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Anarchist Subjectivities and Modern Subjectivity
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Contents

trade or industrial federations, confederations, international associations that each in their turn define, to different and changing degrees, through the singular composition that constitutes them at a given moment, the entities and identities that are each endowed with their own physiognomy, their own subjectivity.

To this properly syndical plane of reality, to its particular multiplicity of collective subjects, intersecting, traversing, or merging with the plane of anarchist-communist "wills" as well as that of individualist subjectivism, there must doubtlessly be joined many others that unfold themselves elsewhere and that only by chance, but sometimes decisively, come to participate in the overall composition of libertarian movements: for example, the family, its characteristic structure in such-and-such a region or in such-and-such a cultural tradition, and its form, singular in every instance; the links between generations and the sociabilities of youth without which we cannot understand, for example, the nature of the "affinity" that gave strength to the small groups operating in the FAI of Barcelona, or, in another manner, within the Makhnovist insurgency, etc.

Associated with anarcho-syndicalism and the formalism of its manifold organizations must be a more flexible and even more diverse perception of the collective subjects capable of enacting libertarian transformation of reality: the "proletariat," the "working class," the "people," the "masses" or even the "revolution" itself, as affirmed by all those who, in different ways, could be called "spontaneists," from Proudhon to Voline, Bakunin, James Guillaume, and Kropotkin.

It is thus to a multiplicity of "subjects" that anarchism refers in order to think a libertarian transformation of reality: to a multiplicity of "planes of consistency" on which these subjects are formed, a multiplicity of subjects corresponding to each plane of consistency. But by multiplying subjectivities, anarchists do not only give substance to the "anarchy" called for by the libertarian movement, which it is at times so hard pressed to justify. They also provide a way to think this "anarchy" *positively*.

One of the questions prompting this essay may be stated as follows: what is the relationship of anarchism to what is called modernity? As Bruno Latour in particular has shown, we can indeed consider modern Western society as essentially founded on the idea of a radical separation between man and nature, between human freedom and natural determinism, between man as pure subject, guided by reason, free and responsible for his actions, and the world as pure object, open to man's manipulation.

Within this dualistic construction of reality that has dominated the West for three centuries, all that exists is divided, in the words of Bruno Latour, into "two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other." On one side is the social and political world, "the free society of speaking, thinking subjects," voluntarily constructed by human beings who give themselves laws and constitutions, while on the other is the natural world of "things," evidently unconscious of itself, mechanical, and entirely subject to determinism [*We Have Never Been Modern* 10–11, 37].

Without doubt, on the terms of this representation, man still emerges from this natural world on which he still depends, both externally and internally. Nonetheless, it is in liberating himself from them that he becomes man; it is in opposition to this radical nature that envelops him that another world is supposed to arise, the qualitatively different, non-natural world of "freedom."

In modern thought, freedom is not at all natural. It requires much effort, many constraints: constraints upon oneself and constraints upon others. For modern thought, the struggle of humanity against the non-human (in us and outside us), of liberty against necessity, of spirit against matter, is the core task of humanity. It is his way of becoming human, attaining self-mastery by means of reason, morality, and law, imposing his domination over nature and the world through science, which allows him to master the laws of its determinism, and through technology, which allows him to to modify it and accommodate it to man's freedom. In its extreme form,

as the radical break between man and nature is intensified into an equally extreme "revolutionary" separation between past and future — "let us make a clean sweep of the past!" — anarchism may well appear to be a belated but direct heir of the upheavals undergone by Europe in the sixteenth century, an excessive but legitimate scion of the modern idea of freedom, the extreme deviation of a much broader movement, convinced of its power to submit reality to man's free will, the ultimate manifestation of the utopias of the French Revolution, for which society could, in the words of M. de Certeau, "constitute itself as a blank page with respect to the past, (..) to write itself by itself (..), to produce a new history on the model of what it fabricates" [*Practice of Everyday Life* 135].

It is this interpretation of anarchism as a utopian and extreme manifestation of modern representations that this book is intended to help challenge. Born in the West, in the context of a modernity to which it owes a great deal and with which it has much in common, anarchism is not a variant of, nor even sympathetic with, this modernity. Nor does it arise from tradition, from a nostalgic desire to return to a pre-modern period, even though tradition plays a great role in its history and thought. Within the frameworks and categories of the dominant representations, anarchism may first seem unclassifiable, incongruous, and inconsistent. This probably explains the lack of anything more than mere anecdotal interest that it has garnered in the history of thought and of social and political life.

This difference between anarchism and the modern vision of man, politics, and society can be approached in several ways. However, it is doubtlessly with respect to the "subject" and "subjectivity," where anarchism and modernity seem closest, that we can best grasp it. The "subject," the individual as a free "subject" who is responsible before himself and the world, is itself the greatest invention of modern thought: that of Descartes and the *cogito*, Kant and the transcendental subject, the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*. It is also that of the "rights of man

Variable in size, content, and structure, enmeshed in one another, such collective arrangements or agents do not stop at providing some of the conditions that can vary the intensity, quality and goals of the individual will or to present the external guarantor of the individualist singularity. They also tend to disrupt the illusory similarity and enclosure of the individuals that they join or, better still, as G. Simondon demonstrates, to reveal within them the potentials that are prior to their individuation. Indeed, individuals, produced in advance by a multitude of heterogeneous conditions, are also led, *a posteriori*, to constantly modify themselves, to disperse once again the qualities that had been combined in such a happenstance manner, to transform themselves (by expansion, contraction, alteration of meaning…) in a constant and unpredictable succession of compositions, decompositions, and recompositions. A process which is, from this point of view, to seriously relativize the distinction between a heterogeneous *a priori* subject to chance and a unified *a posteriori* characterized by an insistent and evident individual will.

The organization by trade, then by industry, of mining, glass, wood, metals, building, etc., along with (for them) their numerous and specific trades sections (masons, cement workers, carpenters, laborers, bricklayers, brick-makers, casters, ropemakers, sheet metal workers, bricklayers, etc.), each anarcho-syndicalist union has a face of its own, a particular identity, a subjectivity that is both singular and fragile, durable and changing, depending at any given moment on a multitude of factors: the number of members, the number of workers in the sector where it is located, the size and number of enterprises, the dominant character of the industrial activity, the age and geographic origin of the workforce, seniority in the organization, the traditions or breaks in tradition from which its history is woven, the events that have marked it, the origin of its militants and membership, etc. A singular organization, the union itself is caught up, each time differently, in ever broader identities, nested within one another: local federations, labor exchanges,

> "The liberty we seek, for ourselves and for others, is not that absolute, abstract, metaphysical liberty which, in practice, inevitably translates into oppression of the weak [...]" [Malatesta, *Anarchy*, Richards trans.].

Inscribed in each individual by the "the refinement of feelings with the growth of relations", by "the possibility for men to join with an ever growing number of individuals and in relationships ever more intimate and complex to the point where the association extends to all mankind and all aspects of life," anarchist "freedom" and "will" are not the present consequence of an ideal future, posterior to human action, but the expression of prior forces in the complex relationships that produced them [ibid.]. As Malatesta wrote [quoting Bakunin]:

> "The very freedom of each individual is no other than the resultant, continually reproduced, of this mass of material, intellectual and moral influences exerted on him by all who surround him, by the society in the midst of which he is born, develops, and dies" [ibid.].

Anarcho-syndicalism

With anarcho-syndicalism, by far the largest current in the history of the libertarian movement, the multiplicity of the anarchist subject is given a new plane of consistency where it changes completely in its scope, dimensions, and qualities. The differences in intensity and quality do not only affect, as in libertarian communism, an individual "human will," the singular resultant of a multitude of external conditions, or the existential singularity of the anarchist individualists' radical subjectivism. From the "individual" this multiple subjectivity becomes collective, as a large number of complex arrangements of forces, desires, individuals and things, human and non-human realities.

and the citizen" of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, that of liberal economics, law, modern, secular morality and representative democracy. But don't the subject and subjectivity also occupy a central place in anarchism, in the revolt that animates it, in its constant concern for justice, in its desire to change the world?

Undoubtedly, yes. Whether in its conceptions of revolution (who is the "subject" of the revolution, who can change things?) or of the liberty that it proclaims (who must and can rebel? who can liberate themselves, and liberate themselves from whom or what?), anarchism is on the side of the subject, of subjectivity. In this sense, it actually has nothing to do with all those who, from Joseph de Maistre to Heidegger, have denounced the lie of modern subjectivism, whether in the name of Being, a natural order, or a traditional order of things. Anarchism is subjectivism, a radical subjectivism, and its reactionary traditionalist opponents are not mistaken. But this radicality, contrary to appearances, has little to do with the modern subjectivity of which it seems at first to be merely an exaggerated version. Anarchist subjectivity is of a different character, most often misunderstood, because it is doubly opposed to traditional or reactionary thought and to modern liberal thought.

What distinguishes anarchist subjectivity from modern subjectivity? We can note two fundamental differences:

- First difference: the modern subject is unified, continuous and homogeneous. It exists in just one form, duplicated by as many copies as there are individuals. Conversely, the anarchist subject is multiple, changing, and heterogeneous. Its forms vary constantly in size and quality. It is most often collective even when it is individual, and regards the individual, in the commonplace sense, as a largely illusory figure in its many metamorphoses.

- Second difference: the modern subject was constructed in radical opposition to nature, distinguishing itself from the

> world, positing as pure thought and as pure freedom, as "otherness with respect to nature and the world of things," as the modern philosopher Alain Renaut tells us.

While the anarchist subject owes much to modernity in its struggle against the natural and traditional order, it also achieves a stunning reversal that defines its specificity. If it constitutes itself against the order of things, it is only in order to return immediately, on their side, to the world and nature, to reclaim them. While it is radically subjective, it is in the name of the real and the world that anarchism is led to turn the bulk of its forces against the modern "subject" that it initially seemed to resemble, against its pretention to be "pure spirit," against the abstraction and enslavement of its so-called "free will," against all the forms of domination and oppression for which its idealism serves as justification. It is within reality that this subjectivity is born, that it grasps and modifies itself; there it is that the anarchist project aims to take shape.

How to demonstrate this dual specificity of anarchist subjectivity — under the sign of multiplicity, on the one hand, under than of inscription within the world and reality, on the other? Two approaches (among others, certainly) are possible:

- The first of these, more theoretical, appears in advance of the anarchist movement on the side of Proudhon and Bakunin; however, it exceeds the limits and the ambitions of this article.

- The other appears later on in the way that the anarchist movement was led, after several decades of experience, to try to think its own history and forms of existence. This is the one we will trace here, at least partially, stopping at the period between the wars (in the late 1920s, to be precise), the end of the first period of its brief history, a point at

ditions", "cho[ice]," and "temperament," of "personal incompatibilities" and compatibilities:

> "There are too many differences of environment and conditions of struggle; too many possible ways of action to choose among, and also too many differences of temperament and personal incompatibilities for a *General Union*, if taken seriously, not to become, instead of a means for coordinating and reviewing the efforts of all, an obstacle to individual activity and perhaps also a cause of more bitter internal strife" [ibid., 426]

With forms and purposes that varied according to circumstances and events, the organizations that Malatesta had tried to build over the course of his entire life, "intimate," "secret," and "public," could indeed appeal to the individual "will." It is wrong to interpret the concept of will on the register of a "voluntarist philosophy," conceived, in opposition to determinism, as the free imposition of an abstract and timeless ideal upon facts. If Malatestan individuals, with their "temperaments", their "affinities," are probably no less multiple than the individuals of the individualists, the "will" that animates them certainly does not correspond to the implementation of the abstract and intellectualized freedom that modern thought recognizes in the "citizen" of representative politics.

"[A] creative power whose source and nature we cannot comprehend," Malatesta writes, the "Will" is first and foremost precisely a "power," much closer, all things considered, to the "will to live" denounced by Schopenauer, or even Nietzsche's "will to power," than the indifferent liberty or "free will" of modernity [Malatesta, "Anarchists Have Forgotten Their Principles"].

As Malatesta explained, in terms that Bakunin could have approved:

scious" anarchists unite in a political organization that is charged with 1) developing the tactics and strategy that this objective requires, 2) providing disciplined militants capable of implementing them. How can we not recognize in this form of anarchist group the modern conceptions of politics and political parties: belief in a specific place, defined solely by its political and rational attributes, a place where men, women, babies, the old, the young, manual laborers, intellectuals, masons, musicians, the French, the Italians, the angry, the apathetic, the myopic and the hunchbacked would abolish their real differences in order to reason together how best to achieve the goal that unites them, decide which path to follow and then abide by the decisions adopted.

One can observe, however, that in its extreme form, this view of the libertarian communist organization (or anarchist communist) has never been real. And it is significant that its most categorical criticism was formulated by Malatesta, the leading theorist of the libertarian communist current. For Malatesta, "platformist" conceptions effectively cease to belong to anarchism. They merely reprise the model of "representation" proper to the governments, political apparatuses, and religions that anarchism refuses:

"Is this anarchist?" Malatesta wrote in response to the Platform. "This, in my view, is a government and a church. True, there are no police or bayonets, no faithful flock to accept the dictated *ideology*; but this only means that their government would be an impotent and impossible government and their church a nursery for heresies and schisms" [in Graham, ed., *Anarchism: A Documentary History* 437]

A respected and influential survivor of the original Bakuninist circles, Malatesta develops a significantly different concept of libertarian communist "organization" which, in its diversity, its flexibility, and its reliance on the "will" of individuals, carefully takes account of the diversity and differences that define the libertarian movement: diversity and differences of "environment", "con-

which its principal militants attempt to reimagine what it is and what it is capable of.

The late 1920s was a difficult time for anarchism, after its virtual elimination from the French trade union movement, the crushing of the Bulgarian anarchists, the suppression of the Spanish CNT chased underground by the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, the weakening of anarchism in Argentina, the crushing of the libertarian movement in Russia under the blows of the Bolshevik dictatorship and under the blows of fascism in Italy. As the land of exile for European anarchists, France becomes, in the words of J. Maitron, a "little international congress, perpetual but reduced to impotence, unable to reach the least lasting agreement, a congress dominated by violent personal and ideological conflicts. It is then, in this climate, that a representation of the totality of libertarian movement takes shape, a common representation, beyond all their divergences, of the forces that compose it. Anarchism is composed of three main streams: anarcho-syndicalism, libertarian communism (or anarchist communism), and individualism — three currents which, with all their ups and downs, would continue to this day as organizational forms or identities. We should probably not attach too much importance to this distinction, which, as we shall see, is far from being able to account for the multiplicity of forms of anarchist subjectivity. It is interesting, nonetheless. In its manner of organizing more than sixty years of libertarian history, it is led in its turn, after Proudhon and Bakunin, although much more rudimentary, to highlight the originality of anarchist subjectivity in relation to modern thought and its typical conception of the subject. It leads to the question of the anarchist subject, and it already multiplies the possible answers.

Who, in anarchism, is the "subject" of freedom, the "subject" of history and of the revolutionary transformation that this movement proclaimed? Is this the "individual" of the individualists, identified with a "me" that is irreconcilable with the social, the impla-

cable enemy of society, of any externality, and of all social and political connection? On the contrary, does it belong to the "anarchist organization" of the libertarian communists, a structure with a collective "will" that is, as Arshinov's 1926 *Platform* declares, responsible for setting revolutionary goals, elaborating the means to achieve them, and leading the people towards this end? On the other hand, must this role of the subject be entrusted to anarcho-syndicalist and revolutionary syndicalist "unions" as a multifaceted expression of labor and, ultimately, of an economy freed from capital and the State?

As broad and generalizing as they may be, three answers are sufficient, in the irreducibility of their views, to challenge any assertion about anarchist unity. They are nonetheless far from doing justice to the multiplicity these three currents contain, not just in an adversarial relationship between them that opposes them, but in what each says about anarchism at the level of the reality that each seeks to express.

Anarchist individualism

Considered in itself (without concern for synthesis with other components), the "individual" that this current celebrates may at first seem very close to the modern subject, the negative moment of its emergence. Indeed, in its rejection of all social bonds, of any inscription within a world outside the self, seen as necessarily alienating, doesn't the individualist contribute to creating the conditions for a liberated subject, a pure consciousness, able to return to the world in order to submit it to its will? Without doubt the individualist's insistence on never breaking with this negative movement, on never ceasing to refuse the social bond that it is supposed to rebuild, would suffice to introduce a doubt as to the nature and meaning of this movement, as to the will that animates it and thus propels it in an endless flight toward the "myself (…) who consumes himself"

of which Stirner speaks, towards the "Nothing" [*The Ego and His Own* 490].

But this flight into nothingness, this refusal and denunciation of the traps of the social bond, constitutes only the negative side of an affirmation that is even more troubling for the unity of the modern subject. If the "I" of individualism, in the radical nature of its critique, tends toward the "nothing," this is because it has at the same time an inalienable, irreducible "property": its own existence. But the "proper" of this individual property (so to speak) is precisely its absolute singularity: "man such as he is, in his irreducible singularity," as Eugene Fleischmann says of Stirner, "always different from the others and always thrown back upon his own resources in his commerce (..) with others." For the individualist anarchist, as Martin Buber wrote concerning Kierkegaard and Stirner, "The category of the Single One, too, means not the subject or 'man,' but concrete singularity" [*Between Man and Man* 48]. As absolute subjectivity, the anarchist individual, whether or not it is conceived according to Stirner, does not constitute an entity that could unify a multitude of similar individuals. On the contrary, it multiplies the irreducibility of subjectivity to the scale of all possible human beings. For the individualist anarchists, whatever criticisms we may make of their way of seeing things, there are as many subjectivities as there are human beings, a multitude of subjectivities, singular in every case, "particular," as Stirner says.

Libertarian communism

Would the libertarian communist current be more conducive to a modern conception of the subject of political action who achieves mastery of things through consciousness, knowledge, and science? Yes, certainly, when compared to the individualist singularity in its more assertive organizational version (called "platformist"). Once agreed on the final objective — libertarian communism — the "con-