

Critique of Static Ontology and Becoming-Anarchy¹

Salvo Vaccaro

translated by Jesse Cohn

ABSTRACT

The following article was written by Salvo Vaccaro and translated by Jesse Cohn. The article raises the following question: Is anarchism a philosophy? Moreover, is anarchism, as a philosophy, foundationalist?

KEYWORDS

ontology, foundation, Adorno, reconciliation, Deleuze, becoming

Anarchism and philosophy [*Anarchisme et philosophie*]. Let's start by questioning the status of the connective "and" [*et*]. Or is the *and* perhaps a copula, an "is" [*est*]? In both cases, it will be necessary above all to understand the two polar terms of this statement, and then to weave a relationship between them, the nature of which will tell us what this "and/is" [*e(s)t*] indicates. It seems that understanding what *anarchism* is represents an easier task, rather than understanding what *philosophy* is in our Western conceptual milieu (from before Plato to the present). But is this so? Let us address this last question.

There are many definitions of *philosophy*; I will consider only three of them. The first definition posits a coincidence between philosophical knowledge and knowledge as such, i.e., knowing

¹ This paper originally appeared as: "Critique de l'ontologie étatique et devenir-anarchie," in Jean-Christoph Angaut, Daniel Colson, Mimmo Pucciarelli (s.d.), *Philosophie de l'anarchie* (Lyon: Atelier Création Libertaire, 2012).

things for what they are; not the analysis of the activity of thinking as a material substrate (today, we would call this the *hardware*), but the analysis of the constructions of thought that serve to situate the object on the basis of its content (i.e., the Aristotelian categories as *software*). This definition has the merit of reminding us of our continuity with antiquity, the cosmology of the Renaissance, and Kant, who innovates only in the *critical* attitude he imparts to this philosophical analysis. When this philosophical analysis “leases” (to use a contemporary term) the criteria of verification belonging to the scientific order, for the precision of the exact sciences transposed onto the plane of thought, then the philosophy of modernity is first and foremost epistemology.

The second definition proposes to go further than this cognitive activity, which no longer agrees to limit itself to deciphering the reasons for the reality of experience (by the use of logic or the senses), in order to project itself beyond: *metà fusikà*. In fact, metaphysics studies, exclusively through the logic of reason—although somehow edified by an affinity with what we might define as *theology*—all that goes beyond the mere reception of the senses, in order to find, beyond sensation, a spirit, an idea, the visibility of which (a tautology in Plato) provides the real key to the understanding of reality because it illuminates the original apparatus that animates it, that gives it existence and allows it to be reproduced.

The third definition in this brief overview is, finally, the specific activity of philosophy that seeks the substance of each thing contained in the objects of thought, a substance by unique necessity that is hidden behind what appears, what is given. In short, ontology seeks being [*être*] behind the existant [*étant*], a deep background that lies behind it, at the cost of the inadmissibility of its thinking existence, so anything short of its pure existence as existant [*étant*].

Surely you will have noticed that I didn’t intend to approach the question of the term “philosophy,” which is generally traced back to the love of wisdom, *φίλος* [*philos*] and *σοφός* [*sophos*] in Greek. But Reiner Schürmann, in a note that I cannot fully analyze in this paper, states that “Philein [*φιλεῖν*] signifies here not ‘to love,’ but ‘to appropriate,’ (*suos* [*σφός*], in Latin, *suus*, in French *sien*). The *philosophos* is the one who pursues a knowledge in order to make it his own.”²

² Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 635n26.

Let us pause for the moment and turn our attention to the other side of the polarity, anarchism. Is anarchism a philosophy? Is it an independent philosophy, or is it contained within a particular school? It is difficult to contain all the protagonists and all the propositions that can be visibly traced back to the anarchist idea within just one body of doctrine in the singular, *anarchism*. Indeed, the plurality of thought and thinkable anarchisms makes it difficult to reduce or return them to unity such that we could identify it within a single discipline of thought that is philosophy. So I say that anarchisms cannot be reduced to a form of thinking which is philosophy, even if in some passages anarchism seems to echo some philosophical considerations. If, for example, we take ethics as the focal point of the dynamics of thought, then we would be further encouraged to think that the plural variants of anarchism could be integrated within a certain ethical conception, tied to an individual and collective behavior as a kind of material precondition for each political hypothesis under the sign of anarchism.

But then, what is this plural anarchism? If we look at it in its historical-material genesis, it arises within the political sphere. It emerged in a thoroughly politicized context, emerged in sharp contrast to the modern, secular tendency to depoliticize society and its constituents (the term *actor* betrays the tacit and servile acceptance of its spectacularization, well before Guy Debord's subtle diagnoses). Of course, the rather visible influence of the Enlightenment might lead us to rethink this "placement" of anarchism within the domain of political ideas in order to give it a philosophical halo instead, but it is almost impossible to detach the anarchist idea from the historical movements that have embodied it, all politically aimed at overthrowing not just one historical political regime, but rather a form inherited for centuries, in order to inaugurate an associative and emancipated form of life.

But is it a form of political thought, i.e., a theory, a philosophy of politics? Or is it only a discursive practice, as in Foucault, which is in equal measure theory and practice? Several elements point towards the latter account, elements that could be interrogated by an interesting and very useful genealogical research (quite far from the kind of historical-archival reconstruction which predominates among anarchists). Above all, the singular condition according to which the stratification of the anarchist idea in general terms only gives us the figure of a theoretical thinker who, even in his biography, coincides with the figure of a militant activist. Apart from Godwin and Stirner, in our "panthe-

on” there is not one anarchist theorist who was not an active protagonist in the history of the political movement. It is as if most agreed on the legitimacy of the act of theoretical reflection, without running the risk of an uncritical and hagiographic exaltation of the singular human figure, but on condition that it be brought down from the ivory tower, set within the plural domain of common mortals, of activists operating within praxis as the primary site of verification and truth-telling, according to the success or failure of political strategies and tactics, just like everyone else in a particular historical and social context.

Since the quantity of documents of all kinds that characterize the cultural production of plural anarchism reflects the discursive practice that feeds on political analyses, on theoretical considerations, of course, but also on pamphlets, leaflets, articles in the endless press that signaled the golden years of the anarchist movements, whose members were mostly subaltern individuals bordering on cultural illiteracy, although very attentive to the cultural dimension—more so than today, when we certainly observe a rise in the cultural competences of each, at least in the rich and powerful planetary North.

Doubtlessly, then, plural anarchism, understood as a *discursive formation*, contains the elements of a theorization of pure politics, so to speak, i.e., infinite and not contingent: the critique of statism (not only of the state-form), the negation of authority constituting a given, as well as some sophisticated levels of self-reflexive theorizing about its own epistemic categories that could almost make it belong to a certain idea of political philosophy. But these singular attitudes do not signal, in my view, the corpus that is emblematic of anarchism and its plural flesh-and-blood historical actors. On the contrary, if we just look at one of the reasons that plural anarchism today speaks haltingly within the social arena of the rich and powerful world of the West, it is likely because it presents this specific element: the ultimately stifling, self-referential conditions of the cultural reproduction of anarchism and its movements, which appears fearful or reluctant to contaminate itself by mixing with and incorporating, through a few filters of critical re-elaboration, certain varieties of thought and practice that come from other, neighboring but distinct cultural contexts that are possessed of many affinities as regards motives, perspectives, goals and objectives.

At the end of this rapid double exposition of philosophy and anarchism, we feel that the status of this *and* lies in a disjunctive conjunction. If we juxtapose their descriptions, we cannot fail to

see how the spark that ignites philosophical thought is visible in *astonishment as the motivating force of cognitive contemplation*, although the detonating fuse that activates anarchist discourse (theoretical and practice at once) is represented, recalling Hannah Arendt here, in *rage as the motivating force for transformative action*. The experience of the injustice, the lying, the arrogance of power is the *prius movens* of anarchist action, and this is reflected in the ethics that it connotes: the privative *a* that negates, as its primary postulate—a kind of unfounded *incipit* of theoretical perspective, but often so profound as to impel a radical turning point in life—the authority towards which, purely in the negative, anarchism orients itself. Of course, it would be too complicated to analyze in brief the ways in which the historical movements have conjugated this “originary rage,” ranging from ironic invective to insurgency, from spontaneous revolt to (more or less) organized revolution.

The negative approach of anarchism, as signaled by the privative *a*, also produces, in my view, another bifurcation of philosophical reflection. Just by the act of excusing itself, in the first place, from the contingent task of offering a proposal for the organization of a society without domination, a task that is also consigned to the real movements, anarchism presents itself as *infinite* in the spirit of its thought. The anarchist proposition, indeed, is not susceptible to counter-factual negation on the historical plane: the fact that no society, ancient or modern (Clastres’ regression to preliterate societies is debatable), has ever achieved an anarchic phase in its existence does not present a theoretical weapon against anarchism, which posits the negation of authority, with all this entails on the institutional and social plane, regardless of the finitude of history. Thus its spirit is infinite, certainly, but in a way that would be dangerously “analogous” to the metaphysical search for a foundation of being [*statut de l’être*] if anarchism were to seek a kind of “counter-foundation of being [*contre-statut de l’être*]” with which to legitimize the negation of authority, not in the very fact of being able to think it, but because a “fundamentally-virtually-anarchic-being” is thinkable.

Instead, the most critical and dissonant contemporary philosophical thought has now abandoned every metaphysical pretension, at least in its more politically radical statements, situating its own research within a trans-generational *finitude* of the human (and even the post-human) that examines the psychological effects of existence at a singular and collective level, from a political standpoint that owes nothing to any theology, seeking to give

the contingent space of life its greatest meaning and value, to lend as much aid as possible to the daily adventure between the prenatal *nihil* and the postmortem *nihil*.

When I point to the perilous nature for anarchist thought of a “counter-foundation of being,” what I am really distancing myself from is the search for an ontology of being that could confirm the anarchist hypothesis by setting it upon a base that has truth as its platform. This is the fate of any ontology as a conceptual operation, short of a pluralistic declination (Deleuze) or a historico-social declination (Hacking). Ontology is that particular branch of philosophical reflection which looks for the stability of being *qua* being, i.e., where the object of research is specifically twisted towards a transcendental abstraction, toward an essence that is invisible to the existence, which is to be anchored to something immobile, to a deep substrate, so that it will stay firmly rooted in a fixed, immutable, predestined condition, which is precisely being *qua* being, not the existence, which is always changing in relation to the historical-conceptual conditions of thought.³

Ontology is a moment of philosophical reflection that signals that we are leaving behind the naturalistic and physical account of the things of the world in order to construct a single hidden essence (Parmenides) that is to be brought into the light of truth. This is the Greek etymology of the word “truth,” *a-letheia*, unveiling, as if the philosophical thought that seeks the origin of the world in the facts of nature carried the vice of concealment in itself, the concealment of the meta-physical, which goes beyond the mere sensible appearance of a world perceived by the easily deceived and deluded senses, while the ability to reason becomes infallible in relation to sense-perception, but such that this is the preserve of an elite of philosophers, of course, whom Plato really intended to be not only cultural but political leaders.

The philosophical approach thus reveals its political intentionality, i.e., in the first place, ensuring knowledge of the world not to those who possess five senses *naturaliter*, so to speak, thus without any specific competencies, but really to those who have a faculty of reason (*logos*, not *noos*, always available to everyone as pure *spirit*), the exercise of which becomes, for the first time, the result of a specific training, a specific domestication, through the

³ “It is no longer being that is divided into so many categories, arranged into an ontological hierarchy, distributed into specific beings assigned to a fixed place; rather, ontic differences are distributed in a smooth space, open to being”: Véronique Bergen, *L’Ontologie de Gilles Deleuze* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001), 19.

schools of thought, the techniques of rhetoric and sophistry, etc.

At the same time, to know the world means to control it, as we can see from the German word *ver-stehen*, *Verstand* (“understanding,” “concept”), both a *comprehension* of the world and a *grasping* of the world; thus, the relationship between power and knowledge appears from the very beginning of a specific disciplinary knowledge such as metaphysical philosophy and, at its heart, the search for an ontological foundation of being. This search has a political purpose: to conceal the eternal tension between thought and world, transforming it into a war, a particular twisting of the conflict in a field of tension that can be appropriated by someone, the victor of thought, we might say, as Heraclitus reminds us when he posits *polemos* as father and king of all things. The doubling of *polemos* takes the name of *stasis*, which in Plato (*The Republic*) means precisely a state of (internal) war:

In my opinion, just as we have the two terms, war [*polemos*] and faction [*stasis*], so there are also two things, distinguished by two differentiae. The two things I mean are the friendly and kindred on the one hand and the alien and foreign on the other. Now the term employed for the hostility of the friendly is faction, and for that of the alien is war. . . . We shall then say that Greeks fight and wage war with barbarians, and barbarians with Greeks, and are enemies by nature, and that war is the fit name for this enmity and hatred. Greeks, however, we shall say, are still by nature the friends of Greeks when they act in this way, but that Greece is sick in that case and divided by faction, and faction is the name we must give to that enmity.⁴

Today, if we tear away the veil of concealment, we can see *stasis* as the thematic root of the “state,” of “statism” as a principle of stability, stability conceived as immobility, the product of a violent appropriation under the sign of a war of conquest, the original myth of the violent foundation of the state and of political power.⁵

⁴ Trans. Paul Shorey, in Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 709.

⁵ Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks*, trans. Janet Lloyd and Jeff Fort (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983); *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

Ontology traces the metaphysical horizon of this entirely philosophical-political course within which to anesthetize the entirely reducible tension between thought and world, to anesthetize the constitutive excess of thought with respect to the world-as-it-is and of the world with respect to the thought-that-conceptualizes-it, to anesthetize what Derrida calls the *aporia* founding the void over which the history of Western thought has raised its crowded mausoleum. Indeed, ontology posits an origin in a dimension that is unverifiable, incorruptible, untouchable—in a word, non-contingent—which renders possible the long trajectory of philosophy’s account not only of the interpretation of the world, but also of its transformation, long before the famous Marxian theses on Feuerbach.

Seeking the ontology of being means seeking to install an essence at the moment of the *arché* of the world, either as originary principle or as the leader dictating the sense [*sens*—in French, both “meaning” and “direction”] of the philosophical account of being. The *arché* is present all at once and in every case, apart from any historical contingency, but far from the human senses, trusting to the *logos* as the sovereign operation of capture: the *logos*, then, not only as a faithful and thus a true account, but the *logos* as the selection intended to determine the supra-historic, eternal and metaphysical truth of the world and of all that will be contained in it. Being *qua* being is stable, hidden in the depths of public invisibility (to attain the light of the Enlightenment, it will be necessary to publicly break through this screen of invisibility), resting upon bases that are stable, thus statist, polemical (warlike) by definition, that is to say political, in order to render senseless any other possibility of thinking beyond the *arché*. A stubbornly anti-an-archic mortgage [*hypothèque*] of thought: here is the statist dimension of ontology, the only one that can be articulated within Western metaphysics.

Seeking a position in a conflict of ontological narratives (Ricoeur) means starting a war of truth under the pyramidal sign of hierarchy. This account, which succeeds in attaining a hierarchically superior position by setting the immobile stance of being on a foundation bolstered by the public recognition accorded to an accredited philosophy, will have the right to present itself as a single, nonconvertible (albeit certainly revocable) truth, only on condition that it fight on the same battlefield, the arena where what is at stake is the position of hierarchical superiority: a paradigm of sovereignty, to paraphrase the political effect of Kuhn’s epistemological tension. Ultimately, determining the static being

means appropriating a sovereign position from which to hierarchically control the entire framework of meaning that includes what is offered as digestible within the paradigm of metaphysical truth and that at the same time excludes, without further appeal, that which does not seem subject to domestication by means of the ontological search, relegating it to the status of a mad thought, utopian, crazy, beyond the pale, because it is unthinkable and impossible, because it is denied by the ontological truth of being.

I think that the *archic* effect of the philosophical search for an ontological foundation for being that would overdetermine the relationship of the being with the lifeworld not only tends to produce metaphysical tension, but it also hides within its subtlest folds a thought extended and aimed at a horizon of salvation and emancipation. Here I will refer to the concept of “reconciliation” (*Versöhnung*), found not only in the dialectic in Hegel, with the debt relative to his surpassing in a materialist key in Marx, but also as the final horizon of Critical Theory with Adorno.

Observers with viewpoints and intentions as different as those of Carl Schmitt and Hans Blumenberg have noted the proximity of the categories of modern political reason to a medieval theological semantics. Giorgio Agamben claims to find a strong analogy between the external forms of the Church’s liturgical styles and specific political organizations. Secularization is literally the transposition onto the earthly plane of the transcendent devices linking the being of corporeal beings to the fate of the spirit, entrusted to the kingdom of heaven rather than to the terrestrial *civitas*. While salvation takes place entirely in the afterlife, according to classical political theology, modernity secularized this device—leaving the formal logic unaltered, while displacing emancipation onto the terrestrial plane. This is accomplished by means of a Copernican revolution that, displacing the cosmological framework from which it starts, concludes its vibrant trajectory in the dialectic of political revolution, which is simultaneously the heir to the historical materialist inversion of Hegel’s dialectic.

For Adorno, therefore, reconciliation becomes the horizon of each counter-factual case of the qualitative transformation of existence, although fundamentally incomplete and ephemeral, in the direction of a dialectic of self-surpassing the split between nature and society, particular and general, world and subject, “a kind of non-violent excess of that abyss . . . a free agreement of multiple non humiliated in his own singularity.”⁶

⁶ Albrecht Wellmer, “Verità, parvenza, conciliazione,” in *La Dialettica*

“Reconciliation” refers to the theoretical point where a synthetic unity of the multiple becomes possible, a “nonviolent synthesis of the diffuse,”⁷ according to Adorno, which reconciles a subject broken by a bourgeois individualism obsessed with disciplinary knowledge (knowledge that is both disciplined and disciplining, reflecting the division of labor as an intellectual level, and thus reduced to a commodity itself, as Alfred Sohn-Rethel argues), in order to recompose a happy identity between his cooler, more sober subjectivity and the world of “undamaged” life, to paraphrase the subtitle of *Minima Moralia*:

Either the totality comes into its own by becoming reconciled, that is, it abolishes its contradictory quality by enduring its contradictions to the end, and ceases to be a totality; or what is old and false will continue on until the catastrophe occurs.⁸

Moderno-Postmoderno: La Critica Della Ragione Dopo Adorno, ed. Albrecht Wellmer and Fulvio Carmagnola (Milano: Unicopli, 1987), 88, 90 [“Truth, Semblance, Reconciliation: Adorno’s Aesthetic Redemption of Modernity,” in *The Persistence of Modernity: Essays on Aesthetics, Ethics, and Postmodernism*, trans. David Midgley (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991)].

“What Adorno’s notion of reconciliation, however, has in common with the theological one is the flavour of something *fundamentally disjunctive* from the historical world *as we know it*. Reconciliation means for Adorno, when measured by empirical reality, something that is *radically* transcendent, which on the one hand falls itself under the taboo on representation, but on the other hand, if it is not to be entirely void, must become the object of a hope that needs at the very least a negative explication. . . . Adorno’s emphatic idea of reconciliation, were one to take it literally, casts a shadow over his work by putting the historical world in a messianic perspective which threatens to level the difference between barbarism and that betterment of society that is humanly possible”: Albrecht Wellmer, “Adorno and the Difficulties of a Critical Reconstruction of the Historical Present,” speech given on the occasion of the awarding of the Adorno Prize in Frankfurt, 2006, trans. Frederik van Gelder.

⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004), 189.

⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 79. See also Richard Wolin, “Utopia, Mimesis, and Reconciliation: A Redemptive Critique of Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory,” *Representations* 32 (Fall 1990): 33–49, and Iain McDonald, “‘The Wounder Will Heal’: Cognition and Reconciliation in Hegel and Adorno,” *Philosophy Today* 44 (Supplement 2000): 132–139.

“Reconciliation,” finally, is the name Adorno wants to give to the road to the ideal state of justice pursued by critical theory, which dialectically strips politics of the task of realizing it,⁹ in order to make it true through a permanent movement of negation. This is precisely what Adorno called negative dialectics, which he entrusts only to art, first of all—to the sense of aesthetic judgment that does not need to have hierarchy because reason and mimesis meet—and secondly, to philosophy:

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light.¹⁰

Reconciliation, thus, is the reconstruction, in a future anterior, of an originary condition for which we will nostalgically develop grief, loss, lack; this originary condition will be recomposed as an emancipatory dimension, a freedom that is tightly restricted to a path of liberation that recovers the identitary unity of being and world—just like Hegel’s Absolute Spirit, the poorly-disguised heir of theological salvation on a spiritual level, but endowed with the political and conceptual power of the dialectical system. The reconstruction of lack evokes the stamp of Christianity upon Western thought that Nietzsche denounced: as the Fall, according to the doctrine of original sin, forever loses the garden of Eden, so the ontological insufficiency of the human condition blocks the way to the anarchic non-place, whose realization is projected ever further away, beyond the anthropological wager concerning the goodness of man (Rousseau), beyond the political gamble of an uncertain revolution, to be found only in a recompositional, nostalgic key, just like the resurrection in the Christian model. Thus, reconciliation does not present itself as a multi-potential

⁹ “[E]ven if his negative dialectics carries with it an ethical message that can be decoded, this message cannot be translated into an account of justice and its relation to law”: Drucilla Cornell, *The Philosophy of the Limit* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 181.

¹⁰ *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 153.

process that is to come (Derrida), but as an event to be recovered.

In this sense, hegemony over the path of liberation outweighs the creative practice of freedom, unwittingly confirming the figure of modernity where even critical theory wished to take a distance from it in order to recuperate it at a deeper level: the priority of the method of thinking over the object of thought, which, politically speaking, means what Habermas never ceases to repeat: the strong character of the unfinished project of modernity signals the impossibility of making the condition of freedom objective, at the cost of an infinite and endless conflict, just as Freud had predicted about analysis. Hence the retreat into a depoliticized position where the neutralization of the conflict revolves around the rules of the game, around methodological procedures, in which freedom finally becomes a dependent variable of the rules rather than a creative invention on the model of artistic genius. On the artistic conception, the conflict between different styles, being left to the an-archic judgment of taste, need not be resolved hierarchically; there is no need to close off the creative tension once and for all on the basis of a master canon of taste.

The dialectic of reconciliation is then perverted into its hierarchical subjection, its archic configuration, in which a unitary identity between being and world is pursued, expressible as the competence of a hegemonic subject, whether in thought or in practice, to dictate the rules of the game (those rules which outline in advance the path of liberation). The political battle between Marx and Bakunin is echoed each time in order to signify a methodological difference between two political theories, both of which are aimed at liberation, but which are both perhaps unconsciously victims of the trap of modernity, which designates a shared fictitious horizon. Being and world are reconciled through the success of the dialectic, ending the story once it has arrived at the terminus. Today, fortunately, this is no longer thinkable within a critical perspective that is more attentive to the dialectic of Enlightenment criticized by Adorno and Horkheimer, which Adorno himself saw as presenting itself just *as* the dialectic . . . of dialectics, so to speak, without specifying in what sense the strong anchoring the negative could have pushed the reconciliation ever further away, without any terminal, definitive, historical closure.

The problem with Hegel's system and its pursuit of the unknown, however, is that in seeking reconciliation with actuality, through the speculative 'is', it normalizes the

flows of life, of thought, of becoming, of evolution, and does so by constantly reducing them to an equilibrate state. In the face of the most extreme, violent tensions and discordance, it persists in positing reconciliation and harmonization.¹¹

The more lasting effect of the philosophical search for an ontological style of thought can be found in the identitarian vice by which we accord an immobile essence to what we accord a proper name. The scope of ontology, in fact, is this form of thought by which we block the flow of time in substance, i.e., that which arises *below* the flux, to be valorized as a noun. Therefore, the ontological operation of substantivating beings and the terrestrial things surrounding them produces a blockage of time, frozen, crystallized in the proper name whose stability conceals and hides the flow of time, this passage from the nothingness out of which we all came to the nothingness into which we are headed. To offer a vital meaning to this passage, which is finally our existence, the only one available to us (and for this reason demanding so much attention and care), would mean valorizing the fullness of life against the destiny of death. The price of this signification is the commodification of life, of its anarchic flow, without any origin other than the fortuitous nothingness, and without predetermined direction, unless this identitarian meaning does not substantivate the becoming of the living into a stable, closed form-of-life, the nomination of which becomes the goal of the control effected by apparatuses of domination.¹²

Gilles Deleuze often invited us to destabilize the ontological operation of the substantivation of being by displacing the names that freeze identity into something static, so as to steer not only the style of thinking but also political existence, both singular and plural, in the direction of the mobile diagram of *becoming*. Although Deleuze proposes an ontology of difference, articulated by

¹¹ Keith Ansell Pearson, "Deleuze Outside/Outside Deleuze," in *Deleuze and Philosophy: The Difference Engineer*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson (London: Routledge, 1977), 5.

¹² On the contrary, "it is essential to overturn the primacy of substance, of the selfsubsistent or identical, and so too any infinite being that transcends and governs the world of finite beings and becoming. It is necessary to situate an originary web of difference from which individual identities both appear and dissolve" (Nathan Widder, "The Rights of Simulacra: Deleuze and the Univocity of Being," *Continental Philosophy Review* 34 (2001): 446.

the arrangement of various concepts such as immanence, multiplicity,¹³ heterogeneous intensities, univocity, become a “connection between fluxes,”¹⁴ which inaugurates a nomadic thought that evades any statist mortgage: “Being, the One and the Whole are the myth of a false philosophy totally impregnated by theology.”¹⁵ Rather, for Deleuze,

The One is said with a single meaning of all the multiple. Being expresses in a single meaning all that differs. What we are talking about is not the unity of substance but the infinity of the modifications that are part of one another on this unique plane of life.¹⁶

¹³ “Recognising multiplicities is to admit that being is incapable of subsuming becoming”: Mark Halsey, “Ecology and Machinic Thought,” *Angelaki* 10.3 (2005): 46. Tom Lundborg thinks the idea of becoming “as an unlimited movement without beginning or end,” “movements of becoming that cannot be actualized or translated into what *is*”: “Becoming, in this sense, does not have a pre-determined goal. It presents only a ‘flow of life’ that can take on new paths and create new ways of thinking and perceiving. For Deleuze, then, the task is to articulate and make thinkable this process by which there is an event of difference that does not fall back on identity and similarity but affirms the creative and productive elements of the event”: Tom Lundborg, “The Becoming of the ‘Event’: A Deleuzian Approach to Understanding the Production of Social and Political ‘Events,’” *Theory & Event* 12.1 (2009): 3).

¹⁴ Philip Goodchild, *Gilles Deleuze and the Question of Philosophy* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1996), 92. For a lexical interpretation of the concept of *becoming* in Deleuze, see Stéfán Leclercq and Arnaud Villani, “Devenir,” in *Le vocabulaire de Gilles Deleuze*, ed. Robert Sasso and Arnaud Villan (Nice: Centre de recherches d’histoire des idées, 2003), 101–105, and Cliff Stagoll, “Becoming,” in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 21–22.

¹⁵ Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 279. “Now we can see as well that that instability and play is not given to us from outside our own reality but is constitutive of that reality. It works from the inside, producing reality from within reality, rather than creating it from elsewhere. The fourth idea in the passage on Heraclitus is that ‘becoming is the affirmation of being.’ Here again, we need to take the term ‘being’ in the second Heraclitean sense, not as a matter of stable identities but as a matter of whatever it is that founds those identities. If becoming is the affirmation of being, it is the affirmation of difference in itself, of a pure difference that is not reducible to the identities, the actualities, that present themselves to us”: Todd May, “When is a Deleuzian Becoming?” *Continental Philosophy Review* XXXVI (2003): 148.

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and*

Becoming is not a category of metaphysical thought which is simply substituted, as such, for being; it is an *evacuation* of the identitarian relation between world and thought—"pure becoming without being (as opposed to the metaphysical notion of pure being without becoming)," as Žižek says¹⁷—in order to eliminate any disciplinary strategy that would establish the monadic isolation of a single substance over things and ways of thinking:

to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds. to the benefit of an unformed matter of de-territorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs. [...] There is no longer anything but movements, vibrations, thresholds in a deserted matter.¹⁸

Within this movement of thought, we will immediately identify the first passage—stripping the concept of “foundation” of any meaning:

What needs a foundation, in fact, is always a pretension or a claim. It is the pretender who appeals to a foundation, whose claim may be judged well-founded, ill-founded, or unfounded. . . . [T]he simulacrum . . . renders the order of participation, the fixity of distribution, the determination of the hierarchy impossible. It establishes the world of nomadic distributions and crowned anarchies. Far from being a new foundation, it engulfs all foundations, it as-

Schizophrenia, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2008), 281.

¹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 9.

¹⁸ *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 13. “The ‘machinic’ in Deleuze’s thought refers to this dynamic process of unfolding subjectivity outside the classical frame of the anthropocentric humanistic subject, re-locating it into becomings and fields of composition of forces and becomings. It is auto-poiesis at work as a qualitative shifter, not merely as a quantitative multiplier. Becomings are the sustainable shifts or changes undergone by nomadic subjects in their active resistance against being subsumed in the commodification of their own diversity. Becomings are un-programmed as mutations, disruptions, and points of resistance”: Rosi Braidotti, “Affirming the Affirmative: On Nomadic Affectivity,” *Rhizomes* 11/12 (Fall 2005-Spring 2006): <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue11/braidotti.html>; see also Rose Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

sure a universal breakdown, but as a joyful and positive event, as an *un-founding*.¹⁹

Of course, the flux of becoming-life is channeled into contingent modalities and forms in order to assemble and articulate existences, but these arrangements are presented as mobile and reversible, open to the contingency of other arrangements that open up new meanings, different each time and never immobile. The diagram of becoming is clearly opposed to the program of statism, i.e., to the individuation of a final horizon toward which we will address the *telos* of historical time. This is the risk courted by a certain metaphysics of anarchy, this idea of a final fulfillment of human effort in the triumphant achievement of a state of total freedom, a post-emancipatory condition that, as Simon Critchley puts it, would mystically reconcile the anarchist idea with the “conflict-free perfection of humanity.”²⁰

To take up an account of the multiple senses of becoming would mean, following Deleuze, to disable the powerful statist idea of a need to trust in an invisible essence behind the appearance of being of life; it would mean dismissing the idea of an eternal order because it has been made real in a substantial and substantive dimension of the world-as-it-is; it would mean taking up a perspective that slips out of virtually every knot of being-thus-and-not-otherwise; it would mean inexorably detaching oneself from a “bellicose” idea of coming to attain, to seize, to capture, to maintain in a lasting and stable condition, even as an idea, a “state” of anarchy in the sense of a realized, achieved society;²¹ it would mean accepting an ethical stance of the plural relationship (and not the individual atom) as the mobile foundation

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, 294 and 303 [*Logic of Sense*, 292 and 300]. “There has only ever been one ontological proposition: Being is univocal. . . . the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, of all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities. . . . It is said of difference itself. . . . Univocity of being thus also signifies equality of being. Univocal Being is at one and the same time nomadic distribution and crowned anarchy”: Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: PUF, 1968), 52–53, 55 [*Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2004), 44–45, 47].

²⁰ Simon Critchley, “Mystical Anarchism,” *Critical Horizons* 10.2 (2009): 282.

²¹ Here, I extend the brief considerations I made in “Anarchie in-finie,” published in *L’anarchisme a-t-il un avenir?*, ed. Renaud de Bellefon, David Michels and Mimmo Pucciarelli (Lyon: ACL, 2001), 531–538.

of each historical fact and thus of each collective solution, each properly *political* solution to the many problems we encounter in social life, because every identitarian form-of-life contains at least two or more singularities that intertwine; it would mean practicing open and indeterminate processes in which one experiments with hypotheses of becoming-freedom and becoming-liberation as conflictual opportunities (and therefore more than just one politics at two moments) to spin the identitarian circle of substantiation, i.e., the self-referential closure of the established and constituted order (whatever the juridical forms in which this can and shall be given).

Let me conclude with a remark made by Gilles Deleuze that, in my opinion, bears on our case: “If we’ve been so interested in nomads, it’s because they’re a becoming and aren’t part of history; they’re excluded from it, but they transmute and reappear in different, unexpected forms in the lines of flight of some social field.”²²

Salvo Vaccaro (b. 1959) is a Professor of Political Philosophy at the University of Palermo where he also teaches Political Science. He is now Vice-President of Social Solidarity and Human Rights at the University of Palermo. He is interested in critical responses to modernity (inspired by anarchist thought) and the Frankfurt School (Adorno and Benjamin). Recent publications include: *Pensare altrimenti: Anarchismo e filosofia radicale del Novecento* (Eleuthera, 2011), *Il governo di se, il governo degli altri* (with S. Marceno; duepunti, 2011), *L’onda araba: I documenti delle rivolte* (Mimesis, 2012), *Il buco nero del capitalismo (zero in condotta, 2012)*, and *La vita oltre la biopolitica/La vie au de la de la biopolitique*, “La rosa di nessuno” (Mimesis, 2013).

Jesse Cohn lives in Valparaiso, Indiana, where he teaches literature, theory, and popular culture; translates anarchist texts, engineering documents, and anthropological papers; edits encyclopedias and anthologies; and researches the radical histories and uses of culture. In all respects, he aspires to be a good “relay.”

²² Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 153.