

# **Anarchism is movement**

**Anarchism, neoanarchism and postanarchism**

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# Preamble

Yes! Anarchism is in movement and it is so twice over.

On the one hand, it has thrown itself towards a dynamic of renewal that has it move at a speed that it has not known for a long time and which translates, among other things, into a significant expansion of its forms and themes of intervention, in the strong diversification of the shapes that it takes on and in the considerable increase of its publications.

On the other hand, the social, cultural, political and technological changes that have occurred over these last decades vigorously spur it on and drive it towards a rapid expansion in distinct zones of the world. Anarchist symbols appear in the most recondite regions of the globe; anarchist actions show up in the news, where they are least expected, and anarchist movements, whose magnitude is at times surprising, stir up multiple geographical areas.

Should we be happy? Of course! Because, parochial patriotism aside, what is good for anarchism is good for all people who, having heard of anarchism or not, knowing or not what it means and sharing or not its principles, suffer in the flesh domination and exploitation and, in some cases, cherish dreams of revolt and rebelliousness. To taint social and political reality with a little more anarchism cannot but contradict the smooth running of oppression and injustice.

Does this robust expansion of anarchism augur the proximate advent of a more libertarian and egalitarian society, or at least, a few social transformations of great magnitude? To these questions, the answer can only be: *not by a long shot!* We are no longer at the age of believing in fairy tales and we know perfectly well that, even assuming that the number of persons touched by the influence of anarchism has undergone an extraordinary growth, it would continue to represent a population of *Lilliputian* dimensions; for too insignificant in the face of the more than seven billion human beings, of every condition and belief, that inhabit the planet and of whom, it must be believed, that a great many would prefer, however difficult it is to accept, other systems of values and other ways of life than those that appear so desirable to us.

However, once the siren songs that announced radiant mornings were silenced and the eschatological hopes were locked away in the trunk of old illusory dreams, what still remains is that the current revival of anarchism is the bearer of excellent prospects for all of the practices of resistance, subversion and rebelliousness that confront the impositions of the reigning social system. The expansion of anarchism opens up, in effect, the possibility of multiplying and intensifying the struggles against the apparatuses of domination, of putting in check more often the attacks on the dignity and the conditions of life of people, of subverting the social relations moulded by mercantalist logic, of tearing away spaces to live differently, of transforming our subjectivities, of reducing social inequalities and expanding the space open to the exercise of practices of freedom.

And all of this, not for tomorrow or the day after tomorrow; not for after the great explosion that will change everything, but for today itself, in the day to day, in the quotidian. For it is in the here and now where the only revolution that exists and that is truly lived is carried out, in

our practices, in our struggles and in our way of living. Here and now, as Gustav Landauer had already indicated, when he said that “anarchism is not a thing of the future but of the present”.

To make a notch in the reality where we live, even if not in the whole of it, even if only in a fragmentary way, to have a bearing on it, finally, after so much time of seeing it pass through our fingers like sand and to thus transform it in the present, no doubt in a piecemeal way, but radically, this is what today’s anarchism in movement offers us. And this, let us not doubt for a moment, is far from being a little thing, above all when we verify that the principles, the practices and the realisations that characterise anarchism are reinvented, claimed and deployed by collectives and by people who do not necessarily come from milieus that define themselves as explicitly anarchist.

I invite you on this occasion to take a brief walk through the resurgence and renewal of anarchism, hoping – as does anyone who writes – to be capable of awakening your interest and of keeping your company until the end, even if the path that I have taken, or my way of following it, is not necessarily the most appropriate.

I have considerably lightened the principal body of the text, placing the development of certain themes in a few final *addenda*. They deal with questions that in my view are undoubtedly important, but whose detailed analysis are unnecessary to follow the principal argument of the book. They can nevertheless be consulted by those desirous of deepening their understanding of the matters focused on. The three addenda that I have included address the questions of modernity and postmodernity, poststructuralism and relativism.

Finally, I have to make two clarifications regarding the bibliography. Bibliographic references are usually organised according to the alphabetical order of the authors names and this is effectively how the general bibliography is presented at the end of the book. However, for the specific theme of postanarchism, it appeared to me to be more useful to organise it chronologically and to have it appear at the end of the chapter dedicated to this theme.

The second clarification is that for the writing of this book, I turned to, sometimes literally, many of my own texts, published in other places and at other times. It is for this reason that I thought it convenient to have a separate bibliography of my own libertarian writings that I have used in this book or that maintain a very direct relationship with it.

# 1. The impetuous resurgence of anarchism in the beginning of the 21st century

Beneath the incredulous gaze of those who had shut it up in the dungeons of history and before the surprise of many, if not to say of everyone, anarchism has been experiencing since the beginning of the 20th century an impressive momentum that manifests itself in various regions of the globe. Independently of whether this preoccupies or makes us content, it has to be stated that anarchism occupies again a significant place on the political scene and that it is in the process of reinventing itself on the triple plane of its practices, its theory and of its social diffusion.

When an unexpected event occurs, it is easy to declare, *a posteriori*, that its mere occurrence is the proof that it *had* to happen and anyone could have anticipated it if they had disposed of enough information. This is of course not generally the case and, with respect to anarchism, it is clear that its return onto the political scene could very well not have happened. No historical necessity presides over its resurgence, nor that of any other social phenomenon. Nothing is written since the beginning and for ever and this is a great good fortune, for this is the price for the very possibility of freedom. Against the idealised images, we have to recognise that if anarchy formed part of the deepest aspirations of the human being, if it were inscribed in some way in human nature, or, also, if humanity moved necessarily towards a horizon of anarchy, despite the ups and downs of history, little space would remain for the idea of freedom, something that would be oddly paradoxical. Castoriadis saw it clearly: either the social-historical is open and permits radical creativity, or we are condemned to repeat indefinitely what already exists. Hence a choice has to be made between, on the one hand, a conception of historical reality that privileges the possibility of freedom, even though this places the perennity of anarchism at risk and, on the other hand, a conception of this reality that can assure, eventually, the permanence of anarchism that would be inscribed in the heart of history, but which reduces considerably the field of freedom.

The fact of not subscribing to theological conceptions of history and of rejecting any strict historical determinism does not impede us from investigating and analysing the reasons for which anarchism rides again. It is precisely these reasons that this book aims to contribute to clarify.

In any case, to be more precise, the concern to elucidate and explain is not the only one at the origin of this essay. Indeed, it is not only a matter of giving *an account* of anarchism, outlining it in its current resurgence, but to contribute to its renewal at the level of its practices and its thought. The book does not have then a purely descriptive goal, but is politically *committed* in favour of the new ways of conceiving and practicing anarchism. These new ways appear to have a more direct connection with current reality and are in a better position to expand the influence of libertarian ideas. Not because this expansion is good in itself, or should be pursued for its own sake, but because it can only have beneficial consequences for the victims of domination and exploitation.

I warred for some time against the *guardians of the temple*; that is, against those who want to preserve anarchism in the exact form that it was inherited, as the risk of asphyxiating it and impeding it from evolving. My appeals then go back some time for “an anarchism disposed to constantly putting its very foundations at risk, directing towards itself the most irreverent of critical reviews”. These exhortations, that rise up not so much against classical anarchism but against its fossilisation at the hands of the vigilantes of orthodoxy, seem to me to be necessary at certain times, though they have ceased to be so today. The exuberant vitality of anarchism has effectively barred those, brimming with love for it, who tried to retain it, so as to preserve it better. The guardians of the temple continue to exist, of course, but they can only carry out rearguard actions and it seems useless and of little interest to develop a critical discourse against their narrow and vetust conception. The concern now is to contribute to stimulate the new anarchism that is developing verdantly, beneath our very gaze. What is important is to help to reform it in the frame of the current epoch, without stopping to criticise this or that aspect of expired conceptions.

To say that anarchism is resurging in the present is to affirm, simultaneously, that it has found itself more or less *missing* for some time. Likewise, when it is stated that it is reinventing itself, it is suggested, analogously, that this is not *a mere reproduction* of previously existing anarchism, but the incorporation of some innovative aspects. Even though the concern here is not to present its past, the reference to the eventual *eclipse of anarchism* and its supposed withdrawal from the political scene obliges us to cast a glance over its history to see whether this has effectively been so. However, previous to that, I believe that it is useful to reflect on the theoretical scenarios where the question of an eventual eclipse of anarchism is not even posed and from which therefore it would be completely incongruent to speak of its current resurgence.

### 1.1. Anarchy versus anarchism: a dubious dichotomy

The first scenario presents itself when *anarchy* is taken as the reference, more than anarchism, and it is defined as a certain *state of things* that would exist in the heart of this or that ambit of reality. A *state of things* whose defining characteristic would consist of excluding domination and where diversity and singularity could manifest themselves freely. Anarchy, taken as an ontologically distinct entity, can be considered in fact as one of the possible multiple modalities of reality. And it can be argued, for example, in a Bakuninist tone, that biological life itself can only develop because it summons conditions for the free manifestation of diversity, of plurality, including the combination of contradictory elements; and because it is capable of smashing the constrictions that strive to repress its free expression and the manifestation of its diversity. Thus, certain aspects of the living would call for a *state of anarchy* to be able to exist. In this sense, anarchy would be directly inscribed in life, as in other spheres of reality, which means that it would never totally disappear; above all, if far from making of it a *state of things* that can only express itself in terms of an *all or nothing*, it may still be considered, in a gradualistic manner, that certain segments of reality carry with them *greater or lesser degrees of anarchy*.

There may well be no inconvenience in speaking of anarchy as a certain state of things, as a certain modality of reality that is accordingly intensely desirable for anarchists and towards which they would like to advance as quickly as possible. However, what is not admissible is that we cling to this reality on the basis of essentialist presuppositions, even though, certainly, they

would serve to exclude any possibility of an eventual disappearance of anarchy, guaranteeing that the latter could continue to exist, even when it manifests itself at a most basic level.

To think anarchy as an ontological entity, as a really existing state of things, does not exclude that this state of things be *contingent* rather than necessary, that it depend on variable circumstances that condition its existence and that it can therefore suffer eclipses and, even, a definitive disappearance. Anarchy, considered as a distinct ontological entity does not enjoy an existence *in itself*, but only that it accedes to existence on the basis of an activity, necessarily human, which constructs a specific conception of anarchy.

In effect, against the essentialist dogma, it has to be admitted that to the degree that *being does not exceed the conjunction of its ways of existence*, there cannot be at its side or in addition to its forms of existence something that would be *its essence*. In this sense, anarchy cannot be this or that *in itself*, but is the circumstantial product of a conjunction of relations; and it only acquires meaning in the context of a culture, of a society and of a particular epoch. More precisely, the context in which anarchy has meaning, by opposition, is in a context of domination, experienced as such by the people who live in the said context.

This means that, genealogically, for anarchy to accede to existence, for it to be constructed as a differentiated and specific entity, not only must there exist apparatuses of domination and resistances to these apparatuses, but that also, furthermore, domination and resistance must enter into the field of *possible experience* of subjects. Often domination is not understood as such, often it does not enter the field of the thinkable and often the resistances that it arouses are not experienced as such, in which case the conditions for the possibility of anarchy are not gathered together and anarchy, plainly, does not exist. For it to exist it is necessary that, in addition to bringing together these conditions, certain ideas – such as, for example, those of singularity, freedom, autonomy and the struggle between domination and what resists it – be effectively thought, something that does not happen until a certain period of historical development. Anarchy as a certain state of things, anarchy as an ontological entity, is not a pre-existent thing, it is a construction and, even, a relatively recent construction.

Anarchy and anarchism are, of course, two different phenomena, but the kind of relation that they maintain reveals that they are intrinsically *connected phenomena*. Indeed, anarchy is meaningless except within the framework of *anarchist thought* responsible for its theoretical conceptualisation. In other words, anarchy – understood in the specific way that anarchists give to the term – is a construction that reveals itself to be inseparable from anarchist thought, simply because it emerged from it. Furthermore, this thought is, for its part, but one of the constitutive elements of the *anarchist movement*, understanding by this a collection of practices, of discursive productions, of social and cultural events, of symbolic elements, etc., that form a specific historical fabric.

Therefore, to the extent that anarchy is a theoretical-practical production that emanates from the anarchist movement, it is not defined once and for all, but can vary with the eventual fluctuations of the anarchist movement and it can, even, disappear if this last should do the same, because in the absence of the concept of anarchy, the movement would be totally undetectable in the heart of reality and its eventual existence would fall fully under the category of the unthinkable, or under that of simple historical vestige of what has only a past reality.

If I have dedicated so much space to the discussion of the concept of anarchy, it is, in part, because certain sectors of the anarchist movement, influenced, perhaps, by the thought of Hakim Bey – to whom we will return further on – currently give a decisive importance to this concept,



which they oppose to that of anarchism. Anarchism would be the obscure side of anarchy, what would pervert it and negate it in practice. In the face of this way of presenting things, it is necessary to see clearly that anarchy and anarchism are two completely inseparable elements, given that neither can exist without the other.

## 1.2 Anarchist movement and anarchist theory

The second scenario where an eventual collapse of anarchism would be meaningless presents itself when, after having separated anarchism as a movement, on the one hand, and anarchism as theory, on the other, certain anarchist thinkers and propagandists, such as Kropotkin, for example, attribute to anarchism a millennial existence under the pretext that certain conceptual or axiomatic elements that characterise it can already be found outlined or formulated since the most remote antiquity. It is clear that if such a perspective is adopted, it becomes difficult to speak of an eventual collapse of anarchism that would precede its current reappearance, given that it is always possible to discover conceptual traces of anarchism in a good many cultures, as far back as one goes in time.

If anarchism has truly accompanied us practically throughout the length of human history because it is inscribed, so to speak, in the human condition, the eventuality of its disappearance constitutes an aberration. Conversely, if we merge together in an inseparable whole *anarchism as a theoretical corpus and anarchism as a social movement*, this possibility becomes evident because anarchism requires, precisely, this theoretical corpus to exist.

What will constitute little by little anarchist thought and what will establish it as a distinct political thought that is recognisable, from a certain moment on and not before, under the denomination of “anarchism” is not separable from a social thought that is forged in the midst of very specific political, economic, cultural and social conditions, and of very definite social struggles. There is no anarchism without the development of capitalism; there is no anarchism without the analyses elaborated, for example, by Proudhon regarding the social conditions created by the establishment of capitalism; and there is no anarchism without the struggles against exploitation carried out by workers, whether they be factory workers, artisans or peasants.

It is evident, therefore, that anarchism did not constitute itself, in Europe, as a definite political thought and, simultaneously, as a significant social movement, until the second half of the 19th century, *giving origin to, at the same time, to the anarchist concept of anarchy*. There is neither anarchism nor anarchy before then, however much certain precursors anticipated some of its conceptual elements, however much social history harbours demands and manifestations that it could claim as its own, and however much, in the light of anarchism once constituted as such, can be observed in certain cultures some forms of organisation and of life similar to those promoted by anarchism, as the current rise of anarchist anthropology makes clearly manifest.

Once this prior reflection on some theoretical scenarios which, in being accepted, would invalidate the possibility of a disappearance, even momentary, of the binomial anarchy/anarchism is closed, we are going to detain ourselves briefly with the history of anarchism. In fact, we are not even going to try to get an overview of such a rich and agitated history, which has already filled thousands of pages and which will continue to fill many thousands more. To dedicate to it, as I will here, only a few paragraphs, would be something of an affront to this history if I did not immediately indicate that my purpose is not to make known the history of anarchism –

excellent books abound in this regard -, but only to illustrate the reasons for which anarchism eclipsed itself for a few decades.

### 1.3. Brief historical considerations

Among the principal references, we find, in the heat of the French Revolution of 1848, the writings of Joseph Déjacque, of Anselme Bellegarrigue and, above all, of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who marked the beginnings of a political thought that identified itself as anarchist thought. After, with the drive of industrialisation and the workers' movement (the creation of the International Workingmen's Association – IWA – in 1864), anarchist thought and the anarchist movement developed *simultaneously* through a series of struggles and events among which stand out, undeniably, the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Saint Imier Congress of 1872. The names of Bakunin, of Guillaume, of Kropotkin, of Reclus, of Malatesta, of Anselmo Lorenzo and of Ricardo Mella, among others, have remained closely associated with the growing relevance of a thought and of an activity that will place itself on the political and social scene as a truly significant phenomenon and entity in the last decades of the 19th century and the first of the 20th century, culminating finally in the Spanish Revolution of 1936.

Anarchism was throughout those years a living thought; that is, a thought in continuous formation, in evolution, in osmosis with the social and cultural reality of the time, capable of enriching itself and modifying itself in contact with the world into which it places itself, through the experiences that it develops, thanks to the struggles in which it participates and the absorption of a part of the knowledge that is elaborated and that circulates in its surroundings. The anarchist movement that feeds this thought, while nourishing itself in turn from it, is also capable of having a bearing on reality, of producing certain effects within it and of exercising an influence that will come to be notable in various European countries such as Spain, Italy, France, Germany, England, Russia or Ukraine, as well as in various Latin American countries – Argentina, Mexico and Brazil, among them – and, even, in the United States of America.

After having demonstrated an appreciable vitality for about a century – *grosso modo* between 1860 and 1940, that is, some 80 years -, anarchism fell back, inflected back upon itself and practically disappeared from the world political stage and from social struggles for various decades, undertaking a long journey in the wilderness that some took advantage of to extend their certificate of dysfunctionality and to speak of it as of an *obsolescent ideology* which only belongs to the past.

The fact is that, after the tragic defeat of the Spanish Revolution in 1939, if an exception is made for the libertarian presence in the anti-franquista struggle, of the participation of anarchists in the anti-fascist resistance in certain regions of Italy during WWII or the active participation of British anarchists in the anti-nuclear campaigns of the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s or, also, a certain presence in Sweden and Argentina, for example, anarchism remained strikingly absent from the social struggles that marked the next thirty years in the many countries of the world, limiting itself in the best of cases to a residual and testimonial role. Marginalised from struggles, unable to renew ties with social reality and relocate itself in political conflict, anarchism lost all possibility of re-actualising itself and of evolving.

In these unfavourable conditions, anarchism tended to fold in upon itself, becoming dogmatic, mummified, ruminating on its glorious past and developing powerful reflexes of self-preservation.

The predominance of the cult of memory over the will to renew led it, little by little, to make itself conservative, to defend jealously its patrimony and to close itself in a sterilising circle of mere repetition.

It is a little as if anarchism, in the absence of being practiced in the struggles against domination, had transformed itself slowly into the political equivalent of a *dead language*. That is, a language that, for lack of use by people, severs itself from the complex and changing reality in which it moved, becoming thereby sterile, incapable of evolving, of enriching itself, of being useful to apprehend a moving reality and affect it. A language which is not used is just a relic instead of being an instrument; it is a fossil instead of being a living body, and it is a fixed image instead of being a moving picture. As if it had been transformed into a dead language, anarchism fossilised itself from the beginnings of the 1940s until almost the end of the 1960s. This suspension of its vital functions occurred for a reason that I will not cease to insist upon and this is none other than the following: *anarchism is constantly forged in the practices of struggle against domination; outside of them, it withers away and decays*.

Stuck in the trance of not being able to evolve, anarchism ceased to be properly anarchist and went on to become something else. There is no hidden mystery here, it is not a matter of alchemy, nor of the transmutation of bodies, but simply that if, as I maintain, what is proper to anarchism is rooted in being *constitutively changeable*, then the absence of change means simply that one is no longer dealing with anarchism.

## 1.4. The resurgence of anarchism

One has to wait until the end of the 1960s, with the large movements of opposition to the war in Vietnam, with the incessant agitation on various campuses of the United States, of Germany, of Italy or of France, with the development, among a part of the youth, of nonconformist attitudes, sentiments of rebellion against authority and the challenge to social conventions and, finally, with the fabulous explosion of May 68 in France, until a new stage in the flourishing of anarchism could begin to sprout.

Of course, even though strong libertarian tonalities resonated within it, May 68 was not anarchist. Yet it nevertheless inaugurated a new political radicality that harmonised with the stubborn obsession of anarchism to not reduce to the sole sphere of the economy and the relations of production the struggle against the apparatuses of domination, against the practices of exclusion or against the effects of stigmatisation and discrimination.

What May 68 also inaugurated – even though it did not reach its full development until after the struggles in Seattle of 1999 – was a form of anarchism that I call “anarchism outside its own walls” [*anarquismo extramuros*], because it develops unquestionably anarchist practices and values from outside specifically anarchist movements and at the margin of any explicit reference to anarchism.

May 68 announced, finally, in the very heart of militant anarchism novel conceptions that, as Todd May says – one of the fathers of postanarchism, whom we will speak of below -, privileged, among other things, tactical perspectives before strategic orientations, outlining thereby a new libertarian *ethos*. In effect, actions undertaken with the aim of developing political organisations and projects that had as an objective and as a horizon the global transformation of society gave

way to actions destined at subverting, in the immediate, concrete and limited aspects of instituted society.

Some thirty years after May 68, the large demonstrations for a different kind of globalisation [*altermundista*] of the early 2000s allowed anarchism to experience a new growth and acquire, thanks to a strong presence in struggles and in the streets, a spectacular projection. It is true that the use of the Internet allows for the rapid communication of anarchist protests of all kinds that take place in the most diverse parts of the world; and it is obvious that it permits assuring an immediate and almost exhaustive coverage of these events; but it is also no less certain that no single day goes by without different anarchist portals announcing one or, even, various libertarian events. Without letting ourselves be dazzled by the multiplying effect that the Internet produces, it has to be acknowledged that the proliferation of libertarian activities in the beginning of this century was hard to imagine just a few years ago.

This upsurge of anarchism not only showed itself in struggles and in the streets, but extended also to the sphere of culture and, even, to the domain of the university as is testified to by, for example, the creation in October of 2005, in the English university of Loughborough, of a dense academic network of reflection and exchange called the *Anarchist Studies Network*, followed by the creation in 2009 of the *North American Anarchist Studies*; or as is made evident by the constitution of an ample international network that brings together an impressive number of university researchers who define themselves as anarchists or who are interested in anarchism. The colloquia dedicated to different aspects of anarchism – historical, political, philosophical – do not cease to multiply (Paris, Lyon, Rio de Janeiro, Mexico and a vast etcetera).

This abundant presence of anarchism in the world of the university cannot but astound us, those who had the experience of its absolute non-existence within academic institutions, during the long winter that Marxist hegemony represented, that followed conservative hegemony, or that coexisted with it, above all in countries like France and Italy. In truth, the panorama outlined would have been unimaginable even a few years ago, even at a time as close as the end of the 1990s.

Let us point out, finally, that between May 68 and the protests of the years 2000, anarchism demonstrated an upsurge of vitality on various occasions, above all in Spain. In the years 1976-1978, the extraordinary libertarian effervescence that followed the death of Franco left us completely stupefied, all the more stupefied the more closely we were tied to the fragile reality of Spanish anarchism in the last years of *franquismo*. An effervescence that was capable of gathering in 1977 some one hundred thousand participants during a meeting of the CNT in Barcelona and that allowed during that same year to bring together thousands of anarchists that came from all countries to participate in the *Jornadas Libertarias* in this same city. A vitality that showed itself also in Venice, in September of 1984, where thousands of anarchists gathered, coming from everywhere, without forgetting the large international encounter celebrated in Barcelona in September-October of 1993.

Many were the events around which anarchists gathered in numbers unimaginable before the explosion of the events of May 68. In fact, the resurgence of anarchism has not ceased to make us jump, so to speak, from surprise to surprise. May 68 was a surprise for everyone, including of course for the few anarchists who we were, wandering the streets of Paris, a little before. Spain immediately after Franco was another surprise, above all for the few anarchists who nevertheless continued to struggle during the last years of the dictatorship. The anarchist effervescence of the years 2000 is, finally, a third surprise that has nothing to envy in those that preceded it.

How will, then, the fourth surprise be that the immediate future undoubtedly holds out for us?

## 2. The form that the resurgence of anarchism takes: neoanarchism

It is very obvious that the kind of anarchism that was slowly created after May 68, and that gained a sudden impulse in the beginning of the years 2000, marked an inflection in relation to what had existed hitherto. To paraphrase the poet Paul Verlaine, one could say that it is no longer “*ni tout à fait le même ni tout à fait un autre*” [neither completely the same nor completely different]. It about in effect a somewhat different form of anarchism which generated itself in and through some practices of struggle against domination that began to extend themselves towards the end of the 1960s, following in the wake of the events of May 68.

It seems particularly clear that if anarchism regained protagonism, it has been, above all, because the changes that have occurred at various levels of social, cultural, political and technological reality have created conditions today in consonance with some of the characteristics of anarchism. This consonance explains how contemporary anarchism responds far better than other currents of socially engaged political thought to the particularities and the *exigencies of the present*.

Nevertheless, if this harmony between certain features of anarchism and certain characteristics of the current epoch have permitted its expansion, such that anarchism reveals itself as a well adapted instrument to the struggles and the conditions of the present, it has also had a retroactive bearing on some of its features. Indeed, these features have been modified as a consequence of the involvement of anarchism in present reality and as a *return effect* on its very capacity to have an impact on reality.

We have then, on the one hand, the constitution of a new reality that presents the peculiarity of lending itself to anarchist intervention and, on the other hand, an anarchism that renews itself precisely because of its action on this reality. It is from this double process or, stated differently, from this *coupling* between reality and anarchism, that this latter has again become truly contemporaneous, meaning by “contemporaneous” that which finds itself *in consonance* with the demands of the struggles provoked in present day reality.

Even knowing full well that no such current exists, that there is neither a doctrine nor an identity that presently calls itself *neoanarchist* and that to promote a new adjective for anarchism – one more – is of little interest, I resort to this expression as a convenient and provisional way to designate this somewhat different anarchism that we find in the beginning of this century.

### 2.1. Anarchism outside its own walls

If there is something that powerfully calls our attention when we observe contemporary anarchism, it is, without any doubt, *its significant expansion beyond the frontiers of the anarchist movement*. It is true that anarchism has always overflowed the contours, ultimately considerably confused, of the anarchist movement, but this overflowing has been amplified in a spectacular

fashion since May 68 until the most recent protest movements, with their massive occupations of public squares and streets (Seattle, the 15M movement, Occupy Wall Street, etc.).

This expansion of anarchism outside its borders is not only of a greater dimension than in the past, it also presents somewhat different features. In effect, it is no longer a matter of an essentially cultural type of overflow, as when some artists, certain singer-songwriters and a few intellectuals sometimes expressed their proximity to libertarian ideas. Today the overflow manifests itself in the very heart of specific struggles undertaken by opposition movements that make no direct claim to anarchism.

Firstly, in the final stages of May 68, we witnessed the creation of *new social movements* that struggled, on identitarian bases, for the recognition of certain categories of people that were strongly discriminated against and stigmatised. These movements were not anarchist, far from it, but on some matters, they moved close to it. In any case, they moved away from classical political schemas, far more *centralised* in their forms of organisation and struggle, as well as showing themselves to be *much less sensitive to the problematic of relations of power*. It was in this way that struggles against various types of domination gained, little by little, a certain importance side by side with more traditional struggles anchored in the economic sphere and the world of work.

Subsequently, towards the end of the 1990s, a new inflection occurred with the appearance of the alter-globalisation movement, a *movement of movements*. Despite its enormous heterogeneity and despite all of the criticism that can be directed at it, it is a movement that bears strong libertarian resonances. It is made up, basically, as everyone knows today, of collectives and people who are active outside specifically anarchist organisations, but who encounter or who reinvent, in struggles, anti-hierarchical, anti-centralist and anti-representative political forms that are quite close to anarchism, as much with regards to decision making methods, as to forms of organisation and the modalities that characterise their actions; actions that in fact often make theirs, principles of direct action.

A good part of the activism associated with it – not all, of course – shows itself to be more fiercely committed to the defence of certain anti-authoritarian practices than some so-called anarchists. At times, it even occurs that they demonstrate themselves to be more intransigent than the anarchists in the demand that the characteristics of the actions undertaken, as well as the modes of decision making and the forms of organisation adopted, be truly *prefigurative*. That is, that they not contradict but, on the contrary, reflect in their very characteristics the goals sought.

Finally, at the beginning of the second decade of this century, occurred the massive occupations of public spaces in Spain's cities, followed by those of Wall Street in New York and in other cities of the United States, which also adopted forms of organisation and modes of action with close affinity to those that characterise anarchism.

The novelty therefore is that today the anarchist movement is no longer *the only depositary*, the only defender of certain anti-hierarchical principles, nor of certain non-authoritarian practices, nor of horizontal forms of organisation, nor of the capacity to undertake struggles that present libertarian tonalities, nor of *mistrust towards all apparatuses of power, whatever they may be*. These elements *have spread beyond the anarchist movement*, and are taken up today by collectives that do not identify themselves with the anarchist label and that sometimes even make explicit their refusal to allow themselves to be closed within the folds of this identity.

To avoid possible misunderstandings, it is important to clarify that this is not a matter of enlisting under the flag of anarchism movements that make no reference to it and of qualifying

as anarchist any popular demonstration that bases itself on direct democracy. Neither the great protest of Seattle, nor the 15M movement, nor Occupy Wall Street were anarchist, and their subsequent shifts can even end up contradicting their initial libertarian tonalities. Anarchism does not only consist of certain formal organisational modalities, but is also based on substantive ideas that are fundamental to define it. In fact, the paradox could occur of certain social movements adopting anarchist organisational models to promote political notions that are its antipodes. It is obvious that horizontal and assembly based functioning is not sufficient to be able to speak of anarchist practices.

However, it is undeniable that the movements that I have referred to present a “family resemblance” with anarchism that places them clearly in its ideological field and that these demonstrations form part of an *anarchism in action*, even if they do not claim the name for themselves and even if they effect some few changes in its traditional forms. It is in part to designate this somewhat diffuse, non-identitarian, form of anarchism, forged directly in contemporary struggles and *outside the anarchist movement* that I have recourse to the expression “anarchism outside its own walls” [*anarquismo extramuros*]. Curiously, this kind of anarchism also includes, at least in Spain, people who defined themselves as anarchists, but who renounced the label so as to be closer and to be more involved in the kinds of practices and sensitivities, globally libertarian, that characterise some of the new rebellious movements.

## 2.2. The new activist fabric and the anarchist identity

Non-identitarian anarchism is part of neoanarchism, but it does not exhaust its extension, but only represents one of its aspects, one of its facets. The other face of neoanarchism is comprised of collectives and people – generally very young – who even though they affirm themselves as explicitly anarchist, they nevertheless express a new sensibility with respect to this identitarian ascription. Their way of assuming anarchist identity is marked by a flexibility and an openness which articulate a different relation with the anarchist tradition, on the one hand, and with opposition movements outside this tradition, on the other hand. The borders between these two realities in fact become more permeable, more porous, the dependence on the anarchist tradition becomes more flexible and, above all, this tradition is understood as having to be cultivated, enriched and, therefore, transformed and reformulated by inclusions and, even, by a *hybridisation*, by a certain *blending* [*mestizaje*], with contributions coming from struggles carried out within the framework of other traditions.

It is not a matter of incorporating into anarchism a few elements of a political thought elaborated outside it. It concerns rather, and above all, of *producing together*, with other collectives also committed to struggles against domination, elements that are incorporated within the anarchist tradition, making it move. This openness of neoanarchism could be illustrated in that famous phrase which states, more or less, the following: “Alone we cannot, but, in addition, it would be pointless”. It is this same sensibility that we find in the declaration of the *Planetary Anarchist Network* (PAN), where one can read:

We are, however, profoundly anti-sectarian, by which we mean two things. We do not attempt to enforce any particular form of anarchism on one another [...] We value diversity as a principle in itself, limited only by our common rejection of structures of domination. Since we see anarchism not as a doctrine so much as a process of



movement towards a free, just, and sustainable, society, we believe anarchists should not limit themselves to cooperating with those who self-identify as anarchists, but should actively seek to cooperate with anyone who is working to create a world based on those same broad liberatory principles, and, in fact, to learn from them. One of the purposes of the International is to facilitate this: both to make it easier for us to bring some of those millions around the world who are, effectively, anarchists without knowing it, into touch with the thoughts of others who have worked in that same tradition, and, at the same time, to enrich the anarchist tradition itself through contact with their experiences.

This identitarian redefinition has important repercussions on *the anarchist imaginary* and this is significant because, as we well know, it is not generally due to a previous knowledge of theoretical texts that young people approach the anarchist movement. It is not by virtue of the writings of Proudhon or Bakunin that there are those who adhere, but because of a particular imaginary; and it is not until later that the canonical texts are eventually read.

The anarchist imaginary has in fact never ceased to enrich itself integrating, among other things, the great historical episodes of struggle against domination, as these manifested themselves in different parts of the world. What it has made its own over the last years has been, for example, the barricades, the occupations and the slogans of May 68 and, after 1986, a series of phenomena such as the anarcho-punk scene (that developed with force starting in the 1980s and which was an authentic breeding ground for young anarchists) or the okupation movement, with its unique aesthetic and lifestyle. These are the elements that have continued to nourish and spur on this imaginary.

It has however undoubtedly been the great international episodes of struggles against various forms of domination (that, without wanting to be exhaustive, go from Chiapas in 1994 to Taksim Square in 2013, passing through Seattle in 1999, Quebec, Gothenburg and Genova in 2001, the *No Borders* camp in Strasbourg in 2002, the Athens neighbourhood of Exarchia uninterruptedly since 2008 until today and Madrid, Barcelona or New York in 2011) that have revitalised the current anarchist imaginary. This imaginary, a little different from that of the 1960s, which generally began with the Paris Commune, moving through the Chicago Martyrs and the misnamed Tragic Week of Barcelona, on to the mutinous sailors of Kronstadt and the *Maknovtchina* of Ukraine, finishing in the Spanish Revolution, is that which today provokes identitarian adherence among anarchist youth. It seems obvious that the new elements which constitute it inevitably redraw the outlines of this identity.

In brief, the contemporary anarchist identity is not at all the same as the old one. It cannot be the same because what constitutes its imaginary sustains itself also from the struggles developed by current protest movements, and these present features different from the older struggles.

These new forms of struggle do not appear by chance and they are not the result of a new political strategy deliberately elaborated somewhere. They are rather the direct result of a re-composition and of a renewal of the apparatuses and modalities of domination that accompany the social changes of these last decades. *The practices of struggle against domination are changing at the same time as the forms of domination change*; and this is absolutely normal because the struggles are always provoked by and defined by *that against which they constitute themselves*. It is the new forms of domination that have appeared in our societies that give rise to the current resistances and which give them the structure that they possess.

The configuration of society in a network, the path from the pyramidal to the reticular and the horizontal, the deployment of new information and communication technologies (from hereon, NICT), all of it evidently puts into movement new forms of domination. It also however facilitates the development of extraordinarily effective practices of subversion which happen to be in consonance with the organisational forms proper to anarchism.

It is the forms adapted by the practices of struggle against the current forms of domination and, more specifically, those that are developed by the new movements of opposition, which find themselves incorporated, partly, in contemporary anarchism and which serve to outline a neoanarchism.

As long as it finds itself in direct connection with these struggles, neoanarchism shares in their imaginary and joins their principle characteristics with an anarchist imaginary which cannot but be modified.

### 2.3. The current revolutionary imaginary

One of the most striking features of this modification concerns the revolutionary imaginary itself.

The stimulus and incitement value that generalised insurrection bears in the classical revolutionary imaginary is effectively replaced in the neoanarchist revolutionary imaginary by the attraction to what could be called *the continuous and immediate revolution*. That is, revolution comes to be considered as a *constitutive* dimension of subversive action itself. Revolution is conceived of as something that is anchored in the present and that it is not therefore something that is only desired and dreamed of as a future event, but is *essentially lived*.

The revolutionary is the will to break the apparatuses of concrete and situated domination, it is the effort to block power in its multiple manifestations, and it is the action to create spaces that are radically separate from the values of the system and the modes of life induced by capitalism. The emphasis is thus placed *on the present* and on *its transformation, limited but radical*, and it is therefore for this reason that so many efforts are dedicated to creating spaces of life and forms of being that are situated in radical rupture with the norms of the system and which give rise to new radically rebellious subjectivities.

It can indeed be seen clearly today that the old revolutionary imaginary conveyed the hope of a possible dominion of society as a whole, and that this hope was the bearer of inevitable totalitarian deviations that were translated into actions, in the case of politics referenced to Marxism, and that remained only in outline, though still perceptible, in those inspired by anarchism.

Likewise, beneath the standard of universalism which could be nothing other than – as with all universalisms – a masked particularism, this imaginary concealed a will to dissolve differences within the framework of a project that, claiming to be *valid for everyone*, negated in practice the legitimate pluralism of political options and values. Finally, the messianic stink of an *eschatology* that strove to subordinate life to the promise of living, and to justify all sufferings and renunciations in the name of an abstraction, was so profoundly encrusted in this imaginary that it blocked the exercise of any trace of critical thought.

Nowadays, the explicit rejection of our iniquitous social conditions of existence remains intact, as well as the desire to illuminate radically different conditions. Nevertheless, the concept of *revolution* is profoundly redefined from a fully presentist perspective: the idea of *a radical rupture*

continues to be held, but without any eschatological point of view. On the contrary, nothing can be proposed for the day after the revolution, *because it cannot be located in the future*. Its only home is the present and *it is produced in each space and in each instant that it is possible to withdraw oneself from the system*.

What is new in the present is that the will of radical rupture can appeal to nothing more than the negation of obedience, to rebelliousness and to profound disagreement with the established reality. No object of substitution is necessary to reject what is imposed upon us; no *progress towards ...*, no *advance in the direction of ...* are required to measure the reach of the consequences of a struggle. The measuring rod with which the new antagonists evaluate the compass of their struggles is not exterior to them and is in no way guided by the more or less wide path that struggles have been allowed to use to approach an objective that would exceed the situated, limited, concrete and particular character of the same.

This is, for example, what one comes away with from a text by the US collective CrimethInc, in which the following can be read:

Our revolution must be *immediate* revolution in our daily lives ... [W]e must seek first and foremost to alter the contents of our own lives in a revolutionary manner, rather than direct our struggle towards world-historical changes which we will not live to witness. (*Days of War, Nights of Love*)

It seems clearly evident that the new struggles contribute especially to multiply and disseminate centres of resistance against very concrete and distinctly situated injustices, impositions and discriminations. It is perhaps this dissemination that explains the great diversity that today characterises a movement fragmented into a multiplicity of currents that run from green anarchism to insurrectionism, from anarcho-feminists to the anarcho-punk movement, from anti-speciesism and veganism to the self-named organised anarchism – generally, of the communist libertarian variety –; without forgetting that anarcho-syndicalism continues to have strong roots in a country like Spain, where it counts on two principal organisations that represent, *grosso modo*, the two traditional currents of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism.

Either way, it is not only that the perspective of a global transformation that gives birth to a new society no longer constitutes the nerve that today dynamises and orients struggles. It is moreover that the struggles which aspire to be global or *totalising* inspire, rather, a certain mistrust because they are seen as tending to reproduce, sooner or later, that which they purport to combat. If in fact capitalism and the apparatuses of domination need, imperatively, to affect *the totality of society*, it is because they can only function in a context where no one of its fragments – neither the most negligible, nor even its interstices – has the possibility of escaping its control. Conversely, the resistances would fatally separate themselves from their reason for being if they intended to mould society in its totality and in all of its aspects. It is a matter then of attacking the local establishment and manifestations of domination, renouncing a confrontation on a more general level, something that would call upon resources of a similar power and nature to those used by the very system to control the ensemble of society.

For this reason, even though the effort to regroup as many forces and wills as is possible continues, the construction of large organisations solidly structured and anchored in a specific territory can no longer be found on the current subversive agendas. On the contrary, what is seen to is the preservation of the fluidity of the networks that are created and the avoidance

of the crystallisation of excessively strong organisations, which only present the appearance of efficiency and which always end in sterilising struggles. This fluidity is especially emphasised in the insurrectionalist position, inspired at its origin by the Italian anarchist Alfredo Bonanno, but which, since then, has evolved and diversified itself. Let us recall that insurrectionalists advocate four major tactics: desertion – *exodus* – consists of escaping the places where practices of hierarchical domination exist; sabotage; the occupation of spaces – streets, places, official buildings, etc. – and, finally, the articulation of two kinds of spaces theorised by Hakim Bey: the TAZ (Temporary Autonomous Zones) and the PAZ (Permanent Autonomous Zones). Although they virulently criticise classical anarchist organisations, proposing much more lax, fluid and informal organisational structures and privileging the creation of small autonomous groups based on relations of affinity, the insurrectionalists continue to defend an idea of revolution that has certain resonances with the traditional.

## 2.4. The construction of the present and constructive anarchism

The emphasis that contemporary anarchism places on the transformation of the present and on the redefinition of revolution as a reality that does not await us at the end of the path traveled by struggles, but as something that occurs within the current struggles themselves and the forms of life that they give rise to, is not unrelated to its present day success.

Indeed, to remain coherent with its wager on the present, anarchism sees itself as summoned to offer, in the context of present day reality, *concrete realisations* which make it possible to live now, even though only partially, in another society, to weave other social relations and to develop another mode of life. These realisations go from self-managed spaces to networks of exchange and mutual aid, moving through okupied spaces to all kinds of cooperatives.

It is basically with concrete achievements and not with cheques to be covered in the future that the promises of the revolution are paid, and they intensely seduce a part of those who reject the current society. It is therefore also because anarchism offers an ensemble of concrete realisations which transform the present and which permit changing oneself, that it today enjoys an undeniable success among certain groups of youth.

To struggle no longer consists only in denouncing, in opposing and confronting, it is also to *create, here and now, different realities*. The struggles have to produce concrete results without ceasing to be conditioned by hopes placed in the future. To learn how to struggle without illusions with regards to the future leads us to locate the whole value of the struggle in its own features. It is in the very reality of the struggles, in their concrete results and their specific approaches wherein lies the whole of their value, and this must not be sought in what is to be found beyond them: for example, in this or that final objective that would give them legitimacy.

It is consequently about tearing away spaces from the system, to develop community experiences that have a transformative character, because only when an activity truly and radically transforms a reality – even if only in a provisional and partial manner – does it establish the bases for going beyond a mere – though always necessary – opposition to the system, creating a concrete alternative that in fact defies it. This is an approach that Proudhon already advocated when he questioned the virtues of destruction and of opposition, and when he emphasised the construction of alternatives. It is also what Colin Ward defended in the 1970s when, anticipating certain neoanarchist positions, he said that anarchism, far from being negation, was the construc-

tion here and now of alternatives that abide by principles other than those of domination. It is lastly what Gustav Landauer proclaimed in the beginning of the last century when he wrote this phrase that I already cited in the preamble: “Anarchism is not a thing of the future but of the present: it is not a question of demands but of life”.

It is accordingly necessary to act upon a milieu that we transform, while this allows us to transform ourselves, modifying our subjectivity. This is possible creating different social ties, constructing complicities and relations of solidarity which outline, in practice and in the present, a different reality and another life. As stated in the French journal *Tiqqun*: “it is a matter of establishing modes of life that are in themselves modes of struggle”. Of course, none of this is completely new and it can be related, in part, to the *lieux de vie* – places of life – created by individualist anarchists towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th.

The criticisms of these approaches also began long ago. It is indeed clear that the system cannot tolerate an *outside* with respect to itself and cannot accept that certain fragments of society escape its control. It would therefore be absurd to think that *spaces removed from the system* can proliferate to the point of being able to progressively subvert and dismantle it. The little islands of freedom are a danger and the system draws its claws well before the threat grows. This marks the limits of the pretensions to change society by means of the creation of *another society* in the midst of that already exists.

This realisation certainly invalidates the excessive confidence placed in the constructive dimension of anarchism, but it does not diminish in any way its interest. The system cannot control everything permanently and in its totality, and in the same way struggles are possible because they encounter and open spaces that escape, in part and during some time, the strict control of the system. So too the spaces that are removed from the system by the concrete realisations of anarchism can subsist for a more or less prolonged period of time.

This is important because, as we well know, besides oppressing, repressing and crushing human beings, the apparatuses and practices of domination always constitute *modes of subjectification* of individuals: they mould their imaginary, their desires and their way of thinking such that they respond, freely and spontaneously, in a way that the dominant authorities expect. It is for this reason that we cannot change our desires if we do not change the form of life that produces them, and thus the importance of creating forms of life and spaces that permit constructing *practices of de-subjectification*. It is ultimately an issue, today as in the past, of producing a political subjectivity that is radically rebellious to the society in which we live, to the commodity values that constitute it and the relations of exploitation and domination that ground it.

It is not uncommon to hear neoanarchists say, with strong Foucauldian accents, that it is a matter of transforming oneself, of changing our current subjectivity, of *inventing ourselves outside of the matrix that has formed us*. But, notice, this does not refer to a purely individual practice, because it is obvious that it is in relation to others, in the fabric of relations, in collective practices and common struggles, where materials and tools are found to carry out this labour upon oneself.

Coincidentally, the importance that practices of de-subjectification have today put directly into question the famous dichotomy that Murray Bookchin established, in the mid-1990s, between *social anarchism* and *lifestyle anarchism*, because both kinds of anarchism, far from being opposed to each other, are intimately connected. The necessary construction of a different subjectivity through struggles, whether with a local or global perspective, implies in effect that there is no *social anarchism* that does not involve strong existential elements and that there does not exist *lifestyle anarchism* that is not impregnated with social aspects. Despite this, it is often said that,

contrary to what occurs with rebellions rooted in the social question, that the rebellions qualified as *existential* are totally innocuous for the system because, even though they may overflow the strictly private sphere, they do not cease to remain confined to reduced spaces which are unable to perturb the well functioning of the system.

Things are not however like this. If anarchism, which is also – above all, some would say – a way of being, a mode of living and of feeling, a form of sensitivity and, therefore, a clearly existential option, represents a problem for the system, it is because in part it opposes a strong resistance, not only in the face of its repressive intimidations, but, above all, against its manoeuvres of seduction and integration. In spite of evident exceptions, it is in fact quite frequent that those who have been profoundly marked by their anarchist experience remain *irrecoverable* for ever. In keeping alive their irreducible alterity with respect to the system, they obviously represent a danger for it. It is not that they permanently challenge it by their mere existence, but that they also serve as relays so that new rebellious sensitivities are born. This sustains a certain relation with something that Christian Ferrer, a good friend and anarchist philosopher, used to say to me: “anarchism is not taught and nor is it learned in books – though these may help -, but is spread by contagion; and when someone is infected, more often than not, it is forever”.

I believe then that *social anarchism*, also called *organised anarchism*, and *lifestyle anarchism*, mutually imply each other. This is indeed so to the degree that, on the one hand, the challenge represented by the adoption of a lifestyle different from that which the established system defends and the refusal to abide by its norms and values constitutes a form of struggle which corrodes its pretension to ideological hegemony and which gives rise to social conflict, when the system takes normalising measures or when dissidents develop activities of harassment. In either case, lifestyle anarchism produces effects of social change that may sometimes be notable.

On the other hand, it is obvious that no one can fight for collective emancipation and commit themselves to social struggles without this profoundly affecting their lifestyle and their way of being. It turns out, in addition, that the two forms of anarchism frequently coincide on the terrain of concrete struggles. This does impede certain determined elements of the anarchist movement from raising barriers between these two ways of practicing anarchism. It is because I am convinced that these barriers weaken anarchism, that I would like to argue briefly here against those who try with effort to consolidate them.

In general, those who are catalogued, in the majority of cases against their will, as supporters of lifestyle anarchism – among whom would be included the majority of neoanarchists – show themselves to be little belligerent as regards the differentiation between libertarian ideological currents and feel themselves to have little interest in internal struggles within the movement. It is more often those who are in favour of social or organised anarchism – that overlap, in good measure, with libertarian communist positions – who strive to extend their sphere of influence in the heart of the movement and confine to its margins “lifestyle” anarchists. It is therefore their arguments that I would like to discuss here, but not without first spelling out certain points, to avoid misunderstandings.

It is obvious that an anarchism “without adjectives” is only sustainable as anarchism if it is committed to social justice and freedom among equals. Not only must it denounce exploitation and social inequalities, it must also struggle against them in the most efficacious way possible; it must be present among those who have committed themselves in these struggles and must endeavour to expand its influence among those most directly affected by the injustices of the system. There is nothing to be said consequently against the efforts, on the contrary, that certain

anarchists deploy to organise themselves with the aim of contributing to better develop those struggles. Nevertheless, it is also obvious that social or organised anarchism conveys, with excessive frequency, practices and political assumptions that surreptitiously distance it from its libertarian roots. Either because it adopts insufficiently horizontal structures – if not on paper, in practice – or because it lets itself be tempted by a certain vanguardism, or also because it is inclined to develop sectarian practices, among other things.

Capitalism is of course our most direct enemy and it should not be given any respite. The struggle against it constitutes an unrenounceable exigency for anarchism. However, considering the cultural diversity, or other kinds of diversity, that characterise the more than seven billion human beings who inhabit the planet, it is unreasonable to think that our values and our social models can succeed in bringing together the preferences of the majority. *Totalizing* perspectives are of no value to us, therefore, neither within the frame of the vast “global world”, nor also in the frame of a particular society. If we do not wish to resuscitate eschatological illusions, we must accept that, for those of us who are committed to combats in favour of emancipation, that we will never know the final success of these combats, nor the advent of the kind of society that we dream of. What we will only come to know is the experience of these struggles and their never definitive results. Consequently, social anarchism or not, organised anarchism or not, in the last instance, we have to wager on *the modification of the present* – a necessarily local and partial modification – turning a deaf ear to the songs of the totalising sirens and abandoning eschatological illusions.

If it is not possible to establish a generalised libertarian communism, nor to render anarchist the whole of the human population, or even a particular society, what can anarchism aspire to and what is left?

Well, even so, what remains is the ongoing struggle against domination in its multiple facets and this includes, of course, domination in the economic sphere, even though it goes well beyond this. What also remains is the transformation of the present, always localised and partial, but radical, and this includes our own transformation. And finally, we have to escape from our confinement and our ghetto, to act together with others, not to convince them, but to accept them; not for strategic reasons, but for reasons of *principle*.

To act with others? You are right comrades, those of you who struggles in the heart of the anarchism that proclaims itself “organised”. To act with others as you often do is honourable, however it also means to act with anarchists who do not enlist under the flag of organisations laying claim to “social anarchism”, but who, far from finding refuge in the private sphere, are also committed to radical struggles. As indeed usually happens with dualisms, the dichotomy suggested by Bookchin deforms reality because there are not *two categories* of anarchism, but a single *continuous one*. At one extreme, we find a lifestyle anarchism withdrawn into itself and totally indifferent to social struggles, while at the other extreme, one finds a social anarchism impermeable to everything other than the social struggle against capital. Between these two extremes, unfolds an array where all of the doses between the two types of anarchism are represented.

What creates the dichotomy, leaving as it does only two possibilities open, is the eventuality of *belonging or not* to a specific organisation. But if the dichotomy originates in this fact, then it is obvious that it cannot serve to say that “social anarchism” is to be found on one side and that what is found on the other side is not social.

The same comment can be applied to the expression “organised anarchism”. There is not an organised anarchism, on the one hand, and another which is not, on the other hand. It is obvious

that one has to organise oneself and that the development of any type of collective activity always calls for some form of organisation, as well as the deployment of a certain organised activity, even if only to publish a few pages or to debate an issue. Therefore, the question is not whether to organise oneself or not, but *how to organise oneself*. And the answer is that to know how to organise ourselves, we have to know *for what purpose we want to organise*. This conditions the form of organisation.

The traditional model presupposes the creation of a permanent, stable and encompassing structure, articulated around a few programmatic bases and some common objectives of a sufficiently general nature such that the structure disposes of an ample temporal perspective. It is a model that got on poorly with actual social conditions and that lost a considerable part of its effectiveness, in times characterised by velocity and the rapidness of changes. The current reality demands much more flexible, more fluid, models, guided by simple aims of *coordination* to carry out concrete and specific tasks. To the degree that, to be effective, the form of organisation must adjust to the nature of the tasks and the objectives for which it was created, and to the degree that these latter are diverse and, sometimes, variable and transitory, a multiplicity of organisational forms must coexist in as complementary a way as possible, without doubting that they can disappear or transform themselves according to the rhythm of social changes and events.

The question of organisation should probably be rethought and given new meaning in the same way as occurred with the concept of revolution, not to proclaim the absence or uselessness of organisation, but to renew its conceptualisation, its forms and practices. It is clear that the fascination currently exercised, in certain activist circles, by the old model of organisation – brandished as a panacea to increase the effectiveness and diffusion of anarchism – in no way facilitates this task. The efforts dedicated to the construction of an anarchist organisation and the priority conceded to this labour diverts attention away from tasks more directly tied to struggles, and sustains the illusion that the difficulties that trouble current struggles are due principally to the absence of a grande libertarian organisation and that these will disappear as soon as the latter sees the light of day.

The preoccupation to organise and organisational activity must be constant such as to be able to develop collective activities. However, this is very different from the determination *to construct an organisation*. For this reason, the use of the expression “organised anarchism” is deceptive. It is an expression that basically refers to anarchism framed in a classical type of organisation or to anarchism bound to the insistent effort to construct such an organisation and suggests that, no matter how organized certain anarchist groups or collectives are for carrying out concrete and specific tasks, these form no part of organised anarchism.

The expression is deceitful, but also dangerous because it introduces, as almost all dichotomies do, an asymmetry of value and a *hierarchisation* between the two poles of the created duality. Accordingly, given that the fact of organising oneself constitutes, obviously, a positive value, valid anarchism is organised anarchism and the other type of anarchism is contemptible. Evidently, the difference between them does not reside in being organised or not, *both are*, but because one is marked by a specific organisation or aims to construct it and the other is not. But of course, if things were said in this manner, the valorising and hierarchising effect that emanates from the expression “organised anarchism” would be lost, and the call to construct “the organisation” would be weakened.

My way of dealing with this question should not be interpreted as an argument for an anarchism closed within the sphere of the individual and resistant to all organised action. To question



the dichotomy created by reference to social anarchism and organised anarchism does not mean that anarchism should not achieve *a social projection* and, more precisely, *a projection within social movements*. If anarchism has revived in the present, it is precisely because it has been present in the large popular mobilisations of the beginning of this century; and it is obvious that if anarchism wants to have any kind of validity, it must pervade the broadest social movements possible – as Spanish anarchism did until the end of the 1930s -. This implies of course that these movements cannot be composed principally of anarchists, nor must they be specifically anarchist. This libertarian impregnation, due to the presence of anarchist militants, as well as people and collectives that *act in a libertarian manner*, even though they do not define themselves as such, can be observed more recently in the multitudinous mobilisations that do not cease to amplify and radicalise themselves in France, since 2008 until today, against the construction of an airport in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, in Brittany, or the mobilisations against evictions in Spain.

If contemporary anarchism changes, it is precisely because it finds itself involved, *with other collectives*, in current struggles and because it incorporates into itself the principal characteristics of these struggles. Because it finds itself in harmony with these struggles, neoanarchism participates in their imaginary and gathers into itself some of their features in an anarchist imaginary which cannot therefore but see itself modified. Ultimately, the anarchism that changes is *the anarchism that struggles* and that struggles in *the present*.

As I already indicated, “neoanarchism” is the expression that appeared to me to be the most convenient to refer to the change experienced by a significant part of contemporary anarchism; this expression though can contribute to cover over certain *continuities* with the anarchism of earlier epochs. In reality, neoanarchism re-encounters and reformulates some characteristics of anarchism that, while it is true that they had practically disappeared after the defeat of the Revolution of 1936, it is also true that they marked anarchism during the first third of the 20th century, above all in Spain. Thus for example, the desire to *transform the present* and to *transform oneself* without waiting for the revolution; or the effort to construct concrete alternatives to the system in multiple domains – such as education or production – or, also, the eagerness to tear away spaces from the system so as to be able to develop other ways of life ... these were aspects that were constantly present from the end of the 19th century to the first third of the 20th century, in different countries, while they acquired a spectacular intensity in Spain after the 19th of July of 1936.

It is very likely that there exists a relationship between the current resurgence of anarchism and its *re-encounter* with principles that made its strength possible in its moments of greatest vigor. However, the terms “re-encounter” or “reinvent” should not be undervalued, because, in effect, it is not about *a mimesis*, a mere reproduction by imitation, but that these old principles are constructed in a new context that marks them with certain different characteristics. The existing continuities and similarities do not take away one iota of value from the process of *reinventing* and *reformulating by oneself*, instead of simply repeating, reproducing or receiving what is inherited.

### 3. The reasons for the resurgence/renewal of anarchism

If anarchism is surging back again with force at the dawn of the 21st century, it is undoubtedly because some of the changes that our societies have experienced during the last decades are in tune with some of its characteristics and because, consequently, a kind of concordance between specific aspects of reality and certain aspects of anarchism have been established. In other words, if some of the characteristics of the contemporary sociopolitical, technological and cultural changes favour the deployment of certain anarchist practices, it is because there exists a certain isomorphism between these said characteristics and practices. As a result, it is in the intersection, in the encounter or, better, in the interaction between these elements – that is, between, on the one hand, the changes that have taken place and, on the other, anarchism; but neither in the one or the other, considered separately. It is in the loop that anarchism forms with the changes that have recently occurred where the secret of anarchism's riding again is to be found.

Accordingly, for example, if we consider changes of a technological kind, it's clear that parallel to the undeniable danger that they represent for our freedoms, NICT [New Information and Communication Technologies] also favour the horizontality of decisions, exchanges and relations, while increasing the possibilities of self-organisation and permitting the rapid dissemination of local initiatives, to mention only a few of the effects of these technologies which move entirely in a direction similar to that advocated or called for by anarchism.

Likewise, if we consider sociopolitical changes, it turns out that the expansion and the growing sophistication of the procedures of control and of the exercise of power that are applied to ever-more numerous aspects of our daily life demonstrate that anarchism was completely correct in insisting on phenomena of power, and this contributes to increasing its credibility. Furthermore, this proliferation of microscopic interventions of power multiplies the occasions for deploying practices of resistance against domination, as anarchism maintains. Other changes, more circumstantial, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, have also played a facilitating role in the development of anarchism. These events effectively put an end to the Marxist hegemony in the challenge to capitalism and unblock the search for other references to direct contemporary radical politics.

Lastly, if we contemplate the cultural changes, we can observe that the crisis of the legitimating ideology of modernity and, especially, the questioning of its essentialist presuppositions – that negated the possibility of freedom –, as well as the collapse of its eschatological perspectives – which sacrificed the present in benefit of the future – and the criticising of its totalising pretensions – which crushed singularities and diversity –, could not but reinforce, through a rebound effect, certain anarchist assumptions.

Before developing these themes, it is worthwhile to stop a few moments before the fact that this is not only about a resurgence of anarchism, but also, simultaneously, about its renewal.

### 3.1. Resurgence and renewal in one delivery

The resurgence and renewal of anarchism take place *in unison*. This concomitance is not surprising because it follows from the fact that the resurgence that we can presently verify is only possible because anarchism renews itself and is able, in this way, *to harness itself* to the new conditions that define the current epoch. Indeed, if it did not renew itself, no matter how favourable present conditions were to it, it could not surge back again. It could not do so for the simple reason that these favourable conditions are, at the same time, *new*, that is, *unprecedented* in the path that anarchism has traveled until now. It is therefore necessary for this latter to change so as to adapt itself to the new conditions and to integrate the novelty that appears along its own journey. The very fact that it surges up again today indicates, in principle, that it has succeeded in carrying out enough of a renewal to be able to connect with the changes that have occurred in its milieu. Therefore, *renewal is a necessary condition to render its resurgence possible*, but, at the same time, given that this resurgence articulates itself with the necessary adaptation to novel conditions, it cannot but reinforce, in turn, the renewal of what made it possible. Which means that *the resurgence of anarchism acts as a necessary condition that makes its own renewal possible*.

Resurgence and renewal acquire the form of a loop that sustains itself in a continuous movement and that recalls what I already mentioned with regards to the interaction between the characteristics of anarchism and those of specific social changes. To applaud the resurgence of anarchism and to lament, at the same time, its movement away from its traditional forms – as some anarchists do and, even, some anarchist currents – constitutes therefore a contradiction that only becomes evident when the relationship between these two aspects is grasped. Here also a choice is imposed, because anarchism would not have been able to surge back again if it had remained unchanging. To oppose its renewal is to act, inevitably, against its reappearance.

While not forgetting that resurgence and renewal are mutually inseparable elements, I am going to separate them, exclusively for the purpose of exposition, presenting, firstly, a few considerations about the renewal of anarchism, following then with its resurgence.

### 3.2. The reasons for the renewal of anarchism

#### 3.2.1. Anarchism as a constitutively changing reality

The renewal of anarchism is to be explained by the fact that by its very *nature*, it is a changing reality, and not only *accidentally* so.

Insofar as it is immersed in the flux of historical time, anarchism, like any other current of thought, necessarily gathers within itself some of the new elements that are produced within it and is thereby modified in a more or less significant manner. In this sense, that anarchism changes with the passage of time is evident, and in no way mysterious. What would be completely unusual would be instead its total invariability.

Anarchism however is not limited to experiencing *conjunctural* modifications, the outcome of historical avatars, but is a *constitutively* changing reality. This means that change is to be found *directly inscribed* in its manner of self-constitution and in its way of existing. Consequently, if change defines anarchism's *way of being*, it *could not continue to be what it is if it did not change*.

In other words, *anarchism is necessarily changeable* because its immutability would contradict *the kind of reality that it is*. This way of being is not without consequences because, for example,

if what I put forth here is true, then there is nothing further removed from anarchism than to conceive it as a timeless, inalterable, immutable thing, defined once and for all. And this immediately pushes aside any pretension to watch over its original purity and any fancy to institute oneself as a guardian of the temple.

The reasons that render anarchism *constitutively* changeable rest principally on *the symbiosis between idea and action* that mark anarchist thought and practices.

As Proudhon and Bakunin clearly stated, *the idea* has as much an origin as a *practical* value; it is born in *a context of action* and is directed towards producing practical effects through the action that it in turn engenders. In this sense, anarchism, contrary to Marxism, is not an ensemble of analytical and programmatic texts that have the aim of guiding action, but an ensemble of practices within which certain principles are manifest. These are principles that constitute themselves therefore through action, that are born from it and that in turn steer it.

The symbiosis between *idea* and *action* is what is at the origin of the *constitutively* changeable character of anarchism. This is very easy to understand as soon as we stop for a moment at what characterizes action. It is in fact clear that far from occurring in a vacuum or in the abstract, all action finds itself necessarily inserted in a historical context. As every historical context is, necessarily, specific and singular – precisely because it is historical –, action that develops within it cannot but be, also, specific and singular and, therefore, change itself in accordance with the inevitable variations that the historical context invariably undergoes. A historical context which, behind each of the changes that it undergoes, is newly singular and specific, and will demand consequently that the actions which develop within it be so as well, if they are to produce any kind of effect.

Of course, as action and idea are intimately bound in anarchism, the changes that action meets with produce, in turn, changes in the conceptual content of what action produces, at the same time as action is a consequence of those changes.

Ultimately, to not be constitutively changeable would mean then for anarchism to break this so particular tie between idea and action that comprises one of its formative elements, and we would find ourselves therefore before something that would be anything but anarchism.

Anarchism does not preexist the practices that institute it and it cannot survive beyond the practices that continuously produce it, except as a historical curiosity. It cannot do so because it is not something that inspires or activates these practices, that is latent below them, for it is nothing else but *these practices in themselves* and the principles that result from them.

### 3.2.2. The formation of anarchism in the struggles against domination

Anarchism can be defined, among other ways, as *what contradicts the logic of domination, at whatever level it is deployed*. It is therefore in the midst of the practices of struggle against domination where it is engendered. This indicates, yet again, that it necessarily evolves. In effect, these antagonistic practices cannot but transform themselves to the extent that, in the course of history and the social changes that accompany it, the apparatuses and modalities of domination modify and recompose themselves.

If it is true that struggles are not born spontaneously from nothing, but are always provoked and defined by that *against which* they constitute themselves, then it can be inferred that it is *the new forms of domination* that have arisen in our society which inspire present day resistances and which bestow upon them their form. In other words, antagonistic movements neither in-

vent themselves nor create that to which they are opposed and against which they constitute themselves; they only invent *the ways to oppose* these realities. So, for example, it is because the apparatuses of domination currently adopt reticular forms that the resistances also adopt them.

Stated differently, *that against which anarchism struggles changes* and, consequently, the forms of struggle also change giving way to new experiences and new approaches which, in being gathered into anarchism, make it evolve.

It also has to be taken into account that the new social conditions not only modify the apparatuses of domination and the corresponding practices of struggle, but also produce modifications in the symbolic fabric and in the cultural sphere. On the one hand, they give rise to new discourses of legitimation that are necessary to support the new apparatuses of domination, but, on the other hand, that also give rise to new analyses and new antagonistic discourses that enrich critical thought. That is, a modality of thought that, in the words of Foucault, put into question all forms of domination, and in which can be found, despite the enormous differences that separate them, as much Castoriadis, as Deleuze, Foucault or Chomsky, among others.

Insofar as this way of thinking also constitutes a form of struggle against domination, it approaches and borders an anarchism that, for its part it, cannot avoid encountering this thought, receiving its influence and therefore changing with the integration into its own discourse of some of the formulations of contemporary critical thought, as we will see in the chapter dedicated to postanarchism.

Ultimately, the only way to render anarchism invariant, fixed and stationary is to tear it away from the milieu where it lives and embalm or mummify it, because living anarchism breaths in the fluidity of the change that animates it and, as said earlier, that makes it not be in every moment “neither totally itself nor totally something other”. It is a constitutively changeable way of being and whose mode of existence consequently consists of finding itself in a perpetual becoming.

### **3.3. The reasons for the resurgence of anarchism**

Among the changes that favour the growth of anarchism, I will only mention those related to the development of NICT and, furthermore, those that result from the current proliferation of relations of power and the effects of domination.

#### **3.3.1. NICT, collective mobilisations and the self-institution of a new political subject**

Although they contain evident freedom destroying features, it is obvious that the NICT also permit the constitution of a milieu favourable to the development of anarchist practices, facilitating horizontality, self-government and the exercise of direct democracy, while stimulating collective creativity and propitiating direct action.

A quick examination of the popular mobilisations that have taken place these last years show that the use of NICT impresses upon them characteristics that favour the expansion of anarchism. So, for example, the extraordinary rapidity and amplitude, sometimes surprising, of the mobilisations that are called through social networks based on electronic exchanges (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) are possible because behind them there are no – or at the origin of the call to which they respond – potent organisations, afflicted with all of the inertia and all of the weight that inevitably accompany stable and lasting structures; and this confers on these mobilisations certain qualities that bring them close to libertarian modes of functioning. In effect, in the absence of a permanent

centre of decision making and of already established structural frameworks, the initial call functions simply as a *trigger*, more than as an organising body, and leaves, thus, the essential part of the mobilisation and its success in the hands of the participants, depending on their sense of self-organisation and their initiative, which in these conditions, cannot but privilege horizontality and collective creativity.

The mobilisations that constitute themselves on the bases of social networks and the NICT have not displaced those that answer to the call of traditional organisations. Both today coexist, but, of course, they give rise to very different dynamics. Classical demonstrations can occasionally be seen to be overwhelmed and to take unpredictable directions, but in principle, everything falls under the control of the organisations that call them and the margin of initiative left in the hands of the participants is minimal. The preparations are long and labourious, prudence is obligatory because an eventual failure of participation represents certain costs for the organisation... By contrast, mobilisations called for without any stable organisational infrastructure can materialise in a way that is practically immediate, and what can happen escapes all control and all prediction. In general, these mobilisations often conclude without anything extraordinary happening, but sometimes the libertarian potentialities that characterise them gain form in very precise circumstances that we will see next.

Certainly, the majority of the popular mobilisations, both those of the past and those of today, have precise demands and they maintain themselves as long as the collective energy that emanates from social discontent is sufficiently intense to sustain them. When this energy abates, either because results have been attained that diminish the discontent, or because of fatigue, dejection or repression, the mobilisation ceases and *the return to order* is produced, as the good people like to say.

Sometimes it happens that these struggles give way to the deployment of a collective creativity that puts into question and makes falter the very logic of the system. *A second kind of movement of rebellion* is thus outlined in which can be seen that the thousands of people who invade the streets and public spaces do not do so only to protest against this or that particular aspect, or to demand this or that concrete measure, but also to institute or, better, to *self-institute itself as a new political subject*.

This process of self-institutionalisation that is carried out within the very mobilisations demands that the people who organise themselves, converse, collectively elaborate a political discourse that is proper to them and construct in common the elements necessary to keep the mobilisation going and to develop political action. This requires that the imagination be put to work to create spaces, construct conditions, elaborate procedures that permit people to elaborate, by themselves and collectively, their own agenda at the margin of the watchwords that come from a place other than the mobilisation itself. This labour of creation of a new political subject then takes the lead over the particular demands that provoked the mobilisation.

In this kind of situation, new social energies form next to those that originate with the initial social discontent, feeding back upon themselves, losing intensity to then, in the following instant, to grow back again, as in a storm. These energies rise up and constitute themselves within the very situations of confrontation. That is why great social uprisings have an unpredictable nature and come under the sign of spontaneity.

To subvert normal functioning and established uses, to occupy public spaces, to transform places of passage into places of encounter and expression, all of this activates a collective creativity that invents, in each instant, new ways to extend subversion and have it proliferate.

Liberated spaces therefore illuminate new social relations which create, in turn, new social ties. People transform and politicise themselves in very few days, not superficially but profoundly, with incredible speed. It is, as a matter of fact, the concrete realisations, here and now, that reveal themselves capable of mobilising people, of inciting them to go further and to make them see that other ways of life are possible. However, for these realisations to see the day, it is necessary that people feel themselves to be protagonists, that they decide for themselves. And it is when they are truly protagonists and they really feel themselves to be so, that they involve themselves totally, exposing their bodies in the development of the struggle, thereby permitting that the movement of rebellion amplify itself well beyond what could have been prognosticated in view of the discontent, source of the first confrontations. This process of self-institution *of a new political space, created in the very midst of struggles*, is very close to what anarchism advocates and calls for.

It was a phenomenon of this kind that occurred in Paris in May of 1968; long before, therefore, the existence of the *Internet*, which demonstrates that the NICT are not necessary for these events to happen. Nevertheless, it is also a phenomenon of this kind that filled the public squares of Spain with protesters from the 15th of May of 2011 on. All the same, what seems quite clear when we observe the struggles of the beginning of this century is that even though the NICT are not, in any way, necessary for the formation of the conditions of collective creativity, direct democracy and self-organisation, they nonetheless encourage their appearance, thus promoting mobilisations with a strongly libertarian character.

### 3.3.2. The proliferation of power and its reconceptualisation

In commenting on the reasons for its renovation and, more precisely, of its formation in struggles, I said that anarchism could be defined as *what contradicts the logic of domination*. Anarchist thought has in effect put so much effort into unmasking the multiple damages that power inflicts on freedom and in delegitimising and dismantling the apparatuses of power, that it has instituted itself as *the ideology and the political thought of the critique of power*, while other emancipatory ideologies that originated in the 19th century confined this subject to a secondary or derivative level. It is precisely the importance given to the phenomenon of power that accounts for the vigorous actuality of anarchism. This latter today harvests, so to speak, the fruits of the secular obstinacy with which it has denounced the harmfulness of power and sees itself, finally, absolved of the accusation of having remained blind to the principal causes of injustice and exploitation, that some situated exclusively in the economic sphere. However, we also have to recognise that in its questioning of power, anarchism has not always been correct.

In showing that relations of power are forged within social ties and that they are created incessantly in the very fabric of society, the research of Michel Foucault has contradicted the anarchist belief in the possibility of radically eliminating power, obliging a fairly profound reconsideration of this entire problem.

Paradoxically, the refutation of anarchism on this precise point seems to assure its permanence for a very long time, because if it is certain that relations of power are inherent to the social and that *anarchism is fundamentally a desire to criticise, confront and subvert relations of power*, then something of what inspires anarchism cannot but persist while societies exist. And not because anarchism is called upon to perpetuate itself throughout the centuries, but because it is unlikely that a political current which, under different names or other modalities, continues to make

the criticism of power its principal preoccupation, whatever the concrete techniques adopted by domination, will completely disappear.

The political importance and actuality of anarchism has grown as the importance and the sophistication of the relations of power of daily life have increased. In revealing the abundant plurality of the modalities of the exercise of power, and in questioning overly simplistic analyses that rendered these invisible and in this way shielding them from any possibility of contestation, Michel Foucault's research has contributed decisively to highlight the extension of power and to magnify its *perceived presence* in the social field. This has enormously *amplified* the field of anarchism's theoretical and practical intervention, underlying its importance.

However, it has not only been our perception of the modalities of the exercise of power that has been diversified and amplified in the last decades. We have also witnessed *the proliferation of those aspects of our lives subject to the interventions of power*.

In contemporary society, power operates with an ever finer surgical precision, gaining access to the smallest details of our existence – so as to, among other things, extract surplus value –, while at the same time increasing the areas in which it intervenes and the diversity of its procedures. Procedures that transform us, for example, into “entrepreneurs of the self”, extending the logic of business to the whole social body, or which use our freedom to make us more competitive. With the multiplication of the facets of our existence that become targets of the interventions of power, the occasions for the concrete intervention of anarchism also consequently multiply and, in parallel, the feeling that the exercise of power constitutes an *omnipresent* phenomenon that should be a principal concern, as anarchism always affirmed, intensifies.

This omnipresence today awakens a more than justified anxiety that the present does not cease to feed. The feeling that the apparatuses of power are in a position to control our most anodyne actions and that nothing can escape their gaze, finds ample sustenance in episodes such as WikiLeaks and Julian Assange, or Edward Snowden and the National Security Agency (NSA) of the United States, as well as in the revelations about the use of *big data* to generate information and economic benefits from the traces left behind by the steps we take in the electronic fabric. Likewise, the procedures of continuous, exhaustive and “for always” recording and storage of exchanges and consultations that pass through the medium of the Internet and mobile apparatuses, accompanied by the unlimited capacity to treat this information, augur or, better, illustrate our already total transparency before the gaze of power. If to this we add that with the use of drones and other techniques for the physical elimination of individuals branded *undesirable* – poisonings, for example –, power has gone well beyond, and without embarrassment, the control of information, then the considerable expansion, in some parts of the population, of the hostility to power and the desire to combat it, is understandable.

This extension of power also has a bearing on the situation in the world of work. Until a few decades ago, resistances were activated and armed on the bases of the conditions of exploitation that weighed upon the workers. Today these conditions continue to sustain important struggles. However, domination, which is much more diversified than in the past, has proliferated outside the field of productive labour, thereby considerably weakening the strength of the workers movement. Today, it is not only a matter of extracting surplus value from labour power; all of the activities which workers give themselves over to, outside their workplaces, also produce benefits to a degree and with a diversity of procedures unknown until the present. Their savings, their leisure, their health, their houses, the education of their children, care given and received,



etc., produce dividends that, if they were always substantial, today have acquired a much more considerable volume.

It is thus not surprising that the coming to political awareness increasingly originates in the experience of the *control exercised over our daily life* and in the perception that *our whole existence is commodified*. It is from this experience and this perception that originate the new antagonistic and radical subjectivities of our time.

It is sufficient therefore to consider simultaneously the contributions of critical thought to a new analysis of the relations of power and the characteristics adopted in the exercise of power in contemporary society, to see that the field that opens up before anarchist struggles is experiencing a spectacular deployment.

The social, cultural, political and technological changes of these last decades are creating conditions favourable to the resurgence of anarchism, while at the same time obliging it to renew a certain number of its presuppositions and perspectives. On the level of practices, this renewal has taken on, in good measure, the form of what I earlier called *neoanarchism*, while on a more theoretical level, it has taken on, in part, the form of *postanarchism*, as we will see in what follows.

## 4. Postanarchism

Strongly criticised by some, praised by others, postanarchism currently enjoys a presence in the international anarchist movement significant enough that it can no longer be ignored by anyone.

The term *postanarchism* probably appeared for the first time in March of 1987, when Hakim Bey – pseudonym for Peter Lamborn Wilson, an anarchist residing in the United States – published a very short text with the title *Post-Anarchism Anarchy*. It would however be a big mistake if we thought to locate in this manifesto the point of departure for postanarchism, as it has subsequently developed. Hakim Bey’s text is a plea against the paralysing effects caused by the fossilisation of anarchist organisations and against the sclerosis of anarchism converted into, according to him, a mere ideology. It is a call to *overtake anarchism in the name of anarchy*, where the conceptual lines of what would subsequently constitute postanarchism appear nowhere. In fact, Hakim Bey’s influence will be noticed, above all, among certain sectors of neoanarchism more than in postanarchism, with the notions of the “TAZ” and “PAZ” – “Temporary Autonomous Zones” and “Permanently Autonomous Zones”, respectively – which he developed in the 1990s and which influenced segments of libertarian okupations and of insurrectionalism.

### 4.1. Where does postanarchism come from and in what does it consist

Paradoxically, it is in a work that did not mention the term postanarchism anywhere where the origin of this current of thought is to be located. In effect, Todd May, a US anarchist and academic, published in 1994 a book whose title, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* already clearly announced what would constitute one of the essential dimensions of postanarchism, namely, the inclusion within anarchism of important conceptual elements taken from poststructuralism. Todd May had already initiated this reflection in 1989 in an article entitled “Is Post-Structuralist Political Theory Anarchist?”. However, in being published in a philosophy journal of limited circulation, it went largely unnoticed. And the same happened with an article entitled “Poststructuralism and the Epistemological Bases of Anarchism”, that another university professor, Andrew Koch, published in 1993, again in a philosophy journal with modest circulation.

A few years later and while the echos of the great demonstration of 1999 in Seattle still resonated with force, offering testimony to the resurgence of anarchism, another book, in which the term *postanarchism* is also not used, took up in part Todd May’s theoretical argument. This book published in 2001 by the Australian anarchist professor Saul Newman, whose title is *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power*, ends with a chapter textually calling for “a postanarchist politics”, employing the instruments of poststructuralism.

In the following year, 2002, another Californian professor, Lewis Call, published a work along the same lines, *Postmodern Anarchism*, which reinforced a current for which there now competed three possible denominations: first, “poststructuralist anarchism”, then “postmodern anarchism”,

and as a third option, “postanarchism”. It was this last denomination, despite being the least precise, the most ambiguous and the most problematic, that finally imposed itself. The first of the denominations mentioned would have been undoubtedly the most appropriate and the most precise, for carrying with it a direct reference to poststructuralism, but it was too much tied to university culture. The final result was also probably influenced by the discredit that undermined the term “postmodern”, due to its vague content, its changing definitions and the sometimes contradictory character of its political implications.

It is possible that the creation, in February of 2003, by Jason Adams – who had participated in the organisation of the Seattle demonstration -, of a website called “Post Anarchism”, which served as a platform for numerous exchanges and debates, contributed to spreading and consolidating the use of this term. In any case, the publications and the references to postanarchism have not in fact ceased to multiply since then and in 2011, a mere ten years after the publication of Saul Newman’s book, there was already a first *Post-Anarchism Reader*.

When the texts that develop or discuss the postanarchist approach are reviewed, what appears with the greatest force is perhaps the idea of a *hybridisation* of anarchism and poststructuralism, or the inclusion of poststructuralist concepts within anarchism. It is the grafting, some would say, of poststructuralism onto anarchism that will make way for a new variety of libertarian formulations which will give form to postanarchism.

Jason Adams states, for example, that postanarchism is not so much a coherent political program, but rather a anti-authoritarian problematic that emerges from anarchist poststructuralist approach or, even, from a poststructuralist anarchist approach.

Benjamin Franks, for his part, writes that postanarchism is to be understood as a new hybrid of anarchism and poststructuralism. And Saul Newman presents it as the construction of an intersection between anarchism and poststructuralist discourse. The same Benjamin Franks adds that the term postanarchism, that is used more often than not with a certain hesitation, refers to an ensemble of efforts to reinvent anarchism in light of the principal developments that have marked contemporary radical theory and that began, in many cases, with the events of May 68 in Paris.

In the initial page of introduction to the website created by Jason Adams, below the heading “What is postanarchism?”, one can read:

In order to understand what the emerging phenomena of postanarchism “is” in the contemporary moment, first of all one should consider what it is not; it is not an “ism” like any other — it is not another set of ideologies, doctrines and beliefs that can be laid out positively as a bounded totality to which one might conform and then agitate amongst the “masses” to get others to rally around and conform to as well, like some odd ideological flag. Instead, this profoundly negationary term refers to a broad and heterogeneous array of anarchist theories and practices that have been rendered “homeless” by the rhetoric and practice of most of the more closed and ideological anarchisms such as anarchist-syndicalism, anarchist-communism, and anarchist-platformism as well as their contemporary descendants, all of which tend to reproduce some form of class-reductionism, state-reductionism or liberal democracy in a slightly more “anarchistic” form, thus ignoring the many lessons brought to us in the wake of the recent past.

Postanarchism is today found not only in abstract radical theory but also in the living practice of such groups as the No Border movements, People's Global Action, the Zapatistas, the Autonomos and other such groups that while clearly "antiauthoritarian" in orientation, do not explicitly identify with anarchism as an ideological tradition so much as they identify with its general spirit in their own unique and varying contexts, which are typically informed by a wide array of both contemporary and classical radical thinkers.

...

[In] Saul Newman[']s ... book "From Bakunin to Lacan: Antiauthoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power" ... the term refers to a theoretical move beyond classical anarchism, into a hybrid theory consisting of an synthesis with particular concepts and ideas from poststructuralist theory such as post-humanism and anti-essentialism.

(Jason Adams, Postanarchism in a Nutshell)

We conclude this brief review taking up what Saul Newman says, undoubtedly the principal theorist of post anarchism:

This does not, in any sense, refer to a superseding or moving beyond of anarchism – it does not mean that the anarchist theoretical and political project should be left behind. ... The prefix 'post-' does not mean 'after' or 'beyond', but rather a working at the conceptual limits of anarchism with the aim of revising, renewing and even radicalizing its implications.

(Saul Newman, Post Anarchist and Radical Politics Today)\*

Given the poststructuralist and postmodern filiation of postanarchism, one could expect that this latter would take up the offensive launched by these two currents of thought against the legitimising ideology of modernity, but now directing this criticism against the modern presuppositions that would eventually dwell in anarchist thought. And, indeed, postanarchists endeavour to show that anarchism is very far from having escaped from the ideological influences of modernity.

It seems to me that we cannot but agree with them on this point on the condition, of course, that we refuse to conceive of anarchism as something which sprung up from a preexisting foundational essence and that we think of it instead as having constituted itself through an ensemble of social and cultural practices deeply rooted in history. These practices were not in fact those of a few isolated individuals, but were developed by thousands of people who were fundamentally – and how the devil could it be otherwise? – *modern subjects*, given that it is in the Modern Epoch when anarchism constituted itself as a significant social movement.

Logically, anarchism cannot but be profoundly marked by the social conditions and the fundamental ideas of modernity. Of course, anarchism is not a faithful copy, a mimetic reproduction, a clone of the principles of modernity, as some postanarchists sometimes insinuate. And it is not for various reasons, such as, for example, that modernity, as with all other historical epochs, is a heterogeneous time that incorporates more influences than those which have a dominant character; and, in this precise case, in addition to those that come from Enlightenment ideology, those that emanate from Romanticism, for example, also manifest themselves.

Anarchism in fact sees itself influenced by modernity twice over. First, because it develops historically within modernity and absorbs therefore some of its characteristics. And, secondly, because it gained body in certain practices of struggle against certain aspects of modernity. Anarchism situates itself consequently, *in modernity and against modernity*, to take up the expression of Nico Berti when he speaks of anarchism as something that is *in history but against history*.

Consequently, anarchism constructs itself at the same time by antinomy and opposition to, and rejection of, certain aspects of modernity. And equally, by assimilation and absorption of, and accommodation to, this same modernity. With some frequency, it happens that *with and against* are not incompatible and, in any case, it is what occurs here, given that, on the one hand, anarchist practices articulate themselves against particular mechanisms of domination of modernity; but, on the other hand, they construct themselves necessarily with materials and with tools specific to its time. They are therefore *simultaneously modern and anti-modern practices*.

The idea in fact that anarchism finds itself inevitably marked by the spirit and the social conditions of its time follows logically from a conception of anarchism that understands its theoretical corpus on the basis of certain practices of struggle and, above all, practices of struggle against domination. The idea that anarchism could move through modernity without being influenced by it could only be sustained by an essentialist conception of anarchism, or on the basis of a mysterious capacity that anarchism would have to be able to transcend the conditions that constitute it.

Allowing then that the postanarchist thesis, according to which anarchism has incorporated certain influences originating in modernity, is reasonable, we can now ask ourselves about the conditions of possibility that have allowed postanarchists to formulate this thesis and even to arrive at constituting themselves as a current of thought within anarchism. It is of course in the social, economic, cultural and political changes of the second half of the 20th century where these conditions of possibility are to be found; that is, finally, in the same phenomena that cause the resurgence of anarchism.

These changes effectively mark the beginning of a transition in our societies towards forms and conditions of existence which only today do we experience their very first effects, but which increasingly differentiate themselves from those that characterised the extensive period of modernity; a period that begins to gain shape during the 16th century, that creates its legitimising ideology during the century of the Enlightenment and that continues to be for the most part ours today, even though it has ceased to be hegemonic. (For a more elaborate development of the question of modernity and postmodernity, see the *Addenda*.)

In parallel to the technological, political and economic changes that have given origin to a recomposition of the apparatuses and modalities of domination and, therefore, of struggles, the second half of the 20th century has seen the development of a strongly critical movement of modernity's legitimising ideology. This critique has antecedents in the very times of the Enlightenment – in Romanticism, for example – and, later, in thinkers situated in opposition to it, such as Max Stirner or Friedrich Nietzsche; a critical movement that from the 1980s on, came to be called postmodern thought or poststructuralist theory.

The conditions then for the possibility of postanarchism lie in the development of poststructuralist/postmodern criticism, which for its part is made possible by *the first steps towards a change of epoch*.

This inclusion of postanarchism in the critical movement that raises itself up against certain aspects of modern ideology bestows a certain credibility on the reproach that all of this concerns

an approach that originates not with concrete struggles and which is finally nothing more than an intellectual movement, not to say, something strictly academic. If we observe with greater attention, however, it can be noticed that its formulation and its development maintain a relation, even though indirect, with current struggles against domination. On the one hand, May 68 and, more generally, the struggles that erupted in the world at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s are not foreign to the elaboration of poststructuralist and postmodernist theses, upon which postanarchism finds fundamental support. On the other hand, postanarchism would not have found any echo and, perhaps, would not even have been formulated without the eruption of practices and forms of intervention that are specific to radical politics, as these have configured themselves from the end of the 1990s until the present.

It is true that postanarchism invents absolutely nothing, that it takes its tools from the theoretical spaces from which is developed the criticism of modernity, namely poststructuralism and postmodernism. It is enough to see the importance that it gives to the anarchist criticism of representation, or the anarchist exaltation of diversity and singularity, to be convinced of the origin of its tools. Nevertheless, it is also true that postanarchism contributes to making this criticism known in anarchist milieus and this is a great merit, even if this is finally its only merit.

It would however be erroneous to reduce postanarchism to the simple role of disseminator of concepts and theses, because postanarchism also presents itself as an effort at self-criticism that realises anarchism by freeing it from the debts that it contracted in the past with the legitimising ideology of modernity. Of course, if the usefulness of the Enlightenment in undermining the conceptions, institutions and practices of subjugation that existed at that time leaves no room for doubt, nor then can it be ignored that the social changes that have occurred over the course of modernity and the labour carried out by critical thought, have made ever more visible the subtle effects of subjugation that the ideas of the Enlightenment also bore, and these can no longer be simply assumed, without further ado, by antagonistic movements.

## 4.2. The criticism of classical anarchism

Among the many criticisms that postanarchism directs at anarchism, two of the most important point to, on the one hand, the essentialist presuppositions that it assumed and, on the other hand, its overly vetust conception of the phenomenon of power. The later fails to take into consideration, among other things, the *productive* nature and the *immanence* that characterise this phenomenon. Even though I have moved to the *adenda* a more detailed exposition of the problematic of power and essentialism, I would like to briefly address the theme of essentialism, considering it exclusively in its relation to *the question of the subject*, which will inevitably touch on some aspects of the problematic of power.

It is in fact obvious that anarchism shares, in good measure, the modern belief in the existence of *an autonomous subject*, and that it would be sufficient to pluck it from the claws of power for it to be able to finally realise itself, to be free and *to act for itself*. It was thus about working for *the emancipation* of individuals. That is, to act to remove them from tutelage, from servitude or, at least, from an ensemble of restrictions that repress them, so as to be able finally to become the owners of themselves. However, poststructuralism teaches us that *beneath the paving stones there is no beach*, that there is not a desire that we can liberate or a subject that we can emancipate, because once emancipated, what would be seen would not be an *autonomous* being, but a being

*already moulded and constituted by relations of power.* To oppose the effect of the apparatuses of domination will never make appear a constitutively autonomous subject that, liberated from what repressed it, would find *its authentic self*, for the reason that this later does not exist. All that we can hope for, and it is not a little, is that the subject find the instruments to modify itself by itself and to constitute itself differently, neither closer nor further from what would be its fundamental nature, for this last is to be found nowhere, given that *it simply does not exist*.

I take from Saul Newman the idea according to which one of the most perverse effects of the ideology of the Enlightenment, and of its humanist presuppositions, is to have been able to construct subjectivities that perceived themselves as endowed with an essence which would find itself repressed by the action of certain external circumstances. This perception effectively guides the struggle against power in a direction that paradoxically *reinforces it*, given that the struggle to liberate our essence from what represses it seeks to liberate something which in fact is already constituted by power. Instead of scrutinising the marks left behind by its interventions, we assume them as alien to power and as something which preexists its action. This leads ultimately to opening the door to the normalising effects that produce the belief in *a human nature* which would be – with apologies for redundancy – purely “natural”. Certainly, if a human nature exists and if we wish to be recognised and recognise ourselves as “human subjects”, we should try to mould ourselves as faithfully as possible to the characteristics that define it and the norms that configure it, without anyone even asking this of us, simply allowing certain normalising effects to act.

With the crisis of the autonomy of the subject, it is of course the ideologies of emancipation that are also seen as invalid, in many respects. In addition to what presented itself as the subject that needed to be emancipated – the autonomous subject –, the subject charged with carrying out the emancipation – the proletariat – also became problematic, while doubts began to grow with regards to the objectives assigned to the final outcome of emancipatory struggle; that is, the creation of a pacified and reconciled society, in the purest eschatological tradition.

These critical developments have led us to the necessity of redefining radical politics, not to disarm them, as is feared by the defenders of ideologies anchored in the 19th century, but to *rearm them* with the aim of increasing their effectiveness in a society that, to say the least, is far from being that of the past. For example, there is no doubt that it continues to be necessary to fight against the State, as long as this continues to be the principal apparatus of repression and control. It is however necessary to abandon, among other things, the ingenuousness of believing that the State only exercises power from above, on subjects whose only tie to it would be rooted in the fact that they are trapped by its nets and suffer its dominion. In reality, these bonds are far more dense than those that can be inferred from a mere relation of subordination, given that the State receives some of its features, from below, in this case, as a consequence of the effects of power produced by subjects themselves in the context of their relations. In receiving them from their subjects, it is natural that it share them, without demanding any coercion. Therefore, to struggle against the State also consists in changing things “below”, in local, diverse and situated practices, there where power acquires part of its attributes.

I am convinced that it would be extremely interesting for anarchism to appropriate and integrate into its own critical baggage the poststructuralist-postmodern critique, above all in its Foucauldian variant. Among other things, this later teaches us about *the a priori of our possible experience*; that is, about what constitutes us today and what, because of the very fact that it constitutes us, escapes our perception. This can help us to understand what sustains our inter-

pretations of, and the nature of what orients, without our knowledge, our thought, our practices, our subjectivity and our libertarian sensibility; and contribute, in this way, to better focus our struggles against domination.

To limit oneself to protecting the modern elements of anarchism is as useless as the effort to place value on the differences that separate it from modernity. What is truly important is to give to anarchism expressions that are in consonance with the present. That is, with an epoch that is still massively modern, certainly, but where the advances of postmodernity are more visible with each passing day.

Nevertheless, it is in no way the debate over postanarchism that will be decisive for reaching this goal, but the changes experienced by the struggles against domination. In effect, to the extent that anarchism, as I do not stop repeating, constructs itself on the bases and in the midst of these practices of struggle, it follows that it necessarily changes when these vary. It is, consequently, because *it indissolubly joins idea and action*, because it establishes *a symbiosis between theory and practice*, that anarchism engenders new ideas when it engages with new practices, thereby renewing itself on both planes at the same time; that is, on that of ideas, on the one hand, and on that of practices, on the other.

Ultimately, it is in the first place because it remains totally faithful to its determination to combat domination in all of its forms; in the second place, because domination modifies its own features with the advance of postmodernity, and in the third place, because anarchism does not separate its theoretical formulations from its practices of struggle; it is for these three reasons, *taken together*, that *anarchism is becoming surreptitiously postmodern*, whether we want it or not, whether we are conscious of it or not. And it does so as a consequence of its adaptation to the characteristics of the present. Needless to say that this is eminently positive, as much to assure the political future of anarchism, as to maintain in all of their intensity the struggles against domination.

### 4.3. The criticism of postanarchism

These quite favourable considerations with regards to postanarchism should not make us lose sight of the fact that it has been the object of strong criticisms from the anarchist movement, and that some of these criticisms are not without foundation. There are, roughly, two types of critical considerations.

The first, formulated by numerous anarchists, among them Jesse Cohn and Wilburg Shawn, believe that classical anarchism and postanarchism in fact differ fairly little and maintain that to justify the existence of postanarchism, its defenders insist on deforming and making a caricature of classical anarchism, of which they certainly have a more than insufficient knowledge of the whole. Thus, postanarchists would trace a biased image of anarchism with the aim of demonstrating the importance of reforming it in the light of poststructuralism and for this they resort to selected fragments of chosen authors who are far from representing the breadth and diversity of an anarchist thought that assumes perhaps some presuppositions originating with Enlightenment ideology, but which also sets aside critically other aspects of this same ideology.

In her book on contemporary anarchism, Vivien García reproaches postanarchists not only for important lacunae that burden their knowledge of anarchism, but also of misinterpreting its nature, succumbing to the professional deformation produced by their academic activity, something



that impedes them from seeing that the texts of anarchism, indissociable from their involvement in political action, cannot be dealt with as if they formed a theoretical corpus of a principally philosophical kind.

Others seek to deactivate the charge against the modern presuppositions of anarchism claiming, as Nathan Jun does, that classical anarchism was already postmodern and that it had anticipated notions emphasised only much later by poststructuralists. Jun's thesis is that the ideas of Prouhon, Bakunin and other anarchist thinkers, among which he highlights of course Max Stirner, are in the end quite close to those of Friedrich Nietzsche, and that it is the ideas of Nietzsche that will influence Foucault or Deleuze.

The second type of criticism, originating above all with platformists (supporters, to varying degrees, of the proposals gathered together in Archinov's Platform (1926) to structure in a more cohesive way organised anarchism) and also with certain libertarian communist currents, believes that postanarchism is an approach that unconsciously plays the game of neoliberalism and that turns anarchism away from the struggles rooted in the world of labour. This criticism, formulated principally by Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt in their book *Black Flame* is already found in embryo in Murray Bookchin and in John Zerzan. As Newman notes, Bookchin and Zerzan attack poststructuralism on various grounds and with different objectives, but their central thesis is that poststructuralism – because it puts into question the autonomy of the subject and the liberatory potential of Enlightenment rationality – implies a kind of nihilist irrationalism which, according to them, renders it impossible to be ethically and politically committed and leads it finally to have conservative implications.

If one in fact follows the writings of Saul Newman over the course of these last years, one can see that the first type of criticism, formulated when postanarchism first appeared, has had a certain effect on the theses developed by him. It has softened, so to speak, his criticism of classical anarchism, attenuating the recriminations against its modern elements, and has had him pay greater attention to the continuities rather than the oppositions between both types of anarchism. It is somewhat as if postanarchism recognised that it had the tendency to overestimate the impact of Enlightenment ideology on anarchism and to exaggerate the reach of its acritical absorption of the essentialism that accompanies this ideology.

We see then that postanarchism has not turned a deaf ear to the criticisms that it has received, showing its openness to react positively to some of these. Furthermore, it has demonstrated its vitality by continuing to feed a critical debate within anarchism and by endeavouring to reach out to the various contemporary expressions of practices of struggle and to the theoretical elaborations of radical politics, as this are developed within, but also outside, the anarchist tradition. In this sense, *queer* theory, postmarxism, the work of Judith Butler, Jacques Rancière, Toni Negri or the Tiqqun current, to cite only a few examples, are taken into account, so as to approach them critically and, also, to collect elements capable of enriching postanarchism and of converting it into a space of anarchist intellectual creativity.

To conclude this chapter, it appeared useful to me to complete it with a list of the principal publications, organised chronologically, related to postanarchism. Some set out and develop postanarchist theses, others comment or analyse them critically and, finally, some, though part of *anarchism in movement*, would be closer to what I have called neoanarchism than postanarchism.

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*Translators Note:* The website that Ibáñez mentions, created by Jason Adams in 2003, no longer seems to exist. Instead of therefore translating Ibáñez's own translation of Adams' text, I have

quoted from a piece by Adams entitled *Postanarchism in a Nutshell* (available at the online Anarchist Library), which seems to repeat the passage quoted by Ibáñez. The passage quoted by Saul Newman appears in the book without any direct reference. I have then assumed that it is quoted from Newman's essay *Post Anarchist and Radical Politics Today*, which is available online [here](#).

## 5. Libertarian prospective

In the preceding pages, I have tried to describe some of the forms in which contemporary anarchism presents itself and I have suggested a few hypotheses with the aim of endeavouring to understand what has given it a new vitality at the beginning of this century. These hypotheses are of course completely debatable and the conception of anarchism upon which they rest may provoke the agreement of some or the reservations of others. However, in light of the successive episodes of rebellion in the world, it seems to me quite clear that anarchism in these last years surges anew with force, that it does so in a significantly renewed form and that *this resurgence and this renewal are intimately bound up with each other*. In other words, one does not go without the other, and this for reasons that are neither due to mere circumstances nor to accidents, but refer instead, as I have tried to show, to essential issues.

With everything, it must still be asked if the form that contemporary anarchism is acquiring, made up of a mixture of neoanarchism, of anarchism beyond its own limits and postanarchism constitutes in the end a subculture of anarchism that will come to add itself to the already existing subcultures – individualism, libertarian communism, anarchosyndicalism, insurrectionalism, etc. – or if, on the contrary, we can consider it as the prefiguration of a new modality of radical politics that will take up anew the fundamental intuitions of anarchism, but recomposing them in an original way. My conviction is that this new radical politics will gain shape, slowly, and will come to substitute, in a more or less long term, that which began in the 19th century. However, I have no certain criterion as to whether this new political radicality is prefigured in contemporary anarchism.

Like the famous Russian dolls that fit one into the other, various elements today come together to explain the double movement of anarchism's resurgence and renewal, and at the same time to offer some clues about grounds on the basis of which it can continue to develop and achieve a real influence on our societies or, at least, on some significant parts of it.

A first aspect that seems quite clear, though it goes beyond the concrete case of anarchism and, even, the more general case of political ideologies and religious affiliations, resides in the extraordinary importance of *the imaginary* in the mobilisation of affects, to create a feeling of community, to stoke the desire to struggle and to activate, eventually, movements of rebellion. In effect, one has to intensely believe that another order of things, much more attractive than that which exists, is possible and fervently desire that this possibility becomes reality, to commit oneself without reservation to the struggle to change existing reality. The recognition of the importance of the imaginary is nothing new; its role however seems to increase significantly in present day subversive movements.

The privation of certain material and/or symbolic goods becomes sometimes in fact so unbearable that people lose all fear and openly commit themselves to the struggle to change things. It may also occur, nevertheless, that the collective imaginary is the principal cause and motor of rebellions. Struggle and commitment however are not self-sufficient values; to fight in the name of convictions and an ideal are not necessarily laudable, as the struggles driven by fascist or ji-

hadist imaginaries remind us. Obviously, everything depends on, ultimately, why one struggles and what we are committed to. The kind of imaginary capable of promoting struggles with a libertarian character takes the form of *utopia*. Utopia can be understood as a principle which activates and revitalises the radical rejection of the world that is imposed upon us, even as, with greater or lesser precision, the outlines of what we desire, or at least the values upon which what is desired should be based, are outlined.

The current resurgence of anarchism is accompanied by a revalorisation of utopian thought and by the conviction of the necessity of utopia. Perhaps because in part the present world lacks any utopia, anarchism finds a propitious breeding ground for its development. These circumstances point to the sustenance and intensification of the *exigency of utopia* as one of the possible grounds for the development of anarchism. However, just as it is said, jokingly, that nostalgia is not what it used to be, it turns out that utopia is also not exactly what it was in the past. If we observe with care the renewal of anarchism, we can see that the current revitalisation of utopia is the revitalisation of *a utopia fully conscious of being so*, absolutely convinced that it is *nothing more* than a utopia; that is, aware that it is only *an incitement* to struggle and not *a future project in search of realisation*. This is a demand for utopia as the receptacle of our desires and of our dreams, as the place for the expression of a more encouraging vision of the world and as a navigation map, blurred and imprecise, where the routes have still *to be invented* more than *to be followed*.

It is consequently a kind of utopia liberated from all of the old eschatological contents that accompanied it far too frequently in the old revolutionary imaginary, a utopia that has bid a final farewell to the siren songs that promised a better future, if the present were sacrificed, and which only points to the future as a mere orientation to *actively construct present reality*. Because it is in our daily life where people have *to live the revolution*. In fact, either we experience it and live it from now on, or, what is more probable, we will never come to know it. A phrase comes to me in this instant, without knowing its source. It more or less said: “life is what passes while we prepare ourselves to live, it is what flows while we plan life projects”; in like manner, the revolution will pass out to sea and it will remain beyond our reach if we do not anchor it firmly in the present.

It may seem incongruent or, even, contradictory to connect so directly something which opens onto the future, as *utopia* does, with the prosaic preoccupation with *the present*; and someone could suspect that I let myself be carried away with oxymorons. Nonetheless, the extraordinary *dilation of the present*, which is for new generations the only truly significant part of a time where the past and present are confined to ever narrower margins, undoubtedly represents one of the most significant phenomena of an epoch when the piercing cry “No Future” resonates. Whether we celebrate the preeminence conceded to the present because it raises itself up against the ingenuous and submissive acceptance of its sacrifice on the altar of the future, or we regret this so called preeminence because it renders difficult the activation of political projects that aim for the long term, it is clear that emergent anarchism and, more generally, radical politics, *express themselves today in the present*. In effect, the current social sensitivity of oppositional movements demands that political proposals be judged in terms of their suitability in really existing situations and that it be in the immediate that they demonstrate their validity. It is for this reason that, to my understanding, the preeminence attributed to the present constitutes a second possible ground for the development of anarchism.

In this case however it is also necessary to avoid a possible misunderstanding. The presentism which characterises a good part of contemporary anarchism must not be interpreted as if the objective of struggles consisted of creating spaces where one can live in a relatively satisfactory manner and in consonance with anarchist values, while the rest of humanity lives in unbearable conditions. This would imply that there is little which differentiates the values of anarchism from the principles which animate the capitalist system. In the same way that no one is really free while there are those who are not, neither can one live in consonance with libertarian principles while others remain exploited and oppressed. Emphasis is not placed on the present so as to attain a certain, more satisfactory, *way of being* – even though the fact of living according to our principles, of being consistent with ourselves and of seeking to resolve the contradictions that the surrounding world imposes on us, also makes us feel better -, but to articulate a mode of struggle. This emphasis simply means that the trap that consists in postponing the actual transformation of reality with the aim of dedicating all of one's energies to pure confrontation is rejected. This trap occludes the fact that the transformation of the present is, before anything else, a weapon and, perhaps, one of the most dangerous for the system because it eats away at it from within and permits its relentless harassment.

Likewise, the emphasis on the present would ingenuously err and would make itself extremely vulnerable, if it pretended to ignore the past and break all of the ties with the memory of earlier struggles and with the accumulated experiences of the long confrontation with domination. To centre on the present does not mean constantly starting from zero and having to newly learn and experiment with everything. The historical legacy of social movements against oppression and exploitation is too rich to not seek to learn from it and to use it to effectively shake up the present. It is precisely because they know that collective memory is the bearer of tremendously dangerous weapons for its survival that the dominant powers of society take such great efforts to bury and distort it.

The new modality of utopia and radical presentism, paradoxically united in contemporary anarchism, are accompanied by a third element that gains daily ever more importance as an instrument of resistance to and subversion of the instituted social system, at the same time as it increases the attractiveness exercised by anarchism. This has to do with its *constructive capacity*, something which completes the diverse practices of confrontation that it encourages and the will to resist that it inspires.

So anarchism must not only offer reasons and means for struggle, it also has to offer *reasons to live in a different way* and the means to experience, in practice, a different life. It is precisely because it is able to offer all of this *today* that it is able to seduce minority elements, but with each day, larger youth elements. Its constructive capacity makes it possible to tear away spaces from the system, and to construct modes of life capable of offering more satisfactions than those offered by the mirages of commodity consumerism and to oppose the later's power of seduction. It is in this constructive capacity where anarchism finds, I believe, a third ground for its development.

A fourth condition consists of the necessity to definitively abandon all *totalising* pretensions, rediscovering the suspicion already manifested in this regard by the rich and fertile current of classical anarchist individualism, even though this based its caution on the demand that all singularities be respected and not on the present arguments.

Against totalising temptations, anarchists must in fact be fully convinced that their values, their ideas, their practices, their utopias, their beliefs, the ways of life they long for, in sum, all

that distinguishes and characterises them will never be able, far from it, to reach *unanimity* in an extraordinarily diverse humanity.

They must accept, without any reticence or the least bitterness, that choices different from their own are perfectly legitimate and that the only rationally conceivable social reality is *a plural and heterogeneous reality*, in which it will represent only a more or less limited part of humanity and in which it will find itself in a context of *necessary coexistence* with other options.

It is a matter then of acting and working “with others”, in struggles and in everyday life, and to open oneself up to ideas and experiences coming from *outside* our own tradition. To do things with others who do not exactly share all of our modes of being and thinking, not because of the mere tactical preoccupation of increasing our forces to better struggle against the enemy, but, as I said before, for reasons of principle, because anarchism is also *the respect of and search for diversity in freedom*. And it should be concretely, in a situation and in practice, that the limits of this common activity and this shared everyday life should be evaluated, because if, effectively, it is certain that other options are perfectly legitimate, it is no less certain that ours are also, at least to the same extent, and that *we have the full right to defend them*. To defend them without imposing them, of course, because “to be an anarchist obliges” – as our comrade André Bernard says –, yet without accepting, as well, that others impose theirs upon us, and without hesitating to resort to force, if necessary, to impede it (see the *addenda* dedicated to relativism).

As it is not advisable to live in a ghetto, to raise frontiers or walls of separation, we will have no other remedy but to find ways to conciliate, on the one hand, the possibility of living in a milieu *as libertarian as is possible* with, on the other hand, the necessity of *coexisting with other milieus*. This is one of the challenges that anarchism has to resolve and that is posed not only at the global level of a society, but, even, in the micro-spaces that we are able today to wrench away from the system. Along this same line, it should be stressed that anarchism should show itself more sensitive to its own cultural and civilisational determinants, acquiring full consciousness of its undeniable Eurocentrism and that its roots plunge into a field historically impregnated with Christian influences. It is indispensable that anarchism establish a dialogue, an exchange and a confrontation with related perspectives, but which are embedded in other cultural contexts, so as to be able to critically rethink some of the presuppositions that shape it and to make them less dependent on its socio-cultural determinants.

The problematic of power or, better, of domination, which has become much more sensitive than in the past and which provokes evermore numerous and vehement reactions of resistance from some youth, constitutes a fifth element that explains the recovery of vitality of the ideology which historically concerned itself, in the most determined way, with this issue.

In parallel, the increase of the presence of power in the social fabric has considerably enriched the analysis of this phenomenon, giving way to a new understanding of its mechanisms. This is certainly a new understanding that obliges anarchism to qualify and, sometimes, to reconsider in depth its own conceptions of power. This has contributed to its renewal, even though the weight of its old conceptions continues to be excessive.

Finally, a sixth element that appears in the double process of the resurgence and the renewal of anarchism – if only enunciated in an explicit manner by the postanarchist current – is the mistrust shown towards a good number of the presuppositions of the legitimising ideology of modernity, and the critical work of clarifying its supposedly emancipatory effects. To mention but one example of the subjugating character of certain supposedly emancipatory presuppositions, it is sufficient to consider the way in which differences, diversity and singularity are crushed as a

result of the beliefs which underlie the acceptance of an essentialist conception of *human nature*, and the universal and, consequently, ahistorical and uniform character, that is conferred upon it.

It will be to the extent that anarchism moves away from – as it has already begun to do so – the legitimising belief of modernity, that it will find itself in a better position to work towards the weakening of the apparatuses of power, apparatuses set up by it, and, consequently, be better received by those actively opposed to them.

In summary, to enclose utopia in amorous care such that it shine in all of its splendor; to free it from its eschatological weight and hold it in the here and now; to concentrate our energies on the transformation of the present; to materially construct seductive alternatives in the face of what existing society offers us; to lock away in the trunk of youthful errors totalising illusions, accepting to be nothing more than an option, a choice, among others; to rethink, in depth, our conceptions of power and to free ourselves from the vestiges of the legitimising ideology of modernity that may still nest in our conceptions: these are some of the paths that seem to point to the current resurgence/renewal of anarchism and they are, I believe, the paths which anarchism will have to pursue, with a firmer step than that which it is taking today, to continue its expansion and deepen its renewal.

## Addenda 1. From modernity to postmodernity

Can the period in which we live, that of the beginning of the 20th century, be completely inscribed within the general coordinates of modernity? Or, on the contrary, are there already discernible indicators that a sufficiently radical transformation has begun, such that it is possible to speak of the emergence of a new historical epoch?

Opinions differ and, for the moment, there is no evidence that clearly favours one of the two options. However, I will risk supporting the thesis of those who believe that modernity is, effectively, a historical epoch that is still fully in force, but that it has nevertheless already initiated a phase of transition towards another epoch. Perhaps due to a lack of imagination, it is convenient for me to designate this new epoch “postmodernity”.

On the one hand, it is obvious that in a period of only a few decades, changes of great magnitude have taken place, as much in the field of technology, as in that of geopolitics and economics, changes that affect the ensemble of society. These changes are not only distinguishable by their magnitude, but by the constant acceleration of the rhythm by which they are produced. The current velocity of the processes of change undoubtedly constitutes an important differentiating factor with respect to the nature of the transformations during earlier centuries.

On the other hand, all epochs produce a legitimating ideology, an ideology that permits its development and acceptance. Modernity does not escape this rule and it also possesses a legitimating ideology which gained form during the Enlightenment and which, perhaps, as a sign of the change of epoch that has already begun, is ceasing to be accepted as the obvious and natural way to contemplate the world, becoming instead an object of radical critiques. But nor does postmodernity escape this rule and it is currently generating its own legitimating ideology through, among other things, a firm opposition to the postulates of modernity.

Let us now briefly examine the characteristics of modernity and postmodernity as historical epochs and as the legitimating ideologies of these epochs.

### Modernity as an historical epoch

I understand that modernity is clearly an epoch which has, as with all epochs, a beginning and an end. To speak of “a beginning” should not be taken to mean an isolated, unique moment, but a more or less extensive process of constitution. The reference to “an end” alludes to a period of decline, also more or less extensive, that is a prelude to its exhaustion and the emergence of a new epoch. In effect, modernity does not appear at a precise moment, already equipped with all of its attributes, but rather the distinctive features that shape it constitute themselves progressively over a period of many centuries. Nor will its disappearance be sudden.

The modern epoch began to acquire form in Europe from the beginning of the 15th century, with, among other phenomena, the construction of a new scientific rationality, the decisive invention of the printing press, advances in the arts of navigation or the European discovery of



the New World... All the same, it was still necessary to wait some time for the formation of some of its elements, such as the nation state or the declaration of human rights. And it was not until the 18th century, under the Enlightenment, that its legitimating discourse was articulated with a certain clarity.

Modernity is not separable from the constitution of the immense enterprise that “Science” represents, nor from the enormous effects that it has produced on our way of being, our form of life and our form of thinking. Modernity is born together with an ensemble of technological innovations that give rise to a new mode of production, that will slowly configure itself as the capitalist mode of production, giving birth in turn to the process of industrialisation that will accelerate and generalise itself in the later half of the 19th century.

To understand the process of the constitution of modernity, it is worth reviewing for a moment what some researchers, such as Pierre Levy, have called “intelligence technologies”. These concern technologies that inscribe themselves in the very process of thought, that have as their function and as effects, rendering possible certain operations of thought that were in no way realisable before these intelligence technologies were constructed; to render possible certain operations of thought, to give them greater efficiency or improve them and, therefore, change them in some sense; to definitively create new forms of thought. Thus writing can be considered an intelligence technology which undoubtedly affected the modalities of thought and had innumerable effects on knowledge. The printing press was another of these intelligence technologies.

The invention of the printing press or, more precisely, its crystallisation and the social diffusion of its use mark the beginnings of modernity. This innovation of intelligence technologies was a crucial element making possible the constitution of modernity, simply because it was fundamental for making possible the constitution of modern scientific reason. Modern scientific knowledge would be practically unthinkable without printed books and all that they imply. The printing press is not only a vector of diffusion and socialisation of knowledge, but it also influences the very form in which it is presented and produced and, therefore, it shapes its very nature. The effect of the printing press goes well beyond the simple facilitation of the circulation of texts. For example, the human subject – author or simple transcriber – is constantly present in the manuscript, even though her/his presence fades away on the printed page, something that helps to construct the idea of objectivity, so important to modern scientific reason. Graphs, tables, images that are reproduced in multiple copies, without the least difference between them, also contribute to objectifying the representation as something trustworthy, natural and secure, contributing thus to the development of one of the principal constitutive elements of the discourse of modernity, namely: the *ideology of representation*.

As with the printing press in the 15th century, all of the great innovations in the field of intelligence technologies have fundamentally changed societies, such that it is not difficult to understand that when the computer and the electronic processing of information appears in the middle of the 20th century, that this too will produce social effects of the first magnitude.

## The ideology of modernity

Despite the considerable heterogeneity of the conceptions and the analyses that forged the world view specific to modernity, it is possible to outline the general features that define it. If Martin Luther’s Reformation and Erasmus of Rotterdam’s humanism, among others, contributed

to constructing its discourse, it was the philosophy of the Enlightenment that gave it body, defining its contents with greater precision. We can synthesise them in the following eleven characteristics:

First, the hyper-valorisation of reason. On the basis of a teleological conception of history, according to which history moves towards a specific end, scientific reason and reason in general appear as vectors of progress and emancipation. History in effect has a point of origin and it progresses in a particular direction that will be appropriate as long as it is always guided by reason. In the process of making reason the central element, definitive of our *I*, according to Descartes, an intrinsic relation, an internal relation between reason and freedom, between reason and progress or between reason and emancipation came to be postulated. From this perspective, the increase of rationality would imply, connaturally, an increase in freedom, and would bring with it the possibility of social progress. Reason is simply emancipatory.

Second, the development of the ideology of representation. That is, among other things, the formulation of knowledge as representation of the world and the subordination of its veracity to the fact that it reproduces reality correctly. This means that knowledge is, in some way, a transcription of the real, a translation of reality to another level – the level of knowledge – that must be as faithful as possible, avoiding any alteration of the translated. The discourse of modernity affirms that this is in fact possible, and thereby automatically establishes a duality, a dichotomy, object-subject, that will drag itself through the whole period of modernity.

A third aspect consists of the attachment to universalism and the belief in the secure foundation of truth. That is, the affirmation according to which the truth – as well as values – can be grounded on indubitable, absolutely true bases. The discourse of modernity is totalising and presents itself as true for all human beings and in all times. This is why the grand narratives, the meta-narratives of modernity, always express themselves in terms of universal values and projects, providing explanations that have an unquestionable, ultimate foundation (for a deeper development of this idea, see the addenda below dedicated to relativism).

Fourth, the affirmation of the centrality of the subject and consciousness. The subject is autonomous, which is to say that in principle it can become the owner or master of itself and the agent of its own history. In like manner, consciousness can be transparent to itself. Important thinkers of modernity concerned themselves with suggesting paths by which consciousness ceases to be an alienated consciousness and comes to be transparent to itself. In this connection, it was Marx who formulated the most genuine social approach regarding what determines consciousness and clouds its transparency.

The fifth aspect concerns the attachment to a humanism based on the belief in the existence of an essential human nature and, more generally, in the adoption of an essentialist perspective. Even though essentialism is not exclusively modern, as it pervades the whole of western philosophy, it is one of the postulates of this ideology most incisively questioned by poststructuralism.

Sixth, the figure of the individual was established and individualism as an ideology was formulated. The modern imaginary leads us to think ultimately as individuals who, as such, are all equivalent and who only belong, as if by circumstantial “addition”, to specific groups, communities or social categories. In this way, we can move through different communities or distinct social categories, without ever ceasing to be individuals. This signifies that the individual takes the place of the community as the constitutive unit of the social and constitutes itself as the subject of law of modern society.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, John Locke or Jeremy Bentham, among others, elaborated the ingredients of a new moral order that would slowly infiltrate and mould the manner in which we imagine society and our place in it. The principal ideas revolve around the basic notions of social contract, rights and moral obligations of individuals, and mutual self-interest. The basis of these ideas, what legitimates the structures of power that operate in society, is the acceptance of its constituent elements to submit to specific game rules under a sort of founding contract. This is an implicit contract that defines the manner in which the different members of society should behave in relation to each other so as to guarantee their own security and to extract the maximum common benefit. The contract gathers together an ensemble of rights and obligations which the society and the members of the society can demand and must grant to each other mutually.

The novelty is that the social bond is grounded in the rights and the interests of the individuals, such that the obligations imposed by society are justifiable only if they preserve these rights and interests. It is as if the modern individual says to those who govern something like the following: "I only concede your right to govern me if you do so for my benefit and if you recognise that it is I who conceded it to you ..."

A seventh aspect has to do with the elaboration of the idea of *progress* and the subordination of the present to the future. Modernity is perhaps the first epoch that perceives itself as an epoch; that is, that thinks of itself as a particular moment in a specific process. The moment that an epoch considers itself as such, it is the past that gives meaning to the present. In other words, the current moment can only be understood in reference to the past and it makes the past responsible for the present. This also means that the present is burdened with the responsibility of configuring the future.

The present time transforms itself into a useful time for the future and it has the moral responsibility of assuring that this future be satisfactory. The faith in progress postulates that the present is necessarily better than what was before and worse than what will happen in the future, as long as obstacles are not raised to the correct functioning of reason. The underlying idea here is that the human being can make history, can govern it, instead of being carried by it, leading it in the right direction as long as it allows itself to be guided by reason.

Eighth, modernity is a project and a process of secularisation. The principles and the supreme values upon which is articulated the ideology of society are no longer to be found in the heavens; they abandon transcendence to situate themselves amidst humanity and in the very heart of society. This signifies the metaphorical death of God, understood as the ultimate foundation of the principles upon which society should be based. However, modernity does not leave the place occupied by God empty, but substitutes the figure of a supreme being with other absolute principles, such as universal reason, absolute values or transcendental truth, that tend to have, in practice, the same effects. God disappears, but *its doubles* enter into action. This does not of course take away from the fact that the process of secularisation has important consequences against religious obscurantism, against the arbitrariness of a power that presented itself as the simple executive arm of commands originating elsewhere.

The ninth aspect has to do with fidelity to a secular eschatology and the affirmation of the historicity of societies. Eschatological thought, so important in Christianity, places at the end of time this splendid moment when evil will be definitively defeated; when absolute happiness will be finally attained, when the subject will be fully realised and will leave behind itself a long path of pain and anxieties, finally reconciling itself with itself. Modernity secularised Christian escha-

tology, emphasising the historicity of our condition and elaborating a series of “grand narratives” about the irrepressible development of progress or the final illumination of all the mysteries of the world, which inspire hope and which promise a kind of final redemption.

This basically means that historicity is our condition. The introduction of historicity into our vision of the world and, thus, into the way in which we conceptualise, represents a substantial change in comparison to other societies. In effect, it assumes that we are no more than a particular moment in a history that has a direction and which advances ineluctably towards a specific end and which, furthermore, will be a happy end. Consequently, hope is fully justified and the great promise borne by the future completely legitimates and renders tolerable all of the suffering that the present may afford us. In this sense, the emancipatory discourses of the 19th century outlined a more or less distant horizon where the conquest of happiness awaits us.

A tenth feature refers to popular sovereignty. Modernity invents “the people” as a new collective agency and establishes popular sovereignty as the source of any pretense to legitimate government. Indeed, it is only possible to govern with the mandate of the people and for the good of the people, and this should give rise to certain means of expression. Some of these are formal and belong specifically to the political sphere, such as for example electoral processes. Others are informal and are found outside this sphere, while conditioning it; it is the case of “public opinion”, constructed as a central authority in the political imaginary of modernity.

Lastly, as the eleventh characteristic that should be mentioned, modernity is a process that has slowly led to the development of industrialisation and the “labour enlistment” of the whole population – even though certain sectors, such as women for example, took considerable time to integrate this process -. This social innovation, which required the development of a series of apparatuses and techniques, produced multiple consequences. Among them, the centrality conceded to work, the growth of the values associated with it, such as professional conscience and the theorisation of the reasons for which labour and its values should be central elements, even to define our dignity; an ensemble of elements that have continued to diminish in the present, which perhaps signals the incipient exhaustion of the modern epoch.

Let us not however precipitate ourselves. Modernity reached one of its most complete expressions in a very recent epoch, as recent as the 1950’s, with the process of *modernisation* (the very term “modernisation” is relatively recent). Modernisation appeared as one of the principal political values for those who govern, as that which populations should pursue and what countries should realise. It is a matter of increasing, as much as is possible, the rationalisation of the economy and society. Its discourse is formulated in terms such as “raising the per capita income of countries”, “maximising the development of productive forces”, “increasing productivity”, “expanding the capitalisation and mobility of available resources”, “improving competitiveness”, “increasing purchasing power”, etc.

On the political level, modernity has endeavoured to generalise the democratic model of political participation, considered as the form of political functioning most adequate to making possible the process of modernisation and drawing out all of its benefits.

In addition to having propitiated certain social advances, modernity has had some very significant costs. It was necessary to pay a very high price for its very development, resulting in an enormous quantity of suffering for the victims of the process, that is, for all of those elements considered marginal with respect to the fundamental values of modernity, for everyone who was in a peripheral position with respect to the centres of power of modernity, and for all of those parts of the world which were colonised so that modernity could prosper and strengthen itself.

## Postmodernity as a historical epoch

In the same way that the Modern Epoch began with a series of technical innovations, such as the printing press, postmodernity also began with an important technological innovation, the electronic processing of information. The power and speed that information technologies have introduced into the treatment and generation of information are not only at the basis of the *knowledge society*, they have also provoked the exponential development of communications, the acceleration of the process of globalisation, the establishment of *a new economic order* and the upsurge of biotechnologies, which, thanks to genetic engineering, have opened up the possibility of artificially selecting certain human characteristics. The simultaneous development, beginning in the 1990's, of cyberspace, a network of electronic interconnections, has had a decisive bearing on all facets of the social fabric; relationally, economically, politically, symbolically, and so on.

In view of these elements, it is easy to understand that the transforming impact of the computer in areas such as production, work, commerce or science, are configuring new conditions of life and a new social framework which cannot but change our vision of the world.

Zygmunt Bauman, the sociologist, who prefers to speak of "liquid modernity" instead of "post-modernity", captures with acuity some of the most significant aspects of the new social reality that is gaining form. To cite but one, acceleration, in all areas, constitutes one of the defining features of a new epoch where everything flows at a vertiginous rhythm. Thus, for example, the obsolescence of products, that until recently was a defect against which one had to struggle – duration was sold – has ceased to be a problem. Today, the speed of becoming obsolete has turned into an advantage for goods: everything ages with enormous velocity and must be quickly substituted. This programmed obsolescence and the necessity of change affects not only industrial products, but extends to all of the phenomena of the work world and daily life: contracts are unstable, commitments are ephemeral. A permanent disposition to change must be manifest, changing direction with each little sign, seeking to be free of any long term ties and maintaining a flexible identity in a world of fluid and momentary connections.

All of these transformations, to which can be added the constant relocations, the reduction of the life cycles of the skills demanded of workers, the deregulation of labour relations, etc., daily feed the feeling of unpredictability and insecurity before the future. The idea that no one will exercise a single, unique profession, nor that they will dispose of the same employment for life, is consolidated and generalised; in the same way that no one is guaranteed the possibility of always remaining in the same place.

The perspective of professional migration, of territorial migration, of skills migration and the uncertainty of payment, sustain an imaginary where lasting, stable identities and, furthermore, permanent identities shaped on the basis of work, cease to be meaningful. This announces the end, therefore, not of work, but of the peculiar ideology of work which was so important in the last phase of modernity. And the end, also, of what we could call identity sedentariness, substituted by the perspective of identity nomadism.

## The ideology of postmodernity

Two centuries had to pass, after the beginnings of modernity, for the conditions to be present for the elaboration of the legitimising discourse of this epoch and to gain awareness that it was ef-

fectively “an epoch”. Two centuries, in addition to the three or four decades that separate us from the beginning of postmodernity. Even taking into account the strong acceleration of historical and social time, the brevity of the time that has passed explains the confusing, diverse, contradictory, incoherent and fragmentary nature of the legitimising discourse of postmodernity.

In fact, the discourse of postmodernity presents a double aspect: it develops, first, a powerful criticism of the ideological presuppositions of modernity – in this sense, postmodernity is an anti-modernity – and it elaborates, secondly, the bases of a legitimising discourse for the new epoch.

While critical of the ideology of modernity, postmodern discourse invites us to see reason, presented as emancipatory, as having in practice totalitarian type consequences. In effect, reason constitutes, among other things, an apparatus of annihilation of differences, however not of differences in terms of inequalities, but of the diversity and the singularities which manifest themselves in all domains, including in the domain of cultures. Reason orders, classifies, universalises, unifies and, for this, it must reduce, expel, neutralise and suppress differences. As well, in its programmatic discourse, modernity promised social progress and wise dominion of nature, but these commitments were not fulfilled. Auschwitz, Hiroshima, the depletion of the planet’s resources and the destruction of minority cultures are some of the consequences brought about by the modern pretension of converting ourselves into the owners and possessors of nature.

The great principles of modernity are, according to postmodern discourse, nothing but simple stories told to legitimate an epoch. The grande narratives are deceiving narratives that hide the enormous effects of power. Behind the beautiful declarations about the autonomy of the subject and about the self-transparency of consciousness, stalked practices of subjection. Truth, objectivity and the secure foundations of knowledge in fact hid particular values disguised behind the pretensions of neutrality, objectivity and universality. Indeed, modernity is not reproached for having killed God, but in having put in the place of absolutes rooted in the heavens, new absolutes that produced the same effects in a more cunning manner.

Considering now the second aspect of postmodern ideology, we see that the effort to elaborate the legitimising bases of the new epoch insists on the fragmentation of reality, of the subject, and also on relativism in the field of knowledge and values.

In the new ideological scenario, eschatology is weakening, the grand emancipatory narratives no longer seduce the imagination, and the horizon of hope that these drew and the great promise that they sheltered ceased to be believable. The perspective of a distant, but secure, goal, outlined by science, in terms of progress, or by politics, in terms of the end of exploitation and domination, is no longer satisfactory. The lines that sketched the path towards emancipation lost clarity, giving way to the idea that there is no pre-established path, no map that could safely direct the navigation towards a future of freedom and happiness. And all of this translates into a strong scepticism and towards a rejection of any *long term project*, whether of a political nature, or existential.

The feeling that the present should not be mortgaged to what the future may bring us has continued to increase and that we should live in the present instant against what some eventual better future has ceased to guarantee. Presentism, the desire to extract all that is possible from the present and to consume the instant, substitutes the sacrifice of investing for tomorrow. Precarious ways of life install themselves in the ephemeral, the immediate is what truly counts, because no hopeful future is guaranteed, and thus the idea that there *is no future* continues to gain strength.

The secularisation driven by modernity grounded itself in the conviction that our historicity propelled us necessarily towards a future of progress, sought after through the rationality of human actions. However, in those moments in which the conviction falters, when the future becomes uncertain and uncontrollable and when eschatology weakens, it seems that secularisation leaves us overly unprotected and that it is necessary to search for protecting transcendent realities which offer us security. We are accordingly witness to a certain return of religious sentiment, the proliferation of sects and esoteric groups, or a greater acceptance of the supernatural and of mysteries that refer to magical thought. It is perhaps for this reason that the ideology of the new times encourages the abandonment of a strict rationality, thereby weakening the border between facts and values, between the affective and the cognitive, or between the real and the virtual.

Perhaps it is also for this reason that *the event* exercises, currently, such an intense fascination on people. Resistant to historicity, the event is what cannot be predicted, what breaks with the logic of rational expectations and represents one of the highest expressions of discontinuity. There is no doubt that there is, currently, an enormous desire for events, a desire for exceptional incidents, even if they are catastrophic, a collective appetite for what surprises, for what is unique and for what occurs without previous warning. Populations are hungry for events. Perhaps, however, this is also a revenge against power, a kind of compensation for the feeling that everything is under control, a sort of challenge to a power that appears to be able to do everything, except, by definition, to predict an event, given that this would cease to be an event if it were predictable.

Before the ideal of a self-possessed individual and constituted as the supporting and legitimating unity of society, the desire of group fusion and intersubjective valorisation gains form. A tendency towards tribal identifications manifests itself. A necessity for strong identifications which certainly promote practices of solidarity and mutual aid, but which at the same time confine them to the interior spaces of the groups to which one belongs. The desire to fuse into the community and to dissolve oneself in the collective outlines a project that exhausts itself in the mere satisfaction of *being together*.

Despite the fact that people continue to mobilise in the streets and continue to participate in elections, symptoms of a global lack of concern for the political sphere are discernible. Scepticism gains ground and increases the distance between political representatives and those represented. After having been a key element in the political imaginary of modernity, public opinion not only appears as infinitely fragmented, but is also ever more perceived as powerfully instrumentalised by the communications media and by the powers which control them. It is obvious that if public opinion is constructed through power, it can no longer serve as an alibi to legitimate it and to have us believe that power respects the public will. Consequently, the problem that political power must now confront is that people desert it and that they neither desire to commit themselves to it nor to participate in it, limiting themselves to living in its shadow and abandoning it completely, in the hands of those who manage it.

To conclude these considerations on the epoch that is beginning to emerge, I want to emphasise that, as modernity established new forms of domination, so too is postmodernity doing the same. To be convinced of this, one has but to think of the effects that the social networks have on our ways of being and on how we relate to each other, or of the surveillance that ICTs make possible, or also the kind of governmentality that the medicalisation of life puts into practice. Therefore, it is by no means a matter of completely celebrating the entrance into postmodernity. What is to be thanked is the demystification and critique of modernity, a critique that, if it serves

anything, makes us more sensitive to the effects of domination generated by the grande principles of modernity and to which we submitted without even knowing that we were doing so.

Should we mobilise ourselves against postmodernity? I believe that yes, but of course, not in the name of modernity ... Should we turn away from the discourse of postmodernity? I believe not. To ignore it, to not wish to listen to it, to not want to understand it, is an enormous hoax, for as we reject the name, the thing continues to advance. Our subjectivity, our ways of subjectification, our closest reality, our social environment ... all of this, whether we want it or not, whether we accept postmodernity or not, is changing. The still confused discourse of postmodernity must be studied and analysed seriously, as much as to better understand the modernity which has constituted us and which has shaped our way of thinking, as well as to try to see the nature of newly approaching forms of domination. If we want to understand the present and strengthen our capacity for action, then we must decipher the discourse of postmodernity.



## Addenda 2. Post-structuralism as a turning point in ways of thinking

The influence of post-structuralism on the configuration of postanarchism is of such a magnitude that to gain a proper understanding of the latter, it is useful to examine it with care. Before we stop to consider three aspects – the question of the subject, the essentialist postulate and the problematic of power – which are of special relevance to rethink anarchism and which occupy a privileged place in the current of postanarchism, it is necessary to situate the immediate predecessor of post-structuralism, that is, structuralism.

### Structuralism

Structuralism is a cultural movement that gestated in the early 1950's, it affirmed itself throughout the same decade (1955, the year Claude Levi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques* was published, was emblematic) and consolidated itself in the decade of the 60's. The apogee of the movement was possibly reached in 1966, a year baptised in France as "the structuralist year". Structuralism's decline however began in this same decade, in the wake of the critical impact of May 68. It nevertheless continued to shine until the mid-1970's, giving way at that moment to post-structuralism.

Structuralism took from Ferdinand de Saussure, founder of modern linguistics, some of its principal conceptual tools. For Saussure, the sign, the constitutive unit of language, has no importance in itself, it lacks positive significance. Its significance does not result from its content but from its position, of the place that it occupies with respect to all of the other signs, that is, of the difference that it maintains with respect to other signs. This means that we should not concentrate on the terms that are in relation to each other, but on the relationships between these terms. In this manner, specific contents are excluded, the signifier is privileged over the signified, the code over the message, which is to say, essentially, the formal structure of the language over the circumstantial statements that can be produced by means of it.

Saussure also emphasised the dichotomy between language and speech. Speech is but one manifestation, one realisation, one particular expression determined by language, by the code. This means that to understand the system of a language, we have to set aside its circumstantial manifestations, we have to ignore speech. Linguistics constitutes itself excluding the one who speaks, pushing away the subject.

The dichotomy between synchrony and diachrony also reveals itself to be crucial and the metaphor of chess helps us to capture its meaning. In effect, Saussure says that to take a decision in playing chess, what is important is the position occupied by the chess pieces on the board, their differential value and the possible combinations between the pieces. How this situation was arrived at – that is, the history that led to this particular arrangement on the board – may be interesting, but, at the time of deciding, it is purely anecdotal. What else does the path along by which we arrived at this situation give? It is the configuration of the situation which conditions

our decision. It is therefore necessary to analyse the structure as such; the way in which this structure arranged itself is of no concern. And this means that history must be excluded from our preoccupations.

Structuralism thus excluded a series of dimensions that had hitherto seemed important, such as the referent, contents, the subject, history.

On the level of philosophy, structuralism constituted itself in opposition to phenomenology and, more generally, against the philosophy of consciousness.

Phenomenology places the accent on the experiential, on the directly lived, on subjectivity as the constituent element of our experience of things and of ourselves. According to phenomenology, the world is transparent to the consciousness of the subject, provided that consciousness frees itself from everything that constrains and distorts it. The subject's consciousness is also transparent to itself, as long as the necessary precautions are taken. For example, it is obvious that an alienated consciousness cannot be transparent to itself. Phenomenology places at the forefront the conscious subject, the consciousness of the subject and the power of consciousness. This means that knowledge involves the rigorous questioning of the subject's consciousness.

Structuralism constitutes itself precisely against these presuppositions and sustains that consciousness is opaque to itself, that the subject and consciousness are not constituent, but rather constituted. They are constituted by language, by codes, by structures, by culture, by the unconscious ... Accordingly, it is useless to interrogate the consciousness of the subject. What must be questioned is what speaks in and through the subject without the latter being conscious of it. And, consequently, the subject must be radically eliminated, the subject of modernity, of phenomenology, the subject as transparent consciousness of itself.

What must be sought out is what hides behind experience and what renders it possible; to investigate what, lying behind appearances, engenders the manifest and the visible. One has to go behind the facts to see what produces them; one therefore has to search for the latent and invisible structures. The truth hides behind what can be seen, lying in the depths covered over by appearances. The metaphor of the researcher is that of the diver.

Structuralism shares some of the fundamental presuppositions of modernity. It values scientificity and gives therefore a privileged place to reason – and to scientific reason in particular –; it assumes a certain essentialism and a certain belief in human nature; it participates in the search for universals, etc.

It nonetheless also questions some of the basic presuppositions of modernity. Concretely, it rejects the idea of an autonomous subject, of a subject creator of itself of itself and of history, and shares in the criticism of the subject as a consciousness transparent to itself.

## May 68 and the decline of structuralism

Structuralism acquired an enormous influence in the heart of the cultural and intellectual world. It was however when it found itself at the apogee of its recognition, marking the thought of an entire epoch, that something surged forth that no one could predict – and even less the structuralists: the eruption of May 68 and this was lethal for structuralism.

In the first place, May 68 was an *event* and, as such, something that structuralism rejected, in principle, as secondary and insignificant. The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan sought to play down the importance of the graffiti, the demonstrations and the street disturbances, saying: nothing

important will happen because “structures do not fill the streets”. Later, before the magnitude of the event, Lacan sought to correct matters saying that “it was the structures that filled the streets ...”. Lacan however doubly equivocated: what was happening was important, and it was not structures that were in the streets, it was *subjects*.

In the same way, May 68 also put into question totalising, globalising and universalising discourses, legitimating the local, the particular and the specific. This contestation could not but affect structuralism, given that it raised suspicion against a type of discourse that corresponded effectively with what it maintained.

## Post-structuralism

May 68 strengthened the conditions for the implosion of structuralism and activated the time bomb that destabilised it and made way for post-structuralism. This latter was constituted on the basis of a denunciation of the former’s *impasses* and its acritical assumption of many of the presuppositions of modernity. Structuralism, for example, is questioned on the grounds that it takes for granted the universal character of scientific reason, accepting concepts such as the truth, certainty or objectivity, and that it seeks to ground knowledge on absolute and definitive foundations.

The humanism that beats in structuralism is also questioned. In effect, despite the fact that it advocated the elimination of the subject, its search for the invariable, for universals and transcultural constants, which are neither historical nor contingent, evidences a profound essentialism that joins with the belief in the existence of *human nature*.

Post-structuralism manifests a radical disagreement with structuralist ahistoricism. The exclusion of history is considered inadmissible and Foucault played an important role in this critique. Nevertheless, when post-structuralism reintegrates history and introduces movement to structures – giving to them their genesis and their dynamism -, it does not take up the concept of history specific to modernity. It rejects history as continuity, history as something with a direction and which advances progressively towards specific goals that always improve upon earlier ones. The post-structuralist conception of history is different, it is discontinuous, lacks any end or purpose and is not evolutionist. It is a historicised structuralism that is characterised by the re-introduction of history into the heart of structure.

Lastly, the exclusion of the subject is also questioned. The subject reappeared in an indirect way as a consequence of the consideration of non-discursive practices which form part of what is outside a text. It also appeared in a direct way as a result of the importance covered by *enunciation* and, therefore, the necessity of taking into account the spoken. In this manner, the subject reintegrates itself in structures, it is again present in them, but no longer as the former subject, not as the subject of modernity; it is not an instituting subject. It is a subject already constituted, but which, still, plays an active role.

What remains of structuralism in post-structuralism is, almost exclusively, the critique of phenomenology and the categorical rejection of the *conscious subject* of modernity.

## Essentialism

Post-structuralism is characterised by its radical rejection of the essentialist perspectives that have accompanied a considerable part of philosophy since Antiquity and that pervade the ideology of modernity.

If the existence of being – of any kind of being – is always a concrete and situated existence that occurs in *a particular world*, then it is inevitable that the changing characteristics of this world condition and mould the concrete expressions of this *being*. The essentialist postulate however pretends that independently of the social and historical conditionalities which it may have suffered, *being*, endowed with a constitutive essence, remains fundamentally *the same*. Behind the contingent and variable modalities of being, as and how it manifests itself, there consequently exists a fixed and invariable, essential being.

Thus beneath the changing forms of that which represses it, is found our constitutive desire; beneath the fluctuating regimes of truth and the sinuous trajectory of reason, is found the truth in its unalterableness and rationality in itself; or beneath the extensive cultural, social and historical diversity which subjects present, is found invariable *human nature*, etc.

Essentialism takes us back directly to the game thought up by Plato which consists in turning our eyes away from the deceitful shadows that surround us, so as at to thereby accede to the essence of things, the unalterable and eternal truth of their being, well beyond the circumstantial distortions imposed by existence.

Accordingly, essentialism incites us to bring together, as much as possible, an existence with the essence that grounds it. Beyond that which appears to us to be, or that which the vicissitudes of our existence have led us to be, what we *are*, authentically, is a consequence of *what is already inscribed in our essence*. Consequently, we should *rediscover* this essence which lies beneath what obscures and deforms it, so as to *attach* ourselves to it as much as it is possible and, thereby, fully *realise ourselves*. It is necessary to break with the distance that separates us from our *true self*, from *authentic* reason, from the constitutive *nature* of the human being ..., because it is in this same distance where is rooted precisely our infelicity and our alienation, our difficulty in realising ourselves fully or in acceding to the full truth. In sum, to find a happiness that is born of the coincidence between what we truly are and what we appear to be, it is clear that we have to endeavour to be *faithful* to our own essence.

Furthermore, in considering that existence is no more than the simple, temporary manifestation of the essence that sustains it, it follows that essentialism emphatically denies the possibility of *creating* and closes down the very possibility of freedom. In effect, as Castoriadis said, *to create*, in the strong sense of the term, is to produce something that is not already fully contained in what is given, in what already exists up to this moment. Accordingly, if what already exists is “the changeable expression of an immutable essence”, whatever we can produce will only represent an expression, distinct as regards form, of this unchanging essence. If things have *an essence*, our practices cannot create anything that is not already part of it. This marks the strict limit of our freedom, a freedom which can only transform, but which can never reach radical novelty.

Following Foucault, one of the principal elements that characterise post-structuralism is the desire to *contradict the essentialist postulate*. It is a matter of neutralising its implications and of demonstrating not only that it is an *intellectual fallacy*, but that it represents, in addition, *a dangerous fallacy* for the exercise of our freedom. There is not in fact behind the *being that is*, that is, of the being that truly exists, *its true being* which we could reach by cleansing it of its

contingent and accidental aspects, which cover over its real existence. *Essence is subsumed in existence*, it does not exist as something separate from it – simply put, *it does not exist* -, and thus to search for it is completely vain. *Essence* is a useless, erroneous and deceitful concept and that is consequently dangerous for our practices of freedom. We only possess *existence*, with its irremediably contingent character.

## The subject

One of the elements that best defines post-structuralism is its reformulation of the question of the subject. It not only reintroduces the subject where structuralism had eliminated it, but it also dismantles the essentialist conception of the subject inherited from modernity.

The philosopher Richard Rorty belongs to those who question the idea according to which people are constituted, in the depths of their being, by a *true I*, by an essential and immutable *human nature*, that had been repressed and covered over by historical institutions and practices. There is, according to Rorty, no *intrinsic human nature* that we could rescue, that we could *free from alienation* or that we have to go on progressively *realising* so as to *finally find ourselves*, as we *really* are.

There is no project for the human being that we might elaborate that would be legitimated by the claim that it is closer than others to its true nature, or that it is more in conformity than others with what is truly the case and which would allow for *a more complete form of self-realisation*.

Of course, we can elaborate transformative projects and we can *desire to be differently*, ceasing to be what we are today, but we must argue for these projects with justifications that make no appeal to our supposed essence. We can, for example, want to be more free, but not because freedom constitutes an exigency inscribed in our nature, nor because it is an exigency that we want to satisfy so as to be, thereby, more *fully human*.

We may want to construct ourselves one way or the other, but none of these ways will be more or less in conformity with our true nature; simply because there is no such thing.

Obviously and fortunately, we can come to be different from what circumstances have made us out to be because we can *create* ourselves in another way.

Foucault, following Nietzsche on the *de-subjectification of the subject*, shelved the category of the subject as a transhistorical element, the ground of experience, and radically inverted the basic assumptions of phenomenology. It is not the subject that is the condition for the possibility of experience, but rather, *it is experience that constitutes the subject*. Or, instead, it is experience that constitutes the plurality of subjects that inhabit the subject-form. It follows, consequently, that the subject, far from being a universal, transhistorical and foundational being, is but a *changing historical product*, as variable as experience itself may be.

In other words, the subject is always the result of specific *practices of subjectification*, historically situated, which need to be analysed if we wish to know how we came to be what we are. It is on this basis that eventually we can act so as to cease to be who we are, to think differently, to create other things, to feel distinctly, to desire in a different way and establish other values. Things neither have to be necessarily as they are – however difficult it is to imagine that they can be different – nor do we have to be as we are – however difficult it is to discern the very path of a possible alternative -.

## Power

Post-structuralism, above all in its Foucauldian version, distinguishes itself by the incisive re-conceptualisation to which it submits the question of power. According to Foucault, power must not be thought exclusively under the form of the law, the State, political authority, as what constrains our freedom, as what prohibits or sanctions our transgressions. Or rather, power is effectively all of this, but it is not only this. The error we usually make consists in *taking the part for the whole*, by reducing power to a single modality. Foucault does the opposite. He puts into parenthesis power's most visible form, not to say the only form that is clearly visible, and centres his attention on the other diverse and multiple forms of the exercise of power, which were able to develop widely because they hid themselves from our sight.

According to Foucault, power is not a thing, it is not a property, it is not something which characterises specific entities, it is not something which is possessed or owned, but is a *relationship*; it is not something which is in a particular place, clearly located. Power is not something which descends – the traditional image –, power ascends; it is not something which pervades everything from above and which continues to irradiate and penetrate everywhere, controlling everything. Power is created and sprouts forth from all spheres of the social because it is immanent to it.

Through a very complex play of the constitution of an *ensemble of effects*, the distinct forms of power that emerge in different social fields reciprocally feed each other, to converge in large tendencies which initiate ascending movements and contribute to configuring the State and the centres of power.

Thus the form of the State is not independent of the relationships of power which are generated, which are woven, in the social fabric. Power *above* – the State and centres of power – is constituted in part, also, by what comes from *below*. However, from these centres and from the State, the exercise of power also flows and projects itself below, eliminating or, on the contrary, selecting and animating the relations of power that are forged there. It is obvious that to speak of an ascending power does not signify, far from it, that the power of the State is underestimated.

Power not only functions according to the model of the law, it also functions under the model of *the norm* and it is, basically, normalising. While the law is prescriptive, the norm is simply declarative, not only expressing a legitimised knowledge that tells us what *we have* to do, but what it would be *normal* to do. It does not oblige us to be in a specific way, but rather informs us of how the majority of our fellows are; and if, in comparing ourselves with them, it follows that we are not as we ought to be, then we endeavour to eliminate or reduce this difference so as to be *normal*. It is evident that the norm, and the process of normalisation, does not function like the law. The latter always needs a sanctioning mechanism, while the former only requires a prompting mechanism that can push us towards a greater conformity. On the other hand, power is not principally a negative authority which limits and constrains. Power is basically *productive*; it is in part constitutive of desire, freedom and the subject. This means that it is already present in these elements and that there is not, therefore, a possible exteriority to relations of power.

However, if power is a relation and, more precisely, a relation of forces, then, necessarily, where there is power there is also necessarily resistance. Power implies, ineluctably, resistance, for the mere fact that it constitutes itself within a relation of forces between things that are in confrontation. Let us not though celebrate this fact too quickly. This resistance is not in a relation of exteriority with respect to power, it remains within its fabric, it is one of its components and shares with it far more than we usually imagine. Even knowing that it does not represent a

radical alterity to power, it is, for Foucault, a matter of multiplying the lines of resistance as lines of intervention by power are deployed. The resonances and the imbrications between resistances and power mean that there is neither a discourse nor a practice that is intrinsically liberating. This or that discourse, this or that practice, may constitute resistance to power in a specific moment, but not because they are intrinsically emancipating or liberating. We must suspect any discourse that pretends to be intrinsically liberating, for it is with this, precisely, that the danger begins.

I cannot resist including a long quotation from Michel Foucault to conclude these quick annotations on a conception of power that has been adopted by post-structuralism and, to a large extent, by postanarchism. In his last interview, just a few days before dying, Foucault said:

... what we can also observe is that there can be no relations of power unless subjects are free [...] To exercise a relation of power, a certain form of freedom has to be present. This means that in relations of power, there necessarily has to be the possibility of resistance, for if there were no possibility of resistance – a violent type of resistance, resistance as flight, astute resistance, of strategies to change this situation, to modify it –, then there would be no relations of power. Given that this is how I approach the matter, I refuse to answer this question that I am so often asked: “if power is everywhere, then there is no freedom?” [...] If there are relations of power throughout society, it is because there is freedom everywhere.

## Addenda 3. Relativism against absolutism: truth and ethics

For many reasons, relativism merits considerable attention from our part. Firstly, because as it radically rejects some of the more questionable presuppositions of the ideology of the Enlightenment, it displays clear affinities with post-structuralism and postmodernism and consequently finds itself quite close to the kind of thought that inspires postanarchism.

It follows, furthermore, that as relativism undermines, by the same root, the principle of authority and radically questions every absolutist argument, that it is disposed to bring a greater flow of water to the anarchist mill than any other current of philosophy. This is even more so as it proffers tools to anarchism to make evident and neutralise traces of authoritarian principles that modern thought may have left in its midst.

There is still however a third argument for relativism which motivates our particular attention. It has to do with the extraordinary hostility shown towards it and the merciless ostracism to which it has been subject ... “Vade retro Satanás” [“Step back, Satan”] has been, it might be said, the anti-relativist *leitmotiv*. In effect, relativist disqualifications and the blunt *anathemas* directed against relativist positions constitute a historical constant. We find these disqualifications in Plato, when he ridicules Protagoras; and we find it as well in the famous encyclical of John Paul II, published in 1993 and entitled *Veritatis Sponsio*, wherein it is proclaimed that the relativist questioning of truth is one of the worst threats that looms over humanity. A warning that, two days before becoming Benedict XVI, cardinal Ratzinger reaffirmed with vehemence in the homily of the mass *Pro Eligendo Pontifice*. In fact, it is quite frequent to hear conservative voices putting us seriously on guard against the devastating effects which relativism has on the moral values of our civilisation. But it is no less frequent to hear progressive voices proclaim that relativism is dangerous, even for simple peaceful and civilised coexistence, given that it would take us in the end to accept brute force as the ultimate means to settle our differences.

The fears which relativism gives rise to evoke those that *the death of God* caused among people some decades ago: “if God is dead, then all is permitted”, “the law of the jungle will impose itself”, “man will become a wolf to man”, and other nonsense of the same kind. We know that it was precisely *the idea of God* which covered over in fact the masked reign of the law of the jungle and that the abandonment of this idea does not end at an *ethical precipice*, on the contrary. And nor does the death of the truth and the farewell to universal principles lead to ethical catastrophes. It was precisely the respect for the divinity and the invocation of these grand principles that blocked the very possibility of an ethics.

This hostility is perfectly understandable when it comes from religious sectors, given that theistic belief demands *the absolute*, for obvious reasons. Faith may experience moments of doubt and stagger momentarily, but it is not fully itself except in absolute certainty. If one has faith, then God *truly* exists and exists for everyone since the beginning of time and forever; including for those who deny its existence. The relativist is therefore seen as an abominable *unbeliever*, given



that s/he questions, in principle, all universals. Curiously, this same hostility also originates with those who defend that *scientific reason* transcends, necessarily, socio-historical circumstances and that it situates itself in the absolute. To the extent that it questions the universality of scientific reason, the relativist is seen consequently as a dangerous *obscurantist*.

Given this so generalised and intense hostility, relativism is condemned and rejected, more often than not, without even bothering to have a quick look at its arguments. In effect, it is as if since the time of Plato that the issue has been resolved once and for all and that nobody with any sense could do anything but energetically distance themselves from it.

It is a simple question of logic: if, as relativism maintains, truth does not exist, then neither can it be true that the truth does not exist. Therefore, the affirmation “the truth does not exist” is not true; and if it is not, then it is true that “the truth exists” and relativism is consequently false. The argument from self-contradiction deals a mortal blow that seems to bring to a definitive conclusion any discussion.

Nonetheless, instead of reassuring us, it is the very bluntness of the argument of self-refutation that should provoke suspicion. For if things are as clear as they appear to be, if relativism is such a foolish, ridiculous, inconsistent and unsustainable position, as Plato affirmed, it would have been logical for the question of relativism to have been closed at the very moment of its formulation. How can it be explained, then, that rather than passing away, that it has remained alive for centuries, that it has reached our own days and that it has even experienced a spectacular *boom* in the last decades?

It is very easy to show, as we will see further on, that the supposed self-contradiction, into which relativism falls, disappears as soon as we cease to play the game established by the absolutists. This is a game that sets up, as an imperative condition to start a discussion about the truth, that the discussion obey the argumentative rules established by the absolutist conception of truth. It is a matter then of a game that consists in using the criterion that is itself under discussion, namely: the truth, as an argument to settle precisely the discussion about this criterion.

It is evident that if it is demanded of the relativist that s/he affirm the truth of her/his affirmations, s/he cannot but fall into contradiction, given that it is the very criterion of truth that s/he disputes. It cannot be asked of someone who rejects the concept of truth whether what they say is true or false. They should rather be asked what reasons they have for believing that their position is better or what arguments make it more acceptable than another. The relativist only falls into self-contradiction when s/he claims for her/himself what s/he denies for others. However, in that case, not only is the relativist self-contradictory, but s/he also becomes an anti-relativist.

We can also see that, repeating the strategy that consists of enclosing relativism in a spiral of self-contradictions, the absolutists make it affirm that “all points of view are equivalent, and no one view is better or truer than any other”. This assertion would oblige the relativist to place her/himself in the absurd situation of having to present her/his view, immediately admitting that there is no good reason for considering it better than any other point of view and that no one, not even the relativist her/himself, have any motive to prefer it to anything else. Of course, as we will see shortly, relativism does not have to accept anything like the affirmation that there are no points of view which are not preferable to others.

It is because I am fully convinced that relativism provides tools of the highest quality to develop practices of freedom and because it does not appear to me to be correct that a millenarian tradition of disqualification should have succeeded in condemning it without due process, that it seems

to me important to contribute to dissipating some of the errors that surround its image and to advocate here in its favour.

## The ethical question

It is precisely on the terrain of ethics where it is usual to say that relativism constitutes the worst of all possible options. In effect, it is accused, among many other things, of dissolving moral values by affirming that all values are equal; of promoting ethical indifference by sustaining that nothing justifies ethical commitment; and of opening the door to the law of the jungle by allowing for nothing else but the use of force as the final resort to settle disagreements. These three accusations are sufficiently grave to have us ask whether they have any kind of foundation.

However, in the first place, the relativist does not affirm that all ethical options are equivalent and that no one option is better or worse than any other.

What the relativist in fact defends is that any moral option is as good as any other and that all ethical values are strictly equivalent, but only *from the perspective of their ultimate foundation*. It is from the point of view of the common absence of an ultimate foundation that the relativist traces a strict equivalence among all ethical values. It is the case that if the relativist had to turn to the criterion of the foundation or the objectivity of values to establish which are better, that s/he could only abstain from any choice, declaring them all equivalent. Nevertheless, what characterises relativism is precisely the categorical rejection of the criterion of ultimate foundation to discriminate between values. With the result that nothing obliges her/him to affirm that there are no values that are not superior to others.

From the affirmation according to which there are no values that are *objectively* better than others because all of them lack an ultimate foundation, the affirmation cannot be inferred according to which it is not possible to differentiate between values.

Therefore, a relativist can state, without contradiction, that her/his values are *better* than others, that certain *forms of life* are preferable to others and that s/he is eventually prepared to struggle for them. However, in contrast to the absolutist, s/he declares at the same time that these values which s/he assumes as *better* lack any ultimate foundation, being, in this respect, *equivalent* to any other value.

In contrast to the absolutist, a relativist cannot argue against a Nazi on the basis that the values that the latter defends are *objectively* reprehensible or that the practices that this same approves of transgress unquestionable moral norms. S/he can only counter her/his own values and present the reasons that s/he has to defend them, but without claiming a privileged status for them against those who question them.

With regards to the second accusation, relativism in fact does not defend that nothing can justify ethical commitment and that it is all the same whether one sets out to defend certain ideas or remains quietly at home watching a soap opera.

For what reason would we be only justified in defending our values, on the condition that they be assumed to be absolute and universal? To affirm that these depend on us, that they are relative to our practices and our decisions, is to assume that they stand only by the activity that we deploy to defend them. In the absence of any transcendent principle to establish the hierarchy of values, to make a determined normative choice obliges the person who makes it to defend the choice with all possible vigour, given that s/he knows that *it rests upon nothing more than the defence*,

*argumentative or of another kind, that is capable of unfolding it*, and that the full responsibility for the choice made falls entirely upon her/him.

It is precisely because s/he does not feel her/himself pushed by any imperative necessity in the choice of her/his normative commitments that the relativist is far from, if not to say at the opposite pole of, a supposed moral indifference.

It is when values are postulated as absolute, it is when they *depend on nothing* and, above all, when they do not depend on ourselves, that then defending them becomes secondary. In forming part of an order which is not susceptible to change, for in such a case, it would not be absolute, then its adoption simply testifies that *we submit* to the imperatives traced by the straight path of the *Good* and of *Truth*. To accept a system of values which, in not depending on ourselves, only offers us the possibility of acceptance, leads to the abandonment of any critical thought and to the renunciation of any attempt to exercise our freedom.

Inhibition and de-mobilisation result when it is believed, as the absolutist does, that values *exist* anyway and that, to the extent that they are *objective*, they will exist *in secula seculorum*; whether we do anything for this to be the case, or not. It is precisely when one believes in the transcendence of values when it becomes secondary and dispensable to defend them or not. Furthermore, good conscious, the tranquility of the spirit and the absence of any trace of doubt, constitute the legacy of someone who knows that when they act according to the *Moral law*, that they do not have to give an account of their actions because these do not refer to one's responsibility, but to what has been dictated by authorities which surpass her/him and which do not depend on her/him.

Accordingly, for example, no absolute moral imperative obliges us to struggle against privileges and injustices. It concerns a decision that is taken or not, influenced by circumstances. As with an absolutist, a relativist can take this decision or not, but if s/he takes it, then s/he cannot find encouragement in the idea that s/he is supported by universal principles which indicate the path to the *Good* and the *Truth*. S/he will limit her/himself to saying that this struggle constitutes *her/his* particular option and will try to argue in defence of this option without appealing to *anything* that transcends it.

The third reproach against relativism is that it opens the path to the law of the jungle. However, it still has to be seen if relativism appeals to force as the final argument to resolve differences.

The answer is *yes*. When all of the arguments are exhausted, nothing remains but relations of force. The relativist nevertheless asks: what is the difference that separates her/him from the absolutist, on this point?

And the response is ... that *there is not the least difference*.

In effect, even though the absolutist presents her/his own position as what permits the use of force to be avoided, s/he cannot hide that s/he also resorts to it as the ultimate argument to settle the differences with those who do not assume her/his rules of play and *refuse to be reasonable*. However, they do this furthermore with the aggravating circumstance which consists in stigmatising the victim of this violence.

To the extent that, as the absolutist contends, ethical criteria do not depend on our decisions and possess an *objective* value, it is obvious that to not accept these criteria can only be a mistake or a demonstration of irrationality. If we reject what has been *objectively* established as *morally* good, it is because we are in no way normal, because we are perverse. This *perversion* excludes us from the treatment that other members of the community of rational beings deserve and dictates the use of force, given that we are impervious to reason. The case of the Inquisition is particularly

exemplary. The violence is that much more intense when it is not only physical. Beyond questioning the rationality of those who do not share their system of values, the absolutists, sheltered by the *objectivity* of their values to the point that all rational beings should assume them, exclude from the human community those who question these values.

In the end, to defend their values or their *form of life*, the relativist, as much as the absolutist, have recourse to the use of force when all of the arguments are exhausted. However, the radical difference lies in the fact that the absolutist feels *fully justified* to do so and that this violence is not her/his responsibility, as she/he limits her/himself to being the docile instrument of the *Good* and of *Reason*.

If in relation to the question of ethics and moral values the opposition between relativism and absolutism is radical, it is no less intense as regards the question of truth.

## The question of truth

Let us recall that the relativist does not say that “the truth does not exist”, still less that “it is true that the truth does not exist”, which would obviously be self-contradictory. S/he only says that the only thing which can be affirmed from the perspective of our way of thinking is that the truth “is”, but that it is “conditioned”; that is, that it always depends on a certain marker or context.

No one, including the relativist, puts into question that, within a specific context, certain beliefs should be accepted as *true-in-that-context*. What the relativist rejects is that *the truth* constitutes a property which, for reasons of principle, transcends *any context*. This attitude represents a serious threat to two fundamental beliefs which the absolutists consider indispensable: the belief in the *universal* nature of truth and in its *objective* character.

Universalism affirms that true beliefs are so “at all times, in all contexts and for all human beings”. The reference to *all times* means that nothing which occurs in the future can alter the truth of a proposition, if it is really *true*. The relativist sees no rational argument which can permit making wagers of this sort about the future and considers them the expression of a mere act of faith. As for the reference to *all contexts*, the relativist asks how anyone can come to know which contexts there are in *all* contexts. And as regards the reference to *all human beings*, the relativist is not only disposed to admit that *certain* truths hold effectively for all human beings, but sees in this fact a confirmation of her/his own point of view.

To the extent that all human beings share common characteristics – for example, of a biological type –, it is not surprising then that certain truths hold for everyone. However, this precisely redounds to the idea that truth is relative to a determined marker which, in this case, are human characteristics. If these characteristics were different, there would continue to be valid truths for all human beings; but because the *context* would be different, these truths would be distinct from those currently held (to offer an example, it could be true that pure hydrochloric acid was good for our skin).

The second basic belief threatened by relativism is *objectivism*. That is, the belief that the truth is independent of the procedures which establish it or of any characteristic of who establishes it. According to *objectivism*, a belief is *true* if it transcends the particular point of view from which it was formulated, if it is abstracted from the marker within which it was produced, and if it is not affected by the location of who enunciated it. This signifies that it is true if it expresses, therefore,

a point of view *from nowhere*, that is, a generic location without qualities. As the relativist cannot see how it is possible to accede to something in complete independence from how it is acceded to, neither can s/he see any meaning in *objectivism*, unless s/he accepts the hypothesis that there exists a place that corresponds the *point of view of God* and that we can put ourselves in this precise place.

The effort deployed by the absolutists to demonstrate the inanity of relativism does not limit itself to signaling its dangers for reason and putting into doubt its logical consistency. This effort also seeks to show the inconsistency of relativism in daily life, given that the relativist would be obliged to deny in practice what s/he proclaims in theory. In effect, however much the relativist attacks truth in theory, it is easy to verify that this contradicts what s/he does in practice. It is obvious that in her/his daily life, that the relativist has no remedy but to permanently invoke the criterion of truth, to employ profusely the *true/false* dichotomy and assume, firmly, the true character of a very ample ensemble of beliefs.

To be able to live, an individual has to believe in the existence of truth. Those human beings who would be incapable of distinguishing between true and false beliefs would extinguish themselves immediately, if they were abandoned to their own fate. This does not mean that human beings have no false beliefs, but it does imply that the majority of our beliefs must be true and that we have to discern them as such to be able to develop in the world. In other words, the use of the *true/false* dichotomy constitutes one of the conditions for the possibility of our experience and it forms an integral part of the conditions for the possibility of our very existence.

Whether we defend a relativist position or not, it is true that if we put our hand in the fire we burn ourselves, that certain plants are toxic and others comestible; it is true that the extermination camps existed, that  $2+2=4$ , that gender, racial, class, etc. discrimination exist; it is true that we cannot do without the concept of the *truth*, and it is true that to deny the truth of all of this is properly untenable. There is therefore a contradiction between what the relativist affirms theoretically and what he does in practice.

A contradiction between theory and practice would in effect be produced if the relativist rejected the concept of truth on the level of theory, but s/he does not do so. Relativism does not intend to *abandon* the concept of truth, but only to give it a *new meaning*, distancing it from its absolutist conceptualisation and marking it pragmatically. What the relativist questions is not the pragmatic value of the belief in truth, but the philosophical presuppositions assumed by the absolutist in this belief.

The usefulness that the fact of believing in the truth represents is in no way put into doubt by the relativist. However, we cannot but remember that *usefulness as a value* presupposes nothing more than this, and that no *logical bridge* exists which allows us to move from *utility* to *truth*. That something is useful does not imply that it is true. Consequently, that we appeal in our daily life to an absolutist conception of truth tells us nothing about the true or false character of this conception.

For example, we all use the truth in the sense of *correspondence*, when we agree that “a statement about certain facts is true, if the facts are effectively as the statement says that they are”. This way of using the truth is undoubtedly tremendously useful for our manner of relating to the world and, also, of dialoguing with others. Today, however, we all know that the correspondence notion of truth is logically and conceptually untenable, despite its doubtless utility.

When s/he plays a game of chess, the relativist assumes an ensemble of rules: s/he assumes, for example, that the proposition according to which the bishop can only move diagonally is true

and that to accept it is part of the very possibility of playing chess. There is though no need to accept *anything further*, there is no need to accept that there is something like an *essence* of the game of chess or that there is something like a place where, independently of our decisions, the rules of chess are located.

The same occurs with the semantic rules of the absolutist type that govern the use of the true/false dichotomy. We have to assume these rules, to assure our existence; nevertheless, we do not have to commit ourselves to anything more than the unquestionable pragmatic value that the correct application of these rules has. Utility and truth are terms that refer to distinct conceptual fields; true and useful are predicates which do not function in the same semantic fields. The pragmatic value of truth only has value of course within the context of a specific *form of life* and for *the kind of being that we are*.

The relativist therefore defends a pragmatic conception of truth and recognises, furthermore, that in ordinary language the semantics of truth is of an absolutist kind, given that it fully assumes universalism and objectivism. Whether we wish it or not, absolutist type truth forms part of our use of the concept of truth in everyday life. This is comprehensible if we accept with Ludwig Wittgenstein that the grammar which governs any language must have a pragmatic value, that is, it must be such that it allows us to develop ourselves in the world. Language is in effect one of the principal tools elaborated by the human being to settle himself adequately within the surrounding world. But for this tool to have been effective, it had to connect to, join with, the characteristics of the world and, so to speak, these latter had to slowly inscribe themselves in our *grammar*. Accordingly, it is utility which presents the true/false distinction so that we could adapt to the world, the world as it would come to be reflected in our semantics of truth.

In the same way that our place in the world presupposes the existence of truth defined in absolute terms, the relation that we maintain with our fellows presents the same demands. However, this does not have to co-validate the absolutist conception of truth.

We cannot in effect *generate meaning*, if not within the setting of conventions and shared practices with our fellows, within a specific culture. Without this exchange and without this common background, communication would be totally impossible. In the same way that one cannot play chess without defining a certain number of rules valid for all players, neither can one communicate or exchange except in the context of a *game of rules* which constrains the acceptability of statements, thus impeding arbitrariness. The fact of admitting, as the relativist does, that these rules are purely conventional does not excuse us from following them if we intend to *play*, that is, in this case, to dialogue and to give meaning.

That the truth depends on our conventions does not mean that we can adopt this or that convention, according to our taste, because our practices and conventions are constrained by our characteristics, by our history and by the demands of life in common, especially those that concern communication. We are not authorised therefore to decide arbitrarily whatever we please to affirm as true. We cannot decide, for example, that a glass of sulfuric acid is good for our health, in the same way that we cannot decide that the extermination camps did not exist, because it was *so decided*. This would be to exclude oneself from any possibility of debate. If one intends to communicate with others, then arguments are necessary and the rules of argumentation have to be respected. To restore truth to our practices, to our conventions and to our characteristics does not mean to remit it to our free will. Relativism does not open the path to arbitrariness. Rather, it most certainly closes access to *arguments from authority* and demands that whatever is affirmed, including the existence of extermination camps, that it be argued for from within the

framework of conventions made explicit as possible. Just as considering truth in absolute terms was renounced, so it is necessary to define as precisely as possible the conditions in which this or that affirmation will be admitted as true, and this of course does not tolerate any exception.

In conclusion, relativism – which is only self-contradictory if it is evaluated according to the criteria *against which it constitutes itself* – does not end at any ethical precipice and does not lead to any political inhibition. On the contrary, it demands a commitment as combative as if it had opted for a specific normative position. In like manner, relativism does not disarm us before choices made and it does not render debate futile, but rather the opposite, given that it makes us responsible for our choices and forces us to defend them, arguing for them. In fact, it seems that ultimately all of the false complaints made against relativism cannot forgive what is most fundamental to it, namely, *a mortal blow dealt to the very principle of authority*. The existence of *Absolute Truths* and *Universal Values* bestows on whoever has them in their possession the right and, even, the moral obligation to vanquish whoever moves away from these truths and these values. In rising up against these absolutes, relativism finishes in a certain way the enterprise undertaken by the Enlightenment; and it is no longer just God, but its *doubles* as well, that see themselves expelled from human affairs.

Finally, I want to call attention to the fact, certainly clearly evident, that our relationship to the world is not exclusively, nor primarily, a relationship of knowledge, but that it is also a relationship of action, of encounters, of sensations, of experiences and sentiments. It is certain that Plato contributed in an important way to privileging the *will to know* and to prioritising the *search for truth* above the remaining human practices. We however do not have to follow his footsteps. We can also question the privilege conceded to truth and prioritise an *ethics and an aesthetics of existence*, in the sense of constructing the possibility that all of us be able to create a beautiful life and one worthy of being lived.

It is obvious that for absolutism, *the Truth* offers no doubt. It is resplendent, brilliant, hard, unmistakable and overwhelming. Its edges appear clear, cutting and they offer themselves to us in terms of *all or nothing*: *half-truths* were never *the Truth*. Truth is not negotiable, it holds for everyone and it holds for ever. Universal, atemporal, absolute, it is indisputable, it imposes itself. We can look away from it, refuse to recognise it, but the truth will continue to be the truth above our decisions. No posterior evidence can change it and, should it change the truth, it is because it was not really true, it only seemed to be. The truth is either absolute or it is not the truth, and when we find it and proclaim it, we are appropriating time and dominating the future; that is, denying it. The future can only show that a truth was not true, but if it is, nothing can go against it. The *will to Truth* is, directly, a *will to Power* that seeks, furthermore, to legislate for eternity. From this perspective, it constitutes a danger and a weakening of our freedom.

The truth is an epistemological question, the construction of the way of life that deserves to be lived is an ethical question. Between ethics and epistemology, the choice, as a significant part of anarchism saw with clarity, offers no doubts, because to decide *how we want to be* is considerably more important than asking ourselves about, what can we know?

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