# Anarchism and the Question of Postmodernity

Eduardo Colombo[*]
Translated by Jesse Cohn[*]

## Abstract

The recent emergence of a 'postanarchist' discourse raises the question of how anarchism relates not only to 'postmodernity' but to 'modernity' itself. While anarchism is a product of and heir to a still-contested Enlightenment legacy, it cannot be reduced to a simplistic repetition of modernity's inaugural themes. Conversely, postmodern theory fails to make important distinctions in conceptualizing power, subjectivity, identity, and values, depriving us of resources for thinking collective action and revolutionary transformation.

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[*] Eduardo Colombo, born in Buenos Aires and living in Paris, is a psychoanalyst affiliated with the Quatrième Groupe, an association formed by breakaway participants in Jacques Lacan's École Freudienne (including Cornelius Castoriadis). A longtime activist who has worked in the French CNT and the FORA, Colombo is author of *La volonté du peuple: Démocratie et anarchie* (Éditions Libertaires, 2007) and *L'Espace politique de l'anarchie: Esquisses pour une philosophie politique de l'anarchisme* (Atelier de Création Libertaire, 2008) as well as many publications on psychoanalytic theory and practice.

[*] Jesse Cohn teaches courses in American fiction, literary theory, and popular culture at Purdue University North Central in Indiana. He is one of the founding members of the North American Anarchist Studies Network and has served as an editorial board member for Continuum Books' Contemporary Anarchist Studies series, *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action*, and the *International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest, 1500 to the Present*. Notable publications include *Anarchism and the Crisis of Representation: Hermeneutics, Aesthetics, Politics* (2006) and *Underground Passages: Anarchist Resistance Culture, 1848-2011* (2014).

> It is a widely spread popular error that our magician is the same Faust who discovered the art of printing, and it is expressive and deeply significant. The multitude identified the two, because they surmised that the intellectual direction which the black-artist represented had found in printing its most terrible means of extension and a union was thereby effected between the two. That intellectual direction is, however, Thought itself in opposition to the blind *credo* of the Middle Age; to belief in all authorities of heaven and earth; to a belief in recompense there for abstinence here; as the Church teaches the charcoal burner who kneels before it, Faust begins to think; his godless reason rises against the holy faith of his fathers; he will no longer grope in darkness and idle about in want.
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> – Heinrich Heine, "The Legend of Faust."[1]

## Prelude

"His godless reason rises against the holy faith of his fathers." The Faust legend could exemplify this exodus from the Middle Ages that allows Modern Times to think of itself as the Age of Reason. Out of the process of secularization, the critique of all forms of authority develops. The long experience of servitude, surveillance, and discipline imposed by the norms of the Church, provoked a "reckless curiosity"[2] in the minds of men and women, and *free inquiry* could only challenge the traditions or negate them all: "unbelief replaced heresy."[3] It was then that "modernity" appeared upon the stage. Anarchism's obstinate defense of freedom will find its marks here.

The Faustian myth was constructed in the second half of the sixteenth century, during a time still frightened by the boldness of thought. Doctor Faustus, rebellious to God, renounces eternal bliss and allies himself with Satan and his earthly pomps. The invention of the printing press gives a tremendous boost to the spread of new ideas, it popularizes knowledge, so that it can still be seen by the closing century as an instrument of the devil in the struggle between

religion and science, authority and opinion, faith and reason.[4] The original story of Faust (Johann Spies, 1587 and Marlowe's *Faust*, 1588) condemned "the infamy of the desire to know everything", yet a few years later (1592), Giordano Bruno will be in the irons of the Inquisition, and Galileo will soon be condemned in turn. By pursuing its own impulse, "[t]he process of knowledge itself had surpassed everything that could make magic enticing."[5]

The periodization of history, while it claims to be merely descriptive, is inevitably a more or less arbitrary dissection of time in accordance with theories (or intentions) that may well be latent or repressed, particularly when this periodization is intended to be normative or centers upon certain values that are to be compared.

The humanist scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries constructed a history divided into three periods: Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modern Times. The Middle Ages begins with the end of the Western Empire in 476, when Romulus Augustus returns the imperial regalia to Constantinople, and comes to close in the second half of the fifteenth century with the invention of the printing press (1468), the fall of Constantinople (1453), and the discovery of America (1492), which signaled the commencement of Modern Times. But there have been readjustments; for example, academics of the nineteenth century added the contemporary period, whose origin is the French Revolution. Previously, humanistic culture, from the first steps of "modernity," had already felt the need to introduce the Renaissance to give the ascent of reason some form of continuity after the long eclipse of the Middle Ages.

"Modernity" found a certain advantage in imagining – as it was not difficult to do so – a period of superstition before its arrival, of religious intolerance and military despotism; to this end, within the Middle Ages, it situated the Dark Ages, a time of clouded minds, defined by a Reason rendered totally prostrate at the feet of divinity: "A glimmering of talents [...] will with difficulty be discerned amidst the universal darkness."[6]

It also felt the need to unify the religious, political and social worlds in the negative,[7] to affirm the autonomy of a sphere proper to human action, a political space. To make sense of the expansion of

the secular, it had to project it, to bring out the contrast, onto what had once signified the expectancy of Salvation, the fear of hell, God's final judgment. It was then necessary to proclaim to Man: "The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted [...] you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, [...] trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature."[8]
In passing from one period to another, we see a procession of historic dates and events alongside cultural changes, which carry with them a need for interpretation, for a recognition of "the spirit of the times," a positive or negative valuation of new symbolic forms, behaviors, beliefs, institutions.

As Jameson says, the difficulties posed by hypotheses of periodization and the uncertainties arising from them come from their globalizing form, which "tend[s] to obliterate difference and to project an idea of the historical period as massive homogeneity," a cultural unit.[9]

This forces us to look more closely at the use of words: "Modern Times" and "modernity" are not synonymous. Modern Times include a long chronological period of four or five hundred years in which certain tendencies, innovations and inventions, cultural changes in different areas of life, come together, develop along parallel lines or mix with one another, or else clash with and fight against one another relentlessly. They include a scientific modernity confirmed by Galileo (1564-1642) and Newton (1643-1727), subsequently extended by quantum physics after 1920. From its very inception, the new science had to fight against the Church, the first of the political powers, charged with monitoring and censoring thoughts and writings.

In political philosophy, modernity begins with Machiavelli (1469-1527) and Hobbes (1588-1679), who, in taking a distance from Antiquity on important concepts of humanity and society, open the way, *a posteriori*, to the "Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns," when the autonomization of the political sphere would postulate the radical equality of men and, therefore, a conventional rather than a natural bond organizing public space. But social and cultural change do not follow a linear trend, and a first crisis of the modern mind will manifest itself with the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), according to the analysis of Leo Strauss. Rousseau was able

to invoke Antiquity to champion the revolt of passion, a passion that remained, with Hobbes, under the guidance of reason. His "attack on modernity in the name of what was at the same time classical antiquity and a more advanced modernity" will be repeated a little over a century later by Nietzsche (1844-1900), who "ushered in the second crisis of modernity – the crisis of our time."[10]

As children of the imaginary of modernity ourselves, we tend to forget that the new ideas of liberty and equality have become naturalized through controversy and struggle, and that they are still weak and pale, still subject to attack in their very foundations. Hobbes, Locke and all the early thinkers who defended contractarian ideas as a basis of political society, all those who made a place within the institution of the city for human will and reason, were seen as the wreckers of the traditional, secure, transcendent, sacred seats of the human community.

As early as 1757, and particularly during the rising period of the Revolution, Edmund Burke (1729-1797) presented his criticism of the abstract ideas of the *philosophes*, "that monstrous fiction" which disrupts the harmony of a political style "in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world." "Society is indeed a contract," Burke admits, but it does not depend on the will of men: "This law is not subject to the will of those, who by an obligation above them and infinitely superior, are bound to submit their will to that law."[11] Burke, generally considered a liberal conservative, manifests a hatred of the French Revolution which rivals even the furious counter-revolutionary and reactionary attacks of Joseph de Maistre or, later, Donoso Cortés.

From 1774 on, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) led his own revolt against the Enlightenment, attacking universalism, rationalism and "the greatness and autonomy of the individual, master of his fate." Herder, as a relativist, believes in community and the hierarchy of cultures; he defends a "different modernity," it seems to Sternhell,[12] which considers individuals to be determined and limited by their ethnic origins, by the continuity of their histories and their languages.

In the continuous struggle between modernity and its detractors, there occurred – let us say, during the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries – a form of condensation that equates the long process of modernity with one of its dazzling highlights: the Enlightenment.

In 1784, Immanuel Kant wrote what became a famous text when he gave the following definition:

> Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* [Dare to know!] "Have courage to use your own reason!" – that is the motto of enlightenment. This is reminiscent of the exhortation of Pico della Mirandola. And Kant continues: "For this enlightenment, however, nothing is required but freedom" and its public exercise.[13]

Commenting on this work, Foucault sees the Enlightenment as a "singular event inaugurating European modernity" and at the same time as a "permanent process."[14] However, it would be reasonable to think that the process leading to the French Enlightenment was not limited to it nor exhausted by its epistemology. We might say that there is "good reason to argue that modernity [...] took place only in the nineteenth century,"[15] but, without adopting an historicist teleology, we may also find that the various tendencies in conflict from the more or less arbitrary beginning of Modern Times – and the antecedents we can identify in the fifteenth century – do not render a linear process destined to culminate in the Enlightenment, but that it was successful, and that this process has continued in spite of its constant eclipses. What characterizes the "spirit of modernity" is perhaps the emergence of humanity from the condition of tutelage, i.e., critical thinking, reckless curiosity, the quest for freedom. A project, or even just a rough idea, of individual and social autonomy. A political project.

The ideas carried by living human beings are not inert; they arouse passions, and passions incite action. The Enlightenment is inseparable from the Revolution.

The enlightened bourgeoisie adhered to universal values, to the belief in the unity of the human race; it had faith in the reason of individuals who would be responsible in their public use of freedom, inseparably linked to freedom of conscience, to inward deliberation. It believed in the future progress of the human spirit.

But the Revolution was not made without the people, nor could it have been. Philosophical ideas and reason in the court of enlightened subjectivity remained helpless to dethrone the Ancien Régime. And the sectional movement introduced a new conception of politics. For the bourgeoisie, Girondin as well as Jacobin, *once the theoretical sovereignty of the people had been proclaimed and its powers delegated*, the revolution was over with. But the sans-culottes began to construct a plebeian social space based on primary assemblies, on absolute control over all delegated powers and substantive equality (i.e., the leveling of ranks and fortunes). The delicate seeds of future anarchies, quickly crushed and soon forgotten, but which reappear in every popular insurrection.

Modern Times, set apart chronologically, include both the Enlightenment and the Anti-Enlightenment, both the Revolution and Thermidor and the Restoration. Joseph de Maistre and Condorcet represent tradition and the Enlightenment, and they were contemporaries.

If we look back at the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns, or if we are now entering a new quarrel – or a new form of the quarre – between Modernity and Postmodernity, it becomes clear that these controversies have a normative character: they are disputes over which values, ideals, and beliefs are better.

Thus, we find that the chronological order is not trivial: the living are still more modern than the dead, we have the privilege of the present to judge the past, and, still more modern than anyone else, the post-moderns can declare the old, "traditional" times to be outdated. Times have changed, as we all can see; we can't go back to the past, it is true, but the constant change in society is not an argument for proclaiming oneself *post* (i.e., for considering oneself to be posterior to a rupture in time, an epistemological break, in a new age that condemns modernity as a mere remnant of an era that is no longer ours).

Another operation, linked to the aforementioned, is, as we have said, to confound Modernity with the Enlightenment, and to demand that they be tried together, *pro* or *contra*. We are forced to stand on the 'contra' side because all nuances have disappeared from the definition of the Enlightenment legacy, and all of its developments have been reduced: Universalism is the hegemony of Western values, there is only one Reason and it dictates the same precepts to all, the Subject is the substantialist and essentialist individual, Identity is the identical or the same (sameness), and Progress is indefinite or deterministic. Forced to dismiss these phantoms, we find ourselves in a vacant world.

Fortunately, this epistemic block was not so monolithic, and someone as modern as de Sade had already, at the time of its origins, seriously cracked it. In addition, modern history did not stop with the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, nor did the critical spirit of modernity:

> Thus, thinkers arriving after the French Revolution had to decide what lessons they had learned from historical experience. The sharpest among them felt that what should be challenged was not the principle of the universal, but the overly narrow and one-sided manner in which it was understood by the *philosophes*.[16]

The Cartesian *subject* will be shaken in turn, giving rise to what Leo Strauss called the second crisis of modernity. Nietzsche wrote: "we are a multiplicity that has constructed an imaginary unity for itself"; "the 'subject' is [...] only a fiction,"; "Once the self hid within the herd; and now the herd is still hiding within the self."[17] He contributed to the separation between the subject and substance.[18] After Nietzsche, Freud (1856-1939) shattered the hegemonic pretensions of consciousness with his divided subject, locating the supreme power over mental life within the dynamics of the unconscious.

Nevertheless, along with a grammatical subject – the subject of action verbs or the subject of the verb *to be* – along with a subject posited as a variable function of discourse (Foucault), what remains

for us as a fundamental and necessary concept of any political philosophy and any theory of action is a *subject as a causative agent of human actions*. A subject that is not necessarily an individual.

Notwithstanding the profound changes that have brought us from an industrial to a post-industrial society – or late capitalism, if one prefers this name – modernity had preserved the spirit emanating from the Enlightenment, and that spirit was revolutionary: humanity had to be freed from submissiveness, ignorance, and intolerance, and society had to be changed. One could criticize all the epistemologies, one could deprive every belief of a foundation, but one desire remained: to transform the foundations of an unjust world. We are nothing, we should be everything!

We will not enter into a discussion, here, of the insurrections, the Commune and the International, the revolutions that shook the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, nor of the historical vicissitudes of socialism and anarchism. However, we will point to two politico-cultural tendencies animating contemporary society. One of them gained momentum after the Second World War and the experience of totalitarianism; based on resistance to these aberrations of the last century, it is organized around the defense of the Rights of Man (human rights). The strength of its influence may be due to its very ambiguity: it occupies part of the place left vacant by the decline of revolutionary hopes, it promises to reconcile the claims of social movement protest with the support and justification of formal liberties. The Rights of Man "associate a critical ferment and a principle of protection."[19] They are part of the legacy of liberal democracy, they are consistent with the thrust of neoliberalism, and as individual rights, they contribute strongly to the individualization and privatization of life.

The other tendency, which also manifests itself in the fifties, acquires a political force as it changes its point of application. Structuralism took its first step in localized and scientific fields, and then, by spreading across an entire academic culture and mingling with Marxism, it also contributed to the decentering and fall of the subject, before giving way to post-structuralism.

The posthumous publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* [1916] inaugurated this current in the field of

linguistics; it found a broad audience in anthropology, and more broadly in the humanities, with Lévi-Strauss' *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, first published in 1947 but reaching its peak twenty years later, with four second-edition printings between 1967 and 1973. At the same time, structuralist Marxism emerged with the writings of Louis Althusser (*For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, 1965) and structuralism was introduced into psychoanalysis with Jacques Lacan's *Écrits* (1966) and his Seminars, running from 1953 to the 1970s. This ended up producing a philosophy which already had the air of the *post*, and which drew on the critical position delineated by Nietzsche, one of the common ancestors of Deleuze and Foucault.

Jean-François Lyotard published *The Postmodern Condition* in 1979, leading the charge against the grand narratives of legitimation, and even more fundamentally, against the metanarrative of the emancipation of the rational subject.

In this overview, we should not overlook Jacques Derrida, the theorist of deconstruction, highly recognized in the United States.

The designation "poststructuralist" or "postmodern" was either not really accepted or directly rejected by the authors just mentioned, who largely issued from a more or less radical left, but the name *postmodern* became widespread after the welcome offered to such French thinkers by American intellectuals, and also through a certain unification of these diverse theories under the term "French theory."

Thus it was, in the last decade of the twentieth century, that there emerged a school of thought – rather, a point of view that was not even a school – which, in identifying itself with this vision of postmodernism or "French theory," invented postanarchism.

In Europe, some intellectuals had been trying to connect anarchism with the theories of Deleuze or Foucault, but according to the laws of the ideological market, it was in the Anglo-American domain that books by Todd May (*The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 1994), Saul Newman (*From Bakunin to Lacan*, 2001), Lewis Call (*Postmodern Anarchism*, 2002)[20] and Richard Day (*Gramsci Is Dead*, 2005) gave recognition to the postanarchists.

In my opinion, both of the aforementioned tendencies, the "liberal" and the "postmodern," fall in line with the demands of the neoliberalism reigning in the developed societies, and give rise not only to significant changes in the body of anarchist theory but also to practices that isolate, privatize and enclose social struggles in the circle of repeated gestures of revolt without ever connecting with the holistic structure of the social institution. Moreover, in subjectivizing protest, they make anarchism into a philosophy for the use of the rich.

Critiques of the theoretical corpus of anarchism – a corpus now called "social," "revolutionary," "classical," or "historical" – whether they come from the liberal[21] or the postmodern side, lead us to wonder what constitutes the specificity or the identity of anarchism.

## Anarchism: Is There An Anarchist Identity?

What do we mean by the words 'anarchy' and 'anarchism'? Obviously, we do not have in mind the sense that Eymar gave to "anarchy" in 1789 while anxiously pondering the consequences of the dissolution of the Estates-General, which he believed would unleash "all the horrors of civil war, the terrible reign of despotism, or that of anarchy."[22]

But what do 'anarchy' and 'anarchism' mean today? In common parlance, the word 'anarchy' has retained its old semantic content of disorder or chaos, and it has acquired the new meaning of a society organized without 'political power' or established and legitimized domination. Anarchism is the theory of this type of society and of the means of bringing it about, a theory and a practice closely linked to the social movement that supports both this project and the socio-political action aimed at its achievement.

We can say, and I think there is some agreement on the subject, that from an historical point of view, the anarchist movement was born in the anti-authoritarian faction of the First International, and specifically with the declaration of the Congress of Saint-Imier (1872).[23] In a book published at that time, Bakunin wrote:

> We believe that the people can be happy and free only when they create their own life, organizing themselves from below upward by means of independent and completely free associations [...][24]

He had said in the previous paragraph:

> Since every state power, every government, by its nature and by its position stands outside the people and above them, and must invariably try to subject them to rules and objectives which are alien to them, we declare ourselves the enemies of every government and every state power, the enemies of state organization of any kind. [25]

And he concludes:

> Those are the convictions of social revolutionaries, and for them we are called anarchists. We do not object to this term because we are in fact the enemies of all power, knowing that power corrupts those invested with it just as much as those compelled to submit to it. Under its pernicious influence the former become ambitious and avaricious despots, exploiters of society for their own personal or class advantage, and the latter become slaves.[26]

For the human beings that we are, time always flows in the same direction, and we are one hundred and thirty-six years away from these origins [now one hundred and forty-two...]. Anarchism has had a very strong and extensive experience in Europe, Asia, the three Americas, mobilizing large masses of the exploited, the oppressed, the persecuted, in spite of brutal repression. All these struggles constitute a rather specific past – even if the past is open to changing interpretations – that anarchism carries with it. As Tomás Ibáñez remarks, this past "confers upon it strong *identifying marks* that are hard not to *inherit* when one claims a place within this tradition."[27]

Analytically, for the purposes of understanding, we can distinguish between the theoretical corpus of anarchism and its historical

practices, even if they are intertwined together to compose an "*anarchist imaginary,* the richness of which is drawn indiscriminately from sources in history and in the realm of ideas."[28]

But ideas and social movements do not necessarily evolve in the same way; ideas can lead a latent life – they frequently do – only to be reborn or revised in light of conditions different from those under which they were born in the first place.

We may also consider, with Proudhon, that ideas arise from action and must return to action;[29] however, nothing prevents us from considering them in themselves, as a body of theory, ideology, or doctrine. I therefore agree with the following statement: "[...] insofar as anarchism is a *social* doctrine, [its] ideological corpus inevitably varied as it came to incorporate new debates and new texts, and [...] it bears the marks of its time. That said, it is not the differences between the corpus of 1872 and that of 1907 or 1936 that interest us but the evaluation of the corpus of 2008 [or 2015!] in light of the epistemic and social circumstances that we face today."[30] A nuance, though: the comparison between the present and the past has much to teach us, especially today. However, looking at the similarities and differences, one might logically wonder what makes the anarchism of 2008 [or 2015] *anarchist*, as the anarchism of 1872 was *anarchist.* In other words, what is the *identity* of anarchism, its specificity, to the extent that it is from ideas and meanings that this entity, anarchism, takes its identity?

The social and political world of the nineteenth century bears the imprint of the French Revolution; it is marked by the industrial revolution and the formation of the proletariat; it experiences popular uprisings, the Revolution of 1848 and especially the Commune. Undoubtedly the manifestations, the representations, the features of the collective imagination, from anarchism's first moments, were determined by this context, but the ideas that will assist in the formation of its theoretical corpus come from a much greater distance. I do not share the opinion of those historians – Max Nettlau for example – who see ancient philosophers such as Antiphon or Zeno the Stoic, or even the legend of the Titan Prometheus, as the origin of libertarian ideas (even if all of this past influences the socio-historical construction of the values of freedom).

The anarchist idea is much more definite. It has its roots, of course, in Athenian direct democracy, but also in heretical movements such as the Brethren of the Free Spirit (XIV century), those "ancestors of Bakunin and Nietzsche,"[31] or the Taborites of Bohemia in the fifteenth century, to which must be added the English radicalism of the seventeenth century, the right of resistance, theories of contract that placed the institution of politics in the hands of men, atheism and the libertines, and especially the sectional experiment of the Great Revolution, the "Enragés" and the critique of political representation.

The demand for *freedom* is first for anarchism, as Ibañez states, but in a synergy of values, equality acquires the same rank, from the era of the Revolution and of the Enlightenment which understands it as the necessary condition for political freedom. Thus, as it is crucial to point out, with the affirmation of individual freedom (related to the critique of representation) anarchism is the only (democratic) political doctrine to deny the primacy of majority rule in the organization of the city. The new paradigm introduced into political philosophy by anarchism, refusing the traditional precept of the need for a law of just constraint in the hands of a power *delegated* by the gods or human beings, opens a great public and personal space of freedom: public, for the freedom of each is extended by the freedom of all, and personal, for, as the person is a social individual, the freedom of others increases the autonomy of the thoughts and decisions one makes within oneself.

In this process, we cannot forget the critique that all anarchist authors have made of the liberal option that situates the *free individual* at the origin of the Social Contract, an option that demands the alienation of a portion of its freedom. For anarchism, freedom, both individual and collective (both approaches occupy reciprocal perspectives, as we have said), is constructed in the course of social struggle, in a state of constant flux: as Ibsen says, "the man who stands still in the midst of the struggle and says, 'I have it' merely shows by so doing that he has just lost it.".[32]

If we situate ourselves within the movement of history, we might say that "thinking the theory or project of an anarchist society is a possibility that appears in a particular moment in the history of the

West and does not spring, ready-made and at random, from the head of a great rebel; it is the product of the real conditions of exploitation and class domination of the statist form of political power and social struggles related to it. But once it has been conceived, *it cannot be reduced to the conditions that determined its birth*. Its expansive force propagates as a value available to all mankind."[33]

Moreover, ideas generally do not form a block or a system that would have an assignable origin; they exist in embryo or in snatches here and there, but they are called forth, assembled, and reorganized, and they take on a new meaning after the fact, when a new social situation breathes life into them.

Specifically, one could propose a restricted denomination of anarchy applied to this body of theory, a core identity, which is not an essence[34] but a definition. And this definition does not refer to all theories or speculative political or philosophical orientations, but to these "key ideas" that are on the level of the utopia in the sense of a horizon. Mindful that these ideas, as living forms, are thought from a particular place and time [*hic et nunc*], so that they continue to change, and always will, with the unfolding of history, and they are inevitably thought within the language of their time. But a utopia is not intended to be realized: it is basically a *negation of that which exists*. We can have a "social ideal," but an "ideal society" is merely a chimera.

*Anarchism* or the *anarchist movement* will remain as the form of situational compromise between these "*idées forces*" and the given (symbolico- imaginary) reality of a particular historical period.

From the moment that positive anarchy rose to prominence with the publication in 1840 of Proudhon's *What Is Property?*, some of its cornerstones are set: property is one of the principles of our government and our institutions, and "'Property is theft!' This is the battle-cry of '93, the signal for revolutions!"[35]

Once constituted as a movement, the identity of anarchism was confirmed via the conceptual tools developed within the International and thus defined a coherent core of ideas and proposals from which every anarchist is recognized as such: freedom

based on equality, rejection of obedience as well as command, the abolition of the state and private property, anti-parliamentarianism, direct action, the rejection of class collaboration. And since the 'social question' is central to all hierarchical regimes, the revolutionary transformation of society becomes the explicit political goal of anarchism.

The various sociopolitical and technological transformations and developments taking place after the war and in the wake of the totalitarian systems made possible, in the last third of the century, the emergence of a new épistémè[36] which favored neoliberalism's cultural ascendancy within late capitalism, an épistémè that helped to establish the trends in philosophy known as 'postmodern.' It is within this soil that the counterrevolutionary attacks of the Anti-Enlightenment sprouted anew.

Anarchism, as we have said repeatedly, is not dependent on any particular philosophical system, no metaphysics or ontology. Malatesta believed that anarchy "is a human aspiration, which is not founded on any real or imagined natural necessity, but which can be achieved through the exercise of the human will."[37]

Changing the world requires human desire and political will. There is no *necessary* connection between *anarchy* and a particular *perception* of the world or a particular theory of knowledge.[38]

However, the relative importance attributed to certain representations of the subject, of power, of human relationships, of values, affects social behavior. The post-modern view – or rather, the vision induced by 'French theory' – tends to colonize the collective imagination by capitalizing on the *conditions* of the privatization of individuals, political apathy or retrenchment, and the increasing dilution of social ties in post-industrial society. Deleuze is right to say that the statements of a discourse "become readable or sayable only in relation to the conditions which make them so."[39]

## The Postmoderns and Power

The central issue in postmodern criticism boils down to the denunciation of the Enlightenment, which is seen as the legitimating

ideology of modernity. In the course of this effort, modernity is stripped of its potential for free inquiry, critique, dissidence, and denunciation, while all the advances made by the critical and revolutionary modernity of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century are placed on the side of the 'post.'

For those who identify themselves with anarchism, this operation starts with the need to demonstrate to what extent "the anarchist theory of the possibility of radically eliminating power was wrong."[40] In the pages of this issue [of *Réfractions*], Ibañez as well as Colson praise Foucault's theory of power.

The *theoretical* decay (with its practical consequences) of a so-called postmodern anarchism is inevitable when it comes to "appropriating, integrating and assimilating into its own corpus the tools Foucault provides."[41] Foucault's theory of power, defining power as the result of a relation of forces in struggle with one another, "a warlike clash between forces," and treating it as "omnipresen[t] [...] because it is produced from one moment to the next [...] [and] it comes from everywhere,"[42] confounding in the word 'power [*pouvoir*]' its double semantic value: 'power' as the ability to do or make something (*potentia*) and power as domination (*potestas*) – which is unacceptable at the socio-political level. He mixes into a catchall concept the "disequilibrium of forces,"[43] situational power or mutual influence (even if they may include a differential valence), and *the institutional forms of political power*.

For Foucault, power [*LE pouvoir*], insofar as it is permanent, stable, established, this is because of the overall effect of all these power relations, in such a way that we can say that *power* [*POUVOIR*] "is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society."[44]

Thus, political power is not the exercise of power by an elite, dominant class or group but a form of social anthropology, anonymous, generalized and even biological (see his notion of a "microphysics of power"[45]). In the face of an anonymous, generalized power without an accountable agent, in a society shaped by power relations that make everyone into a *subjected subject*, both those who command and those who obey alike, rebellion becomes futile. One might say with Cyrano: "it is so much more beautiful

when it is futile." But anarchism has the will to change hierarchical society, to end the private ownership of the means of production and to abolish the State.

It is a mistake to believe that anarchist thought has a simplistic idea of power[46] when it postulates "the abolition of the state" or seeks a "society without political command."

Foucault writes:

> That is to say, power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted 'above' society as a supplementary structure whose *radical effacement* one could perhaps *dream of*. In any case, to live in society is to live in such a way that *action upon other actions is possible* – and in fact ongoing. A society without power relations can only be an abstraction.[47]

Where is the anarchist who is so limited as to imagine a society without the reciprocal action of persons upon one another? And who imagines that these reciprocal influences would not be a mixture of mutual aid and coercion, of love and hate, of *auctoritas* (cultivation) and domination?

Anarchism seeks to build a society that has no place for *institutionalized political power* (domination) (i.e., the abolition of every *arkhê politikê* which would consist in the capacity of a minority to impose its choice of policy on society as a whole).

Bakunin writes in "L'Instruction intégrale":

> The natural influence which human beings exert on each other is only one of the conditions of social life against which revolt would be impossible and useless. This influence is the very material, intellectual, and moral basis of human solidarity.[48]

And Landauer: "[t]he state is a social relationship; a certain way of people relating to one another [...]."[49]

I think that the importance attributed to Foucault's theory of power

by 'neo-anarchists' comes, in large measure, from their decentering of the subject. The *subjected subject* is traversed by the relations of the contending forces that shape and determine it. Thus, the Cartesian subject is toppled from its pedestal. From then on, the tendency will be to join the critique, already underway within modernity, of any *entity* considered to be transcendent, absolute, essentialist, or fixed, for which the Enlightenment will be held responsible. "But what we are destroying are only houses of cards, and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stood,"[50] Wittgenstein writes in the first half of the twentieth century. This 'reckless' critique is a good thing, provided one is careful not to throw away the baby with the bathwater.

## Identity, Values and the New Subjectivity

A few more words to set forth the terms of an old feud that the limits of our review here prevent me from developing and must form the subject of a future essay.

We believe that there is no natural determination of values, no transcendence. In the abstract, the indeterminacy or relativity of values is radical. But the socio-historical process of the symbolico-imaginary institutionalization of existing societies has constructed, in the course of struggle, values such as freedom and equality, which must necessarily be postulated as universal. To postulate them does not mean that they exist universally and absolutely but precisely that they are values to guide our actions. I cannot say that freedom is good for me, but as for you, if you want to live in oppression, that's your business. An *absolute* localism or particularism is irrational.

If we refer to identity, why should we be suspected of putting ourselves in an *identitarian straitjacket*? Why persist in criticizing the idea of a *fixed and homogeneous individual identity*, an *invariant identity*, an *identitarian essentialism*?

The French word *identité* has many meanings, covering both 'sameness [*mêmeté*]' and 'selfhood [*ipséité*].'[51] Identity *ipse* refers to the "self" of all that changes, evolves, , as does all that lives – such as anarchy.

If, in today's world, we mean to speak of a new *antagonistic subjectivity*, a new *subversive ethos*, we must believe that if such a spirit exists, it cannot take refuge in *the subjectivity of privatized, isolated individuals*, communicating merely on a virtual level, skeptical, passionless, and disembodied. The old anarchism of Bakunin sought the force of revolt and struggle – which is necessarily a collective force – among exploited and enslaved people. The *subjectivity of individuals* is a refuge for hermits or dandies, situated either outside of the world or within the interstices of a permissive society.

## In Closing

It is understandable that, in view of the ephemeral nature of human constructions and the inevitable end of all things, we conceive the necessary metamorphosis of anarchism in a form more adequate to the future anarchy, deeper, more subtle, like the caterpillar that becomes a butterfly. What we must not accept is the *pseudomorphosis*[52] of anarchism, like that of the destitute sect which became the powerful Papacy, or that of the revolutionary socialism which became social democracy, lackey of the ruling bourgeoisie.

Fortunately, anarchism resists postmodernity.

Indeed, if we followed postmodern proposals, how could we move towards social emancipation today? If we accept the post-structuralist or *posta* vision, from the standpoint of society in 2008, with *what* would we make a revolution?

In contrast with the modern humanity that rises in revolt against tyranny, against God, against the holy faith of its fathers , we have the postmodern individual: a subjected subject [*sujet assujetti*], depending on a "machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it" (Foucault), "conditioned by subordination," "constituted within sociality by virtue of this submission," occupied by "the formation of primary passion in dependency" (Judith Butler),[53] without a revolutionary project (on the grounds that this would be totalitarian), without an identity (because this does not exist), with values only for itself, isolated in a virtual world, trying to deepen its radical (but powerless) subjectivity, in the midst of a real

world in which profit, political power, armies, and increasingly rampant exploitation reign supreme.

We understand, then, why our postmodern contemporaries have abandoned revolutionary illusions, the belief in the human ability to change the world. Perhaps it is an illusion – but if it becomes a collective passion, it shall be a formidable force that no government can contain.

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1 Heinrich Heine. (1907) *The Works of Heinrich Heine*. (Charles Godfrey Leland, Trans.). London: Heinemann. pp. 256-7. It seems that the myth is based on the life of a certain Johann Georg Sabellicus (ca. 1480-1540), called Master or Doctor Faust ("fist"), a German alchemist of Wurtemberg. Arrested and tried for witchcraft, Faust was executed in the public square in Staufen im Breisgau in 1540. A written report of his "sins," translated into English in 1593, fell into the hands of Christopher Marlowe. Studied by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the tragedy of "Faust" came to overshadow the historic Faust. It has been postulated that Faust was none other than Johann Fust of Mainz, an associate of Gutenberg, inventor of the printing press, whose life has been distorted by folk tales.

2 Friedrich Nietzsche. (2003) *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. (Judith Norman, Trans., Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Ed.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. p. 78.

3 Alexis de Tocqueville. (1998) *The Old Regime and the Revolution*. (Alan S. Kahan, Trans.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 203.

4 Op. Cit., fn. 1., p. 258.

5 Hans Blumenberg. (1985) *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. (Robert M. Wallace, Trans.) Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press. p. 382. See Part III, Chapter 10: "Curiosity and the Claim to Happiness: Voltaire to Kant."

6 Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Condorcet. (1795) *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind: Being a Posthumous Work of the Late M. De Condorcet.* London: Printed for J. Johnson. p. 137.

7 For a positive interpretation of social ties in the Middle Ages, see Peter Kropotkin. (1902) Chapter VI: "Mutual Aid in the Mediæval City" in *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*. New York: McClure Phillips & Co.

8 Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. (1998) *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. (Robert Caponigri, Trans.). Washington, D.C: Regnery Pub. p. 7.

9 Frederic Jameson. (1991) *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press. pp. 3-4.

10 Leo Strauss. (1971) *Natural Right and History.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 252-3.

11 Edmund Burke (2014) *Revolutionary Writings* (Iain Hampsher-Monk, Ed.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 38, 35, 100-1.

12 Zeev Sternhell. (2010) *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition.* New Haven: Yale University Press. pp. 10-1.

13 Immanuel Kant. (1996) *Practical Philosophy*. (Mary J. Gregor, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 18.

14 Michel Foucault. (1988) *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*. (Lawrence D. Kritzman, Ed.). New York: Routledge. p. 94.

15 Vincent Descombes. (1998) "Une question de chronologie,", *La modernité en questions: De Richard Rorty à Jurgen Habermas*. Paris; Éditions du Cerf. p. 384.

16 Vincent Descombes. (2007) *Le raisonnement de l'Ours.* Paris: Seuil. p. 40.

17 Friedrich Nietzsche quoted in David C. Hoy. (2005) *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to Post-Critique* London: MIT Press. p. 53; Nietzsche. (1967) *The Will to Power.* (Walter Kaufmann, Trans., R.J. Hollingdale & Walter Kaufmann, Ed.). New York: Random House. p. 552; Friedrich Nietzsche. (1964) *Die Unschuld des Werdens: Der Nachlass*. (Alfred Baeumler, Ed.). Stuttgart: Kröner. p. 283.

18 Let us note here that Wittgenstein taught, in his Cambridge courses of 1933-1934, that one of the main causes of philosophical confusion arises when "a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it." Ludwig Wittgenstein. (1965) *The Blue and Brown Books.* New York: Harper & Row. p. 1.

19 Marcel Gauchet. (2002) *La démocratie contre elle-même.* Paris: Gallimard. p. v.

20 To cite a few names that are known to us: Salvo Vaccaro in Italy, Daniel Colson in France, Tomas Ibañez in Spain. For the Anglo-Americans, see Vivien Garcia's analyses in Vivien Garcia. (2007) *L'anarchisme aujourd'hui.* France: L'Harmattan.

21 For some responses to liberal revisionism, see my book, Eduardo Colombo. (2007) *La volonté du peuple: Démocratie et anarchie.* Paris: Confédération National du Travail, région parisienne.

22 Quoted in Marcel Deleplace. (2000) *L'Anarchie de Mably à Proudhon (1750-1850).* Lyon: ENS éditions. p. 151.

23 In speaking of the birth of a social movement, 1872 can only be a symbolic date, not an historical date. But just as July 14 symbolizes the birth of the French Revolution without giving it a historical origin (for, in fact, it began more than a year earlier with the peasant uprising, and in the realm of ideas, it had begun at least a century earlier), likewise, 1872 symbolizes the origin of anarchism with the Congress of Saint-Imier.

24 Mikhail Bakunin. (1990) *Statism and Anarchy*. (Marshall Shatz, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 136.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Tomás Ibañez. (2008) "Points de vue sur l'anarchisme (et aperçus sur le néo-anarchisme et le postanarchisme)," *Réfractions.* No. 20. p. 72.

28 Ibid.

29 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. (1858) "L'idée, avec ses catégories, surgit de l'action et doit revenir à l'action, à peine de déchéance pour l'agent." *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église.* Paris: Garnier Frères. Vol. 2., p. 215.

30 Op. Cit., fn. 27., p. 72.

31 Norman Cohn. (1970) *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages.* New York: Oxford University Press. p. 148.

32 Henrik Ibsen as quoted in Georg Brandes. (1899) *Henrik Ibsen: Björnstjerne Björnson: Critical SStudies.* London: William Heinemann. p. 59.

33 See my article, Eduardo Colombo. (2001) "Anarchie et anarchisme," *Réfractions.* No. 7 (Fall/Winter).

34 This is not the place to discuss the formidable complexities of the vocabulary of being: essence, substance, existence. We retain the definition of an object of knowledge without discussing its ontological status. See Barbara Cassin, Ed. (2004) *Vocabulaire européen des philosophes.* Paris: Seuil-Le Robert.

35 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. (1993) *What Is Property?* (Donald R. Kelley & Bonnie G. Smith, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 13.

36 Foucault's term, "épistémè," refers to all the discursive practices, relations of signification, and knowledges that characterize an historical era or period.

37 Errico Malatesta. (1965) *Life and Ideas* (Vernon Richards, Ed., Trans.). London: Freedom Press. p. 42.

38 See Eduardo Colombo. (2002) "L'anarchisme et la philosophie: À propos du *Petit lexique philosophique de l'anarchisme* de Daniel Colson," *Réfractions.* No.. 8., p. 130. I think Colson errs in equating Malatesta's concept of will with Nietzsche's "will to power," two very different concepts: see Daniel Colson on "The notion (sometimes rather Nietzschean) of 'will' in Malatesta." Daniel Colson. (2008) "L'anarchisme, Foucault et les 'postmodernes': Remarques sur le texte de Tomás Ibañez," *Réfractions.* No. 20 (2008), p. 89.

39 Gilles Deleuze. (2006) *Foucault* (Séan Hand, Trans.). New York: Continuum. p. 47.

40 Op.Cit., fn. 27., p. 75.

41 Ibid.

42 Michel Foucault. (2003) *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76* (Mauro Bertani & Alessandro Fontana, Ed., David Macey, Trans.). New York: Picador. p. 16; Michel Foucault. (1990) *History of Sexuality.* (Robert Hurley, Trans.). New York: Vintage. Vol. 1., p. 93.

43 Michel Foucault. (2003) *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76* (Mauro Bertani & Alessandro Fontana, Ed., David Macey, Trans.). New York: Picador. p. 16.

44 Michel Foucault. (1990) *History of Sexuality.* (Robert Hurley, Trans.). New York: Vintage. Vol. 1., p. 93. Cf. Eduardo Colombo (2006) "Les formes politiques du pouvoir." *Réfractions* No. 17. pp. 5-22.

45 Michel Foucault. (2012) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* (Alan Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Vintage. p. 28.

46 Op.Cit., fn. 27., p. 75.

47 Michel Foucault in Hubert L. Dreyfus & Paul Rabinow, Eds. (1983) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics.* Chicago: University of

Chicago Press. pp. 222-3.

48 Mikhail Bakunin. (1992) "All-Round Education," in *The Basic Bakunin*. (Robert M. Cutler, Trans., Ed.). Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. p. 121.

49 Gustav Landauer. (2010) *Revolution and Other Writings*. (Gabriel Kuhn, Trans.). Oakland: PM Press. p. 214.

50 Ludwig Wittgenstein. (2009) *Philosophical Investigations*. (G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, Joachim Schulte, Trans.). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. p. 119.

51 Let us leave to one side the philosophical questions about identity as *idem* or sameness to those who wish to solve the problem of Theseus' ship. But if we do not have the concept of identity *ipse*, we cannot read *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

52 *Pseudomorphosis*: the introduction of new content within an existing form, giving the illusion that this form is perpetuated when its nature has radically changed.

53 Michel Foucault. (2012) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* (Alan Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Vintage. p. 138; Judith P. Butler. (1997) *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. pp. 7, 116.