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John Moore
Lived poetry
Stirner, anarchy, subjectivity and the art of living

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this text constitutes a veritable embodiment of the revolution in poetic language. Further, I maintain that Stirner's text not only prefigures but initiates the revolution in poetic language which Kristeva detects in late-nineteenth-century avant-garde writing. Stirner's key role in the formation of the episteme of modernity has already been established: his inauguration of the revolution in poetic language can now be recognised as an important aspect of that epistemic shift. Further still, I contend that Stirner has, in advance, anticipated *and* resolved the issues which for Kristeva stultify the revolutionary impetus in textual and by extension extra-textual terms. These are large claims, but following Carroll's recovery of Stirner's unacknowledged but seminal participation in and influence on the discursive formation of modernity/ postmodernity, I would go so far as to claim that the insurrectionary impulse articulated and embodied in *The ego and its own* constitutes - to adapt Conrad's term - the secret agent of (modern) history. Although driven underground by the clash of rival political ideologies for much of the twentieth century, the anti- ideological antipolitics of this revolutionary perspective is once again surfacing in the new anarchism(s). And the revolution in poetic language at the core of its textuality remains central to its insurrectionary purpose.

[12]Green, who has himself translated the opening passage of *The ego and its own,* regards the standard Byington translation as 'hopelessly turgid' (Green, 1989: 241). Editors' note: having referred to the original German ourselves, we feel that Byington's translation *is* a reasonably faithful representation of Stirner's (complex and technical) original; therefore, we would have sought to question and clarify John Moore's (secondhand) claim here. Again, we believe that John would have relished the debate.

Introduction[1]

At the heart of the new anarchism(s) there lies a concern with developing a whole new way of being in and acting upon the world.[2] Contemporary revolutionary anarchism is not merely interested in effecting changes in socioeconomic

[1] Editors' note: this was the second draft of John's chapter, completed about two months before his death. Whilst we believe that this stands as a finished piece in itself, because a substantial proportion of the text is dependent on a translation of Max Stirner's *The ego and its own* from the German, there are a number of areas which we hoped to clarify prior to publication. This should not be seen as a weakness, but more in the spirit of ongoing debates about the relationship between theory, method and practice, which were always central to John's concerns. We have edited the chapter sparingly and in keeping with the writing style to which many around the world have become accustomed.

[2] The usefulness of the term 'new anarchism(s)' - or indeed 'anarchism' *per se* in the current context remains somewhat dubious. Like many contemporary radical antiauthoritarians, Stirner refused any reductive ideological labelling, and neither referred to himself as an anarchist nor labelled his perspectives as anarchist. This label has only retrospectively - and rather unfortunately - been appended to his writings. Some contemporary radical theorists (notably Fredy Perlman) have not only refused labelling but have distanced themselves from the (classical) anarchist tradition. Others have attempted to define various post-(classical) anarchist positions and terminologies. Bob Black, for example, has posited a 'Type-3 anarchism', neither collectivist nor individualist - a label which Hakim Bey has characterised as a useful 'pro-tem slogan' (Bey, 1991: 62). Black also authored an essay with the self-explanatory title 'Anarchism and other impediments to anarchy' and in a subsequent critique of 'anarcho-leftism' termed contemporary proponents of anarchy as 'post-leftist anarchists' (Black, 1997: 150). Bey has similarly written an essay entitled 'Post-anarchism anarchy' (in Bey, 1991) which distances contemporary anarchy from a moribund, dogmatic and outdated classical anarchism, and has attempted to launch the term 'chaote' (a proponent of chaos) as an alternative to the term 'anarchist'. In my 1998 essay 'Maximalist anarchism/anarchist maximalism', I adapted the terms 'maximalist anarchism' and 'minimalist anarchism' to draw a comparable distinction between the first wave of (classical) anarchism which effectively climaxed at the moment of the Spanish Revolution, and the second wave of post-Situationist anarchy which emerged in the wake of May 1968 (Moore, 1998a). I have since abandoned the use of the terms 'anarchism' and 'anar-

relations or dismantling the State, but in developing an entire art of living, which is simultaneously anti-authoritarian, anti-ideological and antipolitical. The development of a distinctively anarchist *savoir-vivre* is a profoundly existential and ontological concern and one rich in implication for the definition of contemporary anarchist practice, activity and projects. Central to this process is the issue of anarchist subjectivity and intersubjectivity, as well as related concerns about language and creativity.

Hakim Bey, language and ontological anarchy

Hakim Bey's essay 'Ontological anarchy in a nutshell' (1994) provides a concise but landmark formulation of this issue. The opening passage of the essay focuses on the existential status of the anarchist and anarchist practice:

> Since absolutely nothing can be predicated with any certainty as to the 'true nature of things,' all projects (as Nietzsche says) can only be 'founded on nothing.' And yet *there must be a project* - if only because we ourselves resist being categorized as 'nothing.' Out of nothing we will make something: the Uprising, the revolt against everything which proclaims: 'The Nature of Things is such-&-such'. (Bey, 1994: 1)

chist' in my theoretical and creative work, although like Perlman, Black and Bey (among others), I have retained the use of the word 'anarchy.'

In the present chapter, however, I use the term 'anarchist' and the label 'new anar- chism(s)' as a kind of shorthand and for the sake of convenience. They are not necessarily the most accurate or suitable terms, not least because they do not do justice either to Stirner's thought or the range of contemporary radical antiauthoritarian formulations, but they are perhaps the best currently available. Readers should bear this caveat in mind.

However, as these energies derive *from* the *chora,* they are not lost or denied, but incorporated *into* the union. As a result, the union is not a fixed but a fluid mode of practice. The subject is formed by the synergy of the diverse erotic fluxes which flow in and through the intercourse of the union, just as much as, if not more than, in the initial condition of sociality with the mother. The union acts as a means for multiplying and magnifying as well as diversifying these motile flows and directing them toward a maximisation of uniqueness for each participant. Language more specifically, poetic language - plays a central role in achieving this aim. As a fluid mode of practice, the union requires a signifying practice commensurate with its form. The union is not based on unanimity ('unitedness') but resemblance - a resemblance of interests. If metaphor, the basic figure of poetry, comprises a pattern of resemblances, then the union is a living metaphor, an embodiment of lived poetry, and the words spoken in the union are in the (m)other tongue of poetic language.

Conclusion

In terms of representation, Kristeva claims that investments of erotic energy in revolutionary or reactionary projects are 'textually enacted processes that are manifested in prosody and syntax' (in Payne, 1993: 193). Although a close analysis of the physical, material aspects of the language of *The ego and its own* would be necessary for purposes of substantiating the presence of the genotext in Stirner's work, it is my contention that

subject to stasis. The erotic energies invested in the union are no longer fluid but 'crystallised' and fixed - or, rather fixated on a reunion with the mother's body. In contrast to the life-affirming erotic drives characteristic of the union, society constitutes a mass reactivation of death drives, a psychological atavism whose sociopolitical expression is obedience to authority and support for totalitarian projects (here, John is paraphrasing p. 306 of Stirner (1993)).

> *society* that it has not entered into, but been born into.
>
> But the dissolution of *society* is *intercourse* or *union*. A society does assuredly arise by union too, but only as a fixed idea arises by a thought . . . If a union has crystallized into a society, it has ceased to become a coalition; for coalition is an incessant self-uniting; it has become a unitedness, come to a standstill, degenerated into a fixity; it is - *dead* as a union, it is the corpse of the union or the coalition, it is - society, community. (Stirner, (1993: 305-6)[13]

In Kristevan terms, the Stirnerian subject can be seen to inhabit the realm of the semiotic before and immediately succeeding birth. Intimately connected with the *chora,* the mother's body, the pre-linguistic subject lives in a condition of immediacy. However, in the course of time, this condition comes to be regarded as a restriction, a limitation, a shackle. The subject, made aware of its individuality through the self-assertion and self-reflexivity provided by language acquisition, asserts its independence in order to quit a narrow for a wider form of interdependence. The (speaking) subject prefers (social/sexual) intercourse or union with companions in a sphere that has been chosen or willed, rather than one that has been purely given. Language, openly but playfully conflated with sexuality, provides the means whereby erotic energies are directed away from the mother's body and into the space of the union.[14]

[13] For sound rhetorical reasons, Stirner employs the same term - 'society' ('*Gesellschaft'* in the original) - to designate both the mother-child relationship and the organised social aggregation of individuals and groups.

[14] The dissolution of the initial mother-child 'society' forms a paradigm for the disintegration of (the totality of power relations which comprise) society. For Stirner, however, society is a form of mass psychological regression. Social formations arise when unions lose their motility and become

Drawing upon Nietzschean perspectivism, Bey mounts an anti-foundationalist argument: given the collapse of the philosophical concept of truth, there is no foundation, no basis upon which anarchist subjectivity or activity can be grounded - no foundation, that is, except nothingness itself. Developing his perspective from this epistemological premise, Bey identifies a distinctively anarchist mode of being: ontological anarchy. The anarchist hangs suspended in space above the abyss, certain of nothing except the nothing over which s/he hovers and from which s/he springs. But this existential condition, rather than a cause for despair, remains the source of limitless freedom. For, as Bey indicates, 'Out of nothing we will imagine our *values,* and by this act of invention we shall live' (Bey, 1994: 1). Being and nothingness are not binary oppositions in this formulation, but elements of an overarching complementarity:

> Individual vs. Group - Self vs. Other - a false dichotomy propagated through the Media of Control, and above all through language . . . Self and Other complement and complete one another. There is no Absolute Category, no Ego, no Society - but only a chaotically complex web of relation - and the 'Strange Attractor', *attraction itself,* which evokes resonances and patterns in the flow of becoming. (Bey, 1994: 3)

Nothing can be said about the nothingness underlying existence. Language cannot penetrate and organise this space, except tentatively perhaps through poetry and metaphor: 'As we meditate on the *nothing* we notice that although it cannot be de-fined, nevertheless paradoxically we *can* say something about it (even if only metaphorically): it appears to be a "chaos"'. Through wordplay, through ludic and poetic language, Bey attempts, not to *define* nothingness, but to *evoke* it. Nothingness emerges in his account, not as an empty void, but

as a chaos of plenitude and abundance: 'chaos-as-becoming, chaos-as-excess, the generous outpouring of nothing into something'. Or, to put it more succinctly: 'chaos is life'. Binarist language, unable to constellate a chaos which everywhere overflows its boundaries, seeks to control, contain and domesticate it through the deployment of dualistic categories. Against this language of order and stasis, Bey proposes the language of poetry - a fluid language based on metaphor and thus appropriate to the expression of the flows and patterns of passion, desire and attraction which characterise chaos - and a *'utopian poetics'* (Bey, 1994: 1-4).

Rooted in nothingness, the dynamic chaos that underpins existence, anarchist subjectivity is a life-affirmative expression of becoming. For Bey (1994: 1) 'all *movement* . . . is chaos' whereas stasis remains the characteristic of order. But the anarchist subject is not merely a subject-in-process, but a subject-in-rebellion, and as a result remains nothing without a project. The anarchist affirmation of nothingness simultaneously enacts a refusal of being categorised as a (mere) nothing - or as a *mere* being. But, further, the anarchist affirmation of nothingness is a 'revolt against everything' - in short an insurrection against the totality, against the entire assemblage of social relations structured by governance and control. In other words, the anarchist project affirms nothing(ness) against everything that *exists,* precisely because anarchy (or its synonym, chaos) is always in a condition of becoming.

The anarchist subject - and by extension the anarchist project - is necessarily in a constant state of flux and mutability. Characterised by spontaneous creativity, anarchist subjectivity is marked for Bey by imagination and invention, and hence finds its most appropriate mode of expression in poetic language. Anarchist subjectivity emerges in his work as a synonym for poetic subjectivity, and anarchist revolt as a synonym for the immediate realisation of the creative or poetic imagination in everyday life. Anarchy, in short, remains

him/herself and thus becoming unique. But from the beginning this project is thwarted, and thus the egoist declares war on society, the State and all the other forms of power which attempt to obstruct or limit his/her will to self-enjoyment. At a certain stage, however, the egoist realises that she or he does not have the capacity to combat Power on her/his own, but must link up with other egoists who are similarly seeking self-realisation through free activity. Stirner recommends that the egoist seek affinities within a union of egos. The individual egoist cannot achieve self-realisation in isolation, nor within current social arrangements, and so, through union, egoists mutually pursue the insurrectionary project of 'the liberation of the world' (Stirner, 1993: 305) - but each for entirely egoistic reasons.

Stirner does not regard the union, however, as merely an unavoidable and perhaps unpleasant expedient, but as a mode of affinity rooted in the subject's ontological condition:

> Not isolation or being alone, but society, is man's original state. Our existence begins with the most intimate conjunction, as we are already living with our mother before we breathe; when we see the light of the world, we at once lie on a human being's breast again, her love cradles us in the lap, spoon-feeds us, and chains us to her person with a thousand ties. Society is our *state of nature.* And this is why, the more we learn to feel ourselves, the connection that was formerly most intimate becomes ever looser and the dissolution of the original society more unmistakable. To have once again for herself the child that once lay under her heart, the mother must fetch it from the street and from the midst of its playmates. The child prefers the *intercourse* that it enters into with *its fellows* to the

itations and thus incapable of enacting radical psychosocial transformation.

Kristeva borrows from Plato the term *chora* to designate the space which Stirner calls 'creative nothingness'. The *chora* is 'the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his [sic] unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him' (Kristeva, 1984: 28). Like the creative nothing, it remains unrepresentable because it is impermeable to language: 'although the *chora* can be designated and regulated, it can never be definitively posited' (Kristeva, 1984: 26). 'Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment, but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax' (Kristeva, 1984: 29). While language (and the realm of the symbolic in general) tends to generate a fixed identity around the personal pronoun *I*, the semiotic rhythms derived from the *chora* undermine these tendencies and ensure a heterogeneous subjectivity which 'cannot be grasped, contained, or synthesized by linguistic or ideological structures' (in Payne, 1993: 239). As a result, the heterogeneous subject remains continually in process, free of the stases typical of a unary subjectivity; but, further, in terms of representation, the signifying practices produced by such a subject set off an 'explosion of the semiotic in the symbolic' (Kristeva, 1984: 69).

Kristeva's discussion helps to clarify the revolutionary nature of the charged poetic language which runs through *The ego and its own* as well as the significance of Stirner's concern with subjectivity and the emergence, formation and ongoing development of the subject. Stirner's consideration of these issues, however, extends beyond issues of subjectivity to encompass an interest in intersubjectivity and its role in shaping the self and projects for self-realisation. Contrary to the opinion of Stirner's detractors, the Stirnerian egoist is not an isolated, selfish ego*tist*. The egoist seeks self-realisation through owning

a condition of embodied or lived poetry. The notion of lived poetry originates with the situa- tionists, who contrast lived poetry with the language-form of the poem. Lived poetry is a form of activity, not merely a mode of writing, and springs up in moments of revolt and rebellion. It is life lived as an act of spontaneous creativity and the complete embodiment of radical theory in action (see Moore, 1997b; 2002).

The anarchist-as-poet aims to create and recreate the world endlessly through motility and revolt. In part, this project becomes realisable because the anarchist affirms (rather than denies) the nothingness that underlies all things, and openly founds the anarchist project on this nothing. This affirmation re-situates the individual within the matrix of chaos and makes available - to itself and others - the plenitude of its creative energy. Freedom consists of the capacity to shape this creative energy in everyday life according to will and desire: 'Any form of "order" which we have not imagined and produced directly and spontaneously in sheer "existential freedom" for our own celebratory purposes - is an illusion.' (Bey, 1994: 2). But in order to achieve a generalisation of chaos, the anarchist needs to form affinities and create insurrectional projects based on these affinities: 'From Stirner's "Union of Self-Owning Ones" we proceed to Nietzsche's circle of "Free Spirits" and thence to Fourier's "Passional Series", doubling and redoubling ourselves even as the Other multiplies itself in the *eros* of the group.' (Bey, 1994: 4). Anarchist subjectivity, then, is defined by a complex web of interrelations between the autonomous individual, passional affinities, and the matrix of chaos which 'lies at the heart of our project'. (Bey, 1994: 1). Anarchist subjectivity, in other words, remains inseparable from anarchist intersubjectivity. The anarchist project is formed through interactions that occur between those who desire to dispel the illusory stases of order - those illusions which obscure the unlimited creative potentials of chaos, which manifest themselves as lived poetry in daily life. As

Bey says of affinities formed through free association: 'the activity of such a group will come to replace Art as we poor PoMo bastards know it. Gratuitous creativity, or "play", and the exchange of gifts, will cause the with- ering-away of Art as the reproduction of commodities' (Bey, 1994: 4). Anarchy, a condition of free creativity generated through motility and revolt, can only be conceived and realised by the poetic imagination and, as far as words are concerned, can only find expression in poetic language.

In Bey's formulations, the anarchist subject is simultaneously unary, multiple and heterogeneous. Under conditions of power, the multiplicity of the subject is denied and erased. Through the production of psychosocial stases, power manufactures an apparently unified identity for each individual, containing and channelling otherwise free energies on to the territories of governance and control. These stases of order are illusory, however, in that the organised appearance of unitary identity is based upon the introduction of division into the subject. Power disrupts the free flows of energy within the holistic field of subjectivity: it carves up this field and delimits the split subject, divided from and turned against itself in ways which enhance profit maximisation and social control. A language structured around binary oppositions - and principally the polarity between self and other - maintains a regime based on separation and alienation. Anarchist revolt seeks to abolish all forms of power and control structures. In terms of subjectivity, this project entails destruction of the illusions of a separate self and recovery of a free-flowing and holistic sense of subjectivity. Insurrection aims to dismantle staticity, overcome blockages and put the subject back into process. As part of realising this project, the anarchist uses poetic language in order to combat the language of control and its sociolinguistic construction of the divided self. For the anarchist, poetic language - in all its apparent illogicality - provides the logical mode of expression for the creation

course corresponds, in its effects, in terms of the subject, to revolution in the socioeconomic order' (in Payne, 1993: 165).

Historically, commencing with the texts of Lautreamont and Mallarme in the last third of the nineteenth century, Kristeva discerns in the work of certain avant-garde writers a shift in emphasis towards the deliberate creation of geno- texts which, by actuating the revolutionary potential inherent in poetic discourse, brings about a revolution in poetic language. This kind of avant-garde text 'may be interpreted as an affirmation of freedom, as an anarchic revolt (even though it openly advocates neither freedom nor revolution) against a society that extols material goods and profit' (in Roudiez, 1984: 3). This remains precisely the problem which Kristeva, her focus inclined entirely on literary texts, remains unable to resolve. Although it

> dissents from the dominant economic and ideological system, the [avant-garde] text also plays into its hands: through the text, the system provides itself with what it lacks - rejection - but keeps it in a domain apart, confining it to the ego, to the 'inner experience' of an elite, and to esotericism. The text becomes the agent of a new religion that is no longer universal but elitist and esoteric. (Kristeva, 1984: 186)

The avant-garde text, lacking any commitment to revolutionary social transformation at the level of content, confines its revolution to language and form, and thus remains subject to recuperation. Equally, the conventional political tract, failing to draw upon the revolutionary capacities of poetic language, confines its incendiary appeals to the level of content, and moreover stultifies itself by embodying them in the language of order and rule. Opaque to one another, these two forms of discourse remain trapped within their lim-

of his achievement in this text, it is necessary to relate *The ego and its own* to the analysis of literary discourse undertaken by Julia Kristeva in *Revolution in poetic language.*

Stirner and poetic language

For Kristeva, poetic language and poetry are not coterminous: 'neither confined to poetry as a genre nor inclusive of all poetry, poetic language inscribes the signifying process and manifests the negativity, rejection, and heterogeneity of the subject' (in Payne, 1993: 40). Poetic language 'stands for the infinite possibilities of language' whereas 'all other language acts are merely partial realizations of the possibilities inherent in "poetic language"' (in Roudiez, 1984: 2). Kristevan textual analysis consists of investigating the relations between two interdependent modalities within the signifying process that constitutes language: the semi- otic and the symbolic. These modes manifest two aspects of the subject. The semiotic refers to the rhythms, flows and pulsations which play across and within the body of the subject prior to language acquisition. Semiotic rhythms are never entirely lost, even when they are overlaid and hidden by the symbolic - the order and syntax characteristic of language. Indeed, Kristevan textual analysis focuses on the interplay between semiotic and symbolic dispositions within any text. When the symbolic disposition predominates, a text becomes a phenotext, in other words bound by 'societal, cultural, syntactical, and other grammatical constraints' (in Roudiez, 1984: 5); when the semiotic disposition predominates, a text becomes a genotext, a space for the actualisation of poetic language, an anarchic language which irrupts in rebellion against the constraints of social and semantic order. 'By erupting from its repressed or marginalised place and by thus displacing established signifying practices, poetic dis-

of a life of lived poetry, a means for breaking through the dominant logic, and a repository for the *savoir-vivre* necessary to live in conditions of chaos.

Ontological anarchy, modernity and postmodernity

As a synthetic thinker, Bey constructs a *bricolage* of materials derived from a variety of sources including anarchism, situationism, existentialism and surrealism. However, his formulations concerning ontological anarchy remain exemplary and indicative of the philosophical underpinnings of the new anarchism(s). Although the range of sources upon which he draws suggests that the ideational matrix from which the new anarchism(s) emerge is not in itself particularly new, it is nevertheless associated with newness.

In an important essay entitled 'Anarchy as modernist aesthetic', Carol Vanderveer Hamilton (1995) has identified a discourse of anarchy which runs through modernism and shapes and informs its aesthetics. Subsequently obscured by liberal and Marxist interpretations of modernism, Hamilton maintains that the discourse of anarchy structured modernist representation through a cultural identification of the signifier of the anarchist bomb with modernity. In modernism, then, anarchy became a synonym for newness.

Hamilton's groundbreaking text opens up crucial issues, but given its preliminary nature the discussion inevitably remains generalised. Although the analysis is remarkably wide ranging, the focus on propaganda by deed and the bomb as metonym for anarchism is ultimately restrictive. Hamilton has crucially identified the existence of a discourse of anarchy and established its significance within modernity, yet in her account anarchism emerges as a seemingly uniform doctrine. The reasons for this are not hard to detect. A survey of the

anarchist figures who are namechecked - notably Kropotkin, Goldman, Berkman, De Cleyre and Reclus - suggests that the focus of Hamilton's essay is effectively anarcho-communism. The Stirnerian individualist strand within classical anarchism does not appear within Hamilton's discussion of the discourse of anarchy, despite the widespread acknowledgement of the influence of this strand on modernist thought and aesthetics.[3] In the current context, this remains unfortunate, as it is clear that Stirner remains not merely a crucial influence on modernist anarchism and more generally on modernity, but (more importantly for current purposes) also the key figure underpinning the new anarchism(s) in the period of postmodernity. Even Murray Bookchin, the major ideological opponent of the new anarchism(s), admits the latter point in his splenetic survey of current developments within contemporary anarchy, *Social anarchism or lifestyle anarchism: an unbridgeable chasm* (Bookchin, 1995).[4] In order to understand

[3] Malcolm Green, for example, notes that Stirner 'was forgotten until the turn of the [twentieth] century when his work influenced among others: Scheerbart, Hausmann, Wedekind, B. Traven, Shaw, Gide, Breton, Picabia, Kubin, indeed the whole November 1918 generation, and later Sartre, Camus and Heidegger. Also, of course, the Vienna Group' (Green, 1989: 241). This roll call of modernist figures influenced by Stirner remains very selective, however, and excludes several major names (e.g., Nietzsche), as well as a diverse range of individuals and currents within the radical anti-authoritarian milieu (e.g., John Henry Mackay, Otto Gross, Albert Libertad, and the Bonnot Gang). Stirner's influence on modernism should not - perhaps cannot - be underestimated.

In scholarly terms, Redding (1998) continues the tradition of marginalising Stirner in terms of both anarchism and modernism, but Weir (1997) and Antliff (1997, 2001) redress the balance somewhat by re-establishing Stirner's significance in both discursive spheres and at their points of intersection.

[4] 'Today's reactionary social context greatly explains the emergence of a phenomenon in Euro-American anarchism that cannot be ignored: the spread of individualist anarchism . . . In the traditionally individualist-liberal United States and Britain, the 1990s are awash in self-styled anarchists who . . . are cultivating a latter-day anarcho-indi- vidualism that I will call *lifestyle*

> ways a real I too that joined the company and affirmed in my face that it was not my *you* but my real *I*. Why *the* Son of Man *par excellence* had done the like; why should not *a* son of man do it too? So I saw my I always above me and outside me, and could never really come to myself. (Stirner, 1993: 224-5)

Due to the central value placed upon creativity by Stirner, Carroll maintains that 'the artist is the most appropriate paradigm for . . . the egoist' (1974: 4). But this formulation could equally be reversed so that the egoist becomes the paradigmatic artist. However, the art with which the egoist remains primarily concerned is the *ars vitae* (the art of living) because as a subject in process (of constant self-creation) - 'I am every moment just positing or creating myself' - his/her life is a work of art (Stirner, 1993: 150). But an authentic *ars vitae* remains impossible without a certain *savoir-vivre* - and such knowledge can only be born of reflection; hence, given the decisive role of language acquisition to individuation for Stirner, the importance of the text as a means for self-expression. The *ars vitae* and the *ars poetica* are not antithetical in Stirner, but intimately interconnected.

Although presumably possessing some kind of genealogical link with the eighteenth-century German Romantic prose poems of Novalis, *The ego and its own* is appropriately *sui generis*. It is not a work of poetry in the conventionally accepted sense of the term at the time of its publication.[12] Nevertheless, it remains a work couched in poetic language. In order to appreciate the significance of Stirner's innovation and the magnitude

[12] The specifically French tradition of the prose poem, made famous later in the nineteenth century by Baudelaire, Lautreamont and Rimbaud, seems to have been initiated by Aloysius Bertrand in 1842 - only three years prior to the publication of *The ego and its own* — and is therefore unlikely to have influenced Stirner.

as a means for maintaining social control. The Stirnerian ego seeks to liberate language, or rather repossess it so that it once again becomes available for the free self-expression and enjoyment of the individual. However, it is not sufficient for the egoist merely to reappropriate an enervated or aridly rationalistic language: in making language its own, the egoist must regenerate and reinfuse it with the creativity which lies at the depths of his/her being. The Stirnerian ego, in other words, *transforms* language: she or he does not speak in the prosaic language of authority, but in the only language suitable for an insurrection against authority: the language of poetry.

Stirner dreams of a 'literature that deals blows at the State itself' (1993: 226) and *The ego and its own* is an attempt to generate such a text. Even in transla- tion,12 Stirner's distinctive, poetic style of writing remains evident. Although it is a work of philosophy, it is not composed in the 'stiff, concept-strictured' writing style characteristic of the discourse, but has instead a 'highly flexible aphoristic style' full of 'gaiety and buoyancy' (Carroll, 1974: 27-35). As in many other respects, Stirner anticipates Nietzsche in becoming the first *Dichterphilosoph* (poet-philosopher), penning passages of pure poetry, such as the following indictment of the ego's historical self-alienation and dispossession:

> I, who am really I, must pull off the lion-skin of the I from the stalking thistle-eater [Power]. What manifold robbery have I not put up with in the history of the world! There I let sun, moon, and stars, cats and crocodiles, receive the honour of ranking as I; there Jehovah, Allah, and Our Father came and were invested with the I; there families, tribes, peoples, and at last actually mankind, came and were honoured as I's; there the Church, the State, came with the pretension to be I - and I gazed calmly on all. What wonder if then there was al-

the significance of Stirner to both modernist anarchism and (more pertinently) the new anarchism(s), the nature and significance of his thought needs to be radically revised.

Stirner and the anarcho-psychological episteme

In *The order of things* and *The archaeology of knowledge*, Michel Foucault develops a discursive archaeological methodology which 'attempts to study the structure of the discourses of the various disciplines that have claimed to put forth theories of society, individuals, and language' (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 17).

To achieve this aim, he introduces the notion of the *episteme,* which he defines as follows:

> By *episteme*, we mean . . . the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems . . . The episteme is not a form of knowledge *(connaissance)* or type of rationality which, crossing the boundaries of the most varied sciences, manifests the sovereign unity of a subject, a spirit, or a period; it is the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities. (Foucault, 1972: 191)

anarchism' (Bookchin, 1995: 8-9). Bookchin's jaundiced and distorted account has rightly received numerous trenchant critiques within the anarchist press, notably Watson (1996) and Black (1997). The accuracy of his observation concerning the resurgence of Stirnerian anarchist individualism, even though he sees this as a negative phenomenon, cannot be contested.

On this basis, Foucault then attempts to 'isolate and describe the epistemic systems that underlie three major epochs in Western thought': the Renaissance, the Classical Age, and Modernity (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 18). In analysing these epistemic systems, however, he remains largely concerned with the operations and regimes of power rather than projects aimed at the abolition of power; and, where he is interested in struggles against power, the struggles considered are usually of a partial or reformist nature.[5]5 In examining any one epistemic system, he *is* interested in conflicts and resistances, but the historical course of these conflicts remain of limited concern, and he neglects entirely to examine those discursive - and extra-discursive - practices which seek to overthrow any ruling episteme and the social formation which it articulates. In his account of modernity, for example, those anarchist projects - and particularly the Stirnerian strain - which attempt to initiate a total transformation of life are completely absent from Foucault's discussion.

John Carroll's seminal study *Break out from the crystal palace: the anarcho- psychological critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky* provides an invaluable corrective to Foucault's failures, and indicates the centrality of the Stirnerian - or what Carroll more broadly calls the anarcho-psychological - critique to both the anarchist project and modernity/postmodernity. Although he does not frame his analysis in Foucauldian terms, Carroll's study investigates the discursive conflicts that took place within the emerging episteme of modernity during the nineteenth century. Carroll focuses on the struggle that occurred between what he variously terms three different intellectual, theoretical or ideological traditions, competing social theories, perspectives, world-views, or bodies of social

[5] See for example pp. 211-13 of Foucault's 'Afterword on "The subject and power" ' in Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) which focuses entirely on 'forms of resistance' (p. 211) - i.e., struggles which are essentially negotiations with power instead of seeking its abolition.

emergence of the former from the latter, however, remains the simultaneous act of self-assertion and the subject's insertion (or perhaps more accurately, incursion) into language. At this moment, the primary instance of self-expression, but also the moment when self-expression and self-assertion become identical, the ego moves from the realm of the unutterable into the world of utterance (while not, of course, entirely abandoning the former world). From that moment onward, however, the ego increasingly discovers that the world of utterance is characterised by conflict and delusion, and that she or he must adopt a combative stance and a contestatory mode of procedure if self-realisation is to occur. In the first instance, this contestation takes place within language or in activities whose structures and parameters are defined through language. Language, then, becomes a key area requiring mastery by the Stirnerian ego because it remains essential to the devising of insurrectional projects.

The importance of language in Stirner's work cannot be overestimated. The world of utterance (or, at least in historical terms, the world of power) is a world haunted by spooks - disembodied ideas, principles and concepts, abstractions which take the form of words. The spook is a revenant who assumes the insubstantial shape of the dominant discourse, the language of governance, before it manifests itself in more material forms. It is the language of order, management, utility and rationality. Hence, the ego seeks to find and express itself in a language of insurrection, a language of radical otherness which negates dominant discourses and their expressive modes, as well as embodying the ego's selfaffirmation in a style commensurate with its uniqueness.

Carroll refers to Stirner's 'constant concern with revitalizing language, repossessing it as a creative force' (Carroll, 1974: 36). Power drains language of its vitality and creativity: it captures words, domesticates them, debilitates them, debases them, instrumentalises them, makes them prosaic, so that they may act

mains inevitable unless the individual consents to submit to a life of alienation, subordination and self-renunciation. 'A human life,' the opening chapter of *The ego and its own,* traces the stages of this lifelong struggle which commences at birth: 'From the moment when he catches sight of the light of the world a man seeks to find out *himself* and get hold of *himself* out of its confusion, in which he, with everything else, is tossed about in motley mixture' (p. 9) (all italics are from the original work). The ego is born into a world of illusions which ensnare and blind the individual, and from which the ego must disentangle itself if it is to realise itself. These delusions are caused by the dominance of abstractions - what Stirner calls spooks *('Spuke')* - over concrete individuals. Abstractions - concepts, ideas, beliefs and so on - that were once attributes and thus possessions of individuals, now control their one-time owners, and crystallise as fixed ideas which prevent the free flows of subjective will and desire. They are, in short, power relations. Stirner's entire insurrectional project - which, as Carroll indicates, is envisaged as a revolution against the totality of power relations, not merely the State[11] - thus directly derives from the ontological status of the individual. The ramifications of this insurrectional project are manifold and beyond the scope of this chapter. In what follows, attention will be limited to the key issue of language.

Stirner, language and subjectivity

Stirnerian ontology postulates a radical monism. The Stirnerian ego, as indicated above, embodies a paradoxical reconciliation of opposites, as it is simultaneously being and nothingness: a self-created autonomous but ephemeral individual *and* an inexhaustible creative nothingness. The crucial moment in the

[11] 'Stirner at times uses "State" as no more than a convenient shorthand for supraindi- vidual authority' (Carroll, 1974: 136n).

theory (Carroll, 1974: 1, 2, 3, 6, 13, 14 *passim).* Two of these conflicting perspectives - British, liberal, utilitarian rationalist social philosophy and Marxist socialism - are well known and widely acknowledged elements of the episteme of modernity. The third, however, the anarcho-psychological critique, has been scandalously neglected and written out of accounts of the formation of modernity.[6]

Carroll's text restores the anarcho-psychological critique to its rightful place as a key element in the discursive - and by extension, extra-discursive - contestations over the modern/postmodern condition. *Break Out* convincingly demonstrates that although the anarcho-psychological critique has been obscured by the political conflicts of the two dominant paradigms of capitalist liberal-ration- alism and Marxist socialism, its antipolitics has acted as a persistent underground presence, exerting a barely acknowledged and sometimes unsuspected but often widespread influence. Taking Carroll's analysis further, it can be argued that with the collapse of the Marxist paradigm, the anarcho-psycholog- ical critique is finally emerging from its subterranean hideout and, in contemporary anarchy, catalysing the breakout from the crystal palace of the control complex.

Carroll argues that the anarcho-psychological critique commences with the publication of Stirner's *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* in 1845 (translated as *The ego and its own*). This text 'inaugurates the reconstitution of philosophical debate' and constitutes 'a crossroads in nineteenth-century intellectual history' (Carroll, 1974: 26, 88).[7] The distinctive

[6] And accounts of anarchism too. Bookchin, for example, devotes several ill-tempered pages vainly trying to dismiss individualist anarchism or cast it as reactionary (Bookchin, 1995: 7-11).

[7] Others - notably, for Carroll, figures as diverse as Nietzsche and Dostoevsky (but also Freud and the existentialists) - are to develop the anarcho-psychological paradigm in various directions, which are beyond the scope of this chapter, but Stirner's formulations are originary.

and innovative feature of Stirner's formulations in particular and the anarcho-psychological critique in general remains its emphasis on a unique ontology or, rather, an ontology of uniqueness:

> At the basis of the philosophical innovations of Stirner and Nietzsche is ontology: their radically new perspective on religion, on morals, on political and social life, stems from their attitude to *being*. Their entire work branches out from the stem conviction that there is a primary order of reality about which all that can be said is that the individual exists, that 'I am!' The individual first exists, and then begins to define himself [sic]. Essences, the communicable, socially mediated dimension of individual character belong to the second order of reality. Behind them lies an unconscious, irreducible, never realizable or comprehensible force, an inviolable coherency: the *individuum*. This is the ground of *der Einzige*, the unique one, the realm of what Stirner calls his 'creative nothing'. (Carroll, 1974: 39)

Carroll's analysis proceeds from an examination of ontology to a discussion of the epistemological anarchy developed within the anarcho-psychological critique.

If this cluster of ideas seems familiar, this is because the anarcho-psycholog- ical critique clearly underlies Hakim Bey's contemporary formulation of ontological anarchy in particular and the new anarchism(s) more generally. Carroll makes it clear that the antipolitics characteristic of the anarcho-psychological critique[8] remains rooted in its ontolog-

[8] On the contrast between politics and antipolitics, I refer the reader to my text *Anarchy and ecstasy:* 'by antipolitical I do not mean an approach that pretends it has no ideological dimensions. I do, however, mean an ap-

through making language its own, and exalts in this first victory of its will. The Stirnerian subject is neither intimidated nor victimised by language as the individual is in the Lacanian schema. The reasons for this are clear: the Stirnerian subject is not a split subject, divided by language, because its identity is not wholly defined by language, but remains rooted in the creative nothingness from which it springs.[10] Hence the attitude of such a subject to language - as to the world in general - is not one of victim or dependent, but that of conqueror. Identity is not to be sought in and through language, because it has not been lost; the Stirnerian subject does not need to search for a self, but starts from it: 'the question runs, not how one can acquire life, but how one can squander, enjoy it; or, not how one is to produce the self in himself, but how one is to dissolve himself, to live himself out' (Stirner, 1993: 320).

However, in seeking self-realisation, the Stirnerian ego is immediately confronted with other wills and forces which seek to delimit, contain and control the self-willed individual, and hence 'the *combat* of self-assertion is inevitable' (p. 9). The Stirnerian ego maintains that 'Nothing is more to me than myself!' (p. 5), but finds itself in a world where power, in all its varied shapes and forms, wants the ego to accept that 'It is more to me than myself' (p. 305). In such a world, conflict re-

[10] The Stirnerian entity appears to be a divided or unary subject, but might more appropriately be characterised as a heterogeneous subject. Despite the emphasis in *The ego and its own* on the ego and uniqueness, the Stirnerian subject is not unitary because it has no essence, no basis in being. 'Nothing at all is justified by *being*. What is thought of *is* as well as what is not thought of; the stone in the street *is,* and my notion of it *is* too. Both are only in different *spaces*, the former in airy space, the latter in my head, in *me;* for I am space like the street' (Stirner, 1993: 341). The Stirnerian subject remains a space, a void, within which heterogeneous desires, wills and impulses arise and are then consciously *owned*. Hence Stirner's paradoxical self-characterisation as 'I the unspeakable' or the assertion that 'neither you and [sic] I are speakable, we are unutterable' (Stirner, 1993: 355; 311). In this way, Stirner eludes the Derridean charge of logocentrism, despite the importance of the logos in his work.

an individual is able to draw upon the fund of creative energies which are loaned to it by the nothingness at the basis of its being. These energies are then available at the free disposal of the individual. The capacity to make free and unhindered use of these energies defines the individual as unique. The individual becomes a unique one at the moment of self-reflexivity, in the instant in which she or he realises his or her ownness.[9] The self-created individual wilfully creates and destroys itself. Although the energies of the void are inexhaustible, those energies loaned to the individual are finite. The individual uses up those energies in its progress toward self-realisation: it creates but also consumes and ultimately burns itself out. The individual comes from nothing and returns to nothing. The turning point in this voyage of self-creation and self-destruction occurs at the apogee of its attainment. At the very moment when the individual realises itself as unique, at the exact moment when the maximum degree of individuation and differentiation has taken place, then 'the owner himself returns into his creative nothing, of which he is born'. But at the peak of its powers the individual is less like a comet than a sun - 'the sun of this consciousness' - a burning orb which illuminates, by contrast, the dark void which contains it.

This process is set in motion with each individual's primal assertion of selfhood. By appropriating the words 'I am!', the Stirnerian self takes ownership of language, or at least that little corner that she or he can make their own at this stage of maturation. Confidently rooted in the unutterability of the roots of its being, the Stirnerian individual creates a self through owning language. The origins of selfhood are thus indistinguishable from ownership. The self achieves its initial sense of ownness

[9] The issue of gender - i.e., the question of whether the Stirnerian notion of the individual is gendered or whether it escapes gendering, as well as the question of the relationship between language acquisition and gender identity in Stirner's work - requires consideration in its own right, and unfortunately lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

ical commitments, but this is evidently as true for Bey as it is for Stirner:

> The political anarchism of Stirner and Nietzsche is a logical development of their ontological anarchism: their denigration of social authorities represents one dimension of their endeavour to displace the authority of essences and stress the primacy of the I. Both see the springs of the human condition as anarchic, willful, problematical, a complex of forces with their deeply individual source beneath the superstructure of social mediation; both recognize what Plato referred to as the 'unutterable' in each individual, a noumenal core which makes of human thinking, of necessity, an isolated, introspective activity. The social or essentialist superstructure is by itself lifeless; its function is to provide the *I* with a means of expression. (Carroll, 1974: 39)

Stirner anticipates the Heideggerian/Sartrean emphasis on existence preceding essence. In fact, 'Stirner illustrates how the individual ego, whose ontological ground is simply the self-reflection that it exists, is fettered as soon as it subordinates itself to qualities or essences' (Carroll, 1974: 21). Historically, the Stirnerian ego comes to consciousness in a world of socio-existential alienation. *Historically* this is the case because, as Stirner's broad overview of history

proach that is not political. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines politics as the "science and art of government" and political as "of the State or its government". Political praxis, in this definition, thus remains the ideology of governance, and as such it remains appropriate to the shared discursive territory of the forces of control and counter-control. In attempting to transcend that territory, therefore, it is necessary to construct an antipolitics, an anarchic praxis that is more germane for those whose aim is the dissolution, not the seizure, of control' (Moore (1988: 5-6)).

indicates (1993: 15-151), individuals have always been subject to governance, order and control. The anti-authoritarian insurrection proposed in *The ego and its own,* however, aims to bring about a historically unprecedented world in which socio-existential alienation will be abolished. Born out of a creative nothingness (or non-existence), the ego comes into existence by asserting itself, affirming its existence - in other words, asserting the only thing which, for the individual, has any ontological foundation: its self.

The subject, then, is self-created: it creates itself as an individual by and through its assertion of its self. Language acquisition and use remains crucial to this act of self-affirmation. In emerging from a condition of non-existence to one of existence, a being issues forth spontaneously, but then finds itself in a world requiring introspection and self-reflection. Or, to put it another way: being emerges from a condition of ineffability into a world of language. In some respects this account of the construction of the self concurs with the theories developed by Jacques Lacan (see Payne, 1993). However, on the issue of language, the two thinkers diverge radically. Both agree that language is the major force through which the individual is constituted and structured. However, while Lacan maintains that the entry into language entails a simultaneous submission to social authority, and the beginning of alienation as the self passes from full self-presence to the condition of absence characteristic of language systems predicated on the signifier/signified division, Stirner's perspective on this issue remains rather more radical.

Emerging from non-existence into self-consciousness, the Stirnerian being creates itself as an individual by *appropriating* language: or, more accurately, by appropriating in the first instance only those words which it needs to bring itself into existence as an individual and express its self-affirmation: I am! The Stirnerian being possesses the (self-)confidence to undertake this act of (self-) assertion because, at the deepest levels

of being, it never becomes separated from the creative nothingness which is the ontological (non-)ground of its existence. The creative nothingness of the unutterable void beneath all existence underlies and precedes all notions of self, signifying systems, social mediations and authority structures. But its inexhaustible creativity remains a wellspring at the source of the individual being and fills the latter with confidence in its capacities and energy with which to fulfil its potentials:

> I am *owner* of my might, and I am so when I know myself as *unique.* In the *unique one* the owner himself returns into his creative nothing, of which he is born. Every higher essence above me, be it God, be it man, weakens the feeling of my uniqueness, and pales before the sun of this consciousness. If I concern myself for myself, the unique one, then my concern rests on its transitory, mortal creator, who consumes himself, and I may say: 'All things are nothing to me.' (Stirner, 1993: 366)

This sonorous passage, the closing words of Stirner's symphonic *The ego and its own,* articulates some key themes concerning the self-creation and self-realisation of the individual. The individual is defined by the capacity to own, and primarily by the ability to own him or herself - that is to say, to dispose of the self and act in any way congruent with one's will, desire or interest. Ownership of self is primary; other forms of ownership are secondary and derive from this fundamental form. As a subject-in-process (indeed, a subject-in-rebellion, for reasons that will become apparent subsequently), the Stirnerian self is constantly re-creating itself and revising its modes of activity in accordance with its changing desires and interests, but throughout these continual changes one constant persists: the need to own oneself or be in a condition of ownness. Being in a condition of ownness means first and foremost that