Towards a Transdisciplinary Anarchism

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In 1986, in the preface to what would be his last book, *L'homme et ses trois éthiques*, Stéphane Lupasco declared:

> "Up to now, my work has been at the theoretical level [...] Now it's a question of moving on to the level of practical conditions, of solving the problems posed by the world to the human being [...]".

I'd like to place my speech in perspective with Stéphane Lupasco's final petition, by suggesting, through the very title of this speech, "*Towards a transdisciplinary anarchism*", a practical application of transdisciplinarity to the socio-political field.

I'll try to show that anarchism as a social theory, i.e. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's non-authoritarian, mutualist socialism, can be linked to the values of transdisciplinarity, based on Stéphane Lupasco's logic of dynamic antagonism.

First, I'd like to give an overview of this logic of contradiction, so as to be able to identify its similarities with Proudhonian dialectics.

In his philosophy, Lupasco took into account the epistemological break brought about by quantum physics in the mid-twentieth century. He inserted the contradictory into his own logic because the propositions of quantum mechanics were incomprehensible to traditional logic. The latter, since Aristotle, has been based on the principles of identity (*A is A*); non-contradiction (*A is not non-A*); and the excluded third: there is no term that is both *A and non-A* (*between A and non-A, any third party is excluded*).

For Lupasco, the contradictory thus becomes the texture of the universe. Matter and space-time are productions of the antagonistic dynamism of energy. Everything we observe, every physical, biological, social or cultural system, every phenomenon or event, is a contradictory system produced by the momentary equilibrium between two opposing energy states.

This contradictory logic is based on two antagonistic corollary processes: the first is homogenization/heterogenization, and the second is actualization/potentiation.

The first process can be characterized as follows: A system requires a balance of antagonistic energies: a homogeneous pole is opposed by an antagonistic heterogeneous pole. And the second process: a system is modified when one of the poles of energy is *actualized* (i.e. *manifested*) at the expense of the pole of antagonistic energy, which is *potentiated* (i.e. *awaiting manifestation*).

Stéphane Lupasco envisages a third case where antagonistic energies simultaneously actualize and potentiate each other. He calls this third energetic state the "*included third*" or *T state* (the letter *T* stands for "*third*").

All of this allows Lupasco to identify three energy orientations that give rise to three materials:

1. *Physical matter, where the principle of homogenization predominates.*

2. *Biological matter, where heterogenization predominates.*

3. *Microphysical matter — which Lupasco equates with psychic matter — where a balance is struck between macrophysical homogenization and biological heterogenization.*

Let's leave this supersonic overview of Lupascian philosophy here, and turn our attention without further ado to the word "*anarchy*".

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865) can be considered the promulgator of the political meaning of the word *anarchy*. Anarchism, thus conceived, is the *non-authoritarian, libertarian* form of socialism, as opposed to Marxism, the *authoritarian, statist* form.

The word appears in Proudhon's first work, *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?* (*What is Property?*) (1840). While anarchy, in its common sense, means disorder and chaos, Proudhon puts forward a paradoxical idea that defines a positive form of anarchy: "*The highest perfection of society,*" he asserts, "*is found in the union of order and anarchy.*"

According to Proudhon, anarchy is both order and disorder. Such a predicate is therefore opposed to the principles of identity (*A is A*) and non-contradiction (*A is not non-A*). And it's easy to see why we can't grasp the meaning of the term "*anarchy*", except through what Lupasco has called a logic of contradictories, and which Proudhon intuited with his dialectic of antinomies.

Moreover, the word anarchy is already ambivalent in its Greek etymology *anarkhia*, which is made up of the privative prefix *an*, "*without*", and *archè*.

Anarchy is the absence of *archè*. *Archè* signifies not only the original principle of the beginning of things, but also the ruler, the one with authority, the principle of command. Archè is both the principle that begins and the principle that commands. But since the principle of command has no precedent, being at the beginning, its power is de facto transcendent, sovereign and absolute.

Lupasco explores this theme of *archè* in *Chapter VIII* of *L'homme et ses trois éthiques*. He points out that the religious energy generated by *archè* is the foundation of all *homogenizing totalitarianisms*.

Proudhon shows that true social order (i.e., *positive anarchy*) cannot be imposed by an external *archè*, transcendent to human society. In socio-political terms, he sees that *negative anarchy*, identified with disorder and chaos, is necessary for *archè*. Negative anarchy, disorder, is linked to authority by cause and effect. Disorder is the justification for authority. In modern times, the principle of authority is represented by the state, and Proudhon uses a dialectic of contradiction, which he calls serial dialectics, to liberate the social force of political authority, so that society can recover its natural capacity for self-creation and autonomy.

Stéphane Lupasco himself dealt with the socio-political application of his philosophy in his book *Psychisme et Sociologie*, published in 1978. In it, he demonstrates that the sociological field is either homogenizing or heterogenizing. In a passage from *L'homme et ses trois éthiques*, he states

that the ideology of homogenization corresponds to the actualization of Marxist state socialism, while the ideology of heterogenization corresponds to the actualization of capitalist liberalism.

Lupasco asserts that *heterogeneity* (which he describes as "*libertarian/libertaire*") will necessarily oppose socialist homogeneity, but he seems to reduce this heterogeneity to a form of liberal individualism. He fails to note the existence of two types of socialism, which would belong to two different levels of reality (and here I'm deliberately using Basarab Nicolescu's terminology).

In the *Trialogue*, which follows on from L'homme et ses trois éthiques, there is a very explicit exchange between Lupasco and Basarab Nicolescu. In response to Nicolescu's question as to why Marxist societies "*which started out with very generous, humanist ideas […] arrived, through their own operating mechanism, at the opposite of their own ideas*", Stéphane Lupasco replies: "*Yes, but I'd say that these totalitarian states you're talking about that have a Marxist option also stem from the fact that, for Marx, only macrophysical matter existed. We hadn't yet become aware of biological heterogeneity, which is quite recent.*"

Well, such an answer couldn't have applied to Proudhon!

For Proudhon was well aware of life's antagonistic dynamism. Here's a very explicit quote from *La Guerre et la Paix* (War and Peace), published in 1861: "[*In the physical, psychic, sociological universe*] *opposition, antagonism, antinomy burst forth everywhere […] Antagonism, action-reaction, is the universal law of the world*" (La Guerre et la Paix, "Conclusion générale").

Stéphane Lupasco, who clearly didn't know Proudhon, was unaware that Proudhonian philosophy was based on a logic of contradiction quite similar to his own. Jean Bancal, one of Proudhon's best exegetes, was well aware of this, declaring:

> "The theory of the particle and the antiparticle constitutes in modern physics a confirmation of the Proudhonian theory of the antinomic organization of the world".
>
> (Jean Bancal, Proudhon, Pluralisme et Autogestion, T. 1, Aubier, 1967, p. 118.)

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's social critique was directed against the two actualizations of modern society identified by Lupasco: Marxist authoritarian socialism and capitalist liberalism. Now, since there are three subjects, there should be three types of society. Is a *T*-type society, a "*psychic*" society, possible? This is where I bring in Proudhon's *self-managing socialism*.

Mutualist socialism is based on a logic of antinomies. According to Proudhon, "*the world, society and man are composed of irreducible elements, antithetical principles and antagonistic forces*" (Théorie de l'impôt/The Theory of Taxation).

In his very first work, *De la Célébration du Dimanche* (*The Celebration of Sunday*), he spelled out his social program: "*to find a state of social equality that is liberty in order and independence in unity.*" It was on the balancing of the antagonistic pairs liberty-order and independence-unity that he would base his socio-political vision.

Proudhon's balancing of opposites corresponds to the actualization-potentiation process of Lupascian logic. Proudhon expresses this explicitly in one of his writings *La Pornocratie, ou Les Femmes dans les Temps Modernes*, Chapitre. V (*Pornocracy, or Women in Modern Times, Chapter V*):

> "Opposite terms never do anything but balance each other; equilibrium is not born between them from the intervention of a third term, but from their reciprocal action."

Proudhon's critique of the Hegelian dialectic seems to me to be very similar to that of Lupasco. In *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église* (*Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*), Proudhon writes that Hegel's error is not to have understood that "*the antinomy is not resolvable, but indicates an oscillation or antagonism susceptible only to equilibrium.*"

Obviously, the economic world is no exception to this antinomian reality. The economy, according to Proudhon, is a series of successive couplings of contradictory elements, the principal one being the conflict between labor and capital. What Proudhon calls a series corresponds, in Lupascian terminology, to a chain of systems of systems.

The "*revolutionary*" order (as opposed to the "*theological*" order) thus emerges as an antinomic dialectic that Proudhon calls serial dialectics. This plurality of antinomic elements reveals the work of an organizing force that creates unity. Acting within the antagonistic system itself, this force brings opposing polarities to a dynamic tension that achieves what he calls pluralist unity.

This organizing force, which creates systems of systems, is akin to the Lupascian included third. At the socio-political level, the principle of Justice, which orchestrates the balancing of socio-political antagonisms, is identified with this unifying force. For Proudhon, Justice is a capacity of human consciousness, immanent to it. It innately possesses a sense of human dignity, i.e., the spontaneous recognition of others as equals in law. Through Justice, the human being possesses that faculty which Stéphane Lupasco calls "*consciousness of consciousness* and *knowledge of knowledge*", and which is specific to psychic energy. Justice results from the incessant balancing of antinomies, and is the ethic of the society of the inclusive third.

In his critiques of social alienation (be it religious, capitalist or state-led), Proudhon always attempts to establish what he calls the "*autonomy of society*", outside of any external authority. What he means by "*autonomy of society*" is the social form that positive anarchy takes, i.e., the possibility for society to govern and manage itself. Proudhon theorized his mutualism from the application of Justice to the economy. Proudhonian economic mutualism can be defined as the construction of a society of producers and consumers based on reciprocity and justice in exchanges. It was in *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église* (*Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*) (1858) that Proudhon gave the ultimate definition of his concept of Justice: "Man, by virtue of the reason with which he is endowed, has the faculty of feeling his dignity in the person of his fellow man as in his own person, of asserting himself both as an individual and as a species. Justice is the product of this faculty: "*it is the spontaneously felt and reciprocally guaranteed respect for human dignity, in whatever person and in whatever circumstance it may be compromised, and at whatever risk its defense may expose us.*"

This reference to the perception of "*human dignity*" through the notion of Justice, personally reminds me of Basarab Nicolescu's statement concerning the notion of the *Tiers Caché* (*The Hidden Third*):

> "The Hidden Third is the guardian of the irreducible mystery of the human being. It is the only possible foundation for tolerance and human dignity. Without it, all is ashes."
>
> (Le Tiers Caché. Considérations Méthodologiques.)

By actualizing themselves, homogenizing state societies potentiate liberal pluralistic heterogeneity. Conversely, by actualizing itself, liberalism potentiates homogenizing state totalitarianism. But there is a double potentiation which, on the social level, seems to me to have been

overlooked, since the actualization of both social totalitarianism and social liberalism potentiates both, the society of the third-included.

If we are aware of this double potentiation, we realize that, in the socio-political sphere, modernity could be read as the permanent potentiation of the society of the third-included (i.e. *positive anarchy*).

In the process that Stéphane Lupasco calls *la causalité par antagonisme* (*causality by antagonism*), the cause that is actualization implies a potentiation that contains within it, as potentiation, the cause of what is going to be actualized. Now, if the cause by actualization is an efficient cause, the cause by potentiation, Lupasco tells us, is a teleological cause, a final cause. This teleological cause is the awareness of what can happen. Consequently, we can say that the double potentiation of non-authoritarian autonomous social theory must be seen as the awareness of the finality of human society.

I'd like to quote again from the "*Trialogue*" and Basarab Nicolescu's luminous remark to Stéphane Lupasco:

> "The notion of finality repels the scientific mind, because we automatically think of the old notion of finality. I think you manage to unify the notion of finality and that of freedom, because finality, after all, is the finality of systems, created by the systems themselves. Therefore, it's not an external agent."

Basarab Nicolescu's remark is very Proudhonian, for it means that the teleological cause is not transcendent, that it does not correspond to the authority of an *archè*.

By way of conclusion, I'd like to extract from the "*Trialogue*" this exchange between Basarab Nicolescu and Stéphane Lupasco:

> B. N: […] But couldn't we build a system of relations in which state T, experienced both individually and socially, would predominate?
>
> S. L: It's a new evolution, an evolution towards the sociological psyche.
>
> I dare to equate this evolution towards *sociological psyche* with the *social evolution* towards *transdisciplinary anarchism*.

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