphilosophical character of Foucault’s analysis, which repudiates the notion of transcendent “Knowledge” and instead focuses on the complex power relations which make possible, give rise to, and shape the very idea of knowledge(s).

For Foucault, all statements belong to a particular *discourse*, which is the set of all possible statements that can be articulated about a particular topic within a particular historical period (Foucault, 1994: 79, 158). Discourse defines the boundaries surrounding what can and cannot be *said*, and to this extent shapes or constructs what can be *known*, i.e., the object of knowledge itself. Foucault’s early works are principally concerned with the conditions of possibility (“historical *a priori*s”) that must be in place in order for certain statements (again, that which can be said) to actually emerge within a given

discourse (ibid., 86–92).<sup>6</sup> They are also concerned with demarcating and analyzing *discursive formations* — the historical ruptures and discontinuities whereby new forms of discourse appear and supplant older forms of discourse (Foucault, 1972: esp. Part II, chapter 2). Foucault refers to this mode of analysis as “archeology” (Foucault, 1994: xxii).

The point of the archeological method is “to grasp the statement in the narrowness and singularity of its event; to determine the conditions of existence, to fix its limits as accurately as possible, to establish its correlations with other statements with which it may be linked, and to show what other forms of articulation it excludes” (Foucault, 2003: 401). For Foucault, knowledge is not a *thing* (e.g., a particular mental state) but rather a *relation* between statements within a particular discourse — specifically, the relation of what can be spoken or thought to that which cannot.

Foucault’s major works in the early period involve the application of the archeological method to a particular discourse. In *Madness and Civilization*, for example, he analyzes the discourse of madness *vis-à-vis* various historical institutions: the workhouse, the hospital, the asylum, etc (1965). The appearance of a new discursive formation (e.g., the discourse of madness or insanity) gives rise to a new institutional form (e.g., the asylum), a new knowledge form (e.g., psychiatry) and a new object of knowledge (e.g., the insane). By reflecting on the conditions of possibility which were necessary in order for particular institutional forms to emerge, Foucault uncovers a new form of discursive knowledge that has been constructed in history.

The early works seek to describe particular discursive formations (through “archeology”) but not to *explain* how and why they came about. Beginning with *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault turns his attention to analyses of how power relations produce knowledge within particular discursive formations (a method that he calls “genealogy”) (Foucault, 1995). To this end, he moves beyond discursive formations to a consideration of other forms of knowledge that are formed and constituted by power — viz., non- discursive formations

<sup>6</sup> For example, statements about airplanes could not be uttered in the Middle Ages because the historical *a priori* condition necessary for the production, transmission, and intelligibility of such statements within discourse (viz., the actual existence of airplanes) was not yet satisfied.

and the formation of subjects. Non-discursive formations are practices through which power is manifested in particular forms (e.g., the prison, the asylum, the hospital, etc). Subjects (e.g., prisoners, madmen, patients, etc) in turn, are created through the process of being acted upon by non-discursive practices.

For Foucault, power is not and cannot be centralized in the form of a single coercive apparatus such as “capitalism.” It exists not only at the macro-level of society (e.g., in ideologies, governments, etc.) but also at the micro-level of subjects (as in disciplinary power) (ibid., 135–69). The invisible surveillance of the Panopticon reveals a form of power that is dynamic, ubiquitous, and diffuse (ibid., 195–228). It operates only in the relations of those to whom it applies. It can be exerted on individual bodies (anatomo-power) or entire populations (bio-power) (Foucault, 1990: 140). It is not an absolute force but rather a relationship that exists *between* forces — a set of actions or forces exerted upon other actions or forces, or upon subjects (2003: 137). It is the capacity to act upon *and* to be acted upon, thus is not only repressive but productive as well.

When Foucault says that power “opens possibilities,” he is referring specifically to the capacity of power to bring about new discursive and non-discursive formations and hence to produce new forms of knowledge. Because power is a mode of reciprocal affectivity, however, it not only produces knowledge but is *produced* by knowledge in turn. The range of possible statements circumscribed by a particular discursive formation is shaped by power relations, but the visible manifestation of power relations (for example, at the level of practices and the forms these practices take in institutions) is in turn shaped by what can be said.

How does this reciprocal shaping take place? In the first instance, we recall that power makes actions possible and is made possible by them in turn. This is because all actions, once actualized by power, are related to other actions (hence other possible modalities of power). But to say, speak, utter, write, or communicate in any way is to perform a certain kind of action — namely, the action of producing statements within a particular discourse. Knowledge, then, is essentially the *power* to produce statements which are in turn capable of being related to other statements within a particular discourse. Truth for Foucault is simply the mechanism whereby this power is exercised:

‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements [...] Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and authorities that enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault, 2003: 316–17).

In *Discipline and Punish*, as in the earlier archeological works, Foucault analyzes discursive formations surrounding the institutions of discipline and punishment. The change comes in his extending this analysis to non-discursive formations (practices) and, most importantly, to the power relations which give rise to both discursive and non-discursive formations. Thus, for example, Foucault discusses the non-discursive formation of punishment actualized in the institution of the prison.

Power relations, then, produce non-discursive formations at the level of practice (e.g., punishment) which are in turn made visible in institutions (e.g., the prison). Moreover, these practices produce new forms of knowledge (e.g., criminology) which in turn produce new objects of knowledge at the level of the subject (e.g., the criminal type). This reveals another of Foucault’s essential insights: that subjects are produced and shaped by power relations vis-à-vis becoming objects of discourse (e.g., study, inquiry, analysis, classification, etc) and practices (e.g., work, education, discipline, consumption, etc). To paraphrase W.V. Quine (and turn him on his head), to be is to be the object of a praxis and the subject of a theory. My subjectivity is exhausted by the power exerted on me by others and the world and the power which I exert in turn.

A radical consequence of this view is that subjects, strictly speaking, are not ontologically basic in the way they are for, say, Sartre. This does not mean that individual subjectivities do not exist for Foucault — they do. His point is that there is no preexistent human nature or essence which provides the ontological foundation of subjectivity. The body alone is basic; and bodies are constantly being created and re-created as subjects both by affecting other bodies and by being so affected. Capitalist power, for example, is manifested in practice at the level of institutions (e.g., shopping malls) and exerted



upon bodies. This relation between the body and power gives rise to particular forms of subjectivity — viz., that of the consumer (whose body is affected by power) and, for example, the culture industry (which affects the bodies of others through power).

From a Foucauldian perspective, cinema is both a discursive and non-discursive formation: a mode of knowledge manifested concretely at the level of individual films *and* a mode of power manifested concretely at the level of the film industry. The reciprocal relation between films and the film industry, in turn, produces a particular form of subjectivity — that of the viewer or spectator. Against both critical theory and cultural studies, Foucault would claim that the relation between films and spectators is neither wholly passive nor wholly active. The meaning of a particular film may be assigned to it by a particular spectator, but the spectator *qua* spectator is produced in turn by his or her viewing of the film. Moreover, the range of meanings ascribable to a film and the corresponding modes of spectatorship they produce are bounded by conditions of possibility — to wit, the complex network of discursive and non-discursive formations which produce both films and spectators.

All of this is by way of saying that: (a) cinema *as such* is not reducible either to its formal (i.e., discursive) or politico-economic (i.e., non — discursive) components; rather, both components produce and shape each other reciprocally; (b) the meaning of cinema is not reducible either to the production or consumption of cinematic objects; rather, meaning both creates and is created by viewer-subjects; (c) the particular forms which films take, the particular meanings which are assigned to them, and the particular modes of spectatorship which assign said meanings are mutually irreducible; all are produced by a complex network of power relations. To this we must add (d) that the power relations which give rise to cinema *qua* cinema are neither repressive nor liberatory *in and of themselves*. The extent to which cinema may be regarded as one or the other depends entirely on the political and socio-economic relations which affect and are affected by it.

As the history of cinema makes plain, there is no way to disentangle film from capitalism. On the one hand, Western capitalism gave rise to industrial technology, the market economy, the tri-partite class system, etc., all of which are conditions of possibility for the emergence of cinema. On the other hand, the proliferation of cinema as a modern medium of communication contributed to the transformation of capitalism (i.e., from industrial capitalism to multinational

consumer capitalism). It is therefore wrong to claim that cinema began as a “pure” art-form or “neutral” communication technology which was subsequently appropriated by the bourgeois culture industry for its own ends. Rather, the emergence of the culture industry is coextensive with the emergence of cinema and other modern art-forms/media.

In many respects cinema is more complicated medium than literature, say, because it relies upon a much wider range of communicative mechanisms (e.g., images, music, etc.). To this extent, it is difficult if not impossible (*pace* deconstructionist theory) to regard cinema as a special instance of written textuality, which in turn necessitates the use of altogether different (though not entirely unrelated) strategies in interpreting and analyzing films. For Derrida, again, written textuality is simultaneously dynamic and static. On the one hand, it is constituted by language, which for Derrida remains in a constant state of indeterminacy and play. To this extent written texts are dynamic; they “move.” On the other hand, they are static. A literary work, for example, is constrained by the boundaries of its *ipseity*, its physical “thinghood.” Neither the medium itself, nor the printed words that constitute it, are capable of actual motion in anything but trivial or metaphorical senses. This static dimension places the reader in a unique temporal and epistemological relation to written texts which does not necessarily apply to other media such as film.

At the same time, films are *interpretable*. That is, the viewer can and does attribute *meaning(s)* to films that necessarily contain conceptual — hence linguistic — content. These meaning(s), in turn, are subject to the same instability and indeterminacy that alternately plagues and liberates language generally. If language is truly the horizon of thought, there is no way to separate the visual and aural components of film from its more straightforwardly textual components (e.g., spoken dialogue). All such components, whether considered individually or jointly, are always and already conditioned by the operation of language.

Again, this is not to say that cinema is somehow reducible to written textuality. Films, after all, are characterized in part by a *literal* dynamism that goes beyond their latent linguistic content. Among other things, they contain images and sounds that move in space and time, and this, in turn, produces movement and change in the perception of the viewer. Films include a static component that mirrors that of literary works insofar as they are produced via physical

processes and displayed via physical media. But to state the obvious, one cannot view a movie merely by *looking* at a VHS cassette, a DVD, a film reel, or any other thing-in-the-world. The same is not true of a literary work, which exhibits a one-to-one correspondence between text and medium. To read one must have reliable vision and reliable cognitive faculties (viz., the various faculties associated with literacy). No further mediation is required. A film, on the other hand, must be *projected*, not only in the literal sense of being displayed via appropriate technology, but also in the sense of being foisted upon the world of ordinary sense perception. Put another way, the *content* of a film, as opposed to its medium, cannot be experienced as *immediately* as the content of a written text. Projection, therefore, is a *tertium quid* that is situated between medium and content. And it is precisely projection which makes a film *viewable* and *hearable* as opposed to merely *readable*.

All of this may seem obvious, but its significance should not be overlooked. To interpret a film, one cannot focus on particular images and sounds in isolation — that is, as static entities — nor even on the conceptual relations that exist among said entities. For example, one cannot ascribe meaning to the film by observing a still-frame from one scene and considering its relation to another still-frame. (The same is not true of reading, in which a particular word or phrase can *only* be understood in relation to other words or phrases.) On the contrary, viewing a film requires an analysis of visual, aural, etc. *movements* that affect the senses differentially in space and time. It is the relation of said movements, more so than the discrete images and sounds that comprise them, which encapsulate the meaning(s) of a film.

Visual co-presence of images is not what affects the viewer so much as the dynamic relation of these images in space and time — that is, their *movement* within a scene, coupled with a wide array of other underlying factors (e.g., sound, cinematography, etc) which represent movement *in a particular way*. This movement, moreover, complicates interpretation; the content of images and sounds cannot be understood in themselves precisely because they are physically (and not just conceptually) dynamic, fluid, and unstable. For this reason, films undermine what Derrida calls “the metaphysics of presence” in a much more direct and troubling way than written texts do because they *literally* enact, represent, or perform their own deconstruction. Whereas written text involves relations among concepts, film involves *relations among relations*. (This is in part

what Friedberg means when she refers to films as “virtually mobile”). In sum, we might say that the meaning of a film is twice removed from the conditions of possibility for interpretation, and this is partly what makes film such a complicated medium.

As was made clear in our discussion of Foucault, however, structural and phenomenological features of cinema cannot be divorced from the particular power relations which produce the cinematic form — and vice versa. Moreover, even if the power relations in question can be identified as “oppressive,” this judgment need not carry over to the cinematic form *as such*. (Marx makes a similar point about technology more generally; just because an oppressive mode of production such as capitalism gives rise to industrial technology does not mean that the latter is perforce a vehicle of oppression.) The best we can say, it seems, is that the cinematic form is particularly well-suited *as a medium* to being appropriated and used for oppressive purposes — and this for reasons which both critical theory and cultural studies have noted (e.g., its “virtual mobility,” its mass appeal, etc). The question becomes: how, if at all, is cinema being appropriated and used in the contemporary world, and what does this say about cinema in general?

### III. Toward an Anarchist Film Theory

In his article “What is Anarchist Cultural Studies?” Jesse Cohn argues that anarchist cultural studies (ACS) can be distinguished from critical theory and consumer-agency theory along several trajectories (Cohn, 2009: 403–24). Among other things, he writes, ACS tries “to avoid reducing the politics of popular culture to a simplistic dichotomy of ‘reification’ versus ‘resistance’” (ibid., 412). On the one hand, anarchists have always balked at the pretensions of “high culture” even before these were exposed and demystified by the likes of Bourdieu in his theory of “cultural capital.” On the other hand, we always sought ought and found “spaces of liberty — even momentary, even narrow and compromised — within capitalism and the State” (ibid., 413). At the same time, anarchists have never been content to find “reflections of our desires in the mirror of commercial culture,” nor merely to *assert the possibility* of finding them (ibid.). Democracy, liberation, revolution, etc. are not already present in a culture; they are among many potentialities which must be actualized through active intervention.

If Cohn's general view of ACS is correct, and I think it is, we ought to recognize its significant resonance with the Foucauldian *tertia via* outlined above. When Cohn claims that anarchists are "critical realists and monists, in that we recognize our condition as beings embedded within a single, shared reality" (Cohn, 2009: 413), he acknowledges that power actively affects both internal (subjective) existence as well as external (intersubjective) existence. At the same time, by arguing "that this reality is in a continuous process of change and becoming, and that at any given moment, it includes an infinity — bounded by, situated within, 'anchored' to the concrete actuality of the present — of emergent or potential realities" (ibid.), Cohn denies that power (hence, reality) is a single actuality that transcends, or is simply "given to," whatever it affects or acts upon. On the contrary, power is plural and potential, immanent to whatever it affects because precisely because affected in turn. From the standpoint of ACS and Foucault alike, then, culture is reciprocal and symbiotic — it both produces and is produced by power relations. What implications might this have for contemporary film theory?

At present the global film industry — not to speak of the majority of media — is controlled by six multinational corporate conglomerates: The News Corporation, The Walt Disney Company, Viacom, Time Warner, Sony Corporation of America, and NBC Universal. As of 2005, approximately 85% of box office revenue in the United States was generated by these companies, as compared to a mere 15% by so-called "independent" studios whose films are produced without financing and distribution from major movie studios. Never before has the intimate connection between cinema and capitalism appeared quite as stark.

As Horkheimer and Adorno argued more than fifty years ago, the salient characteristic of "mainstream" Hollywood cinema is its dual role as commodity and ideological mechanism. On the one hand, films not only satisfy but *produce* various consumer desires. On the other hand, this desire-satisfaction mechanism maintains and strengthens capitalist hegemony by manipulating and distracting the masses. In order to fulfill this role, "mainstream" films must adhere to certain conventions at the level of both form and content. With respect to the former, for example, they must evince a simple plot structure, straightforwardly linear narrative, and easily understandable dialogue. With respect to the latter, they must avoid delving deeply into complicated social, moral, and philosophical issues and should not offend widely-held sensibilities (chief among them the

idea that consumer capitalism is an indispensable, if not altogether just, socio-economic system). Far from being arbitrary, these conventions are deliberately chosen and reinforced by the culture industry in order to reach the largest and most diverse audience possible and to maximize the effectiveness of film-as-propaganda.

“Avant garde” or “underground cinema,” in contrast, is marked by its self — conscious attempt to undermine the structures and conventions which have been *imposed* on cinema by the culture industry — for example, by presenting shocking images, employing unusual narrative structures, or presenting unorthodox political, religious, and philosophical viewpoints. The point in so doing is allegedly to “liberate” cinema from its dual role as commodity and ideological machine (either directly, by using film as a form of radical political critique, or indirectly, by attempting to revitalize film as a serious art form).

Despite its merits, this analysis drastically oversimplifies the complexities of modern cinema. In the first place, the dichotomy between “mainstream” and “avant-garde” has never been particularly clear-cut, especially in non-American cinema. Many of the paradigmatic European “art films” enjoyed considerable popularity and large box office revenues within their own markets, which suggests among other things that “mainstream” and “avant garde” are culturally relative categories. So, too, the question of what counts as “mainstream” versus “avant garde” is inextricably bound up in related questions concerning the aesthetic “value” or “merit” of films. To many, “avant garde” film is remarkable chiefly for its artistic excellence, whereas “mainstream” film is little more than mass-produced pap. But who determines the standards for cinematic excellence, and how? As Dudley Andrews notes,

[. . .] [C]ulture is not a single thing but a competition among groups. And, competition is organized through power clusters we can think of as institutions. In our own field certain institutions stand out in marble buildings. The NEH is one; but in a different way, so is Hollywood, or at least the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Standard film critics constitute a sub-group of the communication institution, and film professors make up a parallel group, especially as they collect in conferences and in societies (Andrews, 1985: 55).

Andrews' point here echoes one we made earlier — namely, that film criticism itself is a product of complicated power relations. Theoretical dichotomies such as “mainstream versus avant-garde” or “art versus pap” are manifestations of deeper socio-political conflicts which are subject to analysis in turn.

Even if there is or was such a thing as “avant-garde” cinema, it no longer functions in the way that Horkheimer and Adorno envisaged, if it ever did. As they themselves recognized, one of the most remarkable features of late capitalism is its ability to appropriate and commodify dissent. Friedberg, for example, is right to point out that *flaneurie* began as a transgressive institution which was subsequently captured by the culture industry; but the same is true even of “avant-garde” film — an idea that its champions frequently fail to acknowledge. Through the use of niche marketing and other such mechanisms, the *postmodern* culture industry has not only overcome the “threat” of the avant-garde but transformed that threat into one more commodity to be bought and sold. Media conglomerates make more money by establishing faux “independent” production companies (e.g., Sony Pictures Classics, Fox Searchlight Pictures, etc) and re-marketing “art films” (*ala* the Criterion Collection) than they would by simply ignoring independent, underground, avant-garde, etc. cinema altogether.

All of this is by way of expanding upon an earlier point — namely, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the extent to which particular films or cinematic genres function as instruments of socio-political repression — especially in terms of simple dichotomies such as “mainstream” versus “avant-garde.” In light of our earlier discussion of Foucault, not to speak of Derrida, this ought not to come as a surprise. At the same time, however, we have ample reason to believe that the contemporary film *industry* is without question one of the preeminent mechanisms of global capitalist cultural hegemony. To see why this is the case, we ought briefly to consider some insights from Gilles Deleuze.

There is a clear parallel between Friedberg's mobilized flaneural gaze and what Deleuze calls the “nomadic” — i.e., those social formations which are exterior to repressive modern apparatuses like State and Capital (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 351–423). Like the nomad, the *flaneur* wanders aimlessly and without a predetermined *telos* through the striated space of these apparatuses. Her mobility itself, however, belongs to the sphere of non-territorialized *smooth*

space, unconstrained by regimentation or structure, free-flowing, detached. The desire underlying this mobility is productive; it actively avoids satisfaction and seeks only to proliferate and perpetuate its own movement. Apparatuses of repression, in contrast, operate by striating space and routinizing, regimenting, or otherwise constraining mobile desire. They *must* appropriate the nomadic in order to function *as* apparatuses of repression.

Capitalism, however one understands its relationship to other repressive apparatuses, strives to commodify flaneurial desire, or, what comes to the same, to produce artificial desires which appropriate, capture, and ultimately absorb flaneurial desire (*ibid.*, esp. 424–73). Deleuze would agree with Horkheimer and Adorno that the contemporary film industry serves a dual role as capture mechanism *and* as commodity. It not only functions as an object within capitalist exchange but as an ideological machine that reinforces the production of consumer-subjects. This poses a two-fold threat to freedom, at least as freedom is understood from a Deleuzian perspective: first, it makes nomadic mobility abstract and virtual, trapping it in striated space and marshaling it toward the perpetuation of repressive apparatuses; and second, it replaces the free-flowing desire of the nomadic with social desire — that is, it commodifies desire and appropriates *flaneurie* as a mode of capitalist production.

The crucial difference is that for Deleuze, as for Foucault and ACS, the relation between the nomadic and the social is always and already reciprocal. In one decidedly aphoristic passage, Deleuze claims there are only forces of desire and social forces (Deleuze & Guattari, [1972] 1977: 29). Although he tends to regard desire as a creative force (in the sense that it produces rather than represses its object) and the social as a force which “dams up, channels, and regulates” the flow of desire (*ibid.*, 33), he does not mean to suggest that there are two distinct *kinds* of forces which differentially affect objects exterior to themselves. On the contrary, there is only a single, unitary force which manifests itself in particular “assemblages” (*ibid.*). Each of these assemblages, in turn, contains within itself both desire and various “bureaucratic or fascist pieces” which seek to subjugate and annihilate that desire (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986: 60; Deleuze & Parnet, 1987: 133). Neither force acts or works upon preexistent objects; rather everything that exists is alternately created and/or destroyed in accordance with the particular assemblage which gives rise to it.



There is scarcely any question that the contemporary film industry is subservient to repressive apparatuses such as transnational capital and the government of the United States. The fact that the production of films is overwhelmingly controlled by a handful of media conglomerates, the interests of which are routinely protected by federal institutions at the expense of consumer autonomy, makes this abundantly clear. It also reinforces the naivety of cultural studies, whose valorization of consumer subcultures appears totally impotent in the face of such enormous power. As Richard Hoggart notes,

Studies of this kind habitually ignore or underplay the fact that these groups are almost entirely enclosed from and are refusing even to attempt to cope with the public life of their societies. That rejection cannot reasonably be given some idealistic ideological foundation. It is a rejection, certainly, and in that rejection may be making some implicit criticisms of the 'hegemony,' and those criticisms need to be understood. But such groups are doing nothing about it except to retreat (Hoggart, 1995: 186).

Even if we overlook the Deleuzian/Foucauldian/ACS critique — viz., that cultural studies relies on a theoretically problematic notion of consumer "agency" — such agency appears largely impotent at the level of praxis as well.

Nor is there any question that the global proliferation of Hollywood cinema is part of a broader imperialist movement in geopolitics. Whether consciously or unconsciously, American films reflect and reinforce uniquely capitalist values and to this extent pose a threat to the political, economic, and cultural sovereignty of other nations and peoples. It is for the most part naïve of cultural studies critics to assign "agency" to non-American consumers who are not only saturated with alien commodities but increasingly denied the ability to produce and consume native commodities. At the same time, none of this entails that competing film industries are by definition "liberatory." Global capitalism is not the sole or even the principal locus of repressive power; it is merely one manifestation of such power among many. Ostensibly anti-capitalist or counter-hegemonic movements at the level of culture can and often do become repressive in their own right — as, for example, in the case of nationalist cinemas which advocate terrorism, religious fundamentalism, and the subjugation of women under the banner of "anti-imperialism."

The point here, which reinforces several ideas already introduced, is that neither the American film industry nor film industries as such are intrinsically reducible to a unitary source of repressive power. As a social formation or assemblage, cinema is a product of a complex array of forces. To this extent it always and already contains both potentially liberatory and potentially repressive components. In other words, a genuinely nomadic cinema — one which deterritorializes itself and escapes the overcoding of repressive state apparatuses — is not only possible but in some sense inevitable. Such a cinema, moreover, will emerge neither on the side of the producer nor of the consumer, but rather in the complex interstices that exist between them. I therefore agree with Cohn that anarchist cultural studies (and, by extension, anarchist film theory) has as one of its chief goals the “extrapolation” of latent revolutionary ideas in cultural practices and products (where “extrapolation” is understood in the sense of actively and creatively realizing possibilities rather than simply “discovering” actualities already present) (Cohn, 2009: 412). At the same time, I believe anarchist film theory must play a role in creating a new and distinctively anarchist cinema — “a cinema of liberation.”

Such a cinema would perforce involve alliances between artists and audiences with a mind to blurring such distinctions altogether. It would be the responsibility neither of an elite “avant-garde” which produces underground films, nor of subaltern consumer “cults” which produce fanzines and organize conventions in an attempt to appropriate and “talk back to” mainstream films. As we have seen, apparatuses of repression easily overcode both such strategies. By effectively dismantling rigid distinctions between producers and consumers, its films would be financed, produced, distributed, and displayed by and for their intended audiences. However, far from being a mere reiteration of the independent or DIY ethic — which, again, has been appropriated time and again by the culture industry — anarchist cinema would be self — consciously political at the level of form and content; its medium and message would be unambiguously anti — authoritarian, unequivocally opposed to *all* forms of repressive power.

Lastly, anarchist cinema would retain an emphasis on artistic integrity — the putative value of innovative cinematography, say, or compelling narrative. It would, in other words, seek to preserve and expand upon whatever makes cinema powerful as a medium and as an art-form. This refusal to relegate cinema to either a mere commodity form or a mere vehicle of propaganda is itself an act of refusal

replete with political potential. The ultimate liberation of cinema from the discourse of political struggle is arguably the one cinematic development that would not, and could not, be appropriated and commodified by repressive social formations.

In this essay I have drawn upon the insights of Foucault and Deleuze to sketch an “anarchist” approach to the analysis of film — on which constitutes a middle ground between the “top-down” theories of the Frankfurt School and the “bottom-up” theories of cultural studies. Though I agree with Horkheimer and Adorno that cinema can be used as an instrument of repression, as is undoubtedly the case with the contemporary film industry, I have argued at length that cinema as such is neither inherently repressive nor inherently liberatory. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that the politics of cinema cannot be situated exclusively in the designs of the culture industry nor in the interpretations and responses of consumer-subjects. An anarchist analysis of cinema must emerge precisely where cinema itself does — at the intersection of mutually reinforcing forces of production and consumption.

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# Adrian Blackwell's Anarchitecture: The Anarchist Tension

Allan Antliff\*

## Abstract

Adrian Blackwell has developed the antagonistic aspect of anarchist aesthetics by creating zones of tension enacted in the spaces between art and architecture. The following article is an engagement with and review of his work.

In anarchist political activism, social structures are autonomous from, yet intimately related to, our agency. Society's betterment is conceived as a collective process of self-actualization wherein individual freedom and social freedom are contiguous: anarchism's potential is realized in the social trace of its own immanence. But that trace asserts itself in the face of formidable opposition. Given that existing societies are so antithetical to anarchist values, anarchism necessarily provokes antagonism, conflict, and challenge alongside pre-figurations of freedom as a sensuous reality. These are the politics of artist-architect Adrian Blackwell, who has been active for some time combating the forces of gentrification in Canada's largest city, Toronto. In the course of this struggle, Blackwell has developed the antagonistic aspect of anarchist aesthetics by creating zones of tension enacted in the spaces between art and architecture.

In the first instance, this has been his means of overcoming forces of alienation in the architectural profession. Blackwell argues that

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Public Water Closet, modified portable toilet, 2-way mirror glass (Ottawa and Toronto) 1998, photos: Adrian Blackwell. Copyright Adrian Blackwell.

the production of architecture is “highly mediated [. . .] within the collaborative yet hierarchical structure of a firm” while art is “generated in a context that is proximate to the everyday lives of its



Public Water Closet, modified portable toilet, 2-way mirror glass (Ottawa and Toronto) 1998, photos: Adrian Blackwell. Copyright Adrian Blackwell.

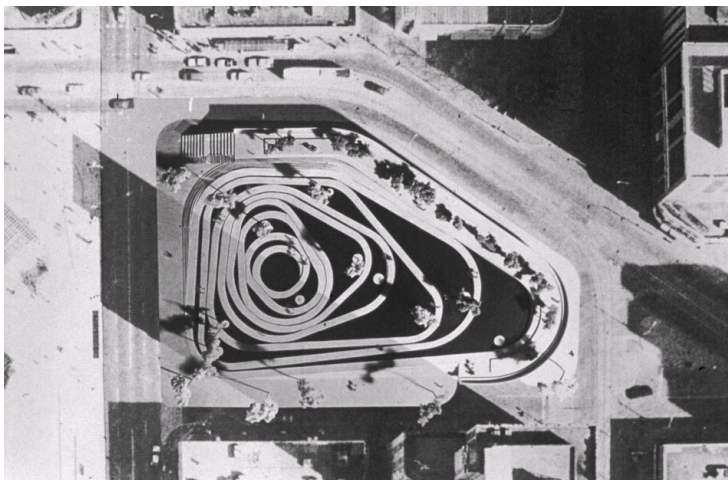
producers” (Blackwell, 2005: 78). Architects build the environments we live in, but the creative freedom of the architect is systemically constrained. How, then, can one radicalize the social potential of architecture? Blackwell’s solution has been to incorporate architectural concerns into art-making, prefiguring anarchic social relationships in the guise of art that takes aim at the popular culture of

capitalist gentrification and the social relations marked out in the urban spaces it creates (*ibid.*).

What is the popular perception of gentrification in Canada and the United States? The term was first coined by British sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964 to describe the transformation of a neighbourhood shaped by a less well-off class to suit another more affluent one. For Glass, gentrification was a predatory social process with a multitude of negative impacts, however, as the decades passed it began to lose its critical bite, at least in North America. Here, where the institution of private property is routinely treated as the structural foundation of civic development, gentrification was naturalized as a positive, politically neutral process of urban revitalization that removes “the stain of poverty” while physically improving the cityscape (Blackwell, 2006: 30). In his political study of the contemporary urban public sphere, American social theorist Jeff Ferrell has pinpointed the rhetorical features of civic uplift through gentrification as deployed by developers, civic officials, and law enforcement. Gentrification cleans up “‘quality of life’ crimes” and solves the unpleasantness of poverty and homelessness by forcing the poor to leave. Out of sight, out of mind, so to speak (Ferrell, 2001: 15).

In late September 1998, after considerable negotiations with city administrators and local businesses, Blackwell installed a portable toilet near the corner of Queen and Spadina in Toronto’s downtown (Blackwell, 2004: 306). The installation was pitched as part of an off-site exhibition organized by an artist-run gallery and Blackwell committed himself to servicing and cleaning the toilet for a month. Prior to installation, he modified the toilet by replacing the door with a two-way mirror. The mirror allowed the casual round of toilet users to watch the street, creating possibilities for play and voyeurism.

At the time the Conservative government of Ontario had passed a “Safe Streets Act” empowering police to criminalize the survival strategies of homeless people. Gentrification was intensifying under the auspices of Toronto’s city hall, which was promoting condominium development in the downtown core. As part of the effort, Toronto police were given increased funding for overtime and a mandate to clear the homeless from public areas (*ibid.*). Government and private developers found common cause in the popularization of a familiar gentrification equation: poor people = danger. Blackwell installed his toilet adjacent to a busy corner where street people



### a public square is a political space

As Toronto proposes to renovate Yonge Street, we have to consider the role of Dundas Square in the public life of the city. What is an urban square? What is its function? In the context of this development which cuts out the center of the city only to replace the existing fabric with entertainment complexes, what do we as citizens receive in return? This is an unusual opportunity to conceive of public space as something which encourages debate, both as it is argued and as it is lived out.

A political space is free from private or state intervention, empty in the sense that it is not ideologically determined. It is for this reason that the square cannot be sympathetic with the context as planned. The corporations which will surround it are pure ideology, their function in the public life of the city is manipulative. Toronto's planning policy promotes the domination of the square by advertising as an expression of urban vitality, demonstrating its hostility to the real function of democratic space.

A democratic space is empty so that people can fill it.

1. It must be an open space encouraging use by anyone who chooses to enter, no matter their identity. Structured non-coercively, it should allow for many entrances and multiple locations of inhabitation with varying qualities. This square would be porous.
2. It should provide place for conversation and interaction at multiple scales, from an intimate discussion to a large demonstration. For these conversations to succeed, each person present must hear and see each of the others. This space would be focused, like a theatre in the round.

Dundas square should be a giant ear, open yet acoustically centered and protected.

Dundas square is a proposal for a new public square in downtown Toronto. It responds aggressively to the authoritarian conceptions of civic space imagined by Toronto's planners and politicians, but it tries to do so while proposing a reasonable solution to the technical demands of the competition.

Dundas Square unofficial competition entry, 3 posters, 24" x 36" each (Toronto) 1998, drawings: Adrian Blackwell. Copyright Adrian Blackwell.

cleaned car windows for money. Local businesses had been agitating for the corner to be cleared, and one of their strategies was to deny access to washrooms.



### **a public square is a space of conflict**

Public space is not the expression of a community's interests, it is an opening that allows different communities and individuals a free space of interaction. This communication is inevitably about conflicting values. Dundas Square is being created through battle between the city's aspiration to compete globally and the existing local context. The development emulates New York's Times Square in order to increase the city's touristic capital. While Toronto's government cherishes the new Times Square strategy where corporate interests have pushed aside smaller businesses to create a mono-culture.

This is the first major downtown development in the Mega-city. It challenges us to consider whether we understand this new place as monolithic or complex. The debate around amalgamation highlights this choice. Citizens in all municipalities organized to express their anger at the centralization of their municipal governments. An overwhelming majority of citizens voted against amalgamation, each municipality considering its autonomy valuable, fearing that in a larger city, dissenting opinion would be harder to protect. In disregarding the views of those affected, the province has called into question the possibility of democratic space. Dundas Square reposes this query. Will we validate the claims of a patronizing government by creating a passive surface which supports the consumption around it, or can we make a space which refuses to surrender the diversity and friction which democracy requires?

Dundas Square must be considered a defensible space in the face of the spectacle which forms its borders, just open enough to facilitate the escape of its inhabitants when their freedom of action exceeds the limits of the state.

Dundas Square unofficial competition entry, 3 posters, 24" x 36" each (Toronto) 1998, drawings: Adrian Blackwell. Copyright Adrian Blackwell.

This was an intervention on the side of the window cleaners, providing a much needed public service to those being discriminated against. In the process, systemic segregation along class lines and the imposition of proprietor rights on the public sphere was successfully disrupted. Use of the toilet also provided respite from intensified police surveillance mandated by the Ontario government and Toronto city council "in the name of the public good" (ibid., 307). In effect,





Architects invited Blackwell to help develop a proposal, but he pulled out once he realized their plans were at odds with his own. The firm went on to win a place in the competition, and eventually secured the commission, giving us the square as it exists today (Blackwell, 2008: 86). The square was a classic exercise in gentrification, promoted as a festive, business-friendly space, tightly-managed and packaged for rental purposes. Accordingly, Brown and Storey designed a square that serves the needs of commerce. A prominent electronic billboard bombarded the public with advertizing and architectural features were introduced to channel traffic flow between shopping destinations. The plaza was conceived as a stage for corporate-backed promotional events, replete with water jets for crowd management.

Blackwell walked away from the privatization of Dundas Square, but he refused to abandon the public space being colonized. Instead, he created his own alternative design, which he presented at a public event celebrating the competition's winning entries. The proposal was inspired by the spaces of civic discourse in ancient Greece — the market place, called the agora, and the focused amphitheater (Blackwell, 2003b: 308).

It took the form of a spiralling platform that gently descends towards a large open area in the centre. A balcony and bleachers provide alternative ways to experience the space which can be entered from multiple directions. The aesthetics are porous, open to the whims of the public (Blackwell, 2008: 86). Following the privatizing logic of gentrification, the planning commission's square was intended to mirror the commercial vocabulary of its surroundings; and this is precisely what Blackwell rejected. In accord with the anarchist insight that diversity, disorder and unpredictability are inescapable facets of social freedom, his square is free of any ideological manipulation, notably the advertising tower that figured so prominently in the winning plan. Blackwell's proposal fostered antagonism between a space for discussion and debate and the commercialized environment surrounding it. The design welcomed demonstrations and other manifestations of political conflict because it refused to impose a hegemonic notion of community on civic life. Accommodating "the diversity and friction which democracy requires" the proposal encouraged "freedom of action" that exceeds any boundaries set down by civic or state authorities (Blackwell, 1998a). Anarchy was flagrantly and overtly celebrated. "Playing with fire, eating outside, telling a lie, kissing on concrete, walking a line, fighting the

power, loving a stranger" — in a civic space autonomous from regulation, the possibilities could and should be endless (Blackwell, 1998b). Blackwell exposed the Dundas Square competition as a gentrifying exercise intent on commercializing the public sphere and managing it.

Occasionally, life imitates art. In 2008, the city employee in charge of Dundas Square's development was appointed Toronto Chief Planner. Meeting with a newspaper reporter for a photo op, he was chased off his own square by an "events manager" who brought along a security guard. They were told that "doing anything on the square" required a permit. A pizza company was setting up to hand out free slices, so they had to move on. Civic rhetoric aside, the reporter concluded, "what we have [at Dundas and Young] is a private square run by a board of management that rents it for corporate events" (Anonymous, 2009).

In the wake of his Dundas Square intervention, Blackwell decided to distill his proposal's anarchic features in ideal form, as a sculpture designed for public use. *Model for a Public Space* was completed in 1999 and has been exhibited in a number of galleries and outdoor civic settings. The model is composed of concentric bleachers about twenty-five feet in diameter. The ring starts at ground level and rises to a height of seven feet before spiralling gradually downward into the centre. This sculpture was inspired by anarchist decision-making processes in which participants form a circle so as to engage with each other face to face. The model is designed to accommodate a larger group of people than a standard circle. Variations in elevation create conditions for playing with the dynamics of implied hierarchies that offset each other. Power relations are symbolically situated and made fluid in the process. Who is more commanding, a person closer to the centre or a person higher up on the periphery? (Blackwell, 2008: 87).

In 2000, in the midst of Toronto's development frenzy, Blackwell exhibited *Model for a Public Space* at the Lisgar Street location of Mercer Union, one of the city's oldest artist-run galleries (est., 1979). Buildings in the area were being converted at a rapid pace into condominiums and upscale locations for high tech companies. Around the corner from the gallery, real estate developers had set up show rooms and stage apartments to lure buyers. While *Model for a Public Space* was on exhibit, Blackwell organized several open forums in which local residents discussed the social problems arising from gentrification and the lack of affordable housing in the immediate





1.



2.

This project is derived formally from the project for Dundas Square, but it responds to my experience with non-hierarchical meeting forms at the Toronto's Anarchist Free School. In these classes and organizational meetings ideas are discussed, and decisions are made by consensus, by a group of people sitting, and talking in a circle.

Model for a Public Space, plywood construction (Architecture Gallery at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg and Mercer Union, Toronto) 2000. Copyright Adrian Blackwell. Photo 1: Rafael Gomez-Moriana, Photo 2: Mercer Union.

neighbourhood (Osborne, 2000: 26–7). A social sculpture of antagonism and agitation pitted the civic freedoms of artists, wage earners, and people on welfare against capitalized urbanism for the affluent.

Blackwell himself was homeless when he installed *Model for a Public Space*. He had been living in a former factory located at 9 Hanna Avenue in which occupants built their own studio units, complete with plumbing and other amenities. A Fiber-Optics company had bought the building site and on March 31<sup>st</sup>, the occupants were given 30 days notice to get out.

9 Hanna was more than a home. The makeshift interior included an immense central area that had been used for a host of activist projects over the years, including banner-making. The studios housed many artists, and the creative work that had gone into them was extensive. “What I loved about 9 Hanna,” Blackwell recalls, “is that you could make things in it. It had two features that made it ideal: affordable, well-lit [studio] units and large open spaces inside the building where it was possible to make a mess and build larger things. It was a functional utopian space” (2005: 88).<sup>1</sup> The building was political and it was social. It was functional and it was unique. It deserved to be commemorated.

With eviction pending, Blackwell documented thirteen artists’ studios using a pinhole camera. Each photograph in the series, titled *Evicted May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000 9 Hanna*, records the individualized features of these spaces. The units had been built and adapted to suit the needs of those who lived and worked in them. No studio was exactly the same as the next and they varied in size according to the amount of floor space occupied. Blackwell has argued such “ideal generic spaces” are antithetical to the money-making conceptions of condo developers, who destroy the possibility of “autonomous creative production” every time they shut down a low-rent building to make way for upscale lifestyle living (ibid., 88–9). His series reclaims the activism of these spaces, where modes of living were freely configured to serve the desires of the inhabitants. These open architectural creations, photographically aestheticized, project an anarchic oppositional power, a threat by example that could not be

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<sup>1</sup> He continues, “By contrast, the condominium loft is primarily concerned with consumption. It short-circuits all the productive possibilities embedded in the studio. For that reason I see the condo craze in Toronto and the gentrification of low rent studio buildings as an attack on the possibility of producing a world of autonomous creative producers.”



These four images are part of a series documenting workspaces in a former munitions plant. These spaces were cheap to rent and easily adaptable. Each photo illustrates a space in which everyday life and creative practice are organically integrated.

Evicted May 1, 2000 (9 Hanna Ave.), 13 colour pinhole photos, 20x24" and 24" x 30", 2001, photos: Adrian Blackwell. Copyright Adrian Blackwell. Photo 1 — Gordon Anderson's Space

left alone, targeted and *Evicted* by the economics of capitalism. The radically reflexive art of Blackwell attacks, in the first instance, forces that undermine the possibility of a better, more humane world. His work configures anarchist aesthetics as an exercise in immanence by appealing to us as potential accomplices in the social tensions that anarchy in art cultivates through its refusal to closet itself within the



Evicted May 1, 2000 (9 Hanna Ave.), 13 colour pinhole photos, 20x24" and 24" x 30", 2001, photos: Adrian Blackwell. Copyright Adrian Blackwell. Photo 2 — Adrian Blackwell's Space

confines of capitalism's cultural institutions. This aesthetic of tension is constantly searching for avenues that break out of alienation, transparencies that bridge the gap between artist and audience, ruptures that draw us into contested social ground, where we discover our own freedom.



Evicted May 1, 2000 (9 Hanna Ave.), 13 colour pinhole photos, 20x24" and 24" x 30", 2001, photos: Adrian Blackwell. Copyright Adrian Blackwell. Photo 3 — Peter Bowyer's Space



Evicted May 1, 2000 (9 Hanna Ave.), 13 colour pinhole photos, 20x24" and 24" x 30", 2001, photos: Adrian Blackwell. Copyright Adrian Blackwell. Photo 4 — Darren O'Donnel's Space

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# Deny Anarchic Spaces and Places: An Anarchist Critique of Mosaic-Statist Metageography

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## Abstract

This article explores how anarchic/anarchist spaces/places are denied/rejected. This rejection is due to, first, an ideological rejection of anarchism and, second, a metageographical impossibility. With regards to this second rejection, it is shown that the current hegemonic conception of metageography, the so-called mosaic-statist metageography (whereby space is divided into territorial units; whereby territorial units are hierarchically ordered; etc.) is related to issues of power and domination. Metageography (which is a set of geographical structures and frameworks through which space is conceived) must be reconstructed according to anarchist principles that make anarchic space once again conceivable while simultaneously criticizing all spaces of domination.

## Introduction

Anarchic/ist experiences and projects have always had a remarkable territorial dimension and this is beginning to be widely recognized (or conceived). The territorial dimension not only refers to

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geographical localization but also to the capacity and potential to construct “spaces” and “places”, outside of dominion relations space (like statist space), based on egalitarian and anti-authoritarian relations, non-hierarchical social practices, collective and individual autonomy, cooperative structures, etc. So anarchic/ist spaces and places can be defined as the (constructed) territories based on and due to anarchist principles and peoples, much like stateless peoples spaces, libertarian communities, social centres, *municipios libres*, Spanish Revolution collectivizations, Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZs), *situations construites*, parties, revolts, etc., everywhere and anytime. These are the “anarcho-territories” as *Anarco-Territoris* (a journal of anarchist territorial thought) has named them. In this sense, *anarchy* and *anarchism* have a broader vision than the more traditional, common and restricted sense, proposed by some anarchist scholars (Shukaitis, 2009; Rebollo et al., 2009).

For many people (perhaps excluding anarchists) anarchic/ist spaces and places do not fit within the current hegemonic geographical structures and frameworks (in a World ordered by States and capitalism), that we call the mosaic-statist metageography. As a result, anarchic/ist spaces and places are not understood, much less conceived. The mosaic-statist metageography (produced and imposed by States and their apparatuses and allies including government, school, mass media, etc.) has hindered the conception and visualization of anarchic places since XIXth. But today a new metageography is in development.

Despite the ideologies of geographical frameworks (used everyday from the most common conversations to political and scientific speeches and concepts), metageography has been paid little attention from within the distinctive anarchist perspective. Nevertheless some anarchists are concerned with this question. The Turkish post-anarchists Evren & Ögdül (2002) and Evren (2006) have argued that there is a relationship between mosaic-statist metageography, euro-centrism, capitalism and globalization.

### Metageography: Making Space Conceivable

Before characterizing the mosaic-statist metageography it is necessary to define the very concept of “metageography”. There are very few different meanings in academic literature. Here I adopt the definition provided by Lewis & Wigen (1997) and Taylor (2003), and

Raffestin (1978, 1983). Metageography describes the internally consistent set of spatial structures or conceptual frameworks through which individuals and groups conceive, order, and interpret space and/or the spatial dimension of the world, the cosmos and/or the universe. Some examples of spatial structures or frameworks include the following concepts: "region," "country," "continent," "culture," "climate" or "eco-region"; the dualistic division between rural and urban spaces; the cardinal points (North, South, West and East). It is important to think these concepts through with all of the ideas and values that are often associated with them because they set political priorities which concern real and imaginary space. In this sense, Toldrà (2010) has explained how Catholic Heaven and Hell were constructed in the Middle Ages: both of them were a perfect copy of feudal territorial and social organization.

Historically, the first metageographies were developed at the precise moment that Humans became conscious of the world around them and of themselves as beings within it. This was when the world became conceptualized and communicated through any kind of language (a set and system of signs and symbols). Concepts such as "space," "world," or "universe," among others, have been nothing more than metageographical frameworks through which *space* as a real object has been conceived. For instance, in the Modern European worldview "space" is understood as an unlimited, continuous and three-dimensional environment that contains physical objects.

Metageography allows us to think and talk about space and spatial relationships and, in turn, it allows us to produce advancements in geographical knowledge. However this possibility is limited. Metageography also fixes the conceptual and mental limits in which *the world* and the terms through which to think about it are possible. It "tells us" what spatial processes or elements we must observe, as well as the way in which these processes and elements must be observed and ordered. In short, metageographical structures impose an *in* and an *out* which it makes possible within established terms and disables anything which goes beyond its limits. In other words, it disables other possible metageographies.

In another sense metageography is both (a) an instrument (or a means) through which to develop goals and actions, and (b) an environment in which to develop them.

### 1. *Metagraphy (Instrument): Functions*

As an instrument, the basic metageographical function is to conceive of the space and the spatial relationships that exist between humans and other elements contained in space. From this point of view other specific functions can be defined:

- To orient space: to place reference points, cardinal points, etc.
- To understand space: to explain spatial phenomena and elements (particularly physical, meteorological, seismic, forms of relief, vegetation, etc); to predict spatial phenomena.
- To order space: to classify and structure hierarchical spaces and places.
- To interpret space: to provide ethical, economic, symbolic, etc., values to space and/or to its elements.
- To communicate in and about space: to give place names (*toponyms*).
- To identify: to associate identities with places.
- To measure space: to count space and spatial elements.
- To dominate and control space: to manage space (human and physical elements), to exploit its resources.

### 2. *Metageography (Environment): Components*

As an environment, a metageography has three components:

- Pattern: corresponds to the territorial model through which space and spatial relationships (between actors and spatial el-

ements) are ordered. To make an architectural simile, pattern is like a building.

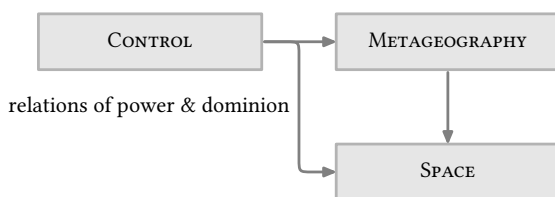
- Content: corresponds to the characteristics that define space, events and spatial elements and actors. To make an architectural simile, content is what is put inside a building.
- Meaning: corresponds to the interests, ethical, aesthetic, emotion values, prejudices, etc., that are loaded into pattern and content components (or into the building and its content).

### **Metageography and Power & Dominion: The Mosaic-Statist Metageography**

There is an important relationship between metageography and power (& dominion), as is demonstrated by metageographical functions (metageography as an instrument). A metageography is never neutral, especially in a socio-spatial context of dominion relations. First of all, it is a social construction (not natural) developed by a particular social group. This group is socially, ideologically and geographically located and imposes its conceptions on other individuals and collectives. As a consequence, its production and reproduction reflects the interests and meanings of that specific territorial actor.

Paraphrasing George Orwell's "He who controls the past controls the future" (1984), it can be said that the group who controls metageography (and its construction) controls the territory (with a hegemonic desire and with imposed terms) (Figure 1). This is the case for metageographies constructed by groups that hold dominion of any kind (including political, economical, and religious, among others). These various constructions tend to converge into a single internally consistent metageography while legitimizing the power relationships established by associated groups. Groups are granted the appearance of naturalness, inevitability, ahistoricity, and/or scientism.

The majority of pre-modern societies (prior to the fifteenth century) have built *states* (such as Aztec, Inca, Egyptian, Chinese, Greek, Roman, etc.), in this respect they have developed similar metageographical structures. Despite the cultural, social or environmental differences, all of these societies have in common their sedentariness



**Figure 1** *The Relationship between Control and Metageography*

*Source: Own Elaboration*

(based on agriculture and urban development) and a clear hierarchical social division. The Neolithic and Urban revolutions had an enormous impact on metageographical construction. In fact, their metageography covered all functions from spatial orientation to the dominion, control and exploitation of *their* territory and the spaces beyond. Similarly, almost every such society has had a “tendency [...] to situate themselves at the centre of their worlds, to exaggerate the extent of their territorial control, and at the same time to envisage one or more zones beyond” (Raaflaub and Talbert, 2010: 4). The metageographical similarities all revolve especially around the pattern component, and can be classified as a “mosaic metageography”: ethnocentrism (creating an “us” located in the centre of the world and a “them” in the periphery) and polygonism (creating territorial units delimited, defined, and hierarchically ordered).

Although the current mosaic metageography is hegemonic in modern European society (inherited from Greek, Roman and Christian metageographical structures), there are some differences (in the content and meaning) (Lewis and Wigen, 1997). Recently, it has been exported and imposed globally through colonialism, imperialism and globalization (Evren and Ögdül, 2002). This type of metageography changed significantly since the sixteenth century and has been especially intense in the nineteenth century (that is, during the Modern world-system as Immanuel Wallerstein called it): it has been combined with statist and capitalist ideology, giving rise to what can be called the “mosaic-statist metageography” (Taylor, 2003). This is the hegemonic metageographical structure in the Europeanized world today.

Within the polygonal component, mosaic-statist metageography orders geographical space through parcels, as if it were a mosaic or a

puzzle where every piece is an independent entity continuous to the others. Overlapping spaces, spaces without description, void spaces or intermediate spaces are aberrations.

Statist ideology conceives the “state” as the only sovereign entity over a delimited territory. The result is the rise of fractional divisions of the world into clearly demarcated and contiguous pieces, such as states, regions, languages, cultures, ecosystems, etc. Every piece is endowed with unique characteristics. The mosaic-statist metageography has also been combined with other ideas such as eurocentrism and European universalism (i.e., putting Europe, European society, and its values at the centre and on a higher hierarchical position), economism and capitalism (i.e., to assign primary importance to economic relations and the dominion of capitalist economy), scientism (i.e., the dominion of physical and biological sciences in the development of spatial metaphors), or the idea of historical progression (i.e., linear and rising evolution of History). As a result of the various combinations, mosaic-statist metageography can be characterized as follows:

- a. Space is ordered as a mosaic (or a puzzle), where every piece is an independent entity continuous to others.
- b. Territorial delimitation is essential.
- c. Any place must be assigned to one territorial unit; therefore, empty spaces (of state power, capital, etc), multiple assignments, overlaps and crosscuts must be removed. Everything must be mapped, named and controlled.
- d. There is a territorial sovereignty within an area, as well as a main characteristic, homogeneity or essence (like a State is the only sovereign entity over a territory).
- e. Territorial units and phenomena are hierarchically ordered, according to the concentration of power and values associated with everyone.
- f. All of the above considerations and their consequences are assumed and supposed to be normal or natural and, therefore, inevitable (whether created by Gods or Nature, and religiously or scientifically demonstrable).

Finally, the production and reproduction of that metageography is accompanied by two more processes (in fact, these are common in other metageographical constructions): naming and graphically representing the space. Through these actions space is provided with names (toponyms and taxons) and images (maps). Both are symbols. Vision and verbalization have a preponderant role (above other senses and forms of expression) in mosaic-statist metageography, unlike other possible metageographies. Their dominance is based on the presumption of an objectivity in which one believes oneself to be able to view and word. In this sense cartography and language (the set formed with maps, place names, scales, orientations and projections) act as a mechanism and metaphor: to name and draw a space is to convert nothing into a metageographical structure. The paradigmatic example is undoubtedly the political map of the states (and their subdivisions).

### Denying Anarchic/ist Space and Places

The geographical imaginary produced by mosaic-statist metageography renders other spatial realities unimaginable. For example, in official history the Hanseatic League or the Malay maritime empire are not considered as States, since its state space was a network of ports and cities (between which there were the sea and other territories) (Scott, 2009). These metageographies face a metahistorical impossibility: the idea of historical progression can enable us to conceive pre-modern states as “states”. In a similar sense, Pierre Clastres (1974) showed how stateless societies were impossible to conceive in traditional Western anthropology: “society” was always associated with dominion power relations. Epistemologically, the obstacle faced was due to a Western cultural ethnocentrism and an *exotic* view of non-Western societies.

Anarchic/ist territoriality is neglected, negated, despised, underestimated, or reduced. Every anarchist could say as much from her/his own experience: the objections against anarchy are produced and reproduced in cultural texts and by everyday people. The metageographical positioning toward anarchic spaces is illustrated very clearly by David Graeber (2004: 38–9), who provides what could very well be a typical and plausible conversation between an anarchist and a sceptic:



**Sceptic:** Well, I might take this whole anarchism idea more seriously if you could give me some reason to think it would work. Can you name me a single viable example of a society which has existed without a government?

**Anarchist:** Sure. There have been thousands. I could name a dozen just off the top of my head: the bororo, the Baining, the Onondaga, the Wintu, the Ema, the Takkensi, the Vezo, etc.

**Sceptic:** But those are all a bunch of primitives! I'm talking about anarchism in a modern, technological society.

**Anarchist:** Okay, then. There have been all sorts of successful experiments: experiments with worker's self-management, like Mondragon; economic projects based on the idea of the gift economy, like Linux; all sorts of political organizations based on consensus and direct democracy, etc.

**Sceptic:** Sure, sure, but these are small, isolated examples. I'm talking about whole societies.

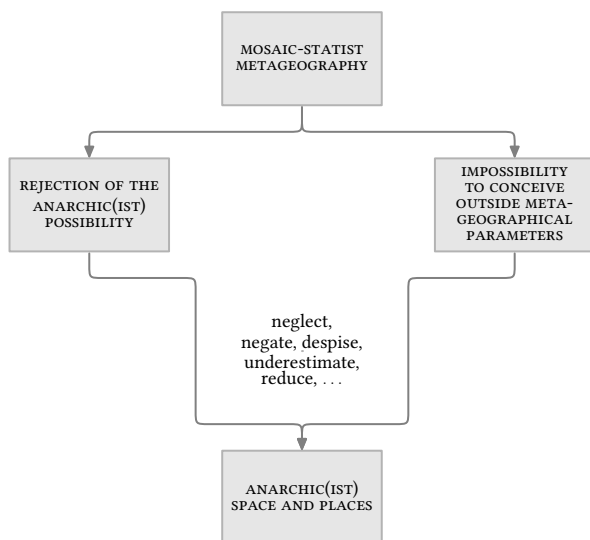
**Anarchist:** Well, it's not like people haven't tried. Look at the Paris Commune, the revolution in Republican Spain, etc.

**Sceptic:** Yeah, and look what happened to those guys! They all got killed!

The above discussion shows the reasoning derived from mosaic-statist metageography. This is not a simple ideological rejection towards anarchism. The metageographical impossibility of anarchic spaces and places is not only reduced to a conscious ideological rejection, but also to a more profound and widespread rejection and inability to operate unconsciously through mosaic-statist metageography. This relation is schemed as follows (Figure 2).

In this way, metageographical structures act through two mechanisms. First, there is a conscious or unconscious rejection of the anarchic/ist possibility. And secondly, there is the inability or impossibility to conceive of an outside to the given, learned and internalized, metageographical parameters. Related to that, the character of the *sceptic* implies a need for the demonstration of real anarchic/ist practices according to scientist parameters and methods.

As David Graeber explains, the impossibility of conceiving anarchic/ist "societies" (and therefore its spaces and places) in the



**Figure 2** *Metageographical Denying of Anarchic Spaces*

Source: Own Elaboration

given example is due to the metageographical correspondence between “society” and “state” — or even “nation-state”. So the *sceptical* character is actually demanding an example of an “anarchist state”: that is, a modern nation-state that, subtracted from the government, nonetheless remained a “harmonious” state like the “normal” states. Secondly, the example also shows the metageographical assumption that power relations are exercised and regulated predominantly by the state. So the *sceptical* character wants only “societies” that replace the state dominion relationship.

According to the internal logic of the mosaic-statist metageography, anarchic spaces and places are not possible because of the following reasons (grouped according to their nature):

- Historical: distant in time (pre-modern); no determinant for the historical progressive development; reduction of the historical scope of anarchism.
- Geographical: distant in space; demographically weak; small surface; spatial dispersion; poor connection; ambiguous territorial delimitation; reduction of the geographical scope of anarchism.

- Durational: temporary and ephemeral.
- Anthropological/Sociological: savage, barbarous and uncivilized peoples; small groups; marginal groups.

More extensively:

### 1. *Historical and Geographical Scope of Anarchic/ist Spaces and Places*

The combination of the mosaic-statist metageography and the idea of historical progression results in a consideration of *Modernity* as relevant and valid idea/ideal. From this position anarchic experiences are reduced to “anarchism”. The official history puts the development of anarchism in nineteenth century and in Europe and North America. So anarchic experiences dated prior to nineteenth century and situated outside Europe are rejected.

Nevertheless anarchic spaces and places have existed “forever” and are “everywhere”. These experiences are in accordance with the principles and aspirations of freedom, autonomy and solidarity. This is not the place to review the evidence, but the work of some anarchist geographers, historians and anthropologists about stateless and governmentless peoples can be cited: Kropotkin (1902), Clastres (1972), Barclay (1982), Graeber (2004) or Scott (2009).

### 2. *Relevance of Anarchic/ist Spaces and Places*

The distance (geographical, cultural, in time, etc) between the centre and the rest of the world is of a decreasing value. The importance of close and known spaces is exaggerated, while distant and unknown spaces are underestimated. Eurocentrism denies the importance of non-European peoples (in geographical and historical terms) and qualifies them only pejoratively (*savage, primitive, uncivilized*, etc).

Classism operates similarly. The oppressed social groups are discriminated and qualified as *outcasts, pariahs*, etc.

### 3. *Delimitation and Organization of Anarchic/ist Spaces and Places*

Polygonism downplays or denies the spaces and places that can not be clearly delimited and organized territorially. It also rejects those that do not last in space and time. In this sense networks, nomadism, the temporary use of space, invisibility, etc., are despised.

### 4. *The Domination of Anarchic/ist Spaces and Places*

Finally, mosaic-statist metageographical arguments silence or distort the authoritarianism and the control, subjugation and domination actions exercised against anarchic/stic peoples and their spaces. Furthermore, those historical events and social and spatial phenomena are reinterpreted according to the hegemonic parameters. Thus anarchic/stic spaces and places are dominated: physically (material domination), metageographically, and metahistorically (the dominion of geographical and historical concepts and knowledge).

## **Some Conclusions: A Necessary Construction of Anarchic Metageographies**

In opposition to the demonstrated metageographical consequences — those that lead to the production of spatial knowledge based on dominion relations (social, cultural, political, economic, etc) — can be raised the possibility of constructing critical metageographies or, as Alba (2006) would say, *free* metageographies. The process of this construction (or, indeed, liberation) implies the removal of metageographical characteristics and the prevention of their reproduction. Some proposals have been made in academic literature. The scope of these differ from author to author, especially based on which component (pattern, content and meaning) and in which grade the proposed actions are performed. Two actions can be defined:

1. To reform mosaic-statist metageography through the application of critic criteria on content and meaning.
2. To construct new metageographies based on antiauthoritarian patterns (together with critic criteria on content and meaning).

### 1. (Critical) Reform of Mosaic-Statist Metageography

This action is operated especially, but not only, on content and meaning. Reform is based on *critical* criteria that lead to the resolution of some metageographical contradictions and to the improvement of other characteristics. However this process does not question the mosaic and statist patterns. In this regard, Raffestein (1983) and Lewis & Wigen (1997), among other scholars, have made some propositions.

Firstly, Raffestin's (1983) proposal is based on the following conclusion: since any metageographical construction is ideological by definition, there is, therefore, no sense to try to construct a non-ideological metageography. He is in favour of a critical metageography that recognizes the inherent ideology and the non-scientific nature of knowledge produced through metageographical constructions. Despite his critical analysis of the metageographical constructions, Raffestin puts all ideologies at the same level and does not take into account the differences among them. Paradoxically that position leads him into an indirect defence of the metageographical *status quo*.

Secondly, Lewis and Wigen (1997: 194) specify and define "ten criteria for a metageographical reform, aiming at the creation of more supple and sophisticated frameworks". The criteria (Table 1) are related to commensurability, geographical determinism, ethnocentrism, and historical and ideological biases, etc., of mosaic-statist metageography. Some criteria put attention on the very roots of statism, but in general they not strongly challenge its dominion.

Paradoxically, reformers such as Lewis and Wigen (1997) adopt a mosaic-statist metageographical perspective to define the new territorial structure. They consider that the main problem with metageographical abandonment "is the danger of losing our ability to talk about the world effectively."

### 2. Construction of Antiauthoritarian Metageographies

The second action involves the construction and use of a new pattern (and content and meaning) which breaks up mosaic-statist metageography, and also includes some previous actions (critical criteria). From this position it is possible to define an antiauthoritarian metageography based on anarchistic principles (freedom, autonomy,

	Criteria	Description
1	Combating cartographic ethocentrism	To assign the same rank in spatial hierarchy to comparable territorial units.
2	Combating geographical determinism	To remove the notion that cultural territorial units correspond to natural ones.
3	Typological honesty	To delimit territorial units on a basis of consistent criteria (justified topology) or, if not, acknowledging clearly (acknowledge topology).
4	Mastery of the metageographical canon	To use and understand geographical taxonomy adequately and clearly.
5	Sociospatial precision	To avoid inaccurate conflation of social, economic and cultural phenomena; to avoid generalizations.
6	Definitional integrity	To remove the notion of correspondence between cultural and political territorial units; to avoid the naturalization of geopolitical units.
7	Neutral nomenclature	To avoid ideologically charged toponymy.
8	Historical specificity	To recognize that territorial units do not constitute timeless entities; to recognize historical contingency.
9	Contextual specificity	To avoid import territorial units into contexts where they do not apply; to construct units adequate to every context (crosscutting and overlapping).
10	Creative cartographic vision	To represent efficiently unconventional territorial units; instead of assuming contiguity, to visualize discontinuity.

**Table 1** *Criteria for a Critical Metageography*

Source: Adaptation from Lewis & Wigen (1997)

solidarity, equality, etc) and make conceivable anarchic space and times in a wide range (historically, geographically and anthropologically/sociologically). An anarchistic metageography has to accomplish two important goals: to visualize anarchic/ist space-time and places, and to criticize the geography of dominion. Both aims are inseparable.

In this direction, the works of Tarrius (2002) and Collins (2007) — to cite just two examples — are based on the same ideas: first, the state territory is not a tight space and second, the state is an invasive territorial actor that interrupts the heterogeneity to impose uniformity. Both of them analyse the “illegal” flows that cross state space and the “new nomads” of the informal economy. In another sense, Alba (2006) proposes to *subvert* as a way to produce new metageographical expressions and representations that were all conceivable but not imagined until then. Many proposals from radical cartography or subversive toponymy provide useful examples of this. Their aim is to highlight the dominion and power relations on geographic knowledge production and reproduction.

The next step is clear. It is necessary to define an anarchic/ist metageography that allows not only conceiving but understanding the anarchic/ist spaces and places. These territories have existed and exist everywhere. The work is to synthesise their territorial dimension and frameworks.

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# Can Franks' Practical Anarchism Avoid Moral Relativism?

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## Abstract

Benjamin Franks' recent contribution to the field of anarchist political philosophy, what he calls 'prefigurative or practical anarchism', is introduced partly in response to the critique of 'metanarratives' made by writers such as Todd May and Saul Newman. Metanarratives, they argue, are both, in theory, epistemologically suspect and, in practice, repressive of alternative conceptions of the good. This is because metanarratives assert the validity of one goal or end for human society and/or individuals and one morally justifiable mode of acting to achieve this, thus risking the exclusion of other goals and forms of moral agency. Framing social and political action within metanarratives of human nature is regarded by May and Newman, the founders of 'postanarchist' theory, as an essential characteristic of the classical anarchisms of the nineteenth century. While Franks, along with many others, is critical of the postanarchist attack on classical anarchisms, he nonetheless shares their rejection of metanarratives and teleology. The practical anarchism he proposes aims to be sympathetic to this concern and does so by adopting and modifying the social practice theory found in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. This may come as a surprise given MacIntyre's position as one of the strongest contemporary defenders of the notion of a *telos* of human life (i.e., that human life has a natural and right end), but it is this exact feature that Franks' account of social practices eliminates. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to assess the consequences of the rejection of metanarratives and *telos* for Franks' practical anarchism. Ultimately, I will show that without a teleological approach, practical anarchism collapses into moral relativism and weakens the definition of 'anarchism' to such an extent that it becomes useless.

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## Introduction

In a recent contribution to the field of anarchist political philosophy, Benjamin Franks introduces what he describes as “a prefigurative or practical anarchism” (Franks, 2008: 147), intended partly as a response to the critique of moral and political universalism made by postanarchist writers such as Todd May (1994) and Saul Newman (2001). Universalism, which can be understood as a meta-ethical commitment to one over-arching moral standard against which claims of what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ can be judged to be ‘true’ or ‘false’, is argued, by the postanarchists, to be both in theory epistemologically suspect and in practice repressive of alternative conceptions of the good. Explaining social and political action within a universalist framework of human nature is regarded by May and Newman as an essential characteristic of the classical anarchisms of the nineteenth century. While Franks (2007), along with others (e.g., Cohn, 2002; Cohn & Wilbur, 2003; Glavin, 2004), is critical of the postanarchist attack on classical anarchisms, he nonetheless shares in their rejection of moral universalism. The practical anarchism he proposes aims to be sympathetic to this typically poststructuralist concern while at the same time providing a foundation for ethical action, and he does so by adopting the social practice theory found in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. This may come as surprise given MacIntyre’s position (1999: x) in recent years as a staunch defender of the idea of moral universalism, basing his account on a form of biological essentialism whereby human beings are understood as having a natural *telos*, an end towards which their actions ought to aim. However, Franks takes his inspiration instead from MacIntyre’s initial work on social practice theory, which echoes poststructuralism’s rejection of claims to universal moral truth (Franks, 2008: 138).

In this article, I intend to discuss the implications of the rejection of moral universalism for a social practice based account of anarchist ethics. If it is the case, as the later MacIntyre argues, that such an ethical theory is left lacking without a universal teleology that is common to all social practices and which informs the ethical actions of the agents involved therein, then Franks’s practical anarchism will be open to critique. Ultimately, I will show that without an appeal to universalism, practical anarchism collapses into moral relativism and, in addition, weakens the very definition of “anarchism” to such an extent that it becomes useless.

## 1. Social Practices and the Rejection of Moral Universalism

MacIntyre (1985: 187) describes social practices in the following, oft-quoted way:

By 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods are systematically extended.

The two most important aspects of this definition for MacIntyre's ethics as a whole are, firstly, the notion of goods internal to practices and, secondly, the standards of excellence appropriate to the practice. The second of these, the standards of excellence, are specific virtues which ethical agents can display. The first, the internal goods, are certain objectives of the practice which can only be achieved by the agent displaying a virtuous character. MacIntyre (1985: 191) writes, "A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such good." The goal of this article is not to assess the concept of virtue or internal good in MacIntyre's or Franks' ethics, but rather to examine what both authors appeal to in order to show how certain virtues and certain internal goods are justified morally. In order to do so, it is necessary to take a look at how social practices operate in the social world of human beings. One way to understand what MacIntyre means by social practices is to examine the parallel arguments, made by Ludwig Wittgenstein among others (Midgely, 1974; Winch, 1958), that the social world is composed of a series of formations which have much in common with games.

Wittgenstein famously criticises traditional, representationalist accounts of language which have it as a collection of words which derive their meaning through linking up to things in the world; in other words, that words are names for objectively existing meanings. All instances of language, on this account, can be unified because they all represent the world, and the difference between two languages is the same as the difference between two sets of labels: they

can both be reduced to representing the same meanings (Quine, 1968: 186). In contrast to this representationalism, Wittgenstein proposes that language be understood as operating as a series of games, by which he means a number of local language communities in which meaning is determined not by having words link up with objective reality, but by tacit agreement among language users such that the use of words by any one member of the community is understood by any other. This relativism also applies to practices of justification, which may be appealed to in the event of disputes about meaning; if language users disagree about the meaning of a statement, then the justificatory practices they appeal to are similarly agreed on tacitly and have no special claim to objective truth. The crucial point to take from this is that a statement is not to be seen as something which can be judged as 'true' or 'false' in reference to some external ruler (i.e., objective reality), but which achieves a truth value depending on the specific language-rules of the community, or language game, in which the statement is made. What warrants these social formations being called games is that they operate according to a specific set of rules and that, in virtue of this, they are social affairs involving more than one language user (Wittgenstein, 2001: §256–71; Winch, 1958: 24–65).

Social practices, for MacIntyre, share the key features of language games; namely, they operate according to a specific set of rules (specific, that is, to that practice), they are necessarily social and they involve a local or contextual account of truth. A comparison can be drawn between MacIntyre's account of practices and that of narratives common to the work of many poststructuralist and postmodern writers. For example, Jean-François Lyotard (1984: xxiv) writes that a defining feature of the contemporary, 'postmodern' age is a rejection of the belief in any one over-arching system that can justify claims about truth. These grand systems he calls 'metanarratives'. In place of metanarratives, like that of representationalism, postmodernism and poststructuralism theorise the social world as a patchwork of local narratives in which truth and justification operate in the same way as in Wittgenstein's language games. What is considered true in one narrative is only assessable within the justificatory practices of that narrative, which are based upon the tacit agreement of the members of that narrative community, and not in reference to a metanarrative. Lyotard (1984: xxiv) describes this picture in explicitly Wittgensteinian terms: "There are many different language games — a heterogeneity of elements." What is particularly interesting about

the treatment of metanarratives by poststructuralist writers is the focus on their ethical and political dimensions. Essentially, they see the critique of metanarratives of justification as applying to both ontological truth claims and moral truth claims. Thus, moral universalism (whereby statements about what is 'good' and 'bad' can be assessed in line with a universal principle, such as in the case of utilitarianism or that of deontological ethics [see, e.g., Franks, 2008: 138–40]) is rejected and replaced with a view according to which moral truth is specific to local narratives.

This focus on moral relativism is important because it is this feature which is central to MacIntyre's early account of social practices, represented best by his book *After Virtue* (originally published in 1981). MacIntyre agrees here with both the language game theorists and the poststructuralists that the social world is composed of multiple practices with potentially irreducible differences, and which cannot be subsumed under one metanarrative of moral justification. After providing examples of competing moral claims about just war, abortion and private education and the arguments used to justify those claims, he writes (1985: 8):

Every one of these arguments is logically valid or can be easily expanded so as to be made to be so; the conclusions do indeed follow from the premises. But the rival premises are such that we possess no rational way of weighing the claims of one as against another. For each premise employs some quite different normative or evaluative concept from the others, so that the claims made upon us are of quite different kinds.

Thus, the moral landscape of society is one in which different narratives contain their own justifications of moral claims. For example, one narrative may never justify warfare as morally good, while another may justify it as good if and only if it is waged with the aim of liberating oppressed groups (MacIntyre, 1985: 6). This is not to say, of course, that moral agreement between narratives (even those separated historically and/or geographically) is impossible, only that when agreement is reached, it is only contingent and not founded upon some objectively existing moral reality.

In his early writings on social practices, MacIntyre argues that morality, rather than being based on supposedly universal principles, should take root in the teleologies that are found in different practices. His claim is that every practice entails a teleological conception

of the agents engaged therein and that those agents can thusly act in a moral way. In acting to realise the good end of human life, “human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realised-its-*telos*”, agents can act in a morally praiseworthy way. This draws on Aristotle’s understanding of *telos*, whereby the ‘good’ end for human life is something natural and common to all human beings: *telos* is a property of a “metaphysical biology” (MacIntyre, 1985: 162). However, for the MacIntyre of *After Virtue*, this deep metaphysical commitment is misguided (as I will highlight below, MacIntyre has retracted this position in recent years). Instead, *telos* is to be considered a property of agents only in so far as they are engaged in practices. In one practice, a particular form of agency is constituted, in another practices, the form of agency constituted may be quite different. These practice based forms of agency include a particular *telos* for the constituted agent. Thus, a human being will, as they move from practice to practice, engage in them as different forms of agency with different *telē*. To use MacIntyre’s example (1985: 188), when engaged in the practice of chess, a person will have the agency of the chess player, with which comes a particular *telos*, that of doing good in the role of the chess player. What this doing good in a practice-specific role consist of, according to MacIntyre, is acting virtuously. Therefore, rather than hold to a fixed table of virtues, MacIntyre’s account of social practices entails different tables of virtues for different practices, each informed by the *telos* specific to the form of agency involved in that practice (1985: 162–3). Where a *telos* can be said to transcend individual practices, it is still contingent and a property of an agency common to a network of practices (MacIntyre, 1994: 288). This latter point will prove to be important to Franks’ practical anarchism.

## 2. *Telos* or *Telē*

The rejection of a single, fixed *telos* is something MacIntyre’s and Franks’ accounts of social practices have in common. Franks’ practical anarchism shares with MacIntyre the perspective “that the social world is constructed out of intersecting social practices with their own histories and traditions” (Franks, 2010: 155). Franks’ (2008: 147) description of practical anarchism is as follows:



Practical anarchism is based on a social account of the virtues (based on a revision of MacIntyre's virtue theory). This identifies goods as being inherent to social practices, which have their own rules, which are negotiable and alter over time. It stresses the immanent values of particular practices rather than the externally decided (consequentialist) values that will accrue.

In addition to the rejection of an over-arching teleology of human life, therefore, practical anarchism shares with MacIntyre's account of social practices the idea of there being goods that are internal to practices. Franks writes too that "each anarchist practice produces [its] own standards", and this can be taken as referring to the standards of excellence (virtues) in MacIntyre's theory. Thus, both accounts of social practices also incorporate the notion of virtuous behaviour, the successful display of which can be seen in agents achieving those goods that are internal to a particular practice. To see the importance of this account of social practices, and in particular the notion of teleology which is central to it, it may be helpful to rehearse Franks' arguments against holding a single, fixed teleology; for he does not follow the later MacIntyre of, for instance, *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999) in reinforcing the normative force of social practice theory with a return to an Aristotelian metaphysical biology (MacIntyre, 1999: x).

Franks, inspired by postanarchist writers but also early twentieth century anarchists such as Errico Malatesta (e.g., 1977: 267) who argues similarly against any teleological account of human beings, rejects the idea that there is one *telos* against which all action can be judged as 'good' or 'bad'. Instead, as the above section shows, he argues for multiple *telē* such that different social practices and, as the case may be, contingent networks of social practices, have internal goods that, for their achievement, demand that the agent act virtuously. The virtuous character is the teleological end for moral agency within that practice. Franks' argument against positing a single, fixed *telos* comes in three parts. Firstly, he argues that even if there were an observable teleology, a moral universal, it would be undesirable as it would limit the moral agency of people and groups, and potentially impose the coercion that anarchists traditionally seek to eliminate. Indeed, a universalist account makes room for the role of moral authorities: individuals or groups who are able to indicate to others what internal goods and standards of excellence should be

pursued. It is characteristic of anarchisms (both classical and contemporary) that such authority be rejected, regardless of meta-ethical commitments to universalism. Mikhail Bakunin (1973: 134–5), for example, who argues for the authority of *science* as a mirror of the natural law found in nature, still rejects the authority of *scientists*. “If there are universal, set standards,” writes Franks (2008: 141), “then moral agents would have to live up to these, and thus be denied the freedom to determine their own values.” The second argument made by Franks against the teleological position is that it entails the potential for the introduction of a moral hierarchy, because if there is a universal standard of moral conduct, and some agents are more capable of measuring up to that standard than others, they will be privileged. “Rules which apply to all regardless of context ignore, and therefore disadvantage, those who are in an unequal position to begin with” (Franks, 2008: 142).

These first two arguments are moral in nature. The final argument, on the other hand, is that a teleological and universalist position falls on epistemological grounds (Franks, 2010: 144):

A fixed concept of what it is to be human is epistemologically suspect, as there seems to be no appropriate methodology for discovering what constitutes humanity’s universal quintessence. Nor is there any agreement among those who commit to essentialism on what constitutes humankind’s fundamental nature.

This final argument echoes that of MacIntyre against the positing of a single *telos*. He writes (1985: 162–3) that universalism “ignores the place in our cultural history of deep conflicts over what human flourishing and well-being do consist in[.]” Indeed, MacIntyre (1985: 181–6) highlights the numerous accounts of the good life that can be found in different periods of human history. With these arguments in place, Franks rejects the universalist position that the internal goods and virtues of particular practices can be justified in line with an objective moral reality.

However, as noted above, MacIntyre has, in the last ten years or so, performed an about-face on the issue of teleology and now argues that context-specific *telē* are not enough to provide the moral guidance agents require in dealing with conflicting practices and virtues (MacIntyre, 2006: 262):

[I]t is only because human beings as rational animals have the specific end that they have that questions about how they should act have determinate answers, answers that are true or false. Withdraw the concept of an end and those moral judgements that formerly presupposed it will continue to mimic judgements that are true or false, but will in fact only function as expressions of attitude. [...] To speak of the end of human beings is to speak of the goods to which they are directed by their nature[.]

MacIntyre's current position, therefore, is that for social practice theory to avoid moral relativism, whereby statements about what is right and wrong have as much claim to objective truth as statements about what is fashionable in clothing or music (i.e., their truth value is determined by contingent agreement among the members of the practice-community), it must posit a universal *telos* for human beings in general. This *telos* can thus be used to help agents decide definitively and correctly between practices and virtues that may conflict. Franks' practical anarchism, given that it rejects such a universalism, would seem to be open to the charge of relativism. I will now attempt to show that this is in fact the case and, furthermore, that this poses a potential problem for the adoption of a non-universalist social practice theory as an anarchist ethics.

### 3. Moral Relativism

While Franks rejects a single *telos* that transcends different practices, he also notes that for deliberation in ethics to exist in any meaningful way at all, there must be "a shared moral discourse that can evaluate and select between rival tactical options" (Franks, 2008: 145). The problem is that his rejection of a *telos* common to every agent or every context is that this moral discourse becomes incredible problematic. To see why this is the case, I propose to introduce an example. Suppose that an anarchist collective which runs a social centre comes to a disagreement in the course of one of their monthly meetings. Some of the members claim that the collective should provide a subsidy to a direct action group involved in the animal rights movement, while the others claim that the subsidy should go to an anti-racist organisation. Each option entails a different internal good and so a different virtue. If the universalist is right and there is a fixed *telos* (or set of *telē*), and the members of

the collective are aware of this *telos* (or set of *telē*), then they will be able to measure the conflicting goods against this objective yardstick and decide which good takes priority at that time. However, without such an external guide, deliberation seems meaningless. If the first group claims in support of their position that it measures up to the contingent *telos* that solidarity should be primarily with the animal rights movement, and the second group claims that theirs measures up to the *telos* that solidarity should be with anti-racism, then there is no way for agreement to be reached. It is impossible to order the potential goods of practices. Furthermore, even if some agreement is made, were a third party to question the prioritising of one internal good over another, no support could be given except from within the practice, which begs the question.

Ultimately, it would seem, there is no way of resolving conflict between goods and virtues, or between practices. This highlights the practical problem with rejection an objective *telos* in the way that practical anarchism does. The ethical dimensions of this theory are reduced to moral relativism. Franks wants to propose a point between moral relativism and moral universalism, but it seems that this point isn't to be found. Of course there can be a *telos* that spans several interconnected practices, but this would be similarly contingent and would still not aid the agent in deciding whether to engage in one group of practices or another.

This last point is especially pertinent to Franks' practical anarchism, because in some places he seems to arguing that certain practices will share a common teleology that distinguishes them as anarchist practices; namely, that they aim to challenge and eliminate hierarchical and capitalist relationships. For example, he writes (2010: 146) that "anarchist prefigurative methods are identifiable as they are the types of practices that would collectively build up to create their anti-hierarchical version of the flourishing society." Indeed, he offers a definition of "ideal type" anarchism as involving the rejection of capitalism and the free market and having an interest in the freedom of others as part of creating non-hierarchical social relations (2006: 112–13). However, he is consistent with MacIntyre's early take on social practices in that he stresses that this shared teleology is contingent, and not something necessary or even essential to those practices (2010: 142):

This is not to say that an identical teleology exists across the range of anarchisms; indeed a careful reading would identify

changes in the framing of purpose of anarchism across its histories and contexts. However, what joins most of the contexts in which anarchism developed are shared narratives [and teleologies] promoting the autonomous actions of the oppressed to (albeit temporarily and incompletely) challenge, alleviate or avoid hierarchies and create more enriching social practices.

This raises, in addition to the question of moral relativism, the question of how, if there is/are no essential feature/s of anarchist practices, how are we to identify them and, further to this, use the term anarchism at all?

Franks own proposal (2010: 139–40) is to apply Michael Freeden's method of definition which eschews necessary and sufficient conditions and instead proposes that one "study and identify the inter-relationship of core and periphery concepts, and to locate these concepts spatially and temporally, exploring the manner in which concepts shift historically from core to periphery (and vice versa)." However, this actually contradicts Franks' claim that anarchist practices don't essentially share either one *telos* or a set of *telē*. Following Freeden's method, if we use it in relation to teleology, it is possible to say that what anarchist social practices share is a commitment to multiple *telē*, which taken together, are definitive of anarchism. These *telē*, however, need not be present in each practice in the same way and to the same extent, but to call these practices anarchist, at least one must be present. For example, while many anarchists in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century may have prioritised the struggle against religion and held that as a core feature of their concept of anarchism, for contemporary anarchists (at least in the post-industrial countries and regions) this is not such a relevant fight, and so this feature has shifted to the periphery. Franks' notion, on the other hand, that there is no *telē* common to all anarchist practices precludes defining some practices as anarchist and others as not.

This comes out in Franks' assertion that not all anarchist practices involve a rejection of hierarchy. He says (2008: 148) that "there are contexts in which goods are immanently developed but a challenge to structures that maintain inequalities of power is not generated — for instance, children playing in a sandbox." The inclusion of this particular example is perhaps intended to highlight the fact that, according to practical anarchism, not all practices share a rejection of hierarchy. But is the suggestion then that children playing in a

sandbox is an anarchist practice? Without the claim that all anarchist practices share some *telos* or *telē*, it's actually impossible to say whether children playing in a sandbox is anarchist or not. More worryingly, perhaps, it becomes impossible to say that practices which claim to be anarchist, such as those of so-called anarcho-capitalists or autonomous nationalists, are in fact not anarchist. The upshot of this is that just as there is no way of morally acting in a non-contingently, meaningful anarchist way without a *telos* or set of *telē*, neither is there any way of using the words 'anarchist' or 'anarchism' that is not contingent and based purely on the accidental language game the agent is presently in. Moral action and use of the word anarchism would be possible, but only within contingent practices and language games.

Where this characterisation of practical anarchism as morally relativistic is a problem is insofar as it falls victim to one of the very critiques Franks makes of an ethics based of a fixed, universal *telos*; namely, that it limits the potential for moral agency. I return to the above example to explain this point. Say the collective came to some contingent agreement and decided to support the animal rights group. They have thus entered into a practice (showing solidarity with radical animal rights organisations) which has its specific internal goods and virtues. The collective has been involved in this practice for some time now and has become fully part of the moral and linguistic game that this practice is. Accordingly, the collective, being explicitly anarchist, calls the practice an anarchist practice, and recognises the specific *telos* of the practice. The entire toolkit the members of the collective have at their disposal for moral evaluation is also a part of the practice, for as Franks notes (2008: 143), "different social practices have their own distinctive discourse and mode of reasoning." So, the only way the members of the collective can evaluate whether the internal good of the practice is worth pursuing is in relation to the *telos* of the practice or using reason which is also part of the practice. This seems to restrict the moral conduct as much as a universal *telos* does, for there is still just one standard against which things can be judged. In fact, the reliance on local or practice-based modes of evaluation might even be more restrictive, as it precludes the goods of other practices being at all meaningful unless there is some contingent resemblance.

Another point of critique can be made in relation to the first two arguments Franks employs against moral universalism. As I noted above, these arguments, that universalism creates the potential for a

restriction of moral agency and the introduction of a moral hierarchy, are moral in nature; that is, they challenge universalism on the grounds that it is immoral. Applying a charge of immorality against a position can, I would suggest, come in two ways. Firstly, it could appeal to a moral universalism. In the case of the arguments made by Franks, limiting moral agency and facilitating the creation of moral hierarchies would be considered universally bad, and so any morally good position would have to avoid these. This raises the paradoxical prescription that if universalism is true, then it should be rejected as false. However, this is only paradoxical if the content of the objective moral reality is such that it would restrict moral agency and create moral hierarchy. Indeed, were the content of objective moral reality limited to the facts that liberated moral agency and moral non-hierarchy are good, then it wouldn't seem to fall prey to its own moral judgement. In other words, if liberated moral agency and moral non-hierarchy are objectively good, external to the peculiarities of any practices or language games, then it makes no sense to say that this universalism results in a limiting of moral agency and a creation of moral hierarchy.

Of course, the particular universalism Franks has in mind is a teleological one whereby a correct and natural *telos* for human beings is asserted as objectively true, and his argument, following the postanarchists, is that this specific type of universalism has the potential to limit moral agency and create moral hierarchy. This, however, would still have to be re-articulated, if a universal prohibition on these evils is to be appealed to, such that one type of universalism is used to challenge and reject another; namely, a universalism of non-hierarchy and liberated moral agency (which sounds deontological) being used to reject a universalism of teleology. One could respond however by attempting to rephrase the prescriptions of the 'good' universalism in a teleological manner. For example, the natural end for all human beings is a life of unrestricted moral agency, free from moral hierarchy. On this account, therefore, all action ought to tend towards this end, and anything that stands in the way of this end or diverts human beings away from it (e.g., a false *telos*) is considered 'bad'. What seems at first to be an argument against universal teleology, can in fact be made into an argument against one type of teleology, from the perspective of another. I would suggest, therefore, that Franks' moral arguments against universalism are in fact arguments against a specific formulation of universalism, and that

they are actually consistent with a universalism that, on either deontological or teleological grounds, prohibits the limiting of moral agency and the creation of moral hierarchy.

There is, however, a second option which would allow the arguments to maintain their moral force, but which would not require an appeal to universalism. Rather than locate the source of the prohibition of restrictions on moral agency and the creation of moral hierarchy in universal and objective propositions, one could locate them in the contingent truths of a particular moral community, a community which incorporates multiple practices. Thus, values can be said to transcend particular practices and constitute a moral reality which, while contingent, can nonetheless act as a universal for the members of the moral community in question. The arguments against moral universalism can be grounded in the shared moral commitments of a community; in this case, the community of anarchists. So, when one argues, as Franks does, that moral universalism limits moral agency and creates moral hierarchy, the move to justifying its rejection on these grounds can be said to be valid because within the particular moral community of anarchists, restrictions on moral agency and the creation of moral hierarchy ought to be avoided. While this doesn't demand a belief in an objective moral reality, it does require that these norms be common to all the members of the anarchist moral community. Rather than arguing that universalism is absolutely wrong, one could argue that it is wrong insofar as we are anarchists. In other words, to be a consistent anarchist, one must act in accordance with the principles of liberated moral agency and moral non-hierarchy; and as the above has shown, these principles could be found in a *telos* that spans the range of anarchist practices. Of course, this cuts against Franks' assertion that there are no *telē* or principles that all anarchist practices share, but without either this commitment or the belief in some objective moral reality, I don't see how the moral arguments against universalism can have any force.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to summarise the argument that has been made here. In the first section, I attempted to highlight the role social practices, for both Franks and MacIntyre, play in their respective understandings of our social world, discussing the relevance of both the notion of language games and metanarratives to this



picture. While MacIntyre begins by rejecting metanarratives and the notion of a single, fixed *telos* for human life, in recent years he has changed his position and argues that there is a single correct and natural end for human life. Franks, however, argues for a complete rejection of a single human *telos*, locating anarchist practices in a historically and ethically contingent space, within which internal goods and virtues do not derive their legitimacy from anything other than the contingent workings of the practice they are inherent to. The second section focused on the notion of multiple *telē* that is used by Franks to highlight the fact that while anarchist social practices are teleological, they are not all subject to one teleology, but to multiple, perhaps irreducible teleologies. The final section discussed the implications of Franks' rejection of one teleology in favour of many. These consequences are, I argued, a relativistic attitude to both the ethics of anarchism and the very use of the word in describing practices. While this moral relativism may not seem so problematic on Franks' account, I have tried to show that in fact it restricts the moral agency involved in practices in the same way that, the postanarchists argue, the assertion of one, universal *telos* does. This is because for agents embedded in social practices, the available resources for moral evaluation make questioning the *telos*, internal goods and virtues of that practice problematic. The only way to evaluate these features is through methods 'designed' to legitimise them. Thus, Franks' practical anarchism, as an alternative to moral relativism or universalism, would appear to collapse into the former. The solution to this, I would suggest, is not to reject practical anarchism completely. Indeed, the introduction of social practice theory into anarchist ethics is an incredibly promising move and has much to offer the anarchist movement in terms of ethical alignment. However, without the inclusion of some level of moral universalism, as with the later MacIntyre, it is open to the charge of relativism which makes its theoretical and practical application problematic.

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# The Body of the Condemned Sally: Paths to Queering anarca-Islam

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## Abstract

The 'case' I investigate is of Sayyid-Sally, an Egyptian transsexual medical student at Al-Azhar University, a pre-eminent institution for Islamic religious studies, who was expelled in 1982 because of her gendered identity. In this article I examine Al-Azhar's position, judicial edict, or Fatwa, regarding Sayyid-Sally. For even after the revelation of Sayyid-Sally's identity, her sex change operation and even after Al-Azhar admitted the existence of the category of the "Hermaphrodite" in certain Islamic legal interpretations, heteronormative gender orientations were still re-established and re-worked by Al-Azhar. I make the case that Al-Azhar's position corresponds to a binary logical order which makes distinction between Natural Hermaphrodite and Un-natural Hermaphrodite. Sayyid-Sally was tolerated at best, even when 9 years later the Administrative Court of Cairo repealed Al-Azhar's decision of expelling Sayyid-Sally. I argue that Anarchism as a political and philosophical orientation, can uniquely inform Islam, and move the debate beyond a practice or mere tolerance to help develop a doctrine of acceptance. I do this to help open-minded (non-essentialist/non-dogmatic) Muslims and anarchists better understand each other, and therefore to more effectively collaborate in the context of what Richard J.F. Day has called the 'newest' social movements.

## Introduction: A Story

In 1982 Sayyid Abd'Allah, a 19-year-old transsexual medical student, at Al-Azhar University — a pre-eminent institution of Islamic

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religious studies in Cairo, Egypt — ‘consulted a psychologist<sup>1</sup>, Salwa Jurgis Labib, claiming to suffer from deep depression’. Salwa examined Sayyid concluding that ‘Sayyid’s sexual identity was psychologically disturbed’. Clinically, Sayyid was considered ‘a psychological hermaphrodite (*Mu-Khunath nafsiyan*)’. Following three years of psychological treatment and in carrying out ‘every effort to restore back Sayyid’s male sexual identity’ yet failing, Salwa decided to refer Sayyid to a surgeon, Izzat Asham Allah Jibra’il. This was ‘so that Sayyid could undergo the process of sex-change surgery, which eventually took place on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1988’. Prior to conducting surgery however, Izzat referred Sayyid to another psychologist,

<sup>1</sup> Deleuze and Guattari critique the practice of psychoanalysis, and which I take as part of the practice of psychology (a behavioral science of the mind, emotion, with a particular focus on the neurological component) writing: “[A psychoanalyst] presents him [and/] or herself as an ideal point [a priest] of subjectification that brings the patient to abandon old, so-called neurotic points [...] in everything the patient says or does, he or she is a subject of the statement, eternally psychoanalyzed, going from one linear proceeding to another, perhaps even changing analysts, growing increasingly submissive to the normalization of a dominant [imposed] reality” (1980: 130–1). In visiting Salwa, Sayyid-Sally, had encountered clinical therapy’s Oedipal “phallic power, masculine power,” and “totemic rituals” found “within a traditional therapy whose predominant edifice of analysis festers in practices deaf to the voice of unreason” (Deleuze, 1990: 18). Psychology rendered unintelligible and dismissed Sayyid’s acknowledgment when she stated ‘I am a She’ as opposed to listening (Guattari, 1989: 39). In Sayyid-Sally’s encounter with psychology, Sayyid-Sally also “came under the specific laws of capitalism, or of the home market of psychoanalysis” (Guattari, 1995: 119). It is a function of the psychoanalytic ‘contract’ to reduce the states lived by the patient, to translate them into phantasies and into ‘sexual disturbances’ (Guattari, 1995: 119). Psychologists, are psychoanalysts “the saboteurs of desire” (Guattari, 1995: 129), in the sense that they “neurotize everything and through this neurotization contribute not only to producing neurotics whose treatment never ends but also psychotics in the form of anyone resisting oedipalization [or] its ‘idealism[s]’” (Deleuze, 1990: 18). The consequence of which is in Sayyid-Sally’s case, psychology as a “traditional [Western] analysis took into accounts non of this experience”; that is, Sally’s identification as a woman; psychology adopts for itself “the phallus as its symbol” (Guattari, 1995: 86). Contemporary dogmatic Islamic attitudes, discursively and ‘on the ground’ unfortunately need to clash more with, perhaps, more radical medieval perceptions of gender and sexuality in Islam. Assad AbuKhalil perceives the sharp change to be the product of colonial and post-colonial attempts to “conform sexual and moral mores to western (primarily Christian) codes of behaviour” (1993: 34). AbuKhalil writes: “what passes in present-day Saudi Arabia, for example, as sexual conservatism is due more to the Victorian puritanism than to Islamic mores. It is quite inaccurate to attribute prevailing sexual mores in present-day Arab society to Islam. Originally, Islam did not have the same harsh judgement about homosexuality as Christianity. Homophobia, as an ideology of hostility toward people who are homosexual, was produced by the Christian West” (ibid., 32).

Hani Najib, 'who reached a similar diagnosis to Salwa, agreeing that surgery would be the best course of action'. In preparing for surgery, Sayyid injected 'female hormones, while experimenting with dressing like a woman, living with the other sex'. This lasted a year, after which Izzat removed Sayyid's 'penis, creating a new urinal orifice and an artificial vagina'<sup>2</sup> (Skovgaard-Peterson, 1997: 320).

News of the surgery broke on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1988, in *Al-Ahram*'s<sup>3</sup> interview with Sayyid. As it happens Sayyid's surgery involved consequences of religious, state, administrative and authoritative, legal orders, 'apart from arousing interest in the Egyptian media and the population at large'. The first consequence was 'the refusal of the dean of the Faculty of Medicine of Al-Azhar in permitting Sayyid, now in the fourth year of his studies, to write his final exams in order to graduate'. The second was 'the dean's refusal of his transfer to the Faculty of Medicine for women'. To Al-Azhar, Sayyid 'became the symbol of what is morally wrong in our age', a *Khawal*; an 'effeminate

<sup>2</sup> Rusmir Music writes: "Phalloplasty can create a flesh and blood penis that may de-privilege the originality of a biological one, while testosterone treatments can similarly grow a beard on an otherwise feminine body. Although threatening the order, vaginoplasty (i.e. Castration) still creates a nothing-Zero, while phalloplasty would create a potent-One. The supposition that gender transition travels a male-to-female trajectory exposes the necessity to deny the reverse process" (2003: 46–8). Resistance to trans-men, in part through misogynistic erasure under the male terminology, Marjorie Garber believes, lies in "a sneaking belief that it should not be so easy to 'construct' a 'man' — which is to say, a male body" (1997: 102), which is to say, a penis. While "creating a vagina then does not preserve the penis, there seems to be an impulse to indulge men's desires, as long as the liminal period is denied and transwomen live a heterosexual life. Similar gratification of men's desires have already been discussed in attitudes toward a young man, who can provide pleasure until he himself becomes an adult man and takes pleasure. Creating a *penis*, on the other hand, even if artificial and 'imperfect', seriously questions what defines a 'real man'. Sally does not have a uterus, ovaries, nor the ability to menstruate or bear children; presumably, her chromosomes are also XY, that of a normative man. Sally's 'sex' was decided — again as with *khunthas*, not by the subject, but via a legal certificate — based on the *visual perception* of her genitals" (Music, 2003: 46–8). In an article published in *Saudi Medical Journal*, Taha and Magbool, similar to Al-Azhar and Tantawi, attempt to establish the pattern of intersex 'disorders' in Saudi Arabia. The authors write that "the single most important factor for female gender assignment [is] phallic inadequacy" (1995: 18), but unfortunately do not pause to ponder what heterosexual norms resolve whether a phallus is 'adequate' or not.

<sup>3</sup> Sally in an interview with Al-Ahram, a national newspaper, talked about her difficulty at Al-Azhar which dated back long before the operation: 'It is strange that they still want to punish me, for that I have actually become a woman, — as if I have committed a crime at the moment I entered the operating room' (Al-Ahram, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1988: 10; Skovgaard-Peterson, 1997: 320).

man willing to play a passive, female, role in sexual intercourse with other men'; 'a well known term of abuse in Egypt denoting the lowest and most despicable kind of man-liness'; 'considered to be a door to hermaphroditism, itself perceived as capable of leading to the abominable crime homosexuality' (Skovgaard-Peterson, 1997: 326). Al-Azhar established a committee to investigate Sayyid's body, one comprised of: 'the Fatwa Council (*Lajnat Al-Fatwa*) and the Mufti of the High Council for Islamic Affairs (*Al-Majlis Al-Aola li Sh-Shu'un Al-Islamiya*)'. The committee examined Sayyid's body 'performing amongst other things an ultra-sound examination of the prostata' upon which they concluded that Sayyid 'was one hundred percent male, both outwardly and inwardly'. Sayyid 'refused to be examined again by the committee' after that. In response, the committee stated: 'here we have a Muslim youth studying at the venerable Islamic Al-Azhar university, who consults specialists of Western psychology and is told to follow his perverse inclinations towards becoming a woman and what comes out is neither male nor female, but something in between the two' (Skovgaard-Peterson, 2007: 5). The committee proceeded to state that the surgeon ought 'be condemned in compliance with Article 240 of the Islamic penal code for choosing to have inflicted permanent ['mutilation' and] injury to his patient'. Ironically it was during this time that the lead representative of the Doctors' Syndicate<sup>4</sup> (*Niqabat al-Atba*) of Giza, assigned a doctor, Husam ad-Din Khatib, to investigate the case, summoning the surgeon, Izzat, the anesthetist, Ramzi Michel Jadd, and the psychologist Salwa before a medical board. All who ruled that the three doctors in question committed a professional mistake; they had failed 'to confirm scientifically the existence of Sayyid's pathological condition prior to conducting surgery'; 'a charge which the doctors purportedly admitted to'. In particular, the board and Syndicate, like Al-Azhar, singled out the surgeon; that 'Izzat had committed a serious medical error by not confirming the presence of a disease [psychological hermaphroditism] before operating'; 'the right procedure would have been to stop the hormonal treatment, and continue with a purely psychological cure' (Skovgaard-Peterson, 2007: 5).

It wasn't until the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 1988, that the Doctors' Syndicate sent a letter to the Grand Mufti of the Republic of Egypt – the head

<sup>4</sup> 'Since 1984, the Syndicate had been dominated by an Islamic movement' (Skovgaard-Peterson, 1997: 320).



Scholar of Al-Azhar University — Sayyid Tantawi, asking him to issue a *fatwa*<sup>5</sup>, a religious ruling, on the matter. Tantawi's fatwa arrived on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 1988, concluding that if the surgeon testifies that surgery was the only cure for Sayyid, the surgery is authorized. However, Tantawi continued, 'this treatment cannot solely result from an individual psychological desire to change sex, as that would threaten the principles, values, ethics and religion of Egyptian society'. The fatwa issued by Tantawi was vague and unclear on whether 'psychological hermaphroditism' — a clinical term adopted by Al-Azhar from 'Western psychology' and used consistently to describe Sally — constituted a sufficient and admissible medical reason or not for accepting her as a transsexual; that is, in so far as what her acceptance would mean in terms of an establishment of an Islamic space of rights for her and other transsexuals. To Tantawi, Sayyid 'had been a man, and was still a man, but now less so, because she had been bereft of her male sexual organs and been attributed with artificial (and "imperfect") female ones. She was not a full man, definitely not a woman, and not a true hermaphrodite' (Skovgaard-Petersen, 2007: 326). As with respect to the Syndicate, it deleted Izzat 'from its membership records and the anesthetist was fined 300 Egyptian pounds for his participation in the operation'.

Without 'any positive evaluation of the surgery in the press', on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1988 the matter was finally deferred to the State<sup>6</sup>,

<sup>5</sup> From my interview with Peter Lamborn Wilson a.k.a. Hakim Bey during my research time with the Affinity Project: "A Fat'wah can be issued but whether anybody follows it is a voluntary process [...] a question of whether you had the [Ummah — The Muslim Community at Large], whether the community would accept those Fat'wahs" (Peter Lamborn Wilson Affinity Project Interview, 2006). Moreover, Wilson continues, "the way you would do it [issue a Fat'wah] would be to point out there is no hierarchy in Islam. There's no Pope to call on his cardinals in this" and that is "why language is important, what theory, is supposed to be about" (Peter Lamborn Wilson, Affinity Project Interview, 2006). See <http://affinityproject.org/interviews/plw1.html> for a transcript of the interview.

<sup>6</sup> For the most part "Arab legal systems can be viewed as: Civilian in origin, transplanted during the colonial encounter with European powers and thereafter developing their own indigenous identity like other post-colonial legal systems yet concurrently maintaining the familiar features of their continental origin" (Shalkany, 2006: 1). But on the other hand "Arab countries were governed by an Islamic legal system before the colonial encounter, and this Islamic heritage seems to continue to influence their normative structure until this day" (ibid.). It is useful to note that the case in question is not explicitly set in the realm of a type of Islamic law situated in Cairo, Egypt, even though what underlies the core of the dispute are diverging views on the moral and political Islamic basis of the place of Trans-sexuality and Transsexuals in Al-Azhar's interpretation of Islam, if not, too, indicative of a systematized problem with a Repub-

with the Attorney General and his deputy public prosecutor acquitting 'the surgeon of the charge, Article 240, of inflicting permanent harm and mutilating' Sally's body through surgery. According to the final report by the Attorney General, released a year later in October 1989, Sally could be considered a woman and the 'surgery had been performed properly according to the standard, rules and codes of these types of operations'. Sally's grievances, however, 'did not end, as Al-Azhar continued to refuse to recognize her as a woman or admit her to the Medical Faculty for women'. Since Sally's overture, Al-Azhar began the documentation, and institutionalization<sup>7</sup>, of cases of what they regard to be 'natural hermaphrodites'. To Al-Azhar, a natural hermaphrodite is one described as with 'two naturally sexual, male and female, organs and whom was to be characterized by the sexual organ from which s-he urinates most'. Where 'there are equal quantities of urination there is ambiguity,' Al-Azhar states. One ought 'wait until the hermaphrodite attains puberty and then look for the appearance of some feature of masculinity, but if none of these characteristics appears, facial hair, gets pregnant, gives milk, or if, on the contrary, they appear, but in a contradictory way, there is a fundamental ambiguity, and one is dealing with a true hermaphrodite' (1985: 41). It wasn't until November 1989 that Sally received a certificate<sup>8</sup> 'stating that she was a woman, approximately two years after the surgery'. It would be another 'one and a half years before the Administrative Court repealed Al-Azhar's decision of expelling Sally before Sally was allowed entry to any university she might wish in order to pass her final exams to become a doctor' (Skovgaard-Peterson, 2007: 3).

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lic promoting bureaucracy and gossip amongst its people as a means of occupying its citizens from what is going on in the upper echelons of state affairs.

<sup>7</sup> Outside the framework of the imperial order of nation-States or Empire, institutions are ineffectual. At best, "the old institutional framework contributes to the formation and education of the administrative personnel of the imperial machine, 'the dressage' of a new elite" (Hardt and Negri, 2009: 5). As for capitalism it tends to make nation-States "merely instruments to record the flows of the commodities, monies, and population that they set in motion" (Hardt and Negri, 2009: 5).

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting that a 'Certificate' became what was necessary for the image of Sally, publicly that is, through Sally's determinism, to be corrected, to come true. A certificate, un-recycled sap from wood, was what was needed to permit what was already permitted, secularly and legally, of Sally herself.

There are two more parts to this paper. In the first part I critique Tantawi's fatwa, and its upholding of gender binaries<sup>9</sup> in a "post-colonial society where public power is a monopoly of those marked for gender as (adult) men, [as for] those not so marked were, as such, no threat, nor was their gender identity a focus of great concern [...] More problematic was the case of men who maintained a public image as men, yet in their private sexual behavior assumed a submissive [sic] role" (Rowson, 1991: 72). As a Muslim anarchist<sup>10</sup>, this critique of Tantawi's fatwa serves to further promote an ethical and political practice that can serve Muslims and anarchists collaborating in what Richard J.F. Day refers to as the *Newest Social Movements*<sup>11</sup> (Day, 2005: 9). Broadly speaking 'Western' anarchists<sup>12</sup>,

<sup>9</sup> Both Al-Azhar and the psychologists involved in this case put to practice binary logic; a logic that as Marjorie Garber describes, is one where the specular requirements extend into the "ideal scenario [...] one in which a person's social station, social role, gender and other indicators of identity in the world could be *read*, without ambiguity or uncertainty" (26). To Al-Azhar, as was demonstrated theoretically with the case of Egyptian psychology, since '82, "every human being has only one sex, which 'is' it's true sex, and that somehow the idea of the hermaphrodite being on the way either further into or out of his [and her] state[s] exists — that is, hermaphroditism as a process [is one] that is reduced to constantly being corporal and psychological movements, manifestations denying this true sex" (Skovgaard-Peterson, 2007: 8). Al-Azhar "real concern, went so far so as to desire to establish as precisely and strictly as possible the limits of the sexes" and which went "as far as possible into detail [while realizing] how much the inter-sexual frontiers are difficult to detail up and the importance they have in the eyes of the Muslim consciousness which finds itself led more and more to set up an impenetrable wall between the sexes" in so far for the purposes of marriage — *Nikah* (Bouhdiba, 1985: 42). Afray and Anderson spell this too quite rightly: "There is a tradition in nationalist movements of consolidating power through narratives that affirm patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, attributing sexual abnormality and immorality to a corrupt ruling elite that is about to be overthrown and/or is complicit with foreign imperialism" (Afray & Anderson, 2005: 161). All which has led, 'Western' and 'Eastern' "scholarship to suffer from a state of labeling-disarray" (Shalkany, 2006: 1).

<sup>10</sup> I will not showcase how the seemingly dichotomous identities Muslim and anarchist can co-exist through an anarchic interpretation of Islam and Islamic interpretation of anarchism I call anarqa-Islam. My work on anarqa-Islam is available at: [http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Mohamed\\_Jean\\_Veneuse\\_\\_Anarqa-Islam.html](http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Mohamed_Jean_Veneuse__Anarqa-Islam.html)

<sup>11</sup> What distinguishes what Richard J.F. Day refers to as the *Newest Social Movements* from other anti-imperialist social movements, is that they are characterized by their practice of a *logic of affinity*; of being "non-universalizing, non-hierarchical, non-coercive relationships based on mutual aid, and shared ethical commitments" (Day, 2005: 9). In other words, the newest social movements are not focused on essentialist conceptions of identity politics, a universal conception of social change — in line with Antonio Gramsci's *logic of hegemony* — and so a mass revolution brought on by those who are oppressed to restore justice to the world that we presently live in.

and activists in the New Left, are predominantly subsumed, unchallenged beyond the fundamentalist and Orientalist<sup>13</sup> representations

<sup>12</sup> In the winter of 2008, I submitted a proposal to address the topic of 'Transsexuality in Islam' using specifically Sayyid-Sally's case study at the 'Renewing the Anarchist Tradition' (RAT) Conference in Vermont. The organizing anarchists rejected it politely. My intent was directed at delimiting the misconception in question, and doing so with anarchists publicly. The response follows: "We really appreciated your second proposal for 'Paths to Queering Islam(s)', and your effort to clarify the importance and stakes of such a project for anarchists. That said, we are going to decline the presentation this year, largely because we don't think that RAT — with all its limitations — is the most appropriate context for the conversation. Transsexuality seems like a sensitive enough topic in Muslim communities that it ought to be addressed in contexts where there is significant participation of people who identify as Muslim, or have a stake in the tradition (even if they have left it). It doesn't seem like a conversation to be had lightly by a group of people who are overwhelmingly not part of a Muslim community and know very little about it. I realize that is absolutely not true of you — but it is true of the vast majority of RAT participants. I regret that RAT is as homogeneous as it is, and have tried in a range of ways to change that over the years I've been involved. But I haven't been particularly successful, and in that sense, it is our deficiencies as organizers that have led us to arrive at this decision, and not a weakness of your proposal or of your own as a presenter. I hope you'll understand. We hope you'll still join us at RAT this year". The response, I believe, is indicative of a certain sensitivity, due to the prevalence of the misconception amongst anarchists, if not too amongst the New Left, that all interpretations of Islam and all Muslims are Transphobic; hence there is an abstinence from broaching the topic. I am against this view because it camouflages differences between Muslims and anarchists, hindering friendship and 'solidarity' work. This dilemma with the RAT conference is not an isolated incident. For instance anarchists associated with the Anarchist Federation in London, England produced an article in their December 2001 issue reducibly levelling the multiplicity of different interpretations of Islam as monolithic, fundamentalist, reactionary, homo-trans-queerphobic and oppressive towards women; "Islam is the enemy of all Freedom loving people", the anarchists in question claimed. In another article titled "Islam and Anarchy Join Together" (2003) on Info-shop, two anarchist bloggers, 'PJP' and 'Brain-Fear' wrote: "Any form of religion is thought control — Islam is sexist and homophobic [...] If they [Muslims] are serious about anarchism, they would have dropped the sexist and homophobic aspects of the religion and accentuated more libertarian aspects of the religion." Further down, in reference to the article, on the same blog, another blogger 'Burning-man' expresses a similar, yet rather poignant sentiment regarding a side-show 'Anarcho-Islam': "Anarcho-Islam is about the stupidest thing I've ever heard of. Islam is about submission. Slave to Allah and all that crap. It has an extremely rigid set of rules and conduct and, while more enlightened than other monotheistic religions in a number of important ways, it never quite went through anything like the Reformation. It is reactionary, pro-capitalist, pro-slavery, imperialist and misogynist to the core."

<sup>13</sup> By Orientalist I mean to denote the fascistic representation or view that thrusts itself upon the Asiatic Other, the inhabitants of Ottoman/Turkish bath houses; ascribing and commoditizing a particular representation of 'the other', transforming Muslim sexual activities into something far promiscuous and "licentious than anything ever seen in Europe" (Shalkany, 2006: 7; see Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Joseph

of Islam and Muslims to which they are exposed; the overarching perception, amongst anarchists in particular, that all Muslims and interpretations of Islam are authoritarian, dogmatic and transphobic is not difficult to prove.<sup>14</sup> This perception hinders the relationship between Muslims and anarchists politically collaborating through groups such as No One Is Illegal<sup>15</sup> (NOII) and Solidarity Across Bor-

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Massad's *Desiring Arabs* (2007). As Massad writes, echoing, Said: "while Orientalists were exploring the sexual practices and desires of Medieval Arabs, Western anthropologists were exploring the contemporary sexual lives and practices not only of Arabs but also of the natives of Africa, Asia, Australia and the Americas. It was within the context of 'ethnography' that Arab readers began to read Orientalist accounts. Influenced by such readings, and especially by the Orientalist judgment that Arab culture had 'degraded' to an age of 'decadence' underneath the Ottomans, most Arab writers since the middle of the nineteenth century were overcome with a sense of crises concerning [...] its 'culture', its 'language', its political and economic order, its 'traditions', its views on its own 'heritage', even 'Islam' itself, in short, a malady that afflicted the whole of Arab Islamic 'civilization' [...] 'backwardness', 'decadence', 'moral decline', 'irrationality', and most of all, 'degeneration', resulting from centuries of Ottoman rule characterized by stasis at best or retardation of things Arab (and sometimes Muslim) at worst" (2007: 8).

<sup>14</sup> Foucault once wrote "at the level of the socialist State [...] we find racism at work [...] whenever a socialism insists, basically, that the transformation of economic conditions is the precondition for the transformation, for the transition from the capitalist State to the socialist State (or in other words, whenever it tries to explain the transformation in terms of economic processes, it does not need, or at least not in the immediate, racism" (1976: 245). Socialism, bio-politically, has been historically antagonistic towards religion; this is not to say without justifiable reasoning(s). Nevertheless, the Euro-centric view, rooted in the essentialist perception that "God [and God's fettered religion solely possess] promises [...] null and void [...] only fulfilled by man's subordination" (Goldman, 1969: 5–7) is evident not only in Emma Goldman's antecedent statement, but also classical anarchism and the practices of nineteenth-century socialism through to the New Left today. Gandhi similarly believes in the existence of this crisis, between religion and the Left, and the necessity for socialism to re-examine this misconception regarding religion, or at least religions that orient themselves, theologically, and practically, as anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist; in other words, religions that share ethico-political affinities with socialism. Gandhi writes in support of Robert Blatchford — who explicitly claimed socialism as a religious belief — and who said: "We have the right to refuse the name of socialist to those who have not grasped the economic truth. But an economic theory alone, or any number of economic theories will make a religion [...] you must widen your definition of socialism [...] we must draw out all the ethical and spiritual implications of these efforts and desires for a juster social order [...] A new conception of life is taking shape, to which it is affection, if not folly, to refuse the name of Religion" (2006: 123).

<sup>15</sup> NOII is a forum for "a loose coalition of activists" resisting neo-liberal globalization in relation to its links "to the displacement of people from the South compelled to leave their homes due to persecution, poverty or oppression [and] colonial exploitation" (Day, 2005: 189–90). These people of the South leave "only to be categorized as 'illegal

ders<sup>16</sup> (SAB) in the newest social movements (Day, 2005: 189–190). The practice is one that Leela Gandhi — following Jacques Derrida, Jean Luc Nancy, and Maurice Blanchot — refers to as a *politics of friendship*<sup>17</sup> in her text *Affective Communities: Anti-Colonial Thought, Fin-De-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (2006).

I conclude the first part, having primarily critiqued Tantawi's fatwa, Al-Azhar's position, and the psychologists in question, by pointing to an alternative logic to their dichotomous reading of gender. I do this through Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *becoming*; a concept they inherited from Friedrich Nietzsche. I do this to delineate essentialist and dogmatic perceptions of gender for both anarchists and 'Western' Muslims. And I do this while refraining from discussing Sally's sexual practices and its potential intersections, and *insurrections* against, gender, preferring to situate, and discuss, as strictly as I know how and time will permit me, transgender politics as they are situated in a post-colonial capitalist-State under military dictatorship, Egypt. I'm not interested in conflating

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aliens' by the supposedly benevolent G8 countries where they seek refuge; they are denied the same rights as 'regular' citizens, and therefore face limited opportunities and further degradation" (Day, 2005: 189).

<sup>16</sup> SAB is a group where Muslim and anarchist activists are "involved in awareness-raising activities and direct action casework, and are committed to recognizing that 'struggles for self-determination and for the free movement of people against colonial exploitation' are led by the communities who fight on the front lines" (Day, 2005: 190).

<sup>17</sup> Gandhi's attention in her text is directed towards the introduction of "western non-players in the drama of imperialism [. . .] some 'minor' forms of [friendships built around] anti-imperialism that emerged in Europe, specifically in Britain, at the end of the nineteenth century" (2006: 1). An example Gandhi draws upon to demonstrate a trans-national politics of friendship is where "in 1914, having resigned his post at St. Stephen's and donated his admittedly meager possessions to the Indian National Congress, [C.F.] Andrews set sail for South Africa to lend support to a certain M.K. Gandhi in his campaign on behalf of the Indian indentured laborers. Gandhi, the records tell us, was waiting for Andrews on the dock" (2006: 14), Gandhi writes. A mourning Andrews, unrecognizable, head-shaved, and dressed in a white dhoti and kurta of coarse material like an indentured laborer might wear, approaches M.K. Gandhi, stooping, touching M.K. Gandhi's feet (Gandhi, 2006: 14). This isn't the only incident this happened. It wasn't a deification of M.K. Gandhi, on Andrew's part, his touching of M.K. Gandhi's feet. Gandhi writes: "In 1919 Andrews touched another pair of Indian feet" (2006, 14). The symbol, the touching of feet, Gandhi describes, "is a rich symbolism [. . .] an iconic anticolonial frieze: the London-trained Indian barrister defying imperial polarities of class and station in an elaborate costume drama" (2006: 14). Andrews, an Anglican priest, Gandhi continues, temporally reversed a "fundamental civilizational hierarchy of Empire in a single defiant gesture of self-abnegation" (2006: 14).

Sally's trans-gendered body with its purported sexual practice(s), unlike Al-Azhar's presumption, that assumes that Sayyid's body underwent surgery for the purpose of engaging in queer sexual practices. Gender and sexuality<sup>18</sup> as discourses differ. They can intersect but are not necessarily correlated.

With this context at the center, in the second and last part, I conclude the paper, arguing for a more fluid reading of Sayyid-Sally's case, speaking to Salwa's affect and the establishment of a space of Islamic rights, *huquq*, for the *acceptance*<sup>19</sup> of transsexuals in Islam.

## The Difference Between Two Logics

Despite what may seem a radical legal precedent, the eventual tolerance of Sally's sex-change surgery that can be found in Tantawi's fatwa<sup>20</sup> does not represent the first case of Transsexuality in Islam.

<sup>18</sup> A discussion on sexuality in this particular case study in so far as it relates would not be impossible but rather difficult in the time and space allocated. Sayyid's surgery, as the case presents itself, pertained to 'a paradox in Sayyid's gender identity', but possibly, equally, though difficult if not proven, Sayyid's desire for engaging in homosexual practices. That may not be the case given there is no evidence to suggest so. Nevertheless, to speak of sexuality would, however, include a discussion of "white heter-normativity" (24). I caution against — in line with Jasbir Puar's discussion in *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007) and Joseph Massad in *Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World* (2002) who makes a similar argument to Puar in his critique of the "universalization of gay rights" — the importation of homo-nationalist discourses by LGBTQ movements in 'the West' to the 'East' (361–85). Khalid Duran too pessimistically prophesizes that "a movement for gay rights [in the East] will not be viewed as indigenous. Rather, it would be considered objectionable as yet another symptom of 'Westernization,' or what Khomeinists have come to label as 'Westoxication'" (194).

<sup>19</sup> From my interview with Peter Lamborn Wilson a.k.a. Hakim Bey during my research time with the Affinity Project: "Tolerance [would signify or] is a kind of weak position [relative to 'the other'] and Acceptance [or radical tolerance] a strong position [relative to 'the other']". In other words, it's not just ecumenicalism here. It's not a reformist position. It's a pretty radical position. . . [ . . . ] and it [acceptance] got Hazrat Inayat Khan in a lot of trouble amongst orthodox Muslims. This movement still suffers from that today. But in India, there is this tradition of that, it still persists in India more than in other countries where the fundamentalist/reformist/modernist thing has swept away the so-called medieval creations which make up all the charm and difference. That's what they hate" (Peter Lamborn Wilson, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Tantawi's fatwa went so far as to point "significantly, the names of the psychologist, the surgeon and the anesthesiast reveal they are Christians" when there existed no particular evidence of the doctors identifying as Christian (Skovgaard-Peterson, 1997: 328). In fact, should the surgeon's name, Izzat Asham Allah Jibra'il's be taken as an

The Islamic Republic of Iran<sup>21</sup>, statistically speaking, carious out, falling behind Thailand, between 15,000–20,000 transsexual surgeries per year since their legalization by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1980. Moreover, and besides the existence of transsexuals during the time of the Prophet<sup>22</sup>, like Everett Rowson writes: “there is considerable evidence for the existence of a form of publicly recognized and institutionalized effeminacy or transvestism among males in pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabian society. Unlike other men, these effeminate or *mukhannathun* were permitted to associate freely with women, on the assumption that they had no sexual interest in them, and often acted as marriage brokers, or, less legitimately, as *go-betweens*” (1991: 671).

Tantawi’s view, Abdulwahab Bouhdiba describes, was that: “anything that violates the [gender binary] order of the world is a grave disorder, a source of evil and anarchy” (1985: 30). To Tantawi, the “bipolarity of the world rests on the strict separation of the two ‘orders’, the feminine and the masculine [and] that the best way of realizing the harmony intended by God is for the man to assume his masculinity and for a woman to assume her full femininity” (Bouhdiba, 1985: 30). Tantawi’s rigid and hermetic claims correspond to a practice of binary logic, a logic that involves platonic, essentialist, oppositional constructs like nature/culture, black/white, with us/against us, truth/rhetoric, speech/writing, natural/unnatural; a logic of an excluded middle. The construction of these qualities through, and as, opposite reveals a misogynist desire for control and combination. The “members of these binary pairs are not equal. Instead the first member of each is meant to dominate the second, which becomes

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indicator of anything, it is that the presence of ‘Allah’ — the Arabic-Islamic word denoting God — indicates that Izzat is not a Christian.

<sup>21</sup> The following site below is a video of Ayatollah Khomeini legalizing transsexual surgeries in Iran in 1980. Retrieval Date: July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Retrieved From: (<http://www.videosift.com/video/Iranian-Ayatollahs-support-transsexual-rights-and-sex-changes>).

<sup>22</sup> There is at least one ‘incident’ that is related for Muslims in the Oral Tradition (From the Book/*Sunan Abu-Dawud*, Book 32, Number 4095): “Narrated Aisha, Ummul Mu’minin: A mukhannath (eunuch) used to enter upon the wives of Prophet (peace\_be\_upon\_him). They (the people) counted him among those who were free of physical needs. One day the Prophet (peace\_be\_upon\_him) entered upon us when he was with one of his wives, and was describing the qualities of a woman, saying: When she comes forward, she comes forward with four (folds in her stomach), and when she goes backward, she goes backward with eight (folds in her stomach). The Prophet (peace\_be\_upon\_him) said: Do I not see that this (man) knows what here lies. Then they (the wives) observed veil from him.”



the 'other' of the first" (Flax, 1990: 36). To Tantawi, Sally was afflicted with "a corporeal disease which cannot be removed, except by this operation" (Skovgaard-Petersen, 330). Tantawi speaks of the surgery as if a cure that discloses 'buried or covered' sexual organs. Tantawi's view is that "God did not send a disease without sending a cure for it," making "a distinction between an outward appearance (*zahir*), which can be deceptive, and an inward essence (*batin*), which is always true" (332).

It is not difficult to see resonances between *zahir* and *batin* and what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari refer to as "the two axes, significance and subjectification" (1980: 167). Guattari and Deleuze propose that every being "possess two very different semiotic systems" (1980: 167). The first system, significance (*surface*), "does not speak a general language but one whose signifying traits are indexed to specific faciality traits [...] defin[ing] zones of frequency or probability, delimit[ing] a field that neutralizes in advance any expressions or connections unamenable to the appropriate significations" (1980: 168). The first system is a surface, the way a face is like a canvas or a map, with varying lines of geography and symmetry, wrinkles, facial features, symbols etc. The second axis is subjectification (*depth*) in which our individual subjectivity, as a singularity, is lodged in "consciousness, passion and redundancies" (1980: 168).

The second is the way our eyes are black holes; holes where our corresponding subjectivity — 'our soul' — takes harbor, an abyss, as illustrated in the Hegelian metaphor: 'the eyes are the *windows* to the soul' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980: 167).

It is this friction between surface and depth, between Sayyid's corporeal and psychic body, between *zahir* and *batin*, or what was publicly ascribed to Sayyid's surface versus what Sayyid thought and felt at depth, that Sayyid articulated as the discomfort, the source of 'extreme depression', and the motive for surgery. Witnessing her surface was anchoring, nailing her subjectivity, and in effect, causing a deep lack of satisfaction at the degree of her depth, Sally desired the correspondence of what was represented on surface to her depth. The application of binary logic to this knowledge of surface and depth, *zahir* and *batin*, is what enabled and permitted Tantawi to split the category of hermaphrodite into 'Natural' versus 'Un-Natural'. Considering, that is, that Sally's un-natural body did not conform to what Tantawi perceived it should be — a Natural Hermaphrodite; Tantawi's fatwa "may just as easily mark a tolerance as [to] indicate an enemy to be moved down at all costs" (Deleuze

and Guattari, 1980: 177). Like Rachel Adams points out, by “encountering ‘freaks’, we contemplate the dissolution of our own corporeal and psychic boundaries, the terror and excitement of monstrous fusion with the surrounding world. If identity formation, whether individual or collective, involves a dual gesture of incorporation and repudiation, freaks remind us of the unbearable excess that has been shed to confer entry into the realm of normalcy” (2001: 7). The ‘freak rational’ behind which binary logic functions is that when it does, it, the dominant machine of the moment, as is the case with Tantawi’s fatwa, operates rejecting “faces that do not conform, or seem suspicious, but only at a given level of choice”; rejecting out of fear, out of the threat of our capacity, as beings, for choice (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 177). What Tantawi’s fatwa did was produce “successive divergence-types of deviance for everything that eludes biunivocal relationships, to establish a relationships between what is accepted on first choice and what is only tolerated on second, third choice, etc.” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 177). Sally’s ‘essence’, or ‘Who Sally felt herself to be’, in this sense, can be hidden by clothing or even external genitals, but once discovered, according to Tantawi’s fatwa, it’s expected to conform to certain societal expectations, realigning clothing and/or genitals as needed.

Transphobia is similar to racism this way. Like Deleuze and Guattari describe, “racism operates by the determination of the degree of deviance from the White-Man face, which endeavors to integrate non-conforming traits into increasingly eccentric and backward waves, sometimes tolerating them at given places under given conditions [...] sometimes erasing them from the wall, which never abides alterity” (1980: 178). The hierarchy established in Tantawi’s fatwa not only ‘operated by a determination of the degree of deviance’ with respect to ‘the un-effeminate-White Man’, as a former colonizer, or even the post-colonially produced ‘un-effeminate-Egyptian Man’ each re-occupation thereafter, but also in relation to what Tantawi believes Islam regards a ‘Natural Transsexual’. The binary logic practiced by Tantawi and Al’Azhar is of the type that points a finger and says: “Aha! It’s not a man and it’s not a woman, so it must be a transvestite” (Deleuze, and Guattari, 1980: 177). This logic isn’t inherent to Islam. No, Al-Alzhar and Tantawis’ logic was premised on the idea that *seeing* stands for *knowing*, while the inward essence of Sally was dismissed as a ‘psychological disturbance’ not only by Al-Azhar, but also by the psychologists as well. But should that be the case, then ‘show me God’. The problem with their vision was

with the type of logic they were applying, that Sally's body didn't correspond to one true 'sex, of which not only exist two for each human being', but also a third sex by Tantawi's admittance, in his own tongue, with the category 'Natural' (Skovgaard-Peterson, 2007: 3; emphasis added).

The 'natural vs. un-natural' distinction demonstrated Tantawi and Al-Azhar's construction of a hierarchy with the category Transsexual, for the purpose of institutionalization, especially in the case of 'Natural', or 'true' Transsexuals. Their vision enables the Muslim perception that "every human being has only one sex, which is its true sex, and that somehow the idea of the hermaphrodite being on the way either further into or out of his [and her] state[s] exists — that is, hermaphroditism as a process [is one] that is reduced to constantly being corporal and psychological movements, manifestations denying this true sex" (Skovgaard-Peterson, 2007: 8; emphasis added). To Tantawi, Sally's body didn't articulate and elevate itself sufficiently or adequately enough to the privileged position of being regarded as a 'true case of hermaphroditism' (Skovgaard-Peterson, 2007: 3). Tantawi himself states: "it is permissible to perform the operation in order to reveal what was hidden of male or female organs. Indeed, it is obligatory to do so on the grounds that it must be considered a treatment, when a trustworthy doctor advises it. It is, however, not permissible to do it at the mere wish to change sex from woman to man, or vice versa" (Skovgaard-Petersen, 2007: 331; emphasis added). Tantawi wants to rationalize to himself Sally's transgendered person at its liminal stage in order to discipline it, classifying and (re)inserting it, having pretended it wasn't there historically speaking, within a normative gender duality, in an effort at reinforcing gender hierarchies in Egypt, a predominantly Muslim country. Tantawi believes that Sally's secret demanded an exact, swift surgical solution to its "signs and symptoms [. . .] everything came down to the dirty little secret" of 'what's wrong with Sayyid?' (Deleuze, 1985: 143). Tantawi's logic is a logic that re-enforces mind-body dichotomies through the practice of using binaries; a logic accompanied by practices "whose operation are not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control methods" (May, 1994: 67).

In moving beyond, given we've arrived at several points of departure, or consequential questions: Did Sally's journey through hell, the tyranny and bureaucracy of Egyptian society, indicate her

becoming 'Woman' and the entire network of essential femininities that arrive with being 'Woman'? Isn't Sally, and arguably any other 'Woman', or 'Man' as Sayyid (for one), always becoming — 'Woman'? And this yearning of Sallys' to 'be woman' — if this ideal state did or could exist: Was it not militating against this 'ideal state of Woman'; or was this 'ideal state of Woman' militating against its own self? In other words, that the category 'Woman' is open to opening and contesting itself through an inscribed gesture of hospitality (by virtue of the idea of 'womanhood') engraved within it, and that threatens essentialist conceptions of it. It's my argument that this gesture of hospitality or characteristic practice 'womanhood' is engraved within the category 'Woman'; that it acts, carrying on an ancient task of 'erasing and re-writing' itself, permitting the blossoming of new expressions of 'Woman'. That is, 'the spirit of womanhood' sets, yet never settles upon different paths, linking and bringing back, connecting like branches of a tree with other cartographies, signs: sublime, imaginary, symbolic, linguistic, ontological and epistemological, all potentially feminine singularities, rhizomatically interrelated through desire to 'Woman'. It's these singularities that de-stabilize the category 'Woman', the experience of *becoming woman*. It's in this light I believe Sally was *becoming man towards a woman*. Sally was becoming Sally.

Deleuze and Guattari write of an alternative logic to binaries, *becoming*. There can be "a becoming woman, a becoming child, that do not resemble 'the' woman or 'the' child as clearly molar entities (although it is possible — only possible — for the woman or child to occupy privileged positions in relations to becomings)" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 275). Becoming "woman is not imitating this entity or even transforming oneself [physically] into it [...] these indissociable aspects of becoming — woman must first be understood as a function of something else" (ibid.). It is "not imitating or assuming the female form, but emitting particles that enter the relation [...] or the zone of proximity, of a micro-femininity, in other words, that produce in us [everyone] a molecular woman" (ibid.). *Becoming* is the imagination then the actualization of "perpetual projects of self-overcoming and self-creation, constantly losing and finding ourselves", destabilizing our gender through performance (Call, 2003; Butler, 1990). An individual is already "a multiplicity, the actualization of a set of virtual singularities that function together, that enter into symbiosis, that attain a certain consistency" (Deleuze, 1993: xxix). A woman "as molar entity has to become-woman in

order that the man also becomes — or can become woman” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980: 276). One becomes without a “beginning nor end, departure or arrival, origin nor destination [. . .] a line of becoming has only a middle” (ibid., 293). Becoming, in this sense, can be seen as a description of what Tantawi called ‘a *mix*’, in reference to Sally’s body not corresponding to one true sex as he expected; the only difference being, that becomings function on the conjunctive *and* (as if composing oneself as a molecular series) while binaries function on a disjunctive *or*.

Tantawi argues that: “to believe in Islam is to accept one’s sex and accept [that] it must be regulated so that it may be used in the right way” (Bouhdiba, 1985: 14). Okay, but then I’ll rhetorically ask who is this earthly authoritative figure in Islam responsible for regulating a body divinely relegated what it is; that is, who is Tantawi to privilege body over mind or mind over body when God created Sally with a mind and heart, no less or more of a degree of ‘naturalness’ than a ‘natural Transsexual’ with a ‘natural’ body (Skovgaard-Peterson, 2007: 8)? Tantawi demonstrates his regulation out of a “real concern, [and] a desire to establish as precisely and strictly as possible the limits of the sexes” only to realize, in his own admission, that “much of the inter-sexual frontiers are difficult to detail up” despite “the importance they have in the eyes of the Muslim consciousness which finds itself led more and more to set up an impenetrable wall between the sexes” (1985: 42). Tantawi strictly considers gender’s ‘natural’ state though the biological framework of ‘unaltered genitals’, and further repeats the argument in his fatwa that: a ‘true man is defined by a fully functioning penis’ as a source of phallic power. One wonders whether Al-Azhar and Tantawi Freudian analysis would apply the same logic to a man castrated in an accident and that man’s newly compromised social status in Cairo upon his ‘phallic loss’ that would deprive him of his legal status as a man. Like Paula Sanders writes, “when in doubt, [Tantawi’s] rule seemed to be to accord the inferior status to hermaphrodites. What was important was that access to the higher status of men be successfully protected. The rules assured that no hermaphrodite would attain the status accorded to men unless it could be demonstrated that he was, indeed, a man” (1991: 81). Tantawi fails to consider situations in which ‘true’ gender cannot be discerned through surgery, particularly in cases in which an individual cannot afford surgery.

In concluding the first part, Tantawi’s fatwa in particular illustrates a dogmatic re-enforcement of identity politics’ underlying

and fatal principle when applied as a practice: that is, that ‘the truth’ about an ‘other’ shouldn’t be discerned from observing outward markers, what’s *zahir* or on surface, further implying that ‘the other’s’ characteristics can’t be neatly divided into two diametrically opposed poles. It is this practice of practicing reductionist identity politics, when it becomes a politics based on appearance that demonstrates a position, which I strongly oppose advocating instead for more fluid articulations of gender through the concept of becoming.

### **Parching, She Drank the Inky Dust of Law — Sweet Honey in Her Mouth**

The world is drenched in seas of beautiful ‘madness’ overlooked. Not the madness of asylums but the madness in each of us — a madness hidden — that starves and liberates — a madness of our own inner (un)doing, our own becoming (Guattari, 1995: 171). Even in the years since 1982 when Al-Azhar panicked with fantasies tied to tying Sally, like hysterics, this source of ‘madness’, this ‘evil and anarchy’ deemed ‘wrong in our age’, resisted her exorcism, instead becoming, living. It is only through “the artistic” process of self-creation, through becoming, Deleuze writes, that we “emerge from ourselves, [and] know what another sees of this universe that is not the same as ours and whose landscapes would have remained as unknown to us as those that might be on the moon” (2000: 42). Sally’s becoming was her dearest possession, her ‘asylum’ — her surface. And the worse the ‘unleashed panic,’ arriving from public torture and the madness that was made to starve, with tyranny all around, the more deliriously Sally resisted; try and imagine, ‘being scrutinized in a city like Cairo, forget the surveillance of people’s eyes’. But it was already too late, Sally, long before, no longer a prisoner, rid herself of the worst complaint, her walls within, reconciling matters between herself and whatever God, becoming, playing to the fullest, exploring gender, performing with a certain madness, breaking her shell, swimming in its open sea. Sally, without a boss, without a factory, took permission from herself, breaking mind-body binaries in Cairo, Egypt, in ‘82. It was not the first incident of Transsexuality Islamically speaking, but Sally certainly stood affectively in a society that mistook her for an object of riotous publicity, a patient; a kind of superstar of madness. She did this in resistance to popular opinion, and in resistance to Al-Azhar in a country that has continued to

declare itself in a 'state of emergency, and terror' (Guattari, 1995: 172) for over 27 years.

This anarchistic nomadic flight and resistance of Sallys', weighed against Al-Azhar's inability to 'tame' her, rested on Al-Azhar's ability to make 'a psychologically disturbed *mu-kuhu'natha*' submit, to conform, body and mind, within certain constructed gendered boundaries. It was not Sally's body, really, that should've demonstrated itself as the problematic for Al-Azhar but rather both her mind and heart; she knew what she was doing. That they couldn't conquer. There, in that terrain, she is free and can be whatever she desires to be. One "would presume that the patient's existing psychological problems, caused by the surgeon's mutilation of their genitals and consequent brainwashing by the society, would have far outweighed potential problems resulting from returning to a body they feel they belong to" (Music, 2003: 42). Particularly given Sally was born and raised in Egypt; 'she never came, she never went, she never left'; she wasn't ambivalent to Egyptian and Muslim culture. Yet she insisted. This too is the reasoning that the Grand Mufti's fatwa became a source of confusion that both "parties [in defense and in opposition to surgery] cited it in support of their position" (Skovgaard-Peterson, 2007: 8). Al-Azhar realized that "socialized into this world of relations, which assumed that men and women must interact, that they must interact in prescribed ways, and that interaction in other ways, threatened the social order and had to be guarded against all costs" (Sanders, 1991: 75). Al-Azhar dread that its order, 'the order of God', would collapse publicly, should Sally be accepted rather than tolerated Islamically; what that would mean in terms of Transsexual rights – in what corner of the Mosque would Sally pray? Al-Azhar in its decision, headed by Tantawi, demonstrated little faith in Islam, or God.

You cannot compromise with belief in difference, in acceptance. It shouldn't be subject to question; *well*, provided the presence of particular ethical and political commitments, as conditions for unconditional friendship. In Islam, righteous "deeds [. . .] recognized are not the monopoly of any single competitor [. . .] as the judge God, has to be above the narrow interest of participants [and] claims of familiarity with the judge [God] with any particular 'team' will not avail the participants" (Esack, 1997: 175). No authority, "no leader, no government, no assembly can restrict, abrogate or violate in any way the rights" (Arkoun, 1994: 106) to existence, to acceptance, they belong to God, not covered with shit, pissed on by demagogues.

That's precisely the point behind the Islamic concept of *Tawheed*, the first proclamation of belief; only God is God, and there is only one, with Muhammad as a final Messenger. *Al-Haqq*, an Arabic word meaning 'The Just', an attribute of God, the transcendent of all beings is one to Who anyone has not only privilege of access to, but right not to access (Esack, 1997: 158). It's given this 'right to access or not' that even the Prophet was warned by God not to exceed God's sole authority over this divinely decreed 'right to not access'. Allah says to Muhammad: "For those who take as *Awliyâ*' [guardians, supporters, helpers, protectors, etc.] others besides Him [i.e. whom take other deities, other than Allâh as protectors, and worship them, even then] Allâh is *Hafiz* [Protector] over them [i.e. takes care of their deeds and will recompense them], and you [O Muhammad] are not a *Wakil* [guardian or a disposer of their affairs have say] over them" (The Holy Koran, Chapter 42, Chapter of 'The Council': Verse 6). It is this spirit of acceptance in Islam, and that exists too in anarchism as a political and philosophical orientation that can uniquely inform Islam politically and ethically, and moves the debate beyond a practice of mere tolerance to help develop a doctrine of acceptance in practice.

*Al-Haqq* radiates out from the singular, the transcendental, to a plural multiple in its form *Huquq* — 'rights' here on Earth — and who but God gifts beings *Huquq*? Inclusiveness is superior to exclusiveness in Islam for as the Holy Koran states: "Verily! God loves those who are equitable" (Chapter 49, The Chapter of 'The Chambers': Verse 9). For Transsexuality to be conceived as a divine testimony to difference, understood in this manner, and with this spirit, is what I believe necessary for Islam in the present. Following from this view any attempt at what Hakim Bey refers to as radically tolerating, or what I call accepting, begins with determining the rights of Transsexuals, to life, to *nikah* (marriage in Arabic), to inheritance, to adoption, etc. Transsexuals have *Huquq*. Transsexuality is not a problem, but is in a Deleuzian sense, a sign; "a sign which constitutes different worlds, worldly signs, empty signs, deceptive signs", a third sex, in a Proustian sense, Transsexuality as 'a natural sex'<sup>23</sup> (Deleuze, 2000:

<sup>23</sup> Far from uniting the sexes, transsexuals separating binary sexes, are the source from which we can proceed to see two divergent homosexual series, or sites: that of Sodom and that of Gomorrah. Proust writes of homosexuality "The two sexes shall die, each in a place apart from the same place" (Proust, Sodom and Gomorrah, 616) having access to the same secret, *the signs* which they both possess.



7–9); a third sex that possess various ‘incarnations’ and simulacric representations through Transexuality’s various intersections with colonial, imperial, cultural, ethnic and racial regimes of truth, indeed historiographies. All “which transform all the other” signifiers, formations, of not only Transexuality itself as a category but the category ‘Woman’ too and to which it is connected to. That said, I caution Muslims against seeking these huquq be established institutionally, ‘under the purported protection of any sovereign’ but God, be it Muftis’, psychologists’, or Al-Azhar. For it shouldn’t be difficult to picture in a scenario where there is a movement towards the institutional establishment of Transsexual rights, Muslims would yet risk the stabilization, translation, inscription and normalization of gender as a drop of ink, words, appropriated by institutions like Al-Azhar; gender would still remain another binary construct, to be squared bracketed on bureaucratic state forms. There is beautiful madness in the ‘un-natural’, in alternative non-institutional forms of resistance.

Nothing is obscure with Tantawi’s fatwa, as soon as one considers the devilish details, the governing frontiers and binary logic that guards and shuts the door on the possibility and rights of an in-between. Tantawi’s view dismisses the abilities of a creating Creator that created Sally differently with neither an intention to cause confusion or out of amusement but rather so that she and only she chooses. It was never considered by Tantawi for instance, that maybe God created Sally to see who will squabble over what, who will leave what’s pertinent in a ruse and for what but that which is ethical and political; foundations from which Muslims can build new communities having given themselves to the acceptance of Transsexuals. It’s not difficult to see Sayyid-Sally’s case serve as a distraction from the political, socio-economic, and humane, problems of Egyptian society. Tantawi looked “at faith in terms of what divides and disperses, ignoring the wisdom of difference and objectives of having faith to begin with”, trespassing Islamically God’s Sole Authority as Divine Judge and provider of rights (Esack, 1997: 171). There is no evidence that Tantawi or Al-Azhar considered much Sally’s faithful determinism, her respect and dignity, as she battled her way to feel what was only hers to feel, despite and following all the trials and tribulations faced at Al-Azhar University, and doubtlessly in the eyes of popular Egyptian culture. And yet, she returned to Al-Azhar and graduated a doctor.

'Natural' or 'Unnatural' there was a binary order that never tried to accept Sayyid-Sally's existence as a divinely decreed right, but rather re-worked a representation of gender to barely tolerate and ignore it and Sayyid-Sally's existence. To Tantawi, all that's left to say lies between us in two Koranic verses: "Unto us our works and unto you your works; let there be no dispute between you and us. God will bring us together and to God we shall return", therein God will decree as an Ultimate Judge the clear positions wherein we differed (Chapter 42, Chapter of 'The Counsel': Verse 15 & Chapter 2, Chapter of 'The Cow': Verse 139).

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## Book Review: *The Politics of Postanarchism*

Leonard Williams\*

Saul Newman, *The Politics of Postanarchism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 200 pp.

As we have come to expect from Saul Newman, this book is the latest in a series of efforts to highlight and explain the anarchist tendencies lurking within poststructuralist thought. Through a number of works tracing the affinity of anarchism and poststructuralism (notably, *From Bakunin to Lacan* and *Power and Politics in Poststructuralist Thought*), Newman has undoubtedly emerged as one of the foremost interpreters of the links between continental philosophy and radical politics. Committed to revealing the ethical and political implications of rejecting foundational approaches to theory and practice, Newman's project has come to an important juncture with this latest work. The primary challenge we confront, as well as the primary focus of this book, is "to think politics outside the state — to explore the constituent principles and ethical contours of a political space which seeks autonomy from the order of the state" (167).

Written with an exceptional clarity, Newman's effort "to affirm anarchism's place as the very horizon of radical politics" (2; original emphasis) involves both geographic and ontological explorations. Geographically, the concern is to locate the place that anarchism

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has in contemporary politics. At first glance, it appears to be simultaneously no place and a non-place. As a “recurring desire for life without government that haunts the political imagination” (1), any conception of anarchism that we might have seems to be little more than a spectre. As such, it lies just beyond our ken, outside the standard conceptions of politics rooted in power and authority, sovereignty and coercion. On a second take, moving from geography to ontology, anarchism is necessarily with us in those moments whenever insurrectionary challenges to authority arise. In this sense, anarchism may well be identified with the perpetual but intermittent spirit of revolt that has long animated any number of social and political movements — from democracy to socialism, from trade unionism to identity politics. We have to be careful, though, not to conceive of anarchism as merely the last refuge of tired radicals, ones who have grown weary of the struggles fought by previous generations. Instead, we are encouraged to see its proper place and configuration as a realm marked by ethical action and utopian dreams, a realm where thinkers and activists seek the simultaneous realization of equality and liberty (sometimes called “equaliberty”). Newman’s perspective, in other words, appears as a *postanarchism*.

What, then, is postanarchism? This question has been the subject of some debate among anarchist theorists and activists for some time now. To some thinkers and activists, the term suggests a new form of anarchism that simply says goodbye to all that — somewhat reminiscent of Bob Black’s work, Newman’s postanarchism bids a particularly eager goodbye to the stilted leftist heritage of the past. To others, the term indicates that radical politics should move to a new plane, should somehow go not only beyond leftism, but beyond anarchism itself. Whether postanarchism is seen as the latest intellectual fad or as the successor to the mantle of radicalism, one confronts this book with the minimal but important goal of making sense of the concept of postanarchism.

Newman takes up the task of explaining postanarchism in his typically capable and insightful way. Drawing on the several strains of poststructuralist thought — as well as ideas from both the (post-)Marxist, continental, and anarchist traditions — he clarifies the scope of postanarchism by engaging in any number of debates within contemporary political theory. You will find sections of the work discussing many of the usual suspects — dynamic theoretical duos such as Deleuze and Guattari, Hardt and Negri, along with Laclau and Mouffe; as well as assorted radical thinkers from Badiou

to Bookchin, from Zerzan to Žižek. Rather unlike the structure of some of his previous books, though, the reader will not find each chapter dedicated to interpreting and critiquing a particular theorist. Instead, this work seems very much like Newman's effort to come to terms with his philosophical conscience. We progress from classical anarchism to postanarchism through a series of moments that amount to a journey exploring possible paths to liberation. The goal is to describe, or (better) to suggest, how we might emerge out of our willing subjection and psychic attachment to power. Newman's rather utopian project, like that of anarchism itself, is thus "to provide a point of alterity or exteriority as a way of interrogating the limits of this [i.e., the existing] order" (7).

In other words, postanarchist theory endeavours to solve the ultimate riddle of power — how to resist or revolt against it without reproducing its structures of domination in another form. Postanarchism, while aiming to provide a path toward genuine emancipation, begins by questioning the epistemological and ontological foundations of the state and capitalism. In laying out this critique, postanarchism cannot depend upon the foundational ideas supplied by essentialism and humanism — the very sort of presuppositions that characterize not only the Enlightenment thought at the heart of modern radicalism, but also major strands of the anarchist tradition itself. To be utopian, in Newman's sense, does not mean realizing some intellectually constructed blueprint of the good society; rather, it means discovering the key features of the future society amid practices of the present one. Poststructural utopianism acknowledges the revolutionary potential in everyday actions, in the molecular or localized forms of resistance that occur whenever and wherever power operates (64–6).

What kind of politics then is anticipated by postanarchist theory? In Newman's phrase, postanarchism constitutes an anti-politics, that is, an anti-political politics. It is a revolutionary enterprise that suspects representation and rejects the state. In sketching the origins of such a politics, Newman begins with a recapitulation of the arguments waged between Marxists and anarchists over the state, the party, and revolution. Even post-Marxist ideas of hegemony and agonistic pluralism, though ostensibly aimed at emancipation, fail to get beyond the framework imposed by the political logic of state sovereignty. As a result, postanarchism seeks "to conceive of a space for politics outside and against the state, and to see politics as an

activity through which the principle of state sovereignty is radically questioned and disputed" (103).

At this point, few anarchists would have any hesitation about subscribing to Newman's analysis. Few, indeed, do not relish the chance to rehash the longstanding quarrels with Marxism in any form. From his encounter with Marxism and post-Marxism, Newman moves to elucidate the connections that link postanarchism with contemporary radical thought and continental philosophy. The aim of his review, once again, is to situate the postanarchist approach as one that rejects the Manichean tendencies found in classical anarchist thought (tendencies that Newman artfully diagnosed in *Power and Politics in Poststructuralist Thought*). Where traditional anarchists oppose the natural to the artificial and the social to the political, postanarchists seek an escape from that binary opposition. The emancipatory question is not how to seize state power, as the Marxists would have it; nor is it simply how to abolish the state in one go, as classical anarchists would have it. Rather, the crux of the matter concerns "how one should build a politics which, in its very existence, presupposes the radical dissolution of the statist imaginary" (111–12). Postanarchism thus tries to map a new territory, a space that lies between the social and the political – while rejecting the essentialist claims long made about both domains. In this new terrain, postanarchism rejects both the notion that emancipation is immanent within capitalist development and the idea that some spontaneous event will usher in an era of undiminished liberation.

For Newman, contemporary anarchism rightly drops a lot of the political and intellectual baggage from the past. Traditional leftist ties with particular labour or socialist movements are often set aside in favour of more diffuse anti-capitalist and egalitarian affinities. Enlightenment conceptions of human nature and reason drop away in favour of non-foundational, poststructuralist ontologies. Skepticism toward meta-narratives, abandonment of essential identities, emphasis on language and discourse, and a concept of constitutive power are the central poststructuralist insights that Newman believes should now guide anarchist politics (140–2). Postanarchism takes these insights as points of departure (lines of flight, perhaps?) from the traditional categories of radical thought. Democracy no longer connotes a stable set of parliamentary institutions nor should it refer to a type of collective decision making. For Newman, following Rancière, democracy must be conceived as a politics of dis-juncture. To the extent that contemporary anarchism destabilizes



the “ontological foundations and essential identities” of traditional anarchism, so postanarchism becomes “an ethics in which power is continually problematised, and where borders are continually contested” (151). Dissent and disagreement, then, are inevitable within political life — and, presumably, within anarchism itself. In postanarchism, “the emphasis is on contingency and practical innovation, rather than on understanding the organic basis and the rational *telos* of the story of human liberation” (153; original emphasis). Foundational principles of action drawn from revolutionary theory or modern social science must give way to a politics rooted in localized practices and pervasive contingencies.

Just as poststructuralism is a philosophy without foundations, so postanarchism is a politics without guarantees. We can no longer place our bets on a proletariat becoming progressively class-conscious or spontaneously engaging in revolutionary action. We can no longer take for granted the inevitable demise of the capitalist mode of production through the dialectical unfolding of communist society. We simply cannot assume that the better natures of human beings will be liberated, and then, expressed in such a way that power and domination need not be a concern any longer.

The imaginary of classical anarchism was one which opposed pure nature to corrupt convention, which sought the liberation of society from the shackles of the state. In Newman’s understanding of postanarchism, “the political is the constitutive space *between* society and the state” (169; original emphasis) — neither pole of that opposition is privileged; neither can colonize or win over the other. Radical politics thus appears as “a series of struggles, movements and communities whose existence is often fragile, whose practices are experimental, tentative and localised and whose continuity is by no means guaranteed” (170). The challenge is to develop and employ non-authoritarian organizations in the service of such non-representative or democratic goals as “equaliberty.”

There seems to me to be no question that *The Politics of Postanarchism* is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand postanarchism. Its theoretical problems and concerns are expertly described and explored. Its sources in poststructuralist thought, its affinities with continental philosophy, and its links to both classical and contemporary anarchism are well summarized and fairly interpreted. Whatever criticisms of the book one might have do not emerge from the scholarship or analysis it presents, they emerge instead from what the work leaves unsaid or little explored.

Newman's understanding of postanarchism is largely elucidated through contrast. We learn, for example, that it does not share the Manichean, even reductionist assumptions of classical anarchism. We learn that postanarchism rejects both the essentialist ontology of Enlightenment thought and the rationalist prescriptions found in the Marxist tradition. Because of its non-foundational, contingent nature, though, it is not surprising that Newman does not entirely succeed when it comes to giving postanarchism any positive content. We know where to find postanarchism at work — in the space between society and state — but we do not quite know if it could be identified on sight. We might be able to pick it out of a line-up, but perhaps could not find it among the crowds on the streets. Some positive content for postanarchism can be found in the ideal of equal-liberty, a key notion for Newman; but for the most part, the concept is defined in straightforward, minimalist, even self-evident terms. It just is not discussed in any significant detail. To the extent that postanarchism appears as a utopianism, it would help us all to know a bit more about the direction in which we should head.

As one absorbs Newman's arguments, it is rather easy to come to the belief that postanarchism is now central to the emancipatory project. Its ontological assumptions and theoretical tools certainly provide an important means for thinking about the possibilities of radical politics. Even so, it is not entirely clear just what is to be done as a result of taking its ontology to heart. In general, when Newman talks about matters of anarchist practice, he most often does so in the context of making theoretical claims about the contours of ethics, though in the concluding chapter, he tries to highlight some concrete examples of postanarchist political activity. Even so, the best he can do is to make admittedly common gestures in the direction of "the decentralised, democratic and non-authoritarian structures and practices involved in what is broadly termed the global anti-capitalist movement" (168). Perhaps the next step in elucidating a postanarchist account of emancipation is to talk not only about specific structures and practices, but to theorize about how it is possible for the critical consciousness on which they depend to emerge in the first place.

Anarchism, as an anti-politics, has typically been marginalized or kept to the outer limits of political theory. Because of this position on the fringe, Newman suggests, anarchism "has something important to say about the nature of the political" (181). That significant contribution is what makes anarchism worthy of further study,

practice, and development; indeed, it is what makes Newman's work inherently valuable. Even so, contemporary anarchism (whether post- or not) remains a largely aspirational doctrine. Perhaps saying something important about the political is less noteworthy than inspiring important political work. If so, then postanarchism — anarchism conceived as a contingent radicalism — must necessarily be understood as an anarchism-to-come.



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# Listen to yourself

Jamie Heckert

*Listen to yourself,*  
to the subtle flows  
of emotion, desire  
coursing through your body.  
You need not conform  
to any boxes, any borders.  
Desires overflow  
these simple lines  
designed  
to control,  
to contain.

*Love yourself,*  
what you bring to the world.  
Voices may say,  
"You're not good enough,  
you're not doing it right."  
They speak  
from anger  
from fear.  
You need not hold  
these words  
in your belly.  
Let them go,  
when you are ready.

*Practice yourself;*  
do what moves you.  
Feel your breath, your body.  
Touch your heart.  
Caress your skin.  
Take in the touch you need  
of wind and water,  
earth and sun,  
food and drink,  
hands and mouths.

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