Post-foundational Anarchism

Tomás Ibáñez

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Forty years later, that is, this same year of 2022, the philosopher Catherine Malabou has gathered in the book that I mentioned above, the contributions around the concept of ontological anarchy of five important contemporary thinkers, starting with Reiner Schürmann himself, and continuing with Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière.

We could well think that at this time the most pertinent thing is to limit ourselves to the first kind of post-foundational anarchism, and simply worry, which is already a great deal, about renewing anarchism.

It is true that it is urgent to advance in this task. However, that does not mean that it is not also worthwhile to reflect on ontological anarchy, because, in addition to contributing to the renewal of the many anarchisms, it also helps to prevent them from reproducing, in their own development, the domination they struggle against, thereby rendering that struggle vain.

And I would still like to make one last precision. The fact of typifying a post-foundational anarchism is not intended to add one more adjective to an anarchism that I like more "without adjectives", nor to encourage the constitution of a new current in the vast field of anarchism; yet another one. The denomination matters little and it would seem very good to me that there would be no more talk of post-foundational anarchism if that expression served as the seed for a new current, because the important thing here is not the denomination but to contribute elements of reflection that may contribute in such a way that at least a part of anarchism accentuates as much as possible its post-foundational disposition.

Introduction

From the date of his first publication, in 1962, to the present, Tomáz Ibáñez has engaged with anarchism with a depth, sensitivity and generosity matched by few of his contemporaries. To walk through this work is to discover a complex path, like the weave of a rope. But like a rope, held together by a seemingly small set of intuitions or ideas, or perhaps even a method, that Ibáñez continually returns to, not repetitively, but as with an expanding musical refrain, turning ever again on itself, simultaneously changing and clarifying its first steps and the next.

This is a body of work that can in no way be read as "pure theory", whatever that might mean. Ibáñez's written reflections bare the traces of a "militancy" that has always marked his life, from a childhood exile to France because of his mother's anarchist affinities, to his early participation in French and exiled Spanish anarchist youth and student groups, to May 68, to his return to Spain after Franco's death in 1975, joining the effort to reconstruct the CNT, and the less than negligible work in various anarchist magazines and newspapers.

The seemingly esoteric or more philosophical nature of many of Ibáñez essays are both the herald and the artisan of that very same militancy.

One of the first essays posted on Autonomies was Ibáñez's 1984 essay, *Farewell to the Revolution*. This early essay not only remains relevant, but in hindsight and now read in the light of the essay that we share with this post, already points to Ibáñez's concern with an anarchism freed from dogma, or more profoundly, an anarchism without the comforting conceptual and political ballast of a past that is no longer ours, and cannot be so.

Post-Foundational Anarchism[1]

At the moment of trying to discover the common thread that unites the texts that I have been publishing in the libertarian field for more than 60 years and to define the general framework in which they can be situated, I have found myself before the problem that these texts refer to something that simply does not exist.

That thing that does not exist and about which I am going to dare to write is post-foundational anarchism.

In order not to fall into a subject that has become fashionable, I am not going to declare that the concept is an empty signifier, no, but it is true that you are not going to find it anywhere. There is no anarchist current that defines itself as such, and there is not even a single text, not a single text, that alludes to that denomination. It is as if anarchism, on the one hand, and post-foundational, on the other, had never met, had never coincided in the same sentence, while in the field of post-Marxism, frequent use is made of the concept.

Now, it is a curious non-existence, because it is quite true that post-foundational anarchism does not exist and, nevertheless, a good part of contemporary anarchism has characteristics that place it squarely in that orientation, especially if one considers its younger element.

In fact, I understand that we can divide post-foundational anarchism into two different kinds.

A first kind refers to an anarchism that has become detached from, that has thrown overboard, the foundations provided by the metaphysics of the time in which it was forged, that is, the modern age.

However, contrary to Aristotle's affirmation, and to what metaphysics has repeated to us for over more than 2000 years, it turns out that, far from making any society impossible, what truly makes *an-arkhé*, ontological anarchy, is placing life and its full creativity at the centre of human existence.

Indeed, in the absence of any foundational principle, human praxis can only be based on itself, and this means that the principles, principles that continue to be essential to act and think, can now only come from the situations and practices of daily life itself, and not from the realm of theory, not from any fixed and unitary metaphysics that oversees practice, dictating its course. The result is that these principles are as multiple as the very multiplicity of the situations concretely experienced. This descent from the heavens of theory to the concrete practices of everyday life implies, and this is very important, that in order to think in another way it is necessary to live in another way, in the same way that living in another way makes it possible to think in another way.

The commitment to wake up from the frozen metaphysical dream and to let emerge the multiplicity that it captured, evokes the magnificent verse of the poet René Char, who speaks to us about: "That part never fixed, asleep in us, from which will spring tomorrow the manifold."[3]

That verse is cited in Reiner Schürmann's book, *Heidegger On Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*.[4] And since I mention this philosopher, I would like to point out that the philosophical interest in ontological anarchy is largely due to his ingenuity when he undertook to read the work of Heidegger, from its beginnings to its end, publishing this labour in the above mentioned indispensable essay in 1982.

[3] "Cette part jamais fixée, en nous sommeillante, d'où jaillira demain le multiple." René Char, *Tansir*.

[4] Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger On Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 43. Translated by Julius Gavroche

sity, the imperative necessity, of a first principle, the *arche*, which brings together in the same concept the ideas of, on the one hand, beginning, origin, and, on the other hand, command, that is, authority, power.

And it is postulated that what comes first, what precedes, has the privilege of subordinating and determining what follows, just as causes precede and determine effects, or that the solidity of the base on which a building is constructed is a condition of its own strength.

And let us also remember that the antonym of the *arche* is, precisely, *an-arche*, anarchy, the absence of a principle that establishes a chain of command, a hierarchy. It is an anarchy which refers to no specific political creed, that is, to any particular entity, but defines the essence of a type of being, and for this reason it is qualified as ontological, ontological anarchy, thereby differentiating it from political anarchism.

What the *arche* accomplishes, as the first hegemonic and foundational principle, is to put under its control, and, therefore, to fix and neutralise, the multiplicity proper to a human being who is naturally anarchic when they come into the world. We are all born without an *arche*, we are born *an-arche-ists*... anarchists...

This naturally anarchic condition of the human being presupposes that it does not have a predetermined nature, a supposed human nature always identical to itself in its essence, but rather that it is an indeterminate being, a network of multiple possibilities that only become unitary, losing its original character of open multiplicity, when an *arche* appears and imposes itself, a principle that, by the fact of being first, determines, commands and hierarchises.

It is this first principle that would protect us from the enormous danger that, according to Aristotle, *an-arkhé*, ontological anarchy, would represent for any society, because the absence of an *arkhè* would unleash the uncontrollable and ungovernable proliferation of that multiple that only the *arkhè* is capable of reducing to unity.

The second kind refers to an anarchism that would escape, not only from the epochal principles of modernity, but also from the very logic of metaphysics.

The first kind of post-foundational anarchism belongs to the beginning of this 21st century, while the second kind would eventually take shape in the second half of the 21st century, provided that, hypothetically, metaphysics were then supplanted by the heights of a technology that would finally be under the absolute control of our world.

I will dedicate very little time to this second type because its eventuality is so eventually final, and it remains so far away in time, that it is best to be prudent and not venture too far.

Well, there is something that seems obvious to me; it is obvious that for the concept of a post-foundational anarchism to make sense, there must be a foundational anarchism, otherwise there would be no reason for any "post". Therefore, the question: Is anarchism, existing anarchism, effectively of a foundational type?

The answer is not easy, it is not easy at all, because anarchism is so extraordinarily diverse that, as we well know, instead of talking about anarchism, the most appropriate thing is to talk about anarchisms. It would then always be possible to refer to some anarchism that cannot be described as foundational, for example, perhaps that of Max Stirner in the mid-19th century, which might perhaps deserve the epithet of post-foundational *avant la lettre*.

Despite this difficulty, I believe it is quite reasonable to consider that the anarchisms that make up classical anarchism harbour some principles that are typical of modernity, and that therefore respond to a certain foundational logic.

In fact, if we stop to think about it, it is the opposite that would be quite disconcerting, because being a fully historical reality, like everything that is born of human activity, embedded in a certain era and immersed in the principles that govern it, anarchism not only owes many of its characteristics to the struggles developed during the second industrial revolution, from 1860 onwards, some-

thing that nobody questions, but also, being immersed in the prevailing metaphysics of that time, it was more than likely pervaded by some of its elements.

Although it is true that in each era, metaphysics contributes to constituting the gaze, the vantage point, of those who inhabit it, it is also true that it creates, at the same time, the blind spot of that perspective, since each epochal metaphysics remains practically invisible while its era is fully in force, and it only emerges when it enters into decline.

The existence of this blind spot makes it impossible to reproach the militants of classical anarchism for not having seen what they could not possibly or willingly see, that is, that their thought reproduced some of the principles of modernity. This absence of reproaches however does not deliver classical anarchism from all criticism.

A criticism that, by the way, does not have to resort to dismissive insult, and can be carried out with the greatest respect, accompanied, as in my case, by a clear admiration.

Indeed, as a war machine against the domination typical of the time in which it was constituted, this anarchism was an apparatus of struggle quite appropriate for its time, although inevitably marked by what it opposed. It was precisely because it was not external, was not foreign, was not radically other to what it confronted, that it was in a position to be able to face it.

That anarchism then constituted a very useful key to open doors of emancipation, but... as we well know, all keys become useless when the locks are changed.

The fact that the epochal determinations of classical anarchism are currently emerging more clearly indicates that it speaks to us from a place and from a time that are no longer ours, so what is required is an *aggiornamento*, its renewal, thereby unlocking anarchism from its modern bindings.

Renewing anarchism is all the more necessary since its modern ties weigh it down considerably.

power and anarchism, it is necessary to build an ethic of permanent revolt, an ethic that promotes, in turn, the development of an art of not being governed.

This art of not being governed defines a way of being in the world, where the subject is constantly confronted with power, and where it struggles to be ungovernable.

Being ungovernable is a condition as difficult as it is enviable. I would like to be ungovernable! However, as enviable as it may be, that condition still does not attain to the condition of not being governed, as Catherine Malabou explains in her recent book of 2022, *Au voleur! Anarchism et Philosophie.*[2]

Indeed, if the ungovernable refers to an ethic of permanent revolt, not being governed refers, for its part, to what is radically alien, strange, to control and to obedience. It is, if you will, "the other" of command and obedience, which cannot be governed, under any circumstances, in any way.

The non-governable can only be dominated, forced, imprisoned, destroyed, but never governed, because that condition, being governed, is not part of its way of being and its possibilities.

Unfortunately, to become non-ungovernable is, for the time being, a pure desire, a pure desire that remains in search of an unknown mode of realisation, and a great deal of reflection, as well as other not necessarily reflexive practices, will still be necessary to find a solution... if there is one.

Paths of uncertainty and incitement to continue reflection are also opened up when the second kind of post-foundational anarchism is approached, the one that distances itself not only from the metaphysics of modernity, but also from the foundations of metaphysics itself.

Let us do a bit of philosophy, let us recall that it was Aristotle who gave impetus to our metaphysical era, instituting the necessity

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[2] Catherina Malabou, *Au voleur! Anarchisme et philosophie.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2022.

They weigh it down, in the first place, because anarchism is not only a struggle against domination, which it is, and against all its forms, but because it is also – and this is very important because it distinguishes it from other political orientations – , moreover, a demand, and an ethical demand, not to reproduce, not to engender, in the very process of its struggle, that very thing against which it is struggling.

And, these same ties also weigh it down, secondly, because anarchism is not only negation, opposition, and antagonism. It is also the construction of concrete alternatives that obey principles other than those of domination.

And it turns out that it is impossible to satisfy these two demands if one participates, a little or extensively, in a metaphysics that, whatever its emancipatory contents, which it undoubtedly has, also manifests aspects that are burdened with a certain potential for domination.

So in order to detect the traces left by the metaphysics of modernity, it is necessary to deconstruct classical anarchism. This is a process that is being carried out by a group of thinkers and militants, anarchists, mostly Anglophones, such as, for example, Todd May, Saul Newman, or Jason Adams, who take their concepts from post-structuralist theories.

Parallel to this deconstruction, many young anarchist groups have developed practices that unveil, without any intention to do so, some epochal inertia that haunts classical anarchism.

Now, deconstructing classical anarchism does not mean to set out in search of an authentic anarchism in the face of a defective or deficient anarchism. It is only about detecting what within anarchism that has ceased to be relevant in the current context.

This purpose marks a difference with post-anarchism, even though it is obvious that there are multiple similarities between both approaches due to their mutual link with post-structuralism, and because it is true that post-foundational anarchism drinks abundantly from post-anarchism. I believe, however, that the

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In fact, that game is much more complex, and mobilises the strange and paradoxical concept of a symbiotic antagonism, a symbiotic antagonism where power and freedom are antagonistic, of course, but at the same time, mutually dependent.

If there is power, it is because there is freedom. Power relations cannot occur where subjects completely lack freedom, because if subjects cannot choose between different behaviours, no exercise of power is necessary for them to do the only thing they can do. This argument is also valid for the antecedent stages, for example, for the immediately preceding stage in which power establishes *the range of possible options*, because if that range is null, no exercise of power is required to determine it, restricting, for example, the options between which the subject can choose, and so on at each step in a long regressive sequence.

So if there is power, it is because there is freedom, no matter how minimal, and, conversely, if there is freedom it is precisely because there is power, something that fits with even greater difficulty into the coordinates of classical anarchism. However, freedom does not exist outside of power relations, it is not an ethereal abstraction. It is rather something that is formed in concrete situations against what is opposed to it. It is in the resistance to power that freedom is constituted and unfolds.

Thinking in a new way about the problem of power involves placing resistance at the heart of that problem, and if it is true, as Michel Foucault explains so well, that where there is power there is also resistance, then the union between power and resistance turns out to be intrinsic; both elements are inextricable.

Resistance is not "the other" of power, it belongs to the same framework in which power acts and is situated, and since anarchism is forged precisely within the practices of resistance, anarchism is also not "the other" of power.

Classical anarchism was mistaken in thinking that because it confronted power, that it was external to it. However, as it is not, as there is, through resistance, an internal relationship between

builders of post-anarchism committed the discursive error of qualifying their proposal in terms of *post-anarchism*, which suggested the idea of ??replacing anarchism with "something else" and that this would completely relegate anarchism to the past. This discursive error centred the debate on the supplanting of anarchism, diverting the discussion from substantive issues and forcing a good part of the theoretical efforts undertaken to confronting an understandable self-defence reaction from a great many anarchists.

In line with the purpose that I mentioned above and that introduces a difference with post-anarchism, I will limit myself to evoking two of the various aspects of modernity that have a certain presence in inherited anarchism, then go on to develop a third aspect that seems to me fundamental because it concerns a key theme of anarchism.

The first aspect is constituted by the totalising perspective that classical anarchism has imported from modernity, and that drives it to formulate organisational proposals for the whole of society, be it federalism, libertarian communism, collectivism, etc.

This totalising perspective feeds the idea of ??a revolution that would affect the whole of society, rendering possible a global reorganisation.

Unlike that perspective, by refraining from advocating any organisational model that has a global scope, and by moving away from the classic revolutionary imaginary, post-foundational anarchism ceases to be strategic, occupied with global approaches, to become tactical, conscious of the partial and limited character of its struggles, as well as of the singular and necessarily multiform character of some libertarian achievements that, like their struggles, can only be local and plural if they do not want to cease being libertarian.

The second aspect refers to the modern belief in the centrality of a subject that would be autonomous, sovereign, self-aware, trans-parent to itself and guided by reason... if it were not alienated and oppressed.

That belief, typical of enlightened humanism, has foundered, dragging with it the project of emancipating the subject.

That project did not realise, as classical anarchism did not, that it makes no sense to try to emancipate what is already constituted by the very thing from which it is intended to be emancipated.

Now, taking this fact into account does not annul the idea of ??emancipation, but it does redirect it towards a process of self-creation of the subject, through practices of de-subjectivisation, rather than trying to liberate what is supposedly natural, that is, the supposed true subject, which would lie beneath oppression and alienation.

The third aspect concerns the problem of power. It is quite true that, unlike the deterministic economism of Marx, the great success of anarchism consists in having proclaimed, and proclaimed very loudly, the importance of power, and of the struggle against it.

Now, it is also true that classical anarchism participates in a conception of power that has already expired; a conception that defined power as uniform, monolithic, invariant, basically repressive throughout history, because that would be its essence.

However, it is well known, notoriously so, that in the 60s/70s of the last century a new conception pointed to the productive, immanent, polymorphous, and historically changing character of power relations that are consubstantial with social life itself and that are born from it.

Of course, this new analysis does not dispense with the need to fight against power, but it does summon anarchism to rethink its own conception.

For example, contrary to what it presupposed, the game of relations between power and freedom is not reduced to a relationship of reciprocal exclusion in which power constrains freedom, while freedom would be the antithesis of power.