After Post-Anarchism

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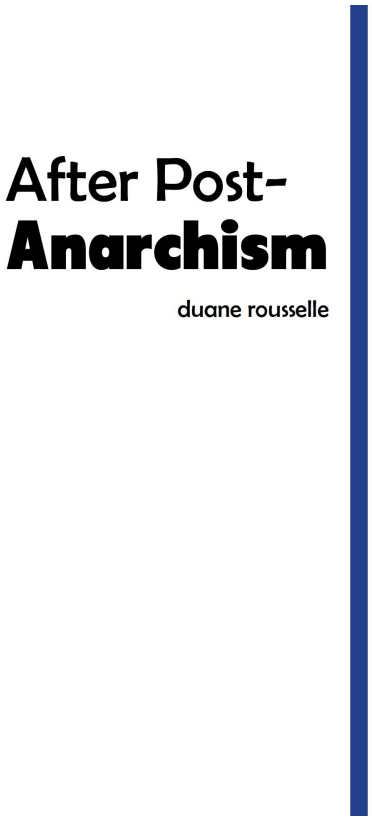

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For Soren,
who taught me the value of a leap.

"What we are dealing with here is another version of the Lacanian '*il n'y a pas de rapport':* if, for Lacan, there is no sexual relationship, then, for Marxism proper, there is *no relationship between economy and politics,* no meta-language enabling us to grasp the two levels from the same neutral standpoint, although—or, rather, *because*—these two levels are inextricably intertwined."

— Slavoj Zizek

Afterword

Children from around the ages of five through seven are believed to have already acquired an understanding of the social norms surrounding sexuality. Immediately following this period of development, the child separates himself ever more from the object of his affection. It is by separating from the object that the child permits the introduction of a gap between himself and the affectively charged object. But it is not the gap that satisfies the child. It is that which fills this gap: a fantasy of connection. The child knows very well that the fantasy of connection offers a much safer encounter with the object than the real connection itself, he understands that the best way to achieve a harmonious and sustained encounter with the object of his affection is to first of all inject the appropriate distance. The game of separation is played similarly across the whole domain of human affairs: separation begets harmony, harmony begets divorce, and divorce begets the quest for a new object of affection. The child separates to fantasize about the object of his affection, the child becomes dissatisfied with the object which no longer measures up to his fantasy, and, finally, the child founds a new object of affection.

When the object of one's affection is the mother, and when the father imposes the injunction 'No!', the child wisely accepts the mediation of language. Better to accept language than to risk a premature fight-to-the-death with the father over the mother. There may even be a heroic act in the child's injection of this distance. Let me provide an example: I do not enjoy having telephone conversations with my grandmother, and I am certain that she does not enjoy having telephone conversations with me. I should want to spare my grandmother's feelings of guilt for not wanting to talk on the telephone with me, and I should do so in such a way that she still does not have to actually talk with me. After many years of awkward telephone conversations, I believe that I have solved our problem: I have stopped making calls to her. This permits her to blame me, rather than herself, for not continuing the conversation, and it relieves her of the need to feel guilt for not calling me. This is how politics must sometimes be played. Sometimes sustaining the precious fantasies of traditional anarchist thought requires that an anarchist disciple divorce himself from orthodoxy to usher in a new edifice. The courage involved in such an act is thus that the ostensibly sectarian anarchist permits the grandmothers of anarchist philosophy (whom he otherwise loves dearly and truly) to blame him for not answering the call.

We can also describe this process in the language of rudimentary set theory. What we learn as children, and all too quickly forget as adults, is that conjunctive operations are best followed by exclusive disjunctions and that exclusive disjunctions are in turn best followed by displacements or the discovery of the previously invisible 'superset'. Slavoj Zizek discovers a similar logic in the acceptance of a new theory:

> [F]irst, [the new theory] is dismissed as nonsense; then, someone claims that the new theory, although not without its merits, ultimately just puts into new words things already said elsewhere; finally, the new theory is recognized in its novelty (Zizek, 2008: 2).

This is the path that critics of post-anarchism have adopted over the years: first, post-anarchism was dismissed as obscurantism, non-sensical, academicism, jargon-laden, and so on; next, Jesse Cohn & Shawn Wilbur, among others, claimed that post-anarchism was not without its merits but ultimately just put into new words what was already said by the classical anarchists themselves; finally, post-anarchism is tolerated and both sides have accepted their loses. The final stage has not been a divorce of post-anarchism from classical anarchism in order to usher in a new edifice but precisely the reverse: there has been a consolidation or marriage of the two terms. In other words, it is now obvious that post-anarchism has passed through two of these major phases in the development of its theory over the last three decades. First, post-anarchism was defined as an attack on the representative ontologies of classical anarchism. Second, post-anarchism was defined as a re-reading of the traditional anarchists to reveal their quintessential post-structuralist nuances—always *avant la lettre*. It seems to me that the second stage has ushered in a marriage of sorts between traditionalist anarchists and postanarchists whereby the two sides have cut their losses and accepted that (a) anarchism was always already post-anarchism, and (b) post-anarchism has itself always been a form of anarchism.

Viewed in this way, we may say that post-anarchism functioned as a 'vanishing mediator' between an old and a new version of anarchism. Vanishing mediators occur between two periods of stasis; as Fredric Jameson has argued, the protestant work ethic (as 'vanishing mediator') allowed for a transition from feudalism toward capitalism. Similarly, post-anarchism allows for the transition from a particular framing of anarchism toward another particular framing of anarchism. Post-anarchism continues to be used as a description for a particular type of anarchist project insofar as that project can not be satisfied by recourse to tradition. In this case, I am more inclined to describe post-anarchism as a '*displaced* mediator' that can be revived at a moment's notice to reconfigure the normal anarchist discourse. *After Post-anarchism* is an attempt to latch back onto the displaced mediator and explore its potential in the emerging stasis of post-anarchist theory. The new terrain is defined by a certain reconciliation between what currently counts as postanarchism, particularly in the Anglophone academic scene, and what counts as *traditional* anarchism. *After* post-anarchism the marriage and along with it both sides of the debate are displaced to make room for something new. I have no pretensions about this 'something new': it will become clear that what I call new is nothing other than the exposition of a shared alliance, secret as it may once have been, between what currently counts as post-anarchism and what today is understood as ontology.

The coming displacement can be summed up in the joke about the philosophy professor who recently got married. The professor was confronted by one of his students: 'Professor!, I need to tell you something immediately!' The professor paused, looked at his wife for a moment, and then responded to the student: 'Wait a moment, before we go any further I want to make sure that what you are going to tell me is worth my time.' He continued: 'Will your message refer to a moment of truth?' The student replied without waiting a moment: 'No, not exactly.' To which the professor posed another question: 'Will your message refer to something good?' The student bit his teeth down onto his bottom lip and then replied: 'Not at all.' The professor asked a final question: 'Can your message be put to productive use?' The student answered, 'Not immediately; perhaps it will even be destructive.' The professor stopped for a moment to think. Dissatisfied by the student's responses and by his own inability to frame what the student might then want to say to him, he grabbed his wife by the arm and then marched off into the university to prepare his next peer-reviewed article. As the professor walked off he yelled out to the student, 'I do

not want to hear any of it!' This explains why professors rarely understand the potential of a revolutionary philosophy. It also explains why the professor did not know that his student was having sex with his wife.

Cunning students of traditional philosophy have been quick to ask: 'So, what comes after postanarchist philosophy?' The answer, which of course they already know, comes: 'It is *post*-post-anarchist philosophy!' This has been the most naive way to attack post-anarchism. But we ought to take it more seriously than they do; the laughter we express over *post*-post-anarchism might very well be an expression of our inability to come to terms with the possibility that post-anarchism might *not* be enough. Post-post-anarchism is a joke because it disembodies us—traditionalists and post-anarchists alike. It exposes us to the possibility that there might still be something else out there. The problem with post-anarchism today is not one of exclusive disjunction—of *either* traditional anarchism *or* post-anarchism—but precisely their conjunction or marriage: *anarchism and post-anarchism.* In this conjunction we have failed to recognize the next operation: the discovery of the superset that displaces the conjunction against an emergent set. In other words, in the marriage of anarchism and postanarchism, we have failed to see that the emerging students of political philosophy have been fucking our wives.

This book was written over the course of a couple months during the summer of 2009. I have only recently encountered an emergent body of thought known as speculative realism. It is now clear to me that speculative realism is grappling with many of the same problems that I have broached in this book. For the sake of introducing the problem early, I shall borrow the phraseology of the object oriented ontologist Levi Bryant: what we are dealing with in the eventual displacement of the current marriage is the problem of the hegemony of epistemology. To put matters even more simply, I will state immediately that this is the problem that post-anarchists face in the third decade of the development of its theory.

Admittedly, a great deal of what follows stems from an early and premature attempt to formulate a response to *criticisms* of post-anarchism. What I discovered was that the criticisms of post-anarchism paralleled the informal fallacy outlined by Freud in his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious.* A neighbour borrows a kettle and returns it damaged. The neighbour constructs three defences: first, that he returned the kettle undamaged; second, that it was already damaged when he borrowed it, and; third, that he never borrowed the kettle in the first place. These criticisms reflected the very same concerns that traditional anarchists initially raised against post-anarchism: they were mostly criticizing in post-anarchism what post-anarchism was criticizing in classical anarchism, namely the political strategy of reductionism and/or essentialism. They argued that: first, post-anarchism represented an attempt to abandon classical or traditional anarchism; second, post-anarchism represented an attempted to rescue classical or traditional anarchism from its own demise, and; third, anarchism was always postanarchist. Traditionalists re-signify their rejection of post-anarchism so that the fantasies grounding the classical tradition can be sustained. My response to these critiques inadvertently lead me to a re-reading of post-anarchism that took its critics' claims more seriously than they may have intended them to be read. If there were critics of post-anarchism on the side of traditional anarchism then there ought to be critics of post-anarchism on the side of *post*-postanarchism too.

For two decades post-anarchism has adopted an epistemological point of departure for its critique of the representative ontologies of classical anarchism. This critique focused on the classical anarchist conceptualization of power as a unitary phenomenon that operated unidirectionally to repress an otherwise creative and benign human essence. Andrew Koch may have inaugu-

rated this trend in the early 1990s when he wrote his widely influential paper "Post-structuralism and the Epistemological Basis of Anarchism." Koch's paper certainly laid some of the important groundwork for post-anarchism's continual subsumption of ontology beneath the *a priori* of an epistemological orientation. His work continues to be cited as an early and important venture into post-anarchist political philosophy. The problem is that Koch could not conceive of an anti-essentialist and autonomous ontological system, one not subject to regulation or representation by the human mind. Consequently, he was forced to assert a subjectivist claims-making ego as the foundation of a poststructuralist anarchist politics.

Saul Newman was indebted to this heritage insofar as he also posited the ego (extrapolated from the writings of Max Stirner) and the subject (extrapolated from Jacques Lacan's *oeuvre*) as the paradoxical 'outside' to power and representation. Todd May fell into a similar trap in his book *The Political Philosophy of Post-structuralist Anarchism* when he wrote that "[m]etaphysics […] partakes of the normativity inhabiting the epistemology that provides its foundations" (May, 1997: 2). Newman's approach did not necessarily foreclose the possibility of a metaphysics, at least to the extent that he began with the subject of the Lacanian tradition (wherein the subject is believed to be radically barred from *das Ding*). On the other hand, May completely foreclosed the possibility of any escape from the reign of the epistemological. There laid the impasse of yesterday's post-anarchism. This impasse at the heart of the project of post-anarchism has forced Koch, Newman, May, and many others, to come to similar conclusions about the place of ontology in post-anarchist theory. The post-anarchists have all formulated a response strikingly similar to Koch's argument that any representative ontology ought to be dismantled and dethroned in favour of "a conceptualization of knowledge that is contingent on a plurality of internally consistent *episteme*" (Koch, 2011: 27).

As a point of connection, Walter Benjamin was known to have failed to defend his *Habilitations-schrift* on the *Origin of the German Mourning-Play* for his PhD examination. Having failed the exam as best he could, the study nonetheless became widely published and influential. For my own PhD examination I also felt destined for failure: I was to defend a written examination on Walter Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood* that demonstrated my ability to parrot information back to my examiners. I thought it much better to fail the exam as best I could than to succeed through the worst possible circumstances. But here I maintain that post-anarchism had to fail in order for it to have been effective. If post-anarchism had not provided its naive reductive account of the classical anarchist tradition, it would not have been able to make enough enemies to separate itself as a sect and as a theory of the new. To put it another way: it is only after the failure of the fundamental fantasy that the traversal of the fantasy can occur. Or, to rephrase an old Shakespearean cliche, why is it better to have loved and lost than to have never loved at all? Precisely because in the most successful failure of love, one is able to pass on to the crucial next stage of learning from one's mistakes. The post-anarchists *needed* to begin by sketching out a naive critique of the ontological essentialism of some monolithic 'classical' anarchist tradition—I claim that we can fail much better.

An old joke reads: a lecturer asked his student: 'What, since every answer of yours is wrong, do you expect to be when you grow up?' The student responded: 'I expect to be a TV weather forecaster after graduation!' Today the traditional and postanarchists might ask us: 'what, since every answer to the question of ontology has been wrong, do you expect to do after post-anarchism?' As good postanarchists we ought to answer our interlocutors as follows: 'I expect to be a speculative philosopher after the coming displacement!' This is precisely the problem that we are up

against: by dismissing all ontologies as suspiciously representative and as incessantly harbouring a dangerous form of essentialism, post-anarchists have overlooked the privilege that they have placed on the human subject, language, and discourse. Here, the ontological question is itself elided into the epistemological register. The epistemological characterization of postanarchism has held sway for far too long. Perhaps it is time to revive the roots of post-anarchism—after all, Hakim Bey's 'post-anarchism anarchy' was itself an ontological philosophy.

Ontology must now be distinguished from representation. The correlation between thinking and being, between mind and thing, is only one of the possible ways of theorizing about meta-ethics. One may also consider the mutual exclusivity of thought and being, mind and thing, insofar as the one is progressively lost as the other is progressively gained. We must shift the terms of the debate and interrogate the hegemony that epistemology has been afforded within post-anarchist philosophy. At least two possibilities are now permitted. On the one hand, we could intervene into the reigning mode of philosophy, namely epistemology, by latching onto concepts from meta-ethical philosophy. Meta-ethics allows one to easily separate the ontological from the epistemological and to answer very particular questions about each in order to formulate an overarching meta-ethical position. What meta-ethics does through an analytical gesture we might do through a critical gesture. Retroactively, I shall insist that this was what I attempted to do with this book. Postanarchism is particularly adept at this task because of its resounding ability to frame itself as an ethical political philosophy as against the strategic political philosophy of classical Marxism. On the other hand, the best way to defeat the privilege of epistemological anarchism is to shift the terms of the debate—this is also something that post-anarchists have already proved themselves quite good at doing. Instead of asking the question 'how do representative ontological systems harbour concealed epistemological orientations toward the political?', one might ask, '*do* epistemological orientations toward the political *always* harbour representative and subject-centred ontological systems?'

The fallacy of strategic political philosophy in the Marxist tradition is, as Todd May quite correctly points out, that it remains committed to a concept of power that is unitary in its analysis, unidirectional in its influence, and utterly repressive in its effect. Similarly, Levi Bryant's ontology allows one to argue that there is a fallacy that occurs "whenever one type of entity is treated as the ground or *explains* all other entities" (italics in original). Whereas May's post-structuralist anarchism moved away from the fallacy of the unitary analysis of power (whereby subjects are constituted by the influence of a single site of power), it nonetheless remained committed to a tactical political philosophy that is monarchical *in the final analysis.* It remains monarchical to the extent that the human world, the world of epistemology, is treated as the yardstick of democracy, and no room is afforded for the things of the world to influence politics. Bryant's argument is quite instructive: "[w]hat we thus get is not a *democracy* of objects or actants where all objects are on equal ontological footing [...] but instead a *monarchy* of the human in relation to all other beings" (italics in original). The real fallacy is thus not against strategic political philosophy but philosophy itself and the way it has played out over so many centuries. "The epistemic fallacy," writes Bryant, "consists in the thesis that proper ontological questions can be fully transposed into epistemological questions."

We can now distinguish three stages in the life of post-anarchism. First, we can deduce what Sureyyya Evren has described as its introductory period. The introductory period of post-anarchism is defined by its inability to side-step the ontological problem in the literature of classical anarchism. During this period, post-anarchism needed to distinguish itself from classical

anarchism while nonetheless remaining committed to its ethical project. The second period overcomes the problem of the separation of post-anarchism from classical anarchism by re-reading the classical tradition as essentially post-anarchistic. Some of the critiques of post-anarchism are included into this period insofar as post-anarchism, for them, was always already anarchism. Whereas the first and second phases included only explicitly anarchist literature under their rubric of worthwhile investigation, in the third period this no longer holds true. To be certain, the second period permitted the incorporation of post-structuralist literature into post-anarchist discussions, but always with a certain amount of reservation. The third period, the one that is to come—the one that is already here if only we would heed its call—will not take such care with attempts at identification or canonization. An *after* to postanarchism is no joke, it is already here, like a seed beneath the snow, waiting to be discovered.

The Sacrifice of Knowing

Held at gun-point by a mugger, you have one of two choices: your money *or* your life. The obvious twist is that if you depart from your life you would also by consequence depart from your money. This choice that is not a choice describes perfectly the dilemma of subjectivity: your knowledge *or y*our being. If you depart from your being you also by consequence depart from your knowing. Why must political philosophy begin with the subject who incessantly thinks himself into existence when we know very well that this is the choice that we make to preserve our life? In order to retain some sense of being we are forced into the choice of knowledge and thus, as a consequence, we lose some of our existence in the process. Rephrasing our choice: either I am not thinking or I am not being. The forced choice is the basis of subjectivity insofar as one can never step outside of epistemology without being reduced to a thing in the real. It is the forced choice of epistemology over ontology that post-anarchism must overcome. To be sure, this is a difficult task—one that requires a paradoxical solution. A traversal of the fantasy of knowing our being thus requires that one take responsibility for the being or thing that works upon our knowledge. Post-anarchism and traditional anarchism have a long distance to travel to traverse the fantasy of choice. Let us hazard a beginning.

Post-anarchism has been of considerable importance in the discussions of radical intellectuals across the globe over the last decade. In its most popular form, it demonstrates a desire to blend the most promising aspects of traditional anarchist theory (particularly, its ethical *a priori*) with developments in post-structuralist and post-modern thought. Post-anarchists have hitherto relied on post-structuralist critiques of ontological essentialism in order to situate their discourse in relation to the traditional anarchist discourse. My argument is that (post)anarchist ethics requires the elaboration of another important line of critique against epistemological foundationalism. To accomplish this task, I turn to the philosophy of Georges Bataille. Bataille's philosophy allows for new ways of conceiving postanarchist ethics that are not predicated upon essentialist categories, foundationalist truth-claims, or the agency of the subject in the political context.

If I am to make the case for post-anarchist ethics, I must first of all provide the reader with the conceptual framework upon which this essay has been constructed. As such, what follows is the result of an attempt at formulating a response to this task which has been set before me. The astute reader will take notice that there are a few incongruities relating to the classification systems developed herein, but these classificatory issues should not in the end distract the reader from the overall point being made. It is not for the purpose of utility or for the gratification of constructing or defending a sound theory of the subject in society that I develop these foundations but rather, and precisely, for the purpose of demonstrating the problem set before me. It is the problem of all positive conceptions of foundation and system—in a word, I am speaking about the problem of *essence*—and the relationship of each of these conceptions to a curious body of thought, anarchism, that I wish to explore. Foundations harbour the full range of possibilities inherent to the questions posed by ontological philosophy, and, similarly, systems harbour the full range of possibilities inherent to the questions posed by epistemological philosophy. Foun-

dations and systems are always fraught with disastrous instability and this thereby necessitates philosophers to produce elaborations on the accidental (what I also call negative elaborations) as well as the essential (what I also call positive elaborations).

For the purposes of this essay, essence and accident should be understood as attributes founded within the inextricable connection between issues concerning ontological and epistemological philosophy and within the overarching study of metaethics. The relationship within and between these two domains is also constitutive of the subject. The within relationship describes positive and negative attributes of the corresponding domain. For example, we may begin from an essential understanding of being or else we may begin from an accidental understanding of being as non-being. Likewise, we may begin from an essential understanding of knowing or else we may begin from an accidental understanding of knowing as non-knowing. The between relationship describes two matrices: on the one hand, there is a constitutive relationship between epistemological and ontological claims that describes the being who thinks herself into existence (an essential discourse), and, on the other hand, there is the non-being whose existence becomes acquired through reductions in useful thought (an accidental discourse). I must now bring these two contingent relationships to point: my assumption is that essentialism is a meta-ethical position, it is perhaps *the* meta-ethical position that has most come under attack from radical philosophers in the contemporary period. As a point of example, I put my tickets in a hat and drew Sartre's name: Sartre argued that the two domains (being and knowing) are as far apart as the poles, "[t]he essence is not *in* the object; it is the meaning of the object […] The object does not refer to being as to a signification; it would be impossible, for example, to define being as a *presence* since *absence* too discloses being, since not to be *there* means still to be" (italics in original; Sartre, [1943] 1993: 8). Sartre's provocation was an elaboration of this full range of attributes inherent to the meta-ethics—it is just as likely that the object's absence (or accidental features) discloses a truth as does its presence (or essential features). In this way, we may also speak of the subject through the full range of attributes. We may do this under the assumption that the subject is nothing but this object among objects, thing among things, who pretends at being something far superior to these things. The subject is thus this inability to consolidate its truth with its being a thing.

It is in this regard, I set before me the task of rewriting the foundation of traditional anarchist conceptions of being; a task that will, as a necessity, remain an unfinished failure. The problem of successfully finalizing this project is also the problem of creating a knowledgeable account of being. Who among us has not had the opportunity to solve the Chinese finger trap? If you try too hard to get yourself out of the trap you end up even further trapped. The task is a delicate one and must be likened to the oft-cited aphorism on the delicacy of relationships: 'relationships are a bit like holding sand in the grip of your hand: if you grip it too tight, the sand trickles out—but hold the sand loosely, and it remains in place.' The paradox is thus that, as Sartre has put it, "[b]y not considering being […] as an appearance which can be determined in concepts, we have understood first of all that knowledge can not by itself give an account of being" (Sartre, [1943] 1993: 9). Perhaps we must begin to approach the truth of the being of the subject with the same delicacy that one solves the problem of the Chinese finger trap.

The success of this project would invite the appearance of the essential subject and foreclose the subject as constitutive of an absence as well. Be this as it may, in writing about the absence I nonetheless construct an appearance in place of it which occurs as a betrayal of the source. In constructing a framework of knowledge about the anarchist subject I only move further away

from that which I seek to describe. As we shall see, there is a lineage of philosophers in the continental tradition whose ideas have converged on this point. For now it will be enough to claim that in the texts of prominent classical philosophers, the study of ontology and epistemology often went hand in hand as two parts of the same enterprise (cf., Silverman, 2008). And, in the development of a meta-ethical framework, so shall it here. Meta-ethics occurs quite fundamentally at the intersection of epistemological and ontological philosophy. (Is this not the same intersection that occurs between Marxism and Anarchism, Economy and State, and so on?)

Unbeknownst to the reader until now: I write this in direct opposition to my overall intention. I write this while shamefaced. In writing about this topic—the subject of anarchist philosophy amidst the recent development of a system of ideas in postanarchist political philosophy—I remain trapped within the world of useful knowledge. For Georges Bataille, all knowledge or positive epistemological systems operate within the restrictive economies of utility (Goldhammer, 2005: 154): "[t]he smallest activity, or the least project puts an end to the game […] and I am […] brought back into the prison of useful objects, loaded with meaning" (Bataille, 2001: 98). The problem of writing the knowledge of being, as with the problem of the least project, is the problem of the erasure of the accidental by the appearance of the essence. And yet is this not also the very problem of being: to speak of the freedom of non-knowledge from the position of the knowing subject? Inevitably, there is a certain passion in this slavery to knowledge, a certain joyful sacrifice of being of which Georges Bataille was keenly aware: "Living in order to be able to die, suffering to enjoy, enjoying to suffer, speaking to say nothing […] the passion for not knowing" (Bataille, 2001: 196). Like Bataille's *oeuvre,* my work springs out of great reluctance and mental anguish, and yet it does not as a consequence dispense with the enjoyment of writing or with the enjoyment of sacrifice. One can sacrifice a great many things in life but in doing so one does not sacrifice the experience of the sacred. On the contrary, it is through sacrifice that one is able to engage in this experience and to thereby celebrate ethical life. According to Bataille, sacrifice of oneself brings the subject into view as an ethical agent. Sacrifice was Bataille's answer to the ethical problem of meta-ethical nihilism; whereby we understand that there are ethics of the first order and there are meta-ethics or ethics of the second order. One may describe a nihilist meta-ethical position but this does not mean that one ceases to act positively in the world. It means, contrarily, that one shall be willing to sacrifice oneself to the positive. It means that she understands that the positive springs forth from within the domain of the negative. It means that ethical acts are never coded into the commandments of the symbolic order, or language. I shall speak to this point in more detail in the sections that follow.

If the reader takes no interest in this text then I can say that I have at the very least grounded my intellectual affairs on the achievement of a sense of mastery over these foundations and systems—those desires first working forth from within this text and then radiating outward (conceptual systems, denotative, descriptive and prescriptive pro-positions, and so on) but also those passions of the university that first work forth from without the text and then burrow their way inside of it (the thirst for knowledge,[1] competing ideological interests, and so on)—that have inhabited my desires and ostensibly inhibited my creative capacities. The truly astute reader should therefore take notice that the classification systems that I have constructed are as faulty as the positive foundations and systems of countless other philosophies, and the governments upon which

[1] For example, it is the foremost duty of the sociology graduate student at the University of New Brunswick to make "an original contribution to knowledge" (University of New Brunswick, 2010: 5).

they are built, as well as, as it were, the great tradition upon which I have erected my black flag; all of the great foundations and systems are destined to failure. The desire of the university is to make the subject contribute to the system of useful knowledge and this outlines those foreign desires that Jacques Lacan named University Discourse. Bruce Fink eloquently described what is at issue in University Discourse: "knowledge replaces the nonsensical master signifier in the dominant, commanding position [...] systematic knowledge is the ultimate authority, reigning in the stead of blind will, and everything has its reason [...] the university discourse providing a sort of legitimation of rationalization of the master's will" (Fink, 1995: 132). Having not realized the benefit of contributing to what Bataille has called the unfinished system of non-knowledge (cf., Bataille, 2001), the subject of University Discourse suffers by tirelessly producing useful knowledge for the academy,[2] she thereby alienates herself from the product of her wasted efforts: "[t]he product or loss here is the divided, alienated subject. Since the agent in the university discourse is the knowing subject, the unknowing subject or subject of the unconscious is produced, but at the same time excluded" (Fink, 1995: 132). Thus, the mastery that I have obtained always also comes at the price of losing myself to the passions of self-negation through sacrifice. It is therefore with a sense of irony that I insist at the outset that this essay is for those of us whose hearts continue to be set ablaze by the fiery desires that endlessly consume us.

My contribution does take on the appearance of utility. My aim in this thesis is to demonstrate the compatibility of post-anarchism with the latent ethical project of traditional anarchist philosophy while advancing still beyond this threshold by bringing post-anarchism into contact with another outside force, the irrecuperable work of Georges Bataille. In doing so, I plan to use this detour to locate traditional anarchism's dormant core, its innermost ethical kernel. I believe that the proper ethical attitude here is not to retreat from University Discourse and all of its problems, nor is it to disavow its problems, but rather it is to speak through University Discourse properly. Apropos of this thesis I am reminded of an infamous joke about a study on the function of the head of the penis. Three results came from the study. First, after one year of research and over two-hundred thousand dollars spent, Duke University found that the head of the penis is much larger than the shaft because it provides more pleasure for the man. Stanford University later concluded, after three years of study, and over two-hundred and fifty thousand dollars, that the function of the head was to provide more pleasure to the other during sexual intercourse. Finally, the University of Wisconsin, a more honest university, spent thirteen dollars and found that the function of the head of the penis is to keep the man's hand from slipping off of the shaft during masturbation. Here we have three responses to University Discourse: a selfish enjoyment, a selfless enjoyment, and a response that has nothing to do with enjoyment at all. The final response sabotages the university discourse from within. It is not for the satisfaction of myself that I write this essay. This would be a naive assumption because it pretends that the desire of the university does not speak through me. Second, I ought not to maintain openly that I write this for the other, for the university, because that would only be an admission of privilege and just as naive as the

[2] The question may be raised as to what extent the development of a non-system of non-knowledge, a radical system, within the academy itself succumbs to the discourse of the university. 2izek has argued that "one should always bear in mind that, for Lacan, [the] university discourse is not directly linked to the university as a social institution [...] Consequently, not only does the fact of being turned into an object of the university interpretive machinery prove nothing about one's discursive status—names like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, or Benjamin, all three great anti-universitarians whose presence in the academy today [is] all pervasive—demonstrate that the excluded or damned authors are the *ideal* feeding stuff for the academic machine" (2izek, 1997).

first response. In claiming that I am a product of the university, a product of privilege, I erase my capacity to make any claim untarnished by the academy. Rather, I must take responsibility for my writing *as* university discourse by using this research to keep my hand from flying off of my shaft as I masturbate wildly—the university provides me with the best possible location from which to mount my study, it structures my desire for which I take *complete* responsibility.

It is my hope that this journey will bring about a renewed interest and understanding in the negative foundation and system of the tradition that guides all of my writing. My aim in pursuing this line of inquiry is to elucidate the nihilist core (from the latin *nihil* meaning nothing or no-thing) that has heretofore animated fragments of the anarchist tradition. This is its accidental core which, as with the subject in Stirnerian or Lacanian philosophy, has been its distinctive but largely unrealized ontology. Thus, there are, as it were, two anarchist traditions that have unfolded in tandem. On the one hand, there is the manifestation of a tradition that opposes what Bataille enthusiasts have described as restrictive states (ie, nation-states) and restrictive economies (global capitalism); however, in this manifest tradition, states and economies are limited to a positive interpretation: state refers to a sovereign political foundation and embodies a set of commandments or laws, and economy refers to a system of exchange and the valuation of this exchange within and between labourers (as in classical Marxian economies). On the other hand, there is the irrecuperable force that answers negatively to questions concerning ontological and epistemological philosophy and describes the base states and economies that provide substance to their restrictive counterparts. Readers acquainted with Hakim Bey's 'ontological anarchism' (cf, Bey, 1993) will be familiar with what it is that I am suggesting. Bey defined 'ontological anarchism' as the philosophy of a general force—Bataille likewise produced a philosophy of the general economy—which is always founded on no-thing:

> As we meditate on the *nothing* we notice that although it cannot be defined, nevertheless paradoxically we *can* say something about it (even if only metaphorically): it appears to be a 'chaos' […] chaos lies at the heart of our project. […] chaos-as-excess, the generous outpouring of nothing into something. […] Anarchists have been claiming for years that 'anarchy is not chaos.' Even anarchism seems to want a *natural law,* an inner and innate morality in matter, an entelechy, or purpose-of-being (Bey, 1993).

The general state is quite simply no-thing. It becomes obvious that although the general state can not be de-fined, nevertheless I can say something about it. What I can say is that it does not occur within a restrictive apparatus of language and knowledge. It is ostensibly captured by these restrictive apparatuses, but in actuality it is not at all captured. It passes like lightning through metaphor.

Post-anarchism has also occurred like a flash of lightning. I shall argue that post-anarchism has commonly been associated with one of two trends over the last two decades. First, and most popularly, it has referred to the extension of traditional anarchist philosophy by way of interventions into and from post-structuralism and/or postmodern philosophy. Second, and most prevalent in the non-Anglophone world, post-anarchism has been understood as an attempt to explore new connections between traditional anarchist philosophy and non-anarchist radical philosophy without thereby reducing these explorations to developments from any particular philosophical group. In this regard, Anton Fernandez de Rota has described post-anarchism as:

> [b]eing in-between, with one foot in the dying world and the other in the world that is coming. It should not be understood as a mere conjunction of anarchism plus post-structuralism alone, no matter how much it drinks from both foundations. Rather, it is a flag around which to express the desire to transcend the old casts (Anton Fernandez de Rota as cited in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: 147).

My belief is that post-anarchism, as a discursive strategy that has gone to great lengths to rethink traditional anarchism from outside of its narrow confines in political economy (or any restrictive philosophy) and canonical thinkers (ie, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin), has provided a moment in which to reflect on anarchism's unique place in an assemblage of competing political language games. Post-anarchism is the realization of traditional anarchist meta-ethics, it *is* anarchist meta-ethics, but it is an incomplete project insofar as it has focused only on the epistemological dimension of meta-ethics.

I argue that meta-ethics is predicated upon the relationship between answers to questions of ontological and epistemological philosophy. Moreover, I argue that the dominant position within contemporary meta-ethics is avowedly nihilist and that this nihilism finds its political equivalent in traditional anarchist philosophy. Given this, there are reasons to believe that contemporary meta-ethical philosophers might benefit from readings in traditional anarchist philosophy, and there are reasons to believe that anarchist philosophers might benefit from readings in meta-ethics. Two variants of nihilism appear within the literature: one that retains the subject as a metaphysical possibility and one that rejects the subject as an inadequate framework for conceiving the base reality of anarchy. In this sense, it makes little difference whether one adopts ethical universalism or ethical relativism because each position appears to be a conflation of the central issues of the ethics of base reality. The crucial distinction is whether or not this base reality is best conceived from within the confines of the metaphysical subject. While I aim to provide the case that we ought to think politics outside of the metaphysical subject, I ultimately remain undecided on this choice. Instead, I trace two meta-ethical pathways for the reader: what I call (1) base subjectivism, and (2) base materialism. I argue that the base subjectivist response to metaethics is easily conceived through a latent reading of the anarchist tradition and that to take this negation of conventional ethics to the end requires an intervention from the work of Georges Bataille.

Next, I situate post-anarchism as a unique political discourse that occurs among an assemblage of other (often contradictory) political discourses in order to introduce the meta-ethics upon which it has been grounded. I claim that post-anarchism is at once the outgrowth of 'new anarchism' and yet also its limit. For this reason post-anarchism can not be reduced to the problems associated with its introductory phase, including, for example, the problem of the reduction of classical anarchism. Instead, postanarchism occurs as the realization of the latent meta-ethical discourse that has always been buried beneath manifest traditional anarchist philosophy. Post-anarchism is what is *in anarchism more than anarchism.* Post-anarchism offers traditional anarchism the opportunity to finally make a beginning at failure. In this regard, it appears as though Petr Kropotkin's ethical philosophy has heretofore provided the *point-de-capiton* of traditional anarchist ethics and so it should prove worthy to reread Kropotkin's ethical system from the standpoint of postanarchist though. As we shall see, it is possible to move beyond Kropotkin's naturalist/humanist ethics by either rejecting it entirely or else founding a post-Kropotkinian terrain upon which to rebuild the traditional discourse. This latter strategy involves carefully se-

lecting which segments of the Kropotkinian discourse to highlight against other (contradictory) segments. I also revisit two strange anarchist meta-ethical systems, virtue ethics and utilitarianism, to arrive at an elaboration of the main trends in post-anarchist political philosophy.

Finally, I explore Bataille's base materialist meta-ethics. I argue that Bataille's meta-ethics answered negatively to the questions of ontological and epistemological philosophy and thereby brought the anti-authoritarian ethic to its fullest realization. Thus, Bataille's philosophy exposed an underside to the foundation and system of conventional political and social philosophy: he described a foundation fraught with instability and a system that aimed only toward failure. He exposed the negative dimension of all philosophical works (and the concrete social practices and institutions founded upon them) as inherently unstable and predicated upon a fundamental failure. He further highlighted the methodology that guides this thesis which is best summarized by the following passage: "You must know, first of all, that everything that has a manifest side also has a hidden side. Your face is quite noble, there's a truth in your eyes with which you grasp the world, but your hairy parts underneath your dress are no less a truth than your mouth is" (Bataille, 1997). It is this latent truth that hides forever beneath the fabric of concrete socio-political existence (and also beneath the apparent discourses interpreted by hermeneutics) that provides the impetus for manifest sociopolitical engagement. It is therefore a misreading of Bataille to focus on that which was intended merely as a metaphor of the Real (ie the potlatch, the gift, and so on). For Bataille, metaphor is the fabric that reveals base reality but it occurs only through the act and not as a consequence of its concrete manifestation. Benjamin Noys argued that "*The Accursed Share* [and other texts written by Bataille are] at [their] most disappointing in [their] concrete political proposals" (Noys, 2000: 113). I argue that to miss this latent reading, expressed in various ways also within the manifest content of Bataille's own writing, is to miss the crucial opportunity of the latent reading of the anarchist tradition. It is to further hinder the reader's ability to conceive of that unique state of individual freedom that Bataille has referred to as sovereignty. "Sovereignty is NOTHING" (Bataille, 1993: 256). Noys writes:

> The movement onward would be the movement of sovereignty as NOTHING, and of sovereignty as that which refuses to settle within subjectivity […] but while sovereignty is NOTHING it is also a 'nothing' that displaces the philosophical model of the subject […] sovereignty is NOTHING, a nothing that is a slipping away of the subject […] it reveals the unstable status of the subject (Noys, 2000: 74–5).

Sovereignty, as the subjectivity of no-thing, is the release of the subject from the chains of knowing: it is the sacrifice of knowing.

The Unstable Framework of Meta-Ethics

There can be said to exist two orders of ethics: those of the first order (normative ethics) and those of the second order (meta-ethics). It will prove important to distinguish between these orders. On this topic John Mackie, the oft-quoted moral skeptic, has provided what is perhaps the most lucid explanation: "In our ordinary experience we first encounter first order statements about particular actions; in discussing these, we may go on to frame, or dispute, more general first order principles; and only after that are we likely to reflect on second order issues" (Mackie, 1977: 9). We may say that ethics of the second order, while not entirely divorced from first order ethics, are defined by the development of a self-referential analysis of normativity. As Mackie has put it:

> One could be a second order moral sceptic without being a first order one, or again the other way around. A man could hold strong moral views, and indeed ones whose content was thoroughly conventional, while believing that they were simply attitudes and policies with regard to conduct that he and other people held. Conversely, a man could reject all established morality while believing it to be an objective truth that it was evil or corrupt (Mackie, 1977: 16).

Relatedly, Burgess has argued that "[t]here is no reason why anethicists [moral skeptics] should not have personal ideals and standards without the intellectual baggage of moral belief that usually accompanies them" (Burgess, 2007: 437). In this sense we may say, for example, that one might hold the meta-ethical position of nihilism and yet nonetheless fall inline with manifest traditional anarchist normativity. Meta-ethics is the study of the latent ethical dimension inherent to any philosophical discourse as well as the philosophical investigation of ethical discourse itself. The curious status of ethics of the second order, as opposed to normative ethics, has been that nihilist responses to meta-ethical questions have been commonplace but this nihilism has been veiled from the wider public—and, more narrowly, it has been veiled from radical social and political theorists—by an insular jargon. In this regard, Allen Wood has argued that "the questions raised by twentieth-century meta-ethics have apparently been radical, and the dominant position was even openly nihilist" (Wood, 1996: 221).

Wood continued by arguing that the meta-ethical views of this later period have been "radical in that they [have] attempted to some degree directly to undermine our commitment to all moral values or to the moral point of view generally, typically by showing that such commitment is based on illusions about morality, regarded as psychological or social phenomenon" (Wood, 1996: 223). I shall for the purposes of this essay assume that Wood's thesis is correct. It shall be my purpose to elaborate the status of these ethics in a sufficient way so as to build a foundation and system capable of describing the meta-ethics of anarchism as the preoccupation of contemporary meta-ethical discourse. In this sense, post-anarchism shall be conceived provisionally as the meta-ethics of anarchist political philosophy rather than more narrowly as 'anarchism plus post-

structuralism.' Post-anarchism, as a contemporary meta-ethical discourse, elucidates the ethical discourse that hides at the core of traditional anarchist philosophy.

The Problem of Place and Ontological Essentialism

There have been two prominent areas of study within meta-ethical philosophy, the description of the relationship between each will prove important in describing the negative foundation and system of postanarchist meta-ethics. Allen Wood has expanded this concentration into a tripartite system: a *metaphysical* investigation into the nature of moral facts and properties, a *semantic* inquiry into the meaning of moral assertions, and an *epistemological* account of the nature of moral knowledge (cf., Wood, 1996: 221). For the purposes of this essay I have collapsed elements of the semantic inquiry into the epistemological account. In this sense, truth-claims are positive propositions intended to be taken as the good and they can be distinguished from the philosophical preoccupations with the actual meaning or intentions of the claim (whereby, for example, academics squabble over the meaning of the word 'ought' or 'must' in varying statements; cf., Silk, 2010).

The first area of meta-ethics has traditionally concerned the place from which ethical principles are said to emanate. From the mid-thirteenth century place was understood as any dimension of defined or indefinite extent. According to this understanding, place occupies the ontological spectrum of meta-ethical questioning and deals with issues concerning the nature and origin of ethical acts (ie, the 'what?' and 'where?' questions that have prompted the development of ethical substantialisms). Central to the preoccupation on place has been the lingering question about the social situatedness of the subject and the role of this context in the development of the subject's ethics;[1] in this regard, ethics remains hinged to the never-ending debates surrounding structure and agency, free-will and determinism, and so on. Three substantial theories have responded to the question of place: (1) ethical universalism, (2) ethical relativism, and (3) ethical nihilism.

Adherents of ethical universalism have posited that there is a shared objective essence that grounds all normative principles irrespective of the stated values of independently situated subjects or social groups. Many times, this essence has arrived as a consequence of the *a priori* assumption of a static and/or natural human nature. It should not go unnoticed that Todd May's post-structuralist anarchist critique of classical anarchism constitutes a gross reduction of the classical anarchist response to the question of place. However, his critique does serve as a useful example of a strong tendency within traditional anarchist discourse toward humanist naturalism:

> we can recognize that anarchism's naturalist view of human beings plays an ethical role in its political theory [...] Moreover, the naturalist justification allows anarchists to assume their ethics rather than having to argue for them. If the human essence is already benign, then there is no need to articulate what kinds of human activity are good and what kinds are bad (May, 1994: 64).

I shall soon return to this point. Essence has also arrived as a consequence of the presumed shared general conditions of a select universal social group relative to another universal social

[1] To provide one preliminary example: this has been the problem of place in theories from the Frankfurt school of Marxism, as Todd May has argued: "The problem is that if all of capitalist society has been co-opted, then there is no place from which critique [or, indeed, ethics] could arise" (May, 1994: 125).

group as products of the unfolding of the *telos* of history (as in some readings of Marx), and/or tireless appropriations of traditional conceptions of morality, rationality, reason, and justice. In the latter case we might take Karl-Otto Apel's and Jurgen Habermas's discourse ethics as our example (in this regard, cf., Johri, 1996). My argument, in this respect, against discourse ethics is very similar to Todd May's in *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (cf., 1994: 125–6) so I won't bother to recast it here. Instead, I would like the reader to notice the nuance employed when describing foundation and system as opposed to life-world and system. May's latent description of Habermas's ethical space, the lifeworld, follows: "[t]he assumption of the ideal speech situation [as the foundation of the life-world] is part of Habermas's attempt to wrest a critical space from capitalist co-optation" (ibid., 126; see also pages 27–31). In other words, the life-world is Habermas's response to the question of place.

There is the further possibility of nonabsolutist universalist ethics as in the case of ethical utilitarianism, a normative theory that proposes that the correct solution is the one that provides the greatest good to the majority of the population. However, within the domain of metaethics the meaning of the good has tended to shift depending on relative representations. This leads us to our second substantial theory: according to ethical relativists ethical truths emerge from within distinctive social groups or distinctive social subjects rather than equally and objectively across all groups. Relativists believe that social groups do indeed differ in their respective ethical value systems and that each respective system constitutes a place of ethical discourse. At the limit of relativist ethics is the belief that the unique subject is the place from which ethical principles are thought to arise. In this sense, subjectivism is the limit of ethical relativist discourse.

Finally, ethical nihilism is the belief that ethical truths, if they can be said to exist at all, derive from the paradoxical non-place within the heart of any place. Saul Newman described this non-place in the following way: "[t]he place of power [and, consequently, resistance] is not a *place* […] Power, as we have seen, does not reside in the state, or in the bourgeoisie, or in law: its very place is that of a 'non-place' because it is shifting and variable, always being re-inscribed and reinterpreted" (italics in original; Newman, [2001] 2007: 81). That this non-place can only be articulated from within the confines of conceptions of place, or in relation to the foundation of place itself, therefore poses a unique challenge for ethical philosophers: is the paradox of non-place significant enough as to lead one to reject its answer to the question of place? Traditionally, those philosophers who have adopted the paradoxical response to the question of place have had the burden of proof to create an account of their philosophical position that was a sufficient response to the community at large. However, the burden of proof argument is typically used against those making positive ontological arguments rather than those making negative or paradoxical arguments such as I am making here (cf., Truzzi, 1976: 4). Nihilists seek to discredit and/or interrupt all universalist *and* relativist responses to the question of place and thus step outside of the burden of proof. Thus, when I speak about nihilism, I intend to describe meta-ethical discourses that refuse to settle within conventional manifest philosophy. Rather, nihilists are critics of all that currently exists and they raise this critique against all such one-sided foundations and systems.

Saul Newman has described Max Stirner, whose work, according to rumours from some anarchists, inspired some of the writings of Nietzsche,[2] as *the* proto-typical post-anarchist. For New-

[2] Some discussions about this topic that are happening here: `http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relationship_between_Fried`
`Max_Stirner`

man, the reason is simple: "Like poststructuralist thinkers who were writing over a century later, Stirner [was] troubled by the whole question of essentialism […] It is for this reason that Stirner […] anticipates […] poststructuralism" (Newman, 2001: 55–6). Max Stirner's critique of the death of god revolved around the paradox of place—Stirner argued that Feuerbach's humanist philosophy did not kill the place of god but merely subsumed it beneath the mask of man (Cf., Newman, [2009]). In this way, a higher abstraction was created in place. Instead of the positive essentialist metaphysics of man, Stirner described accidental man using the concept of the 'creative nothing' (or the 'un-man'), he thereby described a uniquely identifiable variant of the subjectivist school of meta-ethics.[3] It is probably for this reason that Allen Wood described Stirner as a "radical nihilist" (Wood, 1996: 222) rather than a subjectivist (Wood, himself, often taking the position of a 'moral skeptic' and/or 'moral nihilist'), and for the remainder of this thesis I will treat Stirner quite faithfully as such. Stirner's accidental man does not fall into the positive framework of meta-ethical foundations but rather takes on the attributes of the full range of meta-ethical philosophy. His work must therefore be distinguished from, for example, today's reading of the *cogito.* This nihilist response to the question of place takes on a similar dimension as the concept 'anethicism' does in the meta-ethical writings of John Burgess:

> *Anethicism* (or *moral skepticism*) maintains that […] [o]rdinary people's moral judgements are *meant* as statements of impersonal fact about absolute values, but there *are* no such objective values, so moral thinking involves a fundamental mistake and illusion. Anethicism is to ethics as atheism is to theology (Burgess, 2007: 427).

The nihilist responds negatively to the place of ethics just as the atheist responds negatively to the place of god. For example, Nietzsche argued that active nihilists, in negating traditional values, raise the possibility of the transvaluation of values: in this sense, the active nihilist rejects the positive place of ethics but only in order for her to leap forward into the world of positive ethics anew. We find similar arguments in the work of Bataille, Kierkegaard, *Zizek,* Virilio, and others. Nihilists maintain that there may be no objective guidelines for action, only manifest reductions of a base reality.[4] I shall come back to this description of nihilism shortly.

I may now describe the problem of ontological essentialism more broadly as the problem of stable foundations in conceptions of place. It proves fruitful to borrow an explanation from the feminist literature, and in particular Diana Fuss:

> [Ontological essentialism is] a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity. In feminist theory the idea that men and women, for example, are identified as such on the basis of transhistorical, eternal, immutable essences has been unequivocally rejected by many anti-essentialist poststructuralist feminists concerned with resisting any attempts to naturalize human nature (Fuss, 1989: *xi*).

[3] I believe that this accounts for the absence of any development of the notion of 'comm-unity'. On this topic, Stirner pointed to some unarticulated notion of the 'union of egoists'.

[4] For the purpose of this essay I have collapsed 'moral skepticism' and 'moral nihilism' into a higher level category: 'ethical nihilism.' The differences between the two concepts are a matter of subtlety rather than a matter of extreme division, they thus serve my thesis better beneath one term. For example, moral skeptics claim that "[n]o ethical belief is certain, all ethical beliefs are unjustified" while moral nihilists believe that "[a]ll ethical statements are false" (Wood, n.d.: 8).

Crucial, here, is the relationship of ontology, essence, and representation. The problem with ontological essentialism, for Fuss, is that it aims to represent the subject as a transhistorical ideal. In any case, essentialism includes all attempts to describe universal attributes or practices that arise in conjunction with one's being across the positive dimension. The popular contribution of postanarchist philosophy to the anarchist tradition has been its exposition of the history of ontological essentialism within (classical) anarchist literature. Here I should be careful to distinguish between the post-structuralist concern with *difference* and/or *plurality* and the Lacanian or Stirnerian conjecture of empty subjectivity. For example, Fuss brings her rejection of anti-essentialism to the following conclusion: "[i]mportantly, essentialism is typically defined in opposition to difference; the doctrine of essenceis viewed as precisely that which seeks to deny or to annul the very radicality of difference" (Fuss, 1989: *xii*). We shall see that the problem of postanarchist political philosophy in the anglophone world has been to reduce the anti-essentialist impulse to a system of knowledge whose answer to the question of process has been restricted to the post-structuralist emphasis on *difference* and/or *plurality.* In this regard, the problematic emerges not from the production of useful knowledge but from the production of one hegemonic language game. In short, pluralists (relativists) have allowed us to understand that the problem of *difference* is also the problem of democracy and liberal tolerance in that difference *and* democracy are predicated upon a faith in the subject's ability to choose her own reality. As one commentator on a popular anarchist forum has put it: "I am really concerned about the masked social democratic leanings of all the radical postmodernists [...] I just get this feeling that post-anarchism allows the appropriation of the label of anarchism for academics that secretly aspire to be the technocratic class of the global social democratic state."[5]

In the nihilist case, this faith is put to rest: the subject's choices are always based on failure and impossibility. For instance, Jacques Camatte, describing the limits of democracy (as direct democracy, a traditional anarchist idea), has argued that democracy stands in the way of an authentic communism:

> [C]ommunism is the affirmation of a being, the true *Gemeinwesen* of man. Direct democracy appears to be a means for achieving communism. However communism does not need such a mediation. It is not a question of having or of doing, but of being (Camatte, 1969).

The resolution of the problem of system must also go hand in hand with the resolution of the problem of being. The problem of being must also be revealed as the question of non-being. But the problem of being is also hindered by the problem of knowing. For this reason Allen Wood has argued that ethical nihilism "is the diametrical opposite of ethical relativism" and, as a result, "relativism denies that anyone can say or believe [that] anything false" (Wood, n.d.: 3). Relativism allows the ostensibly autonomous subject to make a truth-claim but relativists *always* endorse the truthfulness of this claim positively (Wood, n.d.: 3). Relativists ignore the latent dimension of ethics and rely too faithfully on the manifest dimension. On the other hand, nihilists retain the autonomy of the truth-claim but recognize the paradoxical attributes of this claim— there is a latent truth and there is a manifest truth:

> [R]elativism says that whatever anybody believes must be true (for that person) [...] [nihilism] denies that we can ever be sure which beliefs these are [...] [it] is quite an

[5] See forum thread here: `http://libcom.org/forums/history-culture/post-anarchism-today-new-journal-anybody-r`

> extreme position, and probably false; but it is not threatened with self-refutation, as relativism is. For it is perfectly self-consistent to say that you hold beliefs that are uncertain, or even unjustified (Wood, n.d.: 4).

The consistency of the meta-ethical framework is achieved, as Wood suggests, by granting the full range of attributes to the foundation and the system. Otherwise, the position consistently fails and the one dimension is granted descriptive power over the other. This provides us with a nice entry point into the problem of epistemological foundationalism in positive responses to the question of process.

The Problem of Process and Epistemological Foundationalism

The second area of study in meta-ethical philosophy has traditionally concerned the process (mental or practical) through which humans are thought to arrive at the proper methods of selfconduct (cf., Fieser, 2003). This includes the 'why?' and 'how?' questions that have further prompted the development of semantic theories on ethics. From the mid-thirteenth century process was understood as forward movement (Harper, 2010b). This implies a *telos* but my usage embraces all types of movement, including movement without cause and failed movements. Central to the preoccupation on process has been the question of *telos* inherent to consequentialist ethics or else, as in non-consequentialist ethics, the direction toward which, and the epistemological function through which, the ethical actor is thought to be moving. Finally, we arrive at our second philosophical *a priori* for much of traditional and contemporary ethics. Whereas the first *a priori* has approached the question of place through metaphysics, the second has approached the question of process through epistemology—the study of truth, belief, and judgement in meta-ethics as played out in the fictitious battle between cognitivism and non-cognitivism.

The three substantial theories have also responded in various ways to the question of process. I will provide the most popular configurations of the function of process in *a priori* conceptions of place. First, adherents of ethical universalism have tended to maintain a singular truth across all social groups. By way of example, Noam Chomsky, a noted libertarian anarchist, has argued on more than one occasion, that "one of the, maybe the most, elementary of moral principles is that of universality, that is, if something is right for me, it's right for you; if it's wrong for you, it's wrong for me. Any moral code that is even worth looking at has that at its core somehow" (Chomsky, 2002). Chomsky's adoption of the universalist ethical discourse is nowhere more apparent than in the response he has provided to his critics regarding his participation in what has come to be called the 'Faurisson Affair.' Chomsky, who allegedly supported the 'right' of Robert Faurisson to publicize his questionable thoughts on the holocaust—as Chomsky (1981) has put it, "he denies the existence of gas chambers or of a systematic plan to massacre the Jews and questions the authenticity of the Anne Frank diary, among other things"—had this to say in his defence:

> […] it is elementary that freedom of expression (including academic freedom) is not to be restricted to views of which one approves, and that it is precisely the case of views that are almost universally despised and condemned that this right must be most vigorously defended (ibid.).

Kant's categorical imperative rests upon this axiom of generalizability and as a consequence it bounds the ethical subject to the shared duties illuminated through practical reason (cognitivism): "This harmonizing with humanity as an end in itself would, however, be merely negative and not positive, unless everyone also endeavours, as far as he can, to further the ends of others. For the ends of any person who is an end in himself must, if this idea is to have its full effect in me, be also, as far as possible, my ends" (Kant, [1783] 2007: 181). Thus, for Kant, the universalizing principle takes the form of an imperative resulting from objective reason.

Adherents of the semantic theory associated with ethical universalism have typically presumed an objective place that is illuminated by the reasoning capacities of the mind as in deontological ethics, or empirical observations as in naturalist methodologies, etc. Overall, the popular criticism against ethical universalism has been that adherents have been insensitive to the unique cultural codes of diverse social groups and that they have therefore judged the ethical actions of these groups according to the standards of only one hegemonic social group. As Todd May has put it, "[t]he threat posed [...] in articulating a universal conception of justice is that of allowing one linguistic genre (namely, the cognitive) to dominate others" (May, 1994: 129). Mackie's critique of utilitarianism has stood the test of time and has proved to be a useful critique in this respect:

> People are simply not going to put the interests of all their 'neighbours' on an equal footing with their own interests [...] Such universal concern will not be the actual motive of their choice, nor will they act as if it were (Mackie, 1977: 130–1).

Yet the question is inevitably raised: why do ethical actors utter these statements, *love thy neighbour,* and so on, if they do not believe them to be true? Mackie's response has alluded to the psychoanalytical understanding of the role of fantasy in everyday life:

> It encourages the treatment of moral principles not as guides to action but as a fantasy which accompanies actions with which it is quite incompatible [...] To identify morality with something that certainly will not be followed is a sure way of bringing it into contempt—practical contempt, which combines all too readily with theoretical respect (Mackie, 1977: 131–2).

This logic has close affinities with that of the superego in Lacanian thought, which succeeds in garnering control of the id by way of the subject's encouraged transgressions: *Enjoy!* Moreover, the Lacanian interpretation of Mackie's statement would be that fantasized ethics are the very stuff of the imaginary order—an order of presumed wholeness, synthesis, similarity, and autonomy.

Bernard Williams's response to the central problematic of utilitarianism or consequentialism provided a useful critique of utilitarianism and consequentialism. He argued that people do not judge actions according to their consequences alone. As the Telegraph put it: "Williams pointed out, a very quick way to stop people from parking on double yellow lines in London would be to threaten to shoot anyone that did. If only a couple of people were shot for this, it could be justified on a simple utilitarian model, since it would promote happiness for the majority of Londoners" (Telegraph, 2003). According to Williams, utilitarian ethicists do not take their own discourse seriously—instead, they appear to be victims of their own elaborate fantasy. They thus

fail to traverse the fantasy of ethics. Traversing the fantasy implies bringing it to its limit in order to expose the extent to which the ethical system shatters.[6] The problem of ethical universalism is therefore the problem of mistaking fantasy for base reality, base reality is much rather the unstable foundation of these limits.

This is the nature of fantasy in the political context: we do not bring our political principles to the end precisely in order to defend the principles upon which our unstable ideologies depend. Is this not what is at work in postmodern politics and aesthetics? I hope that the reader will permit me the minor detour to establish this claim. Politics as the surplus of need rendering possible an activity of novelty in the scopic field; this, in essence, defines the public realm as the sphere of action. Hannah Arendt insisted that those who acted in the public realm were courageous—but for so long courage referred to inner-most feelings rather than to the natality of action in the public realm. What could be more inner than that which is outside? What this *something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me* is, for Lacan, is precisely the real of things from which we are barred. It is an outside that is paradoxically at the very heart of the subject. Things have withdrawn from our viewing of them and, as such, the fear that they arouse does not and can not relate to the public realm of perception. Contrarily, politics begins with our frightening relationship to things in the world and with our inability to become the thing among things that we are.

Walter Benjamin knew very well that children had no need for politics. He took pleasure in his childhood relationship to things, a pleasure surmounted by an extreme discomfort on the verge of his collapse. Very nearly had the young Benjamin become a thing among the things that inhabited the space of his hiding place. By encasing himself within the world of things, he threatened to destroy himself and become a thing with them: "The child who stands behind the doorway curtain himself becomes something white that flutters [...] and behind a door, he is himself a door" (Benjamin, 2006: 99). The human intruder invited panic in Benjamin: "In my hiding place, I realize what was true about all of this. Whoever discovered me could hold me petrified [...] [and] confine me for life within the heavy door. Should the person looking for me uncover my lair, I would therefore give a loud shout [...] with a cry of self-liberation" (ibid., 100). A cry, perchance for having failed in his impossible task, for having chosen to be human in the face of abjection; a cry that sounded in the memory of an adult day-dreaming of his more capable childhood. In the withdrawal of things from view, fear and anxiety are primordial—and the distance (however close) of things to view is the founding for politics. Politics involves the administration of fear, it is the fear of fear itself.

Fear is primordial. There is an activity to things. It is the subject whom is *subjected* to things and it is things that *object* to the subject. Lacan believed that the subject was born prematurely, weak. In defence of the anxiety-provoking gaze of things, the subject projects a stain/screen upon the landscape; thus begins the subject's administration of fear. Under postmodern conditions of late capitalism fear is administered on the behalf of the subject by unseen symbolic forces—this is the perversity of postmodern ideology. Politics under postmodern capitalism consists of being seen as a political agent in public: candlelight vigils, Facebook pages, a veritable Kierkegaardian moment where everybody wins (ie, the state wins for ostensibly 'allowing' the protesters to set up camp and the protesters win for bringing themselves and their issues into view). Paul Virilio's

[6] I do not mean to imply that there is an accessible underside to the fantasy. Rather, I intend to point out that the fantasy is itself something that can be fantasized about *to the end.*

work centres around this problem of the stain as the accelerated bringing into view of things under postmodern capitalism. Bertrand Richard writes in the preface to Virilio's newest book: "The administration of fear is a world discovering that there are things to be afraid of but still convinced that more speed and ubiquity are the answer" (Virilio, 2012: 10–1). *Grey Ecology* is the discovery of the accident of postmodern capitalism—an accident that is revealed as a movement from perversion toward psychosis, from disavowal toward foreclosure, a shift in the cultural logic of late capitalism. Today we glimpse the emergence of a new regime of power that sustains itself through an ideology of claustrophobia: "imagine this universe where things will already be there, already viewed, already given" (Virilio, 2010: 34). Beneath the postmodern 'circuits of drive' a disaster is looming: "The fear of acceleration is not there yet, but certain people, who are claustrophobic, or asthmatic, already feel this fear: the fear of exhausting the geo-diversity of the world" (ibid., 33). The fear of acceleration is the onset of postmodern psychosis and the decline of symbolic efficiency, and claustrophobia is the symptom of a world of speed, of the loss of the *nom-de-pere.* It is a fear of fear itself insofar as claustrophobia is the foreclosure of the distance separating ourselves from things.

Virilio contends that today "[w]e are in a world of madness" (Virilio, 2010: 92), the onset of which, I maintain, occurs as a response to the acceleration of the image through the geometral point of the eye. We are reminded that the first machine of acceleration was "not the locomotive of the industrial revolution […] but the photographic apparatus" (ibid., 58). Virilio thereby relegates the problem of acceleration to the operations performed across the scopic field, to the acceleration of the stain: "[t]he machine of acceleration is the machine of vision" (ibid., 58). The question of the scopic field relates to the distance between two unities in geometral space—the stain is the pollution of a distance and this pollution becomes the central problem of postmodern politics. Virilio writes, "[t] he pollution of distance is grey ecology. One must keep one's distance" (ibid., 81). The pollution of our space from things occurs as a consequence of the proliferation of images and as the ostensible elimination of that distance. In the photo-graph one *quickly* brings the world *out there* into one's hands—a deceiving picture of the world that paradoxically brings reality further from view. A fitting aphorism: 'relationships are like sand in the grip of your hand—held loosely and the sand remains where it is, but gripped too tightly and the sand trickles out.' We have gripped things too tightly in our hands—acceleration, hyper-conformity has only made capitalism less perverse and more psychotic! Today, one has the image or the photograph without the sufficient number of *point-de-capiton* [quilting points]. Virilio's 'University of Disaster' is the place from which the discovery of accidents inherent to the acceleration of progress might occur—and these discoveries are crucial because they contribute, in whatever minimal way, to the possibility of regaining some sense of the world. The discovery of the airplane brought with it the accident of the plane crash—and yet, to protect ourselves from the fear of flying, we forget about the accident and focus on the tele-vision folded-out into view just a foot from our eyes. Perhaps the appropriate counter-accident was *JetBlue's* in-flight movie of 'Air Emergency'.

Accidents are un-intentional byproducts inherent to the intentional narcissism of progress. In the scopic field they are best examined through contemporary art. According to Virilio, the accident of abstract art was that it made possible an aesthetics of the invisible—ie, the task of post-war abstract art was to bring the invisible into the geometral space, into the visible. Virilio's response to modern abstract art is crucial for continental aesthetics: he reveals the pollution of the visual field by the narcissism of the imaginary. Thus, the symptom or accident of postmodern capitalism is not just claustrophobia but also glaucoma: "[w]ithout knowing it, there is a restriction of

the visual spectrum, and one loses laterality. […] Tele-objectivity is a glaucoma […] In the here and now, in the divine perception, and not by way of a screen, of a microscope, or the screen of a television, there is a very important element. I am surprised to what degree people are no longer able to orient themselves in life. They have lost their perception of their lateral environment" (ibid., 56). The glaucoma of postmodern capitalism: 'eyes so that they might *not* see.' Lacan was clear on this point: "In the scopic field, everything is articulated between two terms that act in an antinomic way— on the side of things, there is the gaze, that is to say, things look at me, and yet I see them. This is how one should understand those words, so strongly stressed in the Gospel, *they have eyes that they might not see.* That they might not see what? Precisely, that things are looking at them" (Lacan, 1988: 109). "To see," Virilio claims, "is not to know" (Virilio, 2010: 79). Virilio teaches us that acceleration brings with it the accident of seeing but not knowing, of acting without knowing the intention or accidents inherent to one's acts or presentations, and so on. Eyes so that they may not see, Virilio intends to remove our eyes so that we *might* see.

Postmodern politics as the public activity of those who do not act, postmodern aesthetics as the visibility of that which the eyes can not see— Virilio's theory of aesthetics reveals the invisibility of visibility itself. We ought to remember the Lacanian dictum that the foreclosure of the *nom-de-pere* results in the return of the symptom in the real. In other words, what is rejected from the symbolic register re-appears as an imaginary guise in the real. Hubertus von Amelunxen, in an admittedly confused conversation with Virilio, has put this quite well: "Having read basically everything that you have published, I have never understood *Art and Silence,* because you turn the fundamental argument of modernism, to render visible, […] around [by] saying that abstraction anticipated the becoming-invisible of the world of the visible" (Virilio, 2010: 57). This is why Virilio's work on aesthetics is better read alongside Alain Badiou (cf., his fifteen theses on art), Slavoj Zizek and Jacques Lacan, rather than Gilles Deleuze, Hannah Arendt, Jean-Frangios Lyotard or Jacques Ranciere. For example, the accident of Malevich's *Black Square* is fully exposed in Ad Reinhardt's *Abstract Painting:* in the former, a 'new threshold' for painting is breached—a black square disrupts the hegemony of the figurative line. But in the latter, the accident of the 'new threshold' is made possible—after distancing oneself from the painting, shifting one's eyes and perspective, one begins to see beneath the real of the black square a re-emergence of the figurative line. The accident, an accidental encounter with the things of the world through overproximity, through the foreclosure of distance, this is the visible hidden within the invisible. As Virilio puts it, "[a]lthough the accident—the inherent potential for derailment—is intentionally much less visible than the ostensible benefits of any given development, this 'hidden face' deserves critical attention" (ibid., 136). It is this hidden face that challenges the hysterical Left's contemporary fascination with a 'politics without politics' (cf., Dean, 2009).

Postmodern politics, after Virilio, must overcome the problem of the 'wall of language', for it is also the problem of the culture industry, as Virilio writes: "We do not debate in the same manner if we are in a lifeboat, an amphitheatre, or a classroom. You see already the modification of the debate for television, with the quickness of the exchanges. This disrupts the contents between the presenter and the so well-named, his 'guest'. I call this type of debate 'ping-pong'. 'You have five seconds to respond.' 'ping-pong.' […] When I go on television, I hate it. […] I do not want to play 'pingpong'" (Virilio, 2010: 65). Growing up I've become familiar with the best way to practice for ping-pong tournaments: one takes the table and folds one side of it up so that it is against a wall. The 'other' player becomes the wall itself. The ball bounces from the player's paddle toward the

wall and bounces back to the player in an inverted form. Perhaps it is time to stop practicing our politics the way we practice for a ping-pong tournament.

Virilio's *Grey Ecology* is an essential read for those looking to diagnose the accident of contemporary politics. It is also of interest to those dissatisfied with the current democratic turn in the aestheticization of politics and the politicization of aesthetics. The book proves that there is the possibility for a nondemocratic but equally non-statist intervention into aesthetics and politics. Virilio's advice is to look the Medusa in the eye, face our fears, and traverse the fantasy of postmodern politics:

> We must start at the end and head towards the beginning, because the end is here. The finitude of all art and the world is here. Finitude is in front of us, and we must start from the end, not in order to cry, 'Oh, it's horrible.' No, we must do this in order to confront the end and be able to go beyond it. I don't know where this will lead, by the way (Virilio, 2010: 72).

Whether in postmodern politics or in ethical universalism, the appropriate political task is to traverse the fantasy by beginning at the end. But what is the fantasy of ethical relativism?

Ethical relativism retains the function of truth-apt propositions but substitutes the belief in universal truth for the related belief in multiple (often competing) truth-claims that are relative to differing conceptions of place. The problem with ethical relativism is one of accounting for the value of process in competing ethical groups when one social group's ethical code over-rules the legitimacy of another process or value-system to exist. This is the problem outlined by Todd May: "The command to respect the diversity of language games is precisely an ethical one; moreover, it is a universally binding one" (May, 1994: 129). The result is that one invites domination or else falls back into a universal prescriptivism: "[T]he concern with 'preserving the purity' and singularity 'of each genre' by reinforcing its isolation from the others gives rise to exactly what was intended to be avoided: 'the domination of one genre by another', namely, the domination of the prescriptive" (Sam Weber as cited by Todd May, 1994: 129). Zizek argued that this ethical code has become the fantasy of contemporary liberal politics:

> Today's tolerant liberal multiculturalism wishes to experience the Other deprived of its Otherness (the idealized Other who dances fascinating dances and has an ecologically holistic approach to reality, while features like wife beating remain out of sight). Along the same lines, what this tolerance gives us is a decaffeinated belief, a belief that does not hurt anyone and never requires us to commit ourselves (Zizek, 2004).

Ethical relativism thereby renders invisible what was previously visible in the project of ethical universalism: a certain violence or domination. It is for that reason all the more suspect and problematic (how do we attack an enemy that we can no longer see?). Jeffrey Reiman has described this as the paradox of relativism:

> Here enters the paradox: The critique of universal standards because they exclude certain individuals or groups of individuals is a critique of those standards for not being universal enough! Consequently, rather than abandoning or opposing universalism, the critique is itself based on an implicit valuation, albeit one that aims to be more inclusive than the ones critiqued (Reiman, 1996: 253).

Reiman argued that relativism is founded upon a fantasized image of universalism at its limit. His critique was aimed at postmodern versions of meta-ethics and, in particular, the 'Postmodern Ethics' of Zygmunt Bauman. If one is thereby committed to a pluralist/relativist meta-ethics by way of one's rejection of the authoritarianism of universalist meta-ethics, as in the case of post-anarchist meta-ethics (at least according to Benjamin Franks's interpretation; c.f., Benjamin Franks, 2008a & 2008b), then one is forced to return once again to the central problematic: how to account for a nonauthoritarian universalism? Reiman explained: "In short, what postmodernism needs, what virtually every postmodern writer writes as if he or she had, but in fact does not have, is a universal standard for valuing human beings which is compatible with the postmodern critique of universals" (Reiman, 1996: 254).

The problem of universalism is thereby obscured by the relativist critique. There appear to be two appropriate responses to this problem (or dichotomy): the first is to rethink the meta-ethical framework from within the positive discourse of conventional meta-ethics, and; the second is to reject all positive frameworks. It is my belief that only a profoundly negative response is tenable and consistent with the overall tendency of the anarchist project. We are therefore met by the ostensible moral dilemma of choosing any one side of the relativist/universalist debate (this is also argued by Lukes, 2008; but Lukes stands firmly on one of the two sides), but in our case we have noticed that which side one presumes does not matter so much as how well one argues for their side through to its end—or else the problem of the false dichotomy is resolved by rejecting both relativist and universalist approaches in favour of nihilism. In any case, relativists believe that universal truth is constituted by the competing truth-claims of particularly situated social groups and/or subjects. A great example of this approach came from Andrew Koch, an early post-anarchist:

> The truth value of any such assertions [in universalist ethics] has been dissolved by the poststructuralist critique. The plurality of languages and the individuated nature of sensory experience suggest that each denotative and prescriptive statement must be unique to each individual. Consensual politics is reduced to an expression of power, the ability for one set of metaphors to impose […] its validating conditions for truth (Koch, [1993] 2011: 37).

I will return to many of the examples that I have provided in the remaining sections to come, for now it will be enough to take each as a particular example of the foundation and system of conventional meta-ethical philosophy.

I may now briefly describe the problem of epistemological foundationalism as it relates to positive responses to the question of process. The belief that there are basic or axiomatic belief systems that, in turn, constitute the foundation for truth (upon which further truth-claims may be constructed by relation) is endemic to the foundationalist position. Taken together, now, we may say that ontological essentialism occupies the western side of the horizontal axis of being while epistemological foundationalism occupies the southern side of the vertical axis of knowing, as co-constitutive of essence (displayed in Figure 1.0):

Ethical nihilism proceeds on the basis of an epistemological emptiness and/or uncertainty. Ethical nihilists realize that truth-claims are pre-mised upon failure. For some anarchists, such as Benjamin Franks, there are significant problems with the ethical nihilist position (we should also be aware of the conflation in Franks's work between ethical nihilism and ethical relativism). Franks's argument is best summed up in the following passage:

> The belief that the individual (or individual consciousness) is the fundamental basis for the construction of, and justification for, moral values has a number of fatal flaws for an anarchist or any proponent of meaning social action: (1) that it is fundamentally solipsistic, denying dialogue and discourse and the possibility of moral evaluation; (2) it recreates social hierarchies of the form rejected by the core principles of anarchism; and (3) that [Max] Stirner's own meta-ethical account is epistemologically unsound as it ignores its own social construction (Franks, 2008a: 16).

I will approach a response to Franks's argument in the next section, for now it will be enough to distinguish between two main variants of ethical nihilism in relation to the dual question of process. Ethical nihilists are epistemological skeptics and, depending on their answer to the question of place, either hold an agnostic preference in relation to truth, admitting indifference to the fact that truth may or may not exist and that it is not the aim of their own discourse, or else they invite truth in all of its negative dimensions. In the latter approach, truth is believed to occur where existing truth claims are subverted. As we shall see, ethical nihilists may also be radical/base subjectivists (hereafter 'base subjectivists'), particularly of the Stirnerian egoist variety that Franks critiques in his article (although he attributes Stirner's response to place as positive rather than negative). I shall hereafter refer to the two nihilist positions, depending on their respective answers to questions of place and process, as ethical skepticism (as in the base subjectivist variant) and deep ethical nihilism (as in the base materialist variant). Ethical skeptics retain the subject as the locus of political activity (a 'within' categorization) while deep ethical nihilists reject the subject entirely (a 'without' categorization).

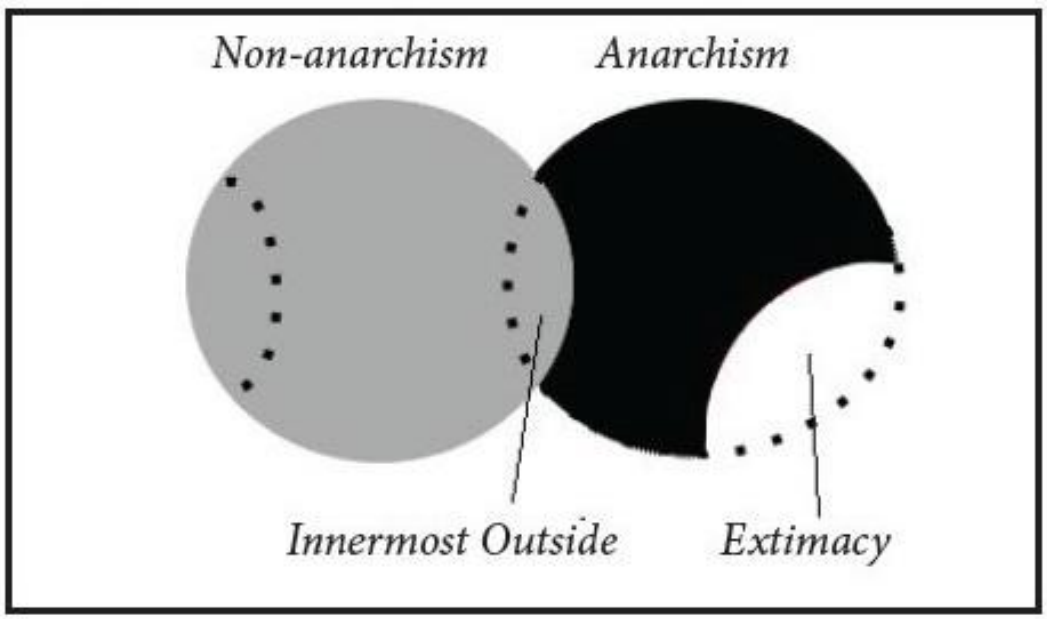

Figure 1.0 — Essence

The Absence of being in Subjectivist and Materialist Meta-Ethics

Taken together, place and process presuppose the possibility for a meta-ethical understanding of the paradoxical essence of being as primordial non-being, as demonstrated by the four potential conclusions inherent to the meta-ethical question; whereby '+' (plus) indicates a traditional conception of that feature and '-' (minus) indicate a paradoxical conception of that feature; ie, '+' indicates stability or presence in the feature and '-' indicates that the feature undermines itself, is absent, or else builds presence upon its own negation/absence:

Four Meta-Ethical Codes

Ethical Code	**Place**	**Process**
Subjectivist	+	+
Base Subjectivist	+	-
Materialist	-	+
Base Materialist	-	-

Four potential codes may be constructed according to this binary classification system and each potential may be respectively labelled as follows: (1) subjectivist, (2) base subjectivist, (3) materialist, and; (4) base materialist. Each code is connected to at least one of the substantial theories outlined above (ethical universalism, ethical relativism, and ethical nihilism) but, for the purposes of this essay, let us consider this as an independent model. My aim is to arrive at two pathways for understanding contemporary meta-ethics. These two pathways will further describe post-anarchist meta-ethics today, and post-anarchist meta-ethics after an intervention with Georges Bataille's philosophy.

In the traditional subjectivist code: place and process refer to the stable and transparent qualities of essence inherent in variants of humanist and existentialist metaphysics whereby the subject assumes the position of mastery over her self-knowledge in order to avoid the truth inherent to her blunders, unintentional utterances, and irrational desires (Fink, 1995: 43). As Sass has put it, in humanist philosophy there is a faith "in the validity of the person's selfawareness" (1989: 446). Thus, the self-aware subject continuously brings herself into being through repetitive movements in rational thought. The function of Descartes's *cogito,* according to philosophers of the subject of non-being (from Sartre to Bataille and Lacan), has been to defend the fragile imaginary ego formation from the trauma of the Real by concealing its inevitable counteracting effects: "He [Descartes] conceptualizes a point at which thinking and being overlap: when the Cartesian subject says to himself, 'I am thinking', being and thinking coincide momentarily" (Fink, 1995: 43). The subject of the subjectivist code submits herself to the foreign demands made onto her and internalizes these cause(s) as her own. However, in doing so the primordial fear nonetheless returns: she has always deviated from this template and she will continue to do so until she takes the time to gaze into the darkness from whence her perversions arose. Fink has described this former process as 'ego thinking' whereby the ego attempts to "legitimate blunders and unintentional utterances by fabricating after-the-fact explanations which agree with the ideal self-image" (Fink, 1995: 44). It is in this sense that we may conclude that humanist meta-ethics, like all positive ethical systems, are founded within the imaginary order.

In summation, the subject of the subjectivist code perpetually aims to conceal the inevitable ruptures in her thinking as a result of the original ontological mistake answered by the meta-ethical question of place: the coherence granted to the subject by her essence registers itself as a manifestation of the imaginary order, an imaginary ego formation and maintainability (ideal-ego/ego-ideal), rather than as the radically foreign and impossible Real ego—here we might imagine Lacan's *Schema L,* the imaginary axis of *a* to *a'* constitutes this field). While this does not preclude the influence of the Real in imaginary and symbolic thought it does, as it were, function to conceal (or repress) the trauma of this loss.

In the base subjectivist code the belief in a truth-bound subject is retained but only as a critique of *telos.* The *telos* of truth, liberation, and the dialectic of history, and so on, is disrupted by an epistemological process that gears itself toward the darkness of the unconscious. Jacques Lacan, the exemplar of the base subjectivist code, appropriated the inverted form of Descartes's *cogito* as: *'either I am not thinking or I am not'* (*'Ou je ne pense pas ou je ne suis pas'*). The presumption was that the subject is constituted by a fundamental split between thinking (*'either I am not thinking*') and being (*'or I am not'*). The lineage of classical and traditional philosophical thought since Plato (and through Aristotle), as well as the positive foundations and systems upon which these traditions have been built, have traditionally upheld the belief in an inextricable connection between the positive responses to place and process. After the base subjectivist re-reading of Freud, through Jacques Lacan's writing, one is able to analytically distinguish between several potential relationships in place and process and to thereafter incorporate absence or accident as the full range of one's being as well as the full range of one's knowing. In the base subjectivist code the subject is retained as the place from which ethics are thought to derive but the process through which these ethics are believed to be filtered is reverted toward a constitutively open discourse whereby the subject's self-knowledge is no longer concealed by imaginary identifications with foreign causes or essences. Instead, the subject assumes the place from which her irrational desires emanate and she is no longer obligated to give way to her everyday rational desires (*'ne ce pas ceder sur son desir').*

In this sense, the subject does not become *sensu stricto* non-being but she becomes symbolically aware of the non-being at the heart of her being. In a word, she understands and comes to occupy that split between her essential ego formation and the desires that continuously call this formation into question. This is what Lacan meant when he argued that "[o]nce the subject himself comes into being, he owes it to a certain non-being upon which he raises up his being" (Lacan, 1988: 192) and "being of non-being, that is how *I* comes on the scene as a subject who is conjugated with the double aporia of a veritable subsistence that is abolished by his knowledge, and by a discourse in which it is death that sustains existence" (Lacan, [1960] 2006: 679). This is precisely a *social* death that occurs in tandem with the negation of one's place in any discursive system, for the destruction of knowledge is simultaneously the destruction of ethics and the destruction of ethics can only be established from within the foundation of knowledge; knowledge is to be thought of as the symbolic apparatus of language, or what Lacan has designated as 'imaginary knowledge' or *connaissance* (Lacan, 1973: 281). Is this not the meaning behind Freud's oft-cited thesis that '[a] man should not strive to eliminate his complexes but to get into accord with them, they are legitimately what directs his conduct in this world'?

I shall pose my answer to this question as the following provocation: is the return of ethics in political and social philosophy not also the symptom of its defeat by the imaginary symbolic system of knowledge? To get into accord with this complex presumes the misdirected and con-

fused passions of the militant whose actions are fraught with mental anguish and who therefore proceeds with great reluctance and caution. This approach, what has been coined the 'ethics of the Real', has been described in great depth by Alenka Zupancic. Zupancic has argued that ethics is paradoxical insofar as "[t]he heart of all ethics is something which […] has nothing to do with the register of ethics […] [Instead it] concerns something which appears only in the guise of the encounter, as something that […] surprises us, throws us 'out of joint'" (2000: 235). This at first appears to be a radically foreign materialist ethical system but it falls back to the ethics of the receptive subject for it is she who must perform the ethical act. The Real is that which interrupts the smooth functioning of the subject's ideological universe and it is also the Real that allows for this universe to become reconfigured by the symbolic system (Zupancic, 2000: 235): "[h]ence the impossibility of the Real does not prevent it from having an effect in the realm of the possible" (Zupancic, 2000: 235).

The ethics of the act occurs by way of the subject's reception of the Real: "will I act in conformity [with] what threw me 'out of joint', will I be ready to reformulate what has hitherto been the foundation of my existence?" (Zupancic, 2000: 235). This is likewise the approach argued for by Richard J. F. Day in his book *Gramsci is Dead* (2005). For Day, as for Lacan, the ethics of the Real (or 'politics of the Act') is required to disrupt the inevitable perpetuation of the politics of demand:

> [E]very demand, in anticipating a response, *perpetuates* these structures, which exists precisely in anticipation of demands. This leads to a positive feedback loop, in which the ever-increasing depth and breadth of apparatuses of discipline and control create ever-new sites of antagonism, which produce new demands, thereby increasing the quantity and intensity of discipline and control. […] It is at this point that a politics of the act [or ethics of the Real] is required (Day, 2005: 89).

Day describes the ethics of the Real as the subject's ability to "go through […] the fantasy of the symbolic system"; "[g]oing through the fantasy in this case means giving up on the expectation of a non-dominating response from structures of domination" (Day, 2005: 89). Day has been one of very few anarchist philosophers to adequately tackle the meta-ethical question of anarchism. To the extent that I can, at this point, come into agreement with Day it is in that particular quality of his more concrete ethics, what he terms the 'ethics of affinity,' that affirms "a logic that escapes reason—the logic of affinity, […] [which] involves other affects such as passion, strategy, rhetoric and style" (2001: 23). It is this logic of passion, rhetoric and style, as an escape from reason, that remains tied to the base subjectivist node as I describe it here.

In the materialist code positive conceptions of place are rejected and traditional understandings of *telos* are largely retained. The subject is abandoned as the site from which ethics are derived but all ethics are thought to arrive as a response to the truth inherent to the goal (s)ought. Although I do not wish to enter into a debate about the plausibility of the claim that Marx was a consequentialist, I would nonetheless hazard to provide an interpretation of aspects of Marx's work as the embodiment of the materialist code as I describe it here. In other words, this should be thought of as an example of consequentialism not as an argument that Marx's work was in fact consequentialist. One should furthermore note that Marx was not an ethicist and meta-ethical interpretations of his work rely principally on the latent rather than the manifest interpretation. Derek P. H. Allen, describing the utilitarian tendency of consequentialism, has argued that:

> Marx believes social revolution is a morally justifiable goal because […] it is a necessary condition of general freedom. Then to the extent that some act *n* is causative of social revolution, it is to that extent and for that reason morally justifiable. The statement […] is consistent with utilitarianism (if 'ought' is qualified by *prima facie*) in case the social revolution is in someone's interest. Marx believes acts causative of social revolution are in the interests of the proletariat; to that extent his position is compatible with utilitarianism [and, I would also add, ethical universalism] (1973: 189).

Thus, because the question of ethics in Marx's own writing has only been answered by the latent content—by way of which we may arrive at the consequentialist reading—it is difficult to infuse Marxist politics with consistent anti-authoritarian ethical obligations, as many attempt to do today, unless first of all tactically pairing the meaning of the manifest content with the latent and manifest anti-authoritarian tendencies of anarchist political philosophy. In this case, anarchism rescues Marxism from the authoritarian, consequentialist, interpretation. For the purpose of this chapter it will be enough to describe materialism as the dogma that aligns itself with the *a posteriori* knowledge of material conditions revealed through teleological conceptions of truth.

In this regard, Georg Lukacs provided an adequate and useful explanation of dialectical materialism: "The premise of dialectical materialism is, we recall: 'It is not men's consciousness [a rejection of 'place'] that determines their existence, but on the contrary, their social existence [an affirmation of 'process'] that determines their consciousness.' […] Only when the core of existence stands revealed [through knowledge-valued methodologies/processes] as a social process can existence be seen as the product, albeit the hitherto unconscious product, of human activity" (Lukacs, 1919: §5). Lukacs, and many other Marxists, strongly criticized what they saw as the bourgeois individualism of subjectivist ethics (and, here, like Franks, they have also conflated the base subjectivist tendency with the subjectivist one). But according to some of the post-anarchists, the materialist ethic reaches its highest and most potent form in the development of the vanguard party. The vanguard party is said to have the astutely positioned role of generating knowledge about matters of the current context based on the trajectory of the necessary movement toward communism, and then transferring this knowledge *onto* those who otherwise lack the proper awareness about such matters. Is this not one of the possible interpretations of the function of false or betrayed consciousness amongst the revolutionary class as preached by traditional or so-called orthodox Marxist intelligentsia, that is, that they value certain truth claims as universal in scope while rendering other forms of knowledge as, pejoratively speaking, *non-knowledge?*

Finally, in the base materialist code, the subject as the place of resistance no longer holds and a deep nihilism takes over the epistemological function. Truth is gained by reductions in useful knowledge. My reading of the significance of recent developments in nihilist communist thought, particularly the writings of the Dupont brothers (writing under the following pen names, at least: Monsieur Dupont, frere dupont, and Le Gargon Dupont) is that there is a base materialist philosophy inherent to their provocation. I would like to quote at length because I believe that nihilist communism has not received the attention it deserves:

> Pro-revolutionary thought is negative thought because it criticises what exists and because it proposes a solution that is real only in the sense that it can be conceived

> of—it says no to reality and yes to what does not exist [an answer to the question of place]. At this juncture there has always been a separating of the ways as to what to do next, the most obvious solution is to attempt some kind of transfer or projection of the milieu's consciousness onto the everyday consciousness of the masses [this is the problem of the vanguard party as a consequence of false consciousness]. When this strategy fails, and for each successive generation of revolutionaries, it has failed, some small fragment of the milieu has recognised the negative character of milieu thought, its incommunicability, and then it rediscovers nihilism [an answer to the question of process]. This is the last position, it seeks only to give nothing back, to hold onto the negative, that there is something remaining, not bound in by the suffocating powers arrayed against it.
>
> It refuses to engage on any terms. The nihilist fragment seizes hold of the negative character and develops it as far as possible within the confines of the contemporary pro-rev framework. The nihilistic tendency develops […] because it recognises that the only other option is a return to politics and complicity. […] The return to positivity erupts at every step within the negative project; you observe how supposed revolutionaries suddenly throw themselves into political campaigns determined by events, particularly during elections, and which have no bearing on expressed pro-revolutionary values. […] ([T]hese arguments have appeared in the anarchist journal *Freedom* and originate in 'class struggle anarchist' circles, that is from those who imagine themselves to have the most radical and uncompromising agenda). […] Their analysis is overburdened by strategy-think […] [and] the immediatistic whizz of solving stated, specific problems (frere dupont, 2004).

I believe that frere dupont's provocation describes precisely the radical appropriation of the nihilist ethic. Taken to its limit, nihilist communism is perhaps the only base materialist political philosophy in practice today.

Georges Bataille's base materialist nihilism is apparent in the Dupont's texts. Bataille's *oeuvre* represents a deep ethical nihilism for two reasons. First, he strongly negated all positive notions of place: "[T]horough-going dehumanization of nature, involving the uttermost impersonalism in the explanation of natural forces, and vigorously atheological cosmology. […] An instinctive fastidiousness in respect to all the traces of human personality, and the treatment of such as the excrement of matter; as its most ignoble part, its gutter" (Land, 1992: *xx*). Unlike the ethical subject in base subjectivist meta-ethics, the subject as a metaphysical category is a symptom rather than a solution to the question of political space. Second, he strongly opposed strictly positive answers to the question of process: "Ruthless fatalism. No space for decisions, responsibilities, actions, intentions. Any appeal to notions of human freedom discredits a philosopher beyond amelioration" (Land, 1992: *xx*). Unlike the ethical act in base subjectivist meta-ethics, the subject's decisions are inconsequential—the best approach is none at all. This is a form of nihilism that tests the limits of ethics (Nick Land has argued that Bataille's nihilism is a full rejection of ethics, cf., Land, 1992: *xx*; here, I would claim that it is much rather a proclamation of an ethics of the second order) while rejecting the *telos* of consequentialist ethics: "Nihilism is the loss of this goal, the nullification of man's end, the reversion of all work to waste. It is in this sense that history is aborted by zero" (Land, 1992: *xx*). Nihilism is therefore the founding of a politics of failure in a space of emptiness. Bataille's nihilism involves the loss of the political subject as

well as the political project. I will explore Bataille's paradoxical ethics in another section of this essay, for now it will be enough to situate Bataille's *oeuvre* firmly within the base materialist response to meta-ethical questioning. Can we not suggest, at least, since it is perhaps on the minds of all contemporary meta-ethicists and yet rarely brought to fruition (Wood, 1996: 221–3), that Bataille's nihilism *is* meta-ethics *proper*, that it is the fullest response to the negation of place and process within the meta-ethical framework? If we are to subscribe to the nihilist currents within contemporary meta-ethical philosophy (and, I will remind the reader that Wood has argued that this is where contemporary meta-ethicists are today) we may also suggest that the base materialist discourse is a rejection of the full range of positive foundations and systems.

Anarchism, The Latent Tradition

I have been hinting that we can further divide each of the two areas of meta-ethical philosophy into manifest and latent subtypes, thus providing another dimension of possibility with which to describe the various paradigms of anarchist philosophy. We may distinguish between the *explicit* (whereby what one considers explicit in a text one also considers to be approaching the objective reading by subtracting the author's unstated intentions and the context within which the author has written. I am aiming to describe the literal) and the *implicit* (whereby what one understands to be implicit one also believes to be brushing the intentions or desires of the author through a negation of the manifest content or else through an interpretation of themes evident across collective representations of texts) elements of the text with respect to questions of place and process. It should be noted that by invoking the concept of intentionality I do not mean to bring about an alliance with hermeneutic methodologies. My belief is that hermeneuticism—at least emblematic in the writings of Paul Ricoeur (cf., Ricoeur, 1981) and Quentin Skinner (cf., Skinner, 1989)—rely on a faith in the smooth dialogue between two *cogitos*. That is, hermeneuticism involves a belief at some level that message *M* arrives to participant *B* from participant *A* in an unaltered form, as *M*. Moreover, message *M* carries with it the intentions and context of the original transmission (as something in *M* more than *M*). However, the lineage of continental philosophy, beginning at least with Bataille through to Lacan, assumes precisely the reverse (for more on this see, for example, Frank & Bowtie's work on hermeneuticism in Jacques Lacan's work, 1997: 97–122). Latent content reveals itself as the discoverable consistency—rather than the explainable intentionality, objective context, or objective meaning—within the residue of the manifest content (Neuendorf, 2002: 5). Another way of thinking the manifest/latent dichotomy comes from Gray & Densten and Hair et al.: Gray & Densten have defined the manifest content as "elements [within a text] that are physically present and countable" (bringing to mind quantitative methodologies in sociology) (Gray & Densten, 1998: 420). Hair et al. have described the latent content as "[contents that] cannot be measured directly but can be represented or measured by one or more [...] indicators" (bringing to mind qualitative methodologies in sociology) (Hair et al. as cited in Berg, 2001: 148). Each definition applies to the interpretation of textual documents but owes a certain debt to the psychoanalytical methods developed originally by Freud.

Freud was principally interested in the analysis of manifest dream content by working through the implications of latent determinations, the dream thoughts:

> All dreams of the same night belong, in respect of their content, to the same whole; their division into several parts, their grouping and number, are all full of meaning

> and may be regarded as pieces of information about the latent dream-thoughts. In the interpretation of dreams consisting of several main sections, or of dreams belonging to the same night, we must not overlook the possibility that these different successive dreams mean the same thing, expressing the same impulses in different material. That one of these homologous dreams which comes first in time is usually the most distorted and most bashful, while the next dream is bolder and more distinct (1961: 216–217).

The themes that emerge from "successive dreams" refer directly to the latent dream thoughts while the manifest dream content refers to the individual "pieces of information". When the manifest content is thus grouped it brings "bolder and more distinct" meaning to the preceding particular dreams. Freud's writing at times confirmed the negative and elusive character inherent to the thoughts of the latent content in the manifest dream-work, as the following passage appears to suggest:

> Now, however, a new state of affairs dawns upon me. The affection in the dream does not belong to the latent content, to the thoughts behind the dream; it stands in opposition to this content; it is calculated to conceal the knowledge conveyed by the interpretation. Probably this is precisely its function. I remember with what reluctance I undertook the interpretation, how long I tried to postpone it, and how I declared the dream to be sheer nonsense. […] It has no informative value […] (Freud, 1961: 99).

Thus, the latent dream content provides the elusive impetus for the manifest elements of the dream—it is, so to speak, the *motor of the dream*, its foundation and system. To provide a crude example with respect to the anarchist emphasis on the place of power I would suggest the following conjecture as the quantitative summation of countless individual anarchist texts: *'Anarchists are against the State, Patriarchy, and the Church because representation and power are an inadequate framework for everyday life'.* More often than not, one finds a variant of this expression in the grassroots publications of contemporary anarchists rather than in the theoretical wellspring from which their actions are sourced, but this does not detract from my overall point.

Admittedly, the previous statement comes easy to me because it refers to the typical structures against which the majority of anarchists position themselves. But the question must be raised, following Saul Newman: "Why is it that when someone is asked to talk about radical politics today one inevitably refers to this same tired, old list of struggles and identities? Why are we so unimaginative politically that we cannot think outside the terms of this 'shopping list' of oppressions?" ([2001] 2007: 171). In Lacanese, what we are dealing with is precisely the movement from 'symptom' to 'sinthome'. The question of latent content is raised in this respect because, despite the clarity of the manifest content within the original texts in question, particular anarchists continue to restrict their analyses of power to the realization of concrete struggles and identities which are recuperated into the imaginaries of radical critical interpretation. This approach certainly manifests in practice what was before rendered a negative force in the latent philosophical text—but it does not *mimic* in practice what was practised in theory such that practice itself might be regarded as a manifest symptom of a latent function.

Certainly, I may say at this point that the negative process reflected in what may come to be regarded as key nihilist texts are themselves to be regarded as practices at the level of dis-

course rather than armchair speculations about life detached from practical relevance. Here, the negation of the manifest discourse may be thought of as a practice but we can not say the contrary: that the practice of the timeless reenactment of the manifest discourse can be thought of as negation. The anarchist tradition, taken in full, transcends these limited prescriptions, quite often identifying these manifestations of limited practice as symptoms of a larger *ethos* inherent to anarchist thought and practice but not reducible to them.

It has become quite fashionable in some anarchist circles to argue for an anarchism that is rooted in practice and to subsequently declare that the entire anarchist tradition collapses around this principle. But this strikes me as profoundly short-sighted: anarchism can not be reduced to an assemblage of practices and/or ideas but rather it has come to embody the tension between and against these two poles. Quite often anarchists have mined the valuable ideas implied in given practices and explored their implications for philosophy. On the other hand, anarchists have also founded a practice of philosophy and named this 'direct action at the level of thought.' For example, Alejandro de Acosta has argued that there has been an undiscovered tendency within traditional anarchist philosophy:

> Philosophers allude to anarchist practices; philosophers allude to anarchist theorists; anarchists allude to philosophers […] What is missing in this schema, I note with interest, is anarchists alluding to philosophical practice (Alejandro de Acosta, in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: 117).

In any case, the concrete manifest statement in my example is that *the State* (and I am inclined to also describe this as the State-ment) *is an illegitimate framework for ethics,* but now we may arrive at the latent definition of anarchism as an attitude of hostility in the face of representation and power (or else, as in base materialist variants, the profoundly negative *an-archy* that ceaselessly intervenes in the politics of representation). After the subtraction of the manifest content we arrive at the latent content: *'Anarchists are against the State, Patriarchy, and the Church, because representation and power are an inadequate framework for political life'.* Is this not precisely what an ethics of the real, and, indeed, Lacanian psychoanalysis as the traversal of the fantasy, is all about? The problem thus becomes: how can we be against representation and power without falling into the service of representation and power. The answer is paradoxical.

Jesse Cohn has analytically distinguished between 'typical' and 'essential' anarchist statements. 'Anarchists are against representation and power', this aligns itself with Cohn's definition of the essential:

> When I say *typical,* I am referring to anarchism as a material fact of history, when I say *essential,* I am referring to anarchism as an idea. The essence is an abstraction from material fact, a generalization about what it is that unites anarchists across different historical periods in an anarchist *tradition,* about the ways in which individual self-identified anarchists have identified themselves (diachronically) with the historical movement as well as (synchronically) with their living cohort (Cohn, 2006: 15).

I believe that Cohn's model (typical/essential) is somewhat inferior to Freud's (manifest/latent) because it precludes the discovery of certain key anarchist tendencies and philosophies

including, most notably, Max Stirner and inheritors of the egoist anarchist tradition (Renzo Novatore, Zo d'Axa, Bruno Filippi, among others) who have always remained on the periphery of traditional anarchist thought, challenging its most basic assumptions. One has always had the sense that these thinkers were anarchists but it has been difficult to integrate them into the traditional language of anarchism.[7] There is thus an ambiguity among the majority of anarchist scholars as to their place in the lineage or canon. I would like to include them in the lineage rather than exclude them because I believe that their inclusion invites new ways of conceiving old ideas.[8] Taken together, anarchism as a tradition, has referred to this latent ethical impulse against representation and power. As Jesse Cohn has put it, [T]he historical anarchist movement presented a socialist program for political transformation distinguished from reformist and Marxist varieties of socialism by its primary commitment to ethics, [as] expressed [by]: 1) a moral opposition to *all* forms of domination and hierarchy (particularly as embodied in the institutions of capitalism and the State, but also as manifested in other institutions, eg, the family, and in other relationships, etc, those of city and country or empire and colony) and, 2) a special concern with a coherence of means and ends [a rejection of *telos*] (Cohn, 2006: 14).

Cohn has strategically described an ethics that is outside of the manifest symptom, but he has also included manifest, particular, embodiments of this ethics as an example (ie, 'particularly as embodied in the institutions of capitalism and the State,' and so on). Traditionally, anarchists have been forced to provide concrete examples so as to avoid the distanciation-effect of theory. But is not Cohn's concretization of ethics the real distance? Does it not, by inscribing a shopping list of struggles and identities, reduce the playing field of politics? One must therefore seek to remain consistent with the latent force rather than the manifest structure of anarchist ethics, for there is a negativity that is at the very core of the anarchist tradition. This negativity is akin to that which is discussed by the meta-ethicist John L. Mackie:

> [W]hat I have called moral scepticism is a negative doctrine, not a positive one: it says what there isn't, not what there is. It says that there do not exist entities or relations of a certain kind, objective values or requirements, which many people have believed to exist. If [this] position is to be at all plausible, [it] must give some account of how other people have fallen into what [it] regards as an error, and this account will have to include some positive suggestions about how values fail to be objective, about what has been mistaken for, or has led to false beliefs about, objective values. But this will be a development of [the] theory, not its core: its core is the negation (Mackie, 1977: 17–8).

Anarchism is primarily an ethical tradition disguised by many of its manifest symptoms and the development of its theory should be distinguished from an elaboration, paradoxical as it may

[7] See Jason McQuinn's discussion of Stirner from *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed:* "Stirner's [...] absolute refusal of any and all forms of enslavement has been a perennial source of embarrassment for would-be anarchist moralists, ideologues, and politicians of all persuasions (especially leftists, but also including individualists and others). By clearly and openly acknowledging that every unique individual always makes her or his own decisions and cannot avoid the choices of selfpossession or self-alienation and enslavement presented at each moment, Stirner scandalously exposes every attempt not only by reactionaries, but by self-proclaimed radicals and alleged anarchists to recuperate rebellion and channel it back into new forms of alienation and enslavement" (McQuinn, 2010).

[8] [revision: I would like to exclude them rather than include them, because their exclusion further excludes the possibility of their recuperation. See, for example, my forthcoming review of Saul Newman's edited book *Max Stirner,* with *The Journal for the Study of Radicalism,* 2012, Vol. 6., No. 2]

be, of its ethical structure. This thesis (that anarchism is primary about ethics) has been raised in many ways (and rarely explored) by many anarchist intellectuals including, most pertinently, David Graeber, who has argued that, as Simon Critchley has retold it, "Marxism is typically a theoretical or analytical discourse about revolutionary strategy, whereas anarchism can be understood as an ethical discourse about revolutionary practice" (2008: 125). It therefore becomes apparent that the anarchist identity, and likewise anarchist subjectivity, depends, firstly, upon its commitment to ethics, and therefore all variants of anarchism must demonstrate to the best extent possible that they have remained faithful to this *ethos*. The ethical task set before the anarchists is one of either discovering the latent impulse anew in manifest content (a questionable enterprise if I may say as this subordinates the unique attribute of anarchism to a *theory* and restricts the focus to the logic of desire; this is what anglophone analysts referred to the 'discourse of the analyst') or else, moving backwards, rejecting the premise that radical politics depends essentially upon caricatures of ontology or epistemology by which Truth and non-being are exaggerated in order to uphold certain political effects. The alternative is to simply offer no-thing, and to fail in this task (in Lacanese, this is a movement from desire to drive).

Anarchy Through Three Discourses

Table 2.0 outlines the conceptual linkages across the three bodies of thought that I have touched upon here and that I will continue to outline in the remaining essay:

Table 2.0—
Place and Process Through Three Discourses

Ethical Code	**Place**	**Process**
***Subjectivist* Classical Anarchism**	**+**	**+**
***Base Subjectivist* Post-Anarchism**	**+**	**-**
***Materialist* Classical Marxism**	**-**	**+**
Base Materialist Georges Bataille	**-**	**-**

Reading from the vertical matrix, within manifest traditional anarchist philosophy ethics are thought to derive from the subjectivity of those seeking to dismantle a limited selection of apparatuses of power (the State, the Church, Patriarchy, etc) from an external place of resistance (Humanity, Brotherhood, the Proletariat, etc) as the latent desire to dismantle all systems of representation and power (Newman, 2004: 107–26). Oppositional politics of this kind tend to take on the characteristics of the hysteric's discourse which, sharing a certain legitimization for the rationalization of the master's discourse (by providing an impetus for knowledge in the university), can be said to uphold the master's discourse. As Bruce Fink has put it:

> [T]he hysteric goes at the master and demands that he or she show his or her stuff, prove his or her mettle by producing something serious in the way of knowledge […] Lacan […] suggests here that [the] hysteric gets off on knowledge. Knowledge is perhaps eroticized to a greater extent in the hysteric's discourse than elsewhere. In the master's discourse, knowledge is prized only insofar as it can produce something else, only so long as it can be put to work for the master; yet knowledge itself remains inaccessible to the master. In the university discourse, knowledge is not so much an end in itself as that which justifies the academic's very existence and activity. [The] hysteric thus provides a unique configuration with respect to knowledge (1995: 133).

There is thus the lingering problem of positive conceptions of process in the discourse of the hysteric to such an extent that the problem of *telos* begins to raise its head once again. It is not for the purpose of overcoming or transgressing the master (incarnated as the State, the Patriarch, etc) that the subject of hysteria provokes the master where he is lacking (that is, in the master's knowledge) but precisely for the purpose of maintaining a distance from the responsibility the subject has to overcome or transgress—the problem of the master is too difficult for the hysteric to overcome. Jacques Lacan, lecturing to the revolutionary students of Paris in May, 1968, had this to say: "Revolutionary aspirations have only one possibility: always to end up in the discourse of the master. Experience has proven this. What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a master. You will have one!" (Lacan in Julien, 1994: 64). If it were merely a question of opposing any of these independent nodes of power from the standpoint of any number of identities then manifest anarchist subjectivity would also be the subjectivity of that which it opposes.

Hysterics, as Bruce Fink argues, "get off on knowledge" (1995: 133), they are intent on "push[ing] the master—incarnated in [the State, Church, Patriarch, etc]—to the point where s(he) can find the master's knowledge lacking" (Fink, 1995: 134). The hysteric thus retains the traditional answer to the question of place—in that the subject adopts, what Lacan has described as 'false being,' a fantasy of being which is an image granted to her through her service to the master's desire—as well as the traditional answer to the question of process—in that the subject has not come to terms with where her own knowledge or desires are lacking: "[t]he hysteric maintains the primacy of subjective division, the contradiction between conscious and unconscious, and thus the conflictual, or self-contradictory, nature of desire itself" (Finks, 1995: 133). The subject has therefore only postponed rather than come to terms with the traumatizing effects that result from the inevitable rupturing of the fragile imaginary ego formation.

The problem of manifest anarchism is further outlined by Todd May:

> [W]ithin the anarchist tradition, the concept of politics and the political field is wider than it is within either Marxism or liberalism […] For Bakunin, the two fundamental power arrangements to be struggled against (along with the capitalists) were, as his major work indicates, the state and the church […] To these later anarchists have added plant managers, patriarchy and the institution of marriage, prisons, psychotherapy, and a myriad of other oppressions (Todd May, 1989: 168–9).

To be sure, there are times when one reads Bakunin with an eye for the particular manifestations of his ethics, as in the case of his writings on the State and Church—"[t]he Church, on the authority of all priests and most politicians, is essential to the proper care of the people's sons; and

the State is indispensable, in their opinion, for the proper maintenance of peace, order, and justice […] [a]nd the doctrinaires of all schools exclaim in chorus: 'without Church or Government, progress and civilization is impossible'" (Bakunin, 1867/1871). But there are also times when the latent reading of the tradition has manifested itself more clearly as a *latent impulse* acting through the manifest content of traditional anarchist texts. As I have written elsewhere, sometimes the latent force flashes like lightning through the manifest language. We catch a glimpse of it just long enough to wonder if, beneath all appearances, there is a secret agent among us.

It should be said that some post-anarchists, such as Reiner Shurmann and Daniel Colson, have hitherto conflated the explicit with the implicit, even where, in select writings, representation and power are at the centre of the discussion (as in many of Bakunin's writings). Colson, for instance, has argued that anarchist subjectivity has always been distinguished from modern(ist) subjectivity according such that:

> [T]he modern subject is unified, continuous and homogeneous. It exists in just one form, duplicated by as many copies as there are individuals. Conversely, the anarchist subject is multiple, changing, and heterogeneous. Its forms vary constantly in size and quality. It is most often collective even when it is individual, and regards the individual, in the commonplace sense, as a largely illusory figure in its many metamorphoses (Colson, 1996).

Colson's reading, much like Schurmann's, comes from a blending of anarchist ethics with outside sources including Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Bruno Latour, etc. In seeking to discover the implied anarchist impulse inherent to these foreign works he misattributes the latent anti-authoritarian impulse of anarchism as the most prominent manifest one thus obfuscating the distinction between latent and the manifest. This problem, I believe, has to do with situating traditional anarchist thought *outside* of the confines of modern thought, especially with regards to its traditional answer to the question of place and process. Modernity, which is most accurately understood as a paradigm of thought to be distinguished from modernism as a countermovement in thought, implies that there is also a modern anarchism and this is the problem Colson has in his theory. There is a form of anarchism that responds in various ways to the paradigm of modernity and then there are those that begin from the presumptions inherent to the modern paradigm. Schurmann also erred in his description of Foucauldian anarchist subjectivity, but in doing so he described quite well what a meta-ethical framework derived from latent anarchist desires might actually begin to look like:

> Foucault has constituted himself as an anarchistic subject in displacing the boundary lines tacitly taken for granted, such as between the normal and the pathological or between innocent and guilty. His anarchism through discursive intervention bespeaks what is possible today, but not what is obligatory; not an 'ought.' 'The search for a form of morality acceptable by everyone in the sense that everyone would have to submit to it, seems catastrophic to me' (Schurmann, 1985: 546).

While the emphasis has been on the individual as the ethical actor—as Todd May has put it, "[h] ere lies the *a priori* of traditional anarchism: trust in the individual […] [f]rom its inception, anarchism has founded itself on a faith in the individual to realize his or her decision-making

power morally and effectually" (May, 1989: 172)—this subjectivist ethics (which, ironically, May does not end up endorsing in his book) has come at the price of a great contradiction:

> With anarchism, as we have seen, there is an essential antithesis between the pure, uncontaminated place of resistance—constituted by essential human subjectivity and natural human society—and the place of power [...] Manichean logic is, therefore, the logic of place: there must be an essential place of power and essential place of resistance [...] Can we not see, then, that in anarchist discourse the state is essential to the existence of the revolutionary subject, just as the revolutionary subject is essential to the existence of the state? [...] The purity of revolutionary identity is only defined in contrast to the impurity of political power (Newman, 2007: 47–8).[9]

It becomes apparent that the implied place from which ethics are thought to derive in traditional anarchist philosophy refers also to the explicit place from which ethics are thought to derive in much of post-anarchist philosophy—each share an elaboration of ethics as place and each presuppose an ethical rejection of essence or identity as representation or authority; namely, each reject ontological essentialism. In this sense, traditional anarchists understood that, at some level, they were against power and representation but rarely did they express this outside of the narrow framework of a limited set of derivatives using the epistemological and ontological toolkits of the given socio-historical paradigm. On the other hand, it is within the latent reading of place in the post-anarchist literature that a rewriting of the manifest ontology of traditional anarchism has taken hold: a reconstitution of place as constitutively empty.

George Bataille's contribution has been to extend the latent reading, even while remaining faithful to its potentiality, toward a radical conception of being as non-being that follows through on what its philosophy set out to do. Bataille could be no more explicit on this point, his goal was to describe the principles of non-place outside of the framework of the subject through his rewriting of materialist philosophy. Bataille argued that "[w]hen the word *materialism* is used, it is time to designate the direct interpretation, *excluding all idealism,* of raw phenomena, and not a system founded on the fragmentary elements of an ideological analysis, elaborated under the sign of religious relations" (1985: 16). Bataille wanted a materialism that remained unhinged from all idealistic systems—an indescribable materialism that is always out of grasp, never revealed in the epistemologies of philosophy. Thus, through Bataille we not only reject the problem of ontological essentialism, as we do after the postanarchist intervention, but also the problem of epistemological foundationalism.

It is at the level of process that ethical notions of place become retroactively coded with significance. For example, within the latent sphere of place in post-anarchist philosophy—which is really nothing other that the 'post-' or 'meta-' itself—the latent process of what, for the sake of usefulness, I will call heterogeneity (a term used by Bataille; this term will be further elaborated in an upcoming section), is introduced in order to combat the homogeneity of traditional Manichean subjectivity. Within the restrictive codes of traditional anarchist philosophy one finds a latent negative commitment to combating all forms of power and representation including the power over mobility locked into the isolated notion of place. However, manifest descriptions of place in traditional anarchist philosophy have prefigured a movement of homogeneity in the

[9] I should say that this is not necessarily true of the "newest social movements" (Day, 2005).

concept of place. Post-anarchists have corrected this by both implying and enacting the principle of heterogeneity in various ways and, in doing so, conforming to the process outlined by Georges Bataille. In this way both traditional anarchism and post-anarchism appear to be unbalanced meta-ethical discourses (each unbalanced at opposite ends of the alignment between the axes of place and process). George Bataille's philosophy, on the other hand, achieves a balance and retroactively fulfills the latent ethical injunction inherent in traditional anarchism. Bataille's philosophy fills in the obvious missing row in my elaboration of the relationship between place and process.

Recently, Benjamin Franks has argued that, within anarchist meta-ethics, there have been competing tendencies between "individualist or 'philosophical' anarchisms [which] are often based on deontological theories, which privilege a discourse of 'rights' and 'individual autonomy' [and] social anarchisms [which] are often either consequentialist [...] and thus prioritize good social outcomes—or prefigurative [...] and as such are more consistent with practise-based virtue ethics" (2008b: 135).[10] Here, as my preliminary response, there are as yet two other options: (1) an ethics of base subjectivism, as opposed to a purely subjectivist model, and (2) an ethics of base materialism, as opposed to a purely materialist model. Rather than select the one over the other—although I maintain that the latter is the realization of the ethics inherent in the former—I would like to remain undecided between the two.

"Ethics," said John D. Caputo, "hands out maps which lead us to believe that the road is finished and there are superhighways along the way" (Caputo, 1993: 4). I am now tempted to change Caputo's line to this: 'Ethics produces being where there is a disavowal of non-being, and then hands out discursive maps which lead us to believe that the road to heaven is finished and that there are superhighways along the way'. Caputo continued, "Deconstruction issues a warning that the road ahead is still under construction, that there is blasting and the danger of falling rock" (Caputo, 1993: 4): the anarchist tradition issues a warning that there is no road, only swamp and a feral human nature. Massimo Passamani, an insurrectionary anarchist, brought this point home: "In the face of a world that presents ethics as the space of authority and law, I think that there is no ethical dimension except in revolt, in risk, in the dream" (Passamani, [2010]). Anarchism, as the ethics of the real, rejects the dreams of imaginary others and in so doing rejects all positive conceptions of ethics. Post-anarchism is the manifestation of a negation that traditional anarchism set in motion long before. It is the meta-ethics of traditional anarchism. Post-anarchism is the realization of this meta-ethical rejection of ethical discourses in traditional anarchist philosophy.

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In writing this I am brought back to an article entitled "On Metaethics: A Reverie" (1996) by a well known meta-ethicist by the name of Francis Sparshott. Sparshott attributed a Kuhnian relationship to the development of meta-ethical foundations and systems: "a period of confusion [wherein] normal science [is] displaced by revolutionary science, in which one or all of the elements in the old consensus are rejected in favour of new claimants; and this revolutionary science, if it succeeds in winning acceptance, hardens into a new paradigm within which a new kind

[10] In exploring this distinction it appears as though Franks has only reposed the problematic account of 'lifestyle' versus 'social anarchism' that Bob Black has criticized in his book *Anarchy After Leftism* (1997) and also in his most recent book *Nightmare of Reason* (2010).

of normal science is established" (Sparshott, 1996: 35). We may say that traditional anarchism as a manifest philosophy is the normal science of anarchism whereas post-anarchism is the revolutionary science that never settles. Only with the separation of post-anarchism from classical anarchism would the possibility of the marriage and settling of post-anarchism into classical anarchism have been possible. Moreover, only with this subsequent marriage of post-anarchism and classical anarchism is the displacement of the marriage possible and the inauguration of the new post-anarchism: post-post-anarchism as post-anarchism.

Sparshott continued, "New and old paradigms are strictly incommensurable, in that neither accepts the standards by which the other would condemn it; but the historical displacement is irreversible, since the forces that made the revolution succeed as science must be real, though neither paradigm can contain them" (Sparshott, 1996: 35). Strictly speaking, these are the effects of what I have termed *anarchy,* the elusive subject matter of anarchist philosophy after post-anarchism. However, Sparshott's aim was to translate the Kuhnian theory into a philosophical metaphor for novelty*:* "Public or radical philosophy attacks whatever may seem to be a pressing intellectual problem without systematic regard for what philosophy departments are up to—including the academic conventions about what radical philosophy would be" (Sparshott, 1996: 35). Here I am tempted to describe post-anarchism as an attack on the system of knowledge that is at once the rationalization of the master's will from without the academy and also the imperative of the rationalization of the master through the production of knowledge from within the academy. Sparshott's model constitutes a break from epistemology as such, and it puts in process a radical system of non-knowledge. The problem of rationalization constitutes a rejection of desire as the irrational force of the species, a betrayal of the fundamental source; any ethical movement is in the end illusory, a fantasy, just as "a scientific revolution is in the end successful or illusory, much as a political revolution finds it has to take over or replace the extant bureaucracy and somehow do all or most of what it did" (Sparshott, 1996: 36).

It is in this sense that post-anarchism is 'insurrectionary' rather than 'revolutionary.' By revolutionary, I mean to refer to political revolutions rather than epistemological revolutions. Stirner described the difference between insurrection and revolution:

> Revolution and insurrection must not be looked upon as synonymous. The former consists in an overturning of conditions, of the established condition or status, the State or society, and is accordingly a political or social act; the latter has indeed for its unavoidable consequence a transformation of circumstances, yet does not start from it but from men's discontent with themselves [...] The Revolution aimed at new arrangements; insurrection leads us no longer to let ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and sets no glittering hopes on 'institutions' (Stirner, 1907).

The problem is the reproduction in still purer form of the alienation of the species at the hands of any number of particular manifestations of power. In serving the academy one risks feeding it with precisely that which it simultaneously rejects and internalizes as its sustenance:

> Philosophy has no warrant unless it is to be the 'pursuit of wisdom', the constant rectification of understanding and the elimination of systematic sources of error. 'Normal' philosophy admits the possibility of 'revolutionary' philosophy not merely in principle but as its most fundamental part; whatever a radical philosophy proposes turns out to be something the academic discipline has merely put on hold,

> rather than rejected. As in most professions, however, the most deeply subversive moves are accepted only if they are made by authorized wielders of the paradigm, in a suitable tone of voice (Sparshott, 1996: 36).

In this sense anarchism admits the possibility of post-anarchism as its most fundamental part and, moreover, post-anarchism admits the possibility of *post*-post-anarchism as its most fundamental part. In this sense, post-anarchism is anarchism of the second-order, a rejection of the rationalization of the master's will and, subsequently, it is revolutionary philosophy (or what I have termed 'insurrectionary' philosophy): "in its undisguised form [it is] intolerable to those vocationally engaged in normal philosophy, because it throws away all the real gains that reflection has made in a coherent evolutionary history" (Sparshott, 1996: 36). Post-anarchism, like radical philosophy, occurs "outside the limited areas where normal science [or anarchism] is carried on, [where] a fruitful chaos [still] reigns, where there are no agreed paradigms" (Sparshott, 1996: 36). Postanarchism is therefore the meta-ethics of anarchism *par excellence* because it is the home of meta-ethics itself, the politics that meta-ethics was seeking, just as meta-ethics is the haven post-anarchist politics have been attempting to describe for so long. Meta-ethical philosophy is understood as the calling into question of the supposed paradigms of normal philosophy without necessarily predicating this on the grounds of critique (cf., Sparshott, 1996: 38–9). The promise of post-anarchism is the development of new ways of thinking about old ideas on the subject of anarchism, recirculating frozen signifiers, letting a little *anarchy* into the mix.

Post-Anarchism: A Case for the Centrality of Ethics

This chapter serves to introduce the body of literature in post-anarchism while highlighting the latent ethical foundation that it shares with traditional anarchist philosophy. The former must be provisionally understood as the return of anarchist ethics as it is realized in the ethical assault on ontological essentialism. Post-anarchists, such as Saul Newman, have argued, in various ways, that "[t]he problem of essentialism is the political problem of our time" (Newman, [2001] 2007: 4). I have already argued that this is a problem that begins from within the foundation and system of meta-ethics, and that essentialism is thus a meta-ethical position. If these propositions are correct then it becomes further possible to describe postanarchism as the new form of anarchism that unearths one of the many possible manifestations of the latent impulse inherent to traditional anarchist thought. In this sense, post-anarchism describes what is new about traditional anarchism today but it does not, at least by this standard alone, abandon what is old in traditional anarchism. Post-anarchism must be understood as a discursive paradigm, that is, as a loose assemblage of (often times contradictory) ethical claims.

Post-anarchism, as a meta-ethical response to traditional anarchist philosophy, has as its point of departure one of two non-ethical *a prioris:* epistemological and ontological. Hereafter, we must distinguish between three points of departure for anarchist philosophy: epistemological, ontological, and, finally, *meta-ethical* (as a strange synthesis between the former philosophical domains). Thus, to begin from a place of ethics does not preclude an epistemological defence of anarchism nor does it forbid the ontological defence, it merely subsumes these beneath the meta-ethical *a priori.* This has always been the latent, and at times also quite explicit, preoccupation of traditional anarchist political philosophy but the consequence of this pre-occupation—an attack on essentialism, toward an embrace of the accidental—has not yet been fully realized. The significance of its *realization* has been *discovered* before the significance of its *discovery* has been *realized.* I will briefly review some of the literature in order to highlight the differing philosophical points of departure.

Some post-anarchists, such as Andrew Koch and Todd May, have argued that any ontological conception of human nature or community has authoritarian implications: "[post-anarchism] challenges the idea that it is possible to create a stable ontological foundation for the creation of universal statements about human nature […] claims [that] have been used to legitimate the exercise of power" (Koch, [1993] 2011: 24). Interestingly, Koch, here, implies that what is needed is a relativist discourse. Todd May has similarly argued that ontologically rooted conceptions of power in traditional Marxist philosophy (what he called a 'strategic political philosophy'; ie, the idea that power emanates from a central location, operating uni-directionally, to repress an essentially creative human nature) have served to legitimize vanguardist interventions into politics: "if the fundamental site of oppression lies in the economy [or, as in the case of anarchist philosophy, the state; namely, in any (series of) central location(s)], it perhaps falls to those who

are adept at economic [or state, etc] analysis to take up the task of directing the revolution" (May, 2008c: 80). If we take, as our point of departure, an essentialist ontology of the subject, as in humanist philosophy, we "thus undermine at a stroke the subject's transparency, voluntarism, and self-constitution" (May, 2008c: 80) and provide ample philosophical support for the subject's constitution by vast apparatuses of power. In short, May argued that we fall back into a crude structuralism as the harbinger of a form of philosophical determinism. Suffice to say, May believed that the denial of the subject's self-constitution is also the promotion of an authoritarian ethical framework. Likewise, if we begin from an essentialist ontology of the object (the state, patriarchy, the church, etc), we greatly reduce the political field and embrace an oppositional relationship of dependence that mutually constitutes the anarchist *subject* and the anarchist *object* (Newman, 2001: 47–8). Richard J. F. Day has argued that May's approach is accurate in its critique (and novel in its marriage of anarchist and post-structuralist philosophy) but it replaces one problematic philosophical framework for another equally problematic one grounded in Habermasian intersubjective rationality: "The fatal problem […] is that [he] cannot imagine how a commitment to fight domination can be *shared* without recourse to universal intersubjective reason […] At worst, it risks falling back into the Enlightenment humanist trap of responding with 'reasonable' and 'justified' violence to all who refuse to play by its rules" (Day, 2001: 26). May's meta-ethical framework thereby failed in its insistence on providing "binding rules of conduct" for the subject (Day, 2001: 24–6).

Daniel Colson argued that anarchist subjectivity is at odds with the dominant paradigm (what he refers to as 'the modern paradigm'): "The anarchist subject is multiple, changing, and heterogeneous" (Colson, 1996). At its core, according to Colson, the anarchist subject is anti-authoritarian, resistant to the universalist and totalizing premises of modernist ethics. Colson focused on the ontological dimension by rewiring the *cogito ergo sum* of traditional anarchist and humanist political philosophy in an important way, but he did not properly ground this approach in any meta-ethical framework. Instead he described an ontological point of departure: the anti-modernist anarchist subject as some kind of Deleuzian machine. Likewise, Saul Newman offered a radically ontological point of departure for post-anarchist rejections of ontological essentialism. He described the anarchist subject as composed of a 'radical lack' at the heart of its being:

> This lack or void which constitutes the subject is not, however, a fullness or essence. It is, on the contrary, an absence, an emptiness — a radical lack […] it is a nonplace that resists essence because it does not allow a stable identity to arise. The subject can never form a complete or full identity (2001: 140–2).

While I do not reject this ontology—indeed I think it provides an important ingredient for the type of approach that I am trying to advance—it does not elaborate the anti-authoritarian ethic as the primordial condition motivating the anarchist critique of essentialism, and even if it did begin to sketch out such an ethical system it would inevitably fail because of its *a priori* rejection of universalism in favour of a crude post-structuralist relativism. Newman's ontology did not describe the motivating conditions that have led to his assault on traditional conceptions of being and knowledge. He thereby risks rejecting the traditional anarchist discourse in its entirety (and, as we shall see, this ethical component is what constitutes the unique core of its discourse amongst a chain of political equivalences). A Lacanian may describe the ethics as the *c factor* of anarchist political philosophy. As Lacan put it, "[i]n the symbolic order, first of all, one cannot

neglect the importance of the *c factor* which, as I noted at the Congress of Psychiatry in 1950, is a constant that is characteristic of a given cultural milieu" (Lacan, 2006b: 204). In a word, the *c factor* describes what is central and consistent to any milieu. In any case, Newman was aware of this limitation and he pointed toward future research in the area:

> While the possibility has been created, then, for a non-essentialist politics of resistance to domination, it remains an empty possibility. If it is to have any political currency at all [...] [i]t must have an ethical framework of some sort—some way of determining what sort of political action is defensible, and what is not. [...] Is it possible to free ethics from these essentialist notions while retaining its critical value and political currency? This is the question that the anti-authoritarian program must now address (2001: 160–1).

I believe that Newman was correct, this is the fundamental question for post-anarchists, and it is one that has not been adequately addressed by any of the prominent post-anarchist writers. Instead we find an epistemological point of departure in the work of Andrew Koch ([1993] 2011) and Todd May (2011), epistemological *and* ontological points of departure in the work of Saul Newman (2009, [2001] 2007, 2004) and an ontological point of departure in the work of Daniel Colson (1996), hakim bey (1993) and Reiner Schurmann (1986, 1985). It will be important to further express the rejection of epistemological approaches and to further develop a meta-ethical foundation for the ontological approaches but before doing so I must make some mention of the criticism directed toward post-anarchism as a new discourse on traditional anarchism.

New Anarchism and the Reduction of the Classical Tradition

The new paradigm of anarchist philosophy, which is what many of us are calling post-anarchism (cf., Evren in Rousselle & Evren, 2011; Call, 2010; Call in Rousselle & Evren, 2011; Call, 2002: 65), is fuelled by an overarching ethical injunction against the fantasies of representation inherent to projects built upon positive ontological foundations. The claim must now be made: if anarchist social philosophy is to remain relevant today, anarchists will need to embrace that which has historically distinguished their tradition from other social and political traditions—anarchism has always been distinguished from other political traditions, especially Marxist and Liberal (for this argument see Day, 2005: 14, 127; May, 1994: 57), on the basis of its commitment to an anti-authoritarian ethos—in a word, anarchists will need to reconstitute anarchism as an ethical discourse relevant for the contemporary world by reattaching itself to its own latent ethical imperative while simultaneously updating its manifest content in the wake of the development of post-modern society. Lewis Call, describing an anarchism suited to the contemporary world, argued that "[i]t is becoming increasingly evident that anarchist politics cannot afford to remain within the modern world. The politics 126 post-anarchism of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin—vibrant and meaningful, perhaps, to their nineteenth-century audiences—have become dangerously inaccessible to late twentieth-century readers" (Call, 2002: 117). Anarchist writing must be brought into accord with the complex(iti)es of post-modernism.

I have suggested that post-anarchism presents a new reading of the traditional anarchist discourse. The development of a distinctly post-anarchist philosophy was thought to have emerged

out of what David Graeber has called 'new anarchism' (Evren in Rousselle & Evren, 2011). Any umbilical cord that once attached David Graeber (2002) to the term 'new anarchism' has now been cut. In an email correspondence, Graeber insisted:

> If I end up being considered the source of something like 'new anarchism' (not even a phrase I made up, it was invented by the editor of *NLR* [*New Left Review*], since you never get to make up your own titles in journals like that), that would be a total disaster! (Graeber, 2010).

We must rethink the newness of post-anarchism. The supposed newness of post-anarchism has been put into question for at least three interrelated reasons: first, there is the problem of the abandonment of traditional anarchist discourse in favour of some redemptive 'fresh' and 'contemporary' discourse—the implication is that traditional anarchist philosophy is replaced by post-structuralist political philosophy. This, for example, is probably what Todd May meant when he argued that "post-structuralist theory is indeed anarchist [...] It is in fact more consistently anarchist than traditional anarchist theory has proven to be," (May, in Rousselle & Evren, 2011). Second, there is the problem of the appearance of transcendence by the post-anarchist discourse with respect to the traditional discourse: 'it is not good enough that anarchism has been abandoned but now post-structuralists believe that their discourse is *superior* to traditional anarchist discourse!' Finally, there is the belief that post-anarchism represents a 'newness' that can not be discovered from within the traditional discourse as it is read today (as Jesse Cohn & Shawn Wilbur have argued, in *deconstructive* fashion, "[t]here is almost complete inattention to the margins of the 'classical' texts, not to mention the margins of the tradition [...] Such 'minor' theorists as Gustav Landauer, Voltairine de Cleyre, Josiah Warren, Emma Goldman, and Paul Goodman, to name just a few of those excluded, would seem to merit some consideration, particularly if the project is a rethinking of 'normal anarchism'" (Cohn & Wilbur, 2003). Of course, the question must be raised as to what/whom constitutes the anarchist canon and at which point of exhaustion can one be said to be representative of such a tradition (I will broach this question shortly). I shall address these misconceptions throughout this section but for now I will suggest that post-anarchism is merely the contemporary realization of what it was that made traditional anarchism a unique discursive body and that this is primarily what constitutes its novelty. Others have described this new form of anarchism as a "paradigm shift within anarchism" (Purkis & Bowen, 2004: 5; also see Evren in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: 4). Can we at least provisionally admit that anarchism is not a tradition of canonical thinkers but one of canonical practices based on a canonical selection of ethical premises? If this is the case, the paradigm shift that erupted at the broader level and made its way into the anarchist discourse, as 'post-anarchism,' allowed for the realization and elucidation of the ethical component of traditional anarchist philosophy.

Elsewhere I have argued (as Saint Schmidt, [2007] 2008) that the critics of post-anarchism (in particular: Antliff, 2007; Cohn & Wilbur, 2003; Cohn, 2002; Day, 2005; Franks, 2007; Kuhn, 2009; Sasha K, 2004; Zabalaza, 2003),[1] whether by directing their criticism exclusively against postanarchism's prefix (the supposed 'newness') or by directing it toward post-anarchism's reduction of the classical anarchist tradition, have pursued problematic lines of critique. With regards to the

[1] The relationship between critics, proponents, and ambiguous endorsers of post-anarchism is a complicated one. Critics also demonstrate support at times and vice versa. There is the further complication of post-anarchism being a discourse that many adopt simply by writing from within the current paradigm.

first manoeuvre, the critics have fluctuated between two mutually exclusive arguments, the first of which was that post-anarchism represented an attempt to rescue the presumed inadequacies of an increasingly stale orthodoxy (Cohn & Wilbur, 2003). This critique focused on the implied claim that post-anarchism has represented an attempt to *abandon* classical or traditional anarchism while at the same time, and quite ironically, the critique focused on the implied claim that post-anarchism represented an attempt to *rescue* traditional anarchism from its own demise. The obvious question one should ask to the critics is: which is it, *abandon* or *rescue*?

With regards to the second manoeuvre, some critics have interrogated what they saw as the reductive elements that were found to be at the core of the post-anarchist narrative. It should be noted that most of these critiques have aimed squarely at Saul Newman (and in particular his book *From Bakunin to Lacan,* see Newman, 2001) rather than more broadly at the post-anarchists as a whole—excluding, for example, the nonAnglophone post-anarchists out of Spain, Germany, and Turkey (see my interviews with Sureyyya Evren from Turkey, Jurgen Mumken from Germany, and Anton Fernandez de Rota from Spain, 2011 in *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies,* called "A Virtual Post-Anarchism Roundtable"). Therefore, a word of caution is in order: to reduce post-anarchism to only that which has been expressed by Saul Newman, or to Anglophone postanarchists alone, is to fall victim to precisely the attitude Newman sought to avoid. There is also the more obvious problem of reductionism *as* the very condition of meta-explorations of the anarchist tradition. To explore a discourse one must inevitably trace its contours. This practice is not unusual for anarchists: as I have claimed in the preface to my book on post-anarchism, "critics should be made aware of their own reduction of the post-anarchist body of thought" (Rousselle in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: viii). Despite all of this, as Sureyyya Evren has pointed out:

> There was an 'anarchist canon' which existed before the post-anarchist attempts at 'saving' it. And it seems like an important task to decode the biases affecting information on what is anarchism, what represents anarchism, and the anarchist canon. How do exclusions work within knowledge production processes on anarchism? What are the structural assumptions behind the canonization of anarchism? Most of the known works on post-anarchism in English, which were fundamentally disapproved of by anarchists for misrepresenting anarchism, were in fact taking the given histories about anarchism for granted. Cliched notions of classical anarchism were not some invention of post-anarchists keen on building straw-person arguments from reductions in the traditional canon and discourse. Instead of accusing some post-anarchists for employing problematic conceptions of anarchism, I would like to ask where those conceptions actually came from in the first place (Evren in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: 10–11).

Evren's argument is that the reduction of the classical tradition to any number of select representatives or readings is already there within the classical texts. That this was the founding for post-anarchism's introductory period does not in any way discount post-anarchism's further critique of essentialism and reductionism even while it is representative of such a tendency.

In fact, this tendency continues within the 'anarchist studies' milieu itself. In *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy* (Amster et al., 2009), for example, the editors delineate three forms of anarchism in the introduction of the book, as the book's very foundation: "classical anarchism" (Amster et al., 2009: 2–4), "1960s-1970s anarchism" (Amster et al., 2009: 4), and "contemporary anarchism" (Amster et al., 2009: 4–5). Why,

here, does the reduction of classical anarchism to a monolithic whole founded within a particular lineage of time or as the reduction of classical anarchism to a selection of writers (here, the usual writers are selected, including Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin) go unchallenged as the problematic of *contemporary anarchist studies*? The 1960s-1970s version of anarchism broadened the ethical commitments of anarchists, according to the introduction of this book, as they "began fanning out in new [sic?] directions as a result of theoretical engagements with radical anti-racism(s) and feminism(s), Situationism [sic], developments in Marxism, and the like […] Anarchists began generating critiques of 'work' in and of itself, challenging the assumed logic of classical working class politics" (Amster et al., 2009: 4–5). Finally, what the editors describe as "contemporary anarchism", a post-Seattle version of anarchism, appears to be another way of describing "post-anarchism" (perhaps we may say that anarchists simply have anxieties over the prefix 'post-'): "Some anarchists have continued to develop general critiques of leftism, formal organization, essentialism, identity politics, civilization, hierarchy, and capitalism, to take just a few examples" (Amster et al., 2009: 5). But these examples, taken together, describe the overarching tendency of the post-anarchist discourse. Despite the reduction of classical anarchism and the anarchist canon, the editors do not question the critique, made by Gabriel Kuhn, that "much of [the post-anarchist] critique of of 'traditional/classical' anarchism seems to focus on an effigy rather than a vibrant and diverse historical movement" (Kuhn, 2009: 21). It strikes me that Evren is correct: the strategy pursued by the post-anarchists was already there within our anarchist history books—and it will be long before this problem disappears. This is the problem that post-anarchism brought into view.

What we ought to take note of is that the critics are themselves suspicious of reductionist and essentialist strategies on the part of the post-anarchists. Many of the critics have mined the classical tradition for post-anarchistic tendencies without daring to call this approach post-anarchist. Perhaps the exemplar of this trend is Jesse Cohn who has recently argued that "anarchists have pretty much always been interested in and actively theorizing about and investigating the kinds of things that now get called 'cultural studies'" (Cohn, n.d.). This approach is interesting because the discipline that we now call Cultural Studies is a new construction of the university and so what Cohn is expressing is a new way of reading old traditions. This therefore highlights the way in which post-anarchists use contemporary discourse to reinvigorate classical quandaries. In any case, the traditionalists have therefore only exposed the extent to which they shared in the defining attitude of post-anarchism. Far from a mere overnight transformation of anarchist priorities and even further from a rejection or replacement of traditional anarchism, post-anarchism has more simply been a concept used to describe what has always already been going on within anarchist movement[2] (Purkis & Bowen, 2004; esp pp. 15–17).

Kuhn, for example, argued that "[t]here is [a] difficultly with the postanarchist label, namely the suggestion that the junctions of anarchism and post-structuralism/postmodernity as laid out by Newman […] are new, when, in fact, they are not" (Kuhn, 2009: 21). What I have argued, is that this newness is never in fact entirely new *sensu stricto* but rather a redefinition of something that was previously thought unimportant or hidden amongst the old. It is naive, at best, to argue that the postanarchists have moved beyond traditional anarchism. Thus, we may find

[2] There is a problem of classifying the 'anarchist' assemblage —are we a movement?, are we a 'we?', 'the' movement?, a movement of movements?, a milieu? For this thesis I have opted to use the term 'anarchist movement' to signal a relation to the question of process.

post-anarchist readings at the margins of this or that writer but the question we must ask is one which Sureyyya Evren has already asked: 'why now do we find these readings and not yesterday?' (Evren, in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: 10–11) and 'why, after the emergence of these new readings today, do anarchists continue to selectively define traditional anarchism according to a limited perspective?' What bothered Kuhn, it seems, was the audacity of creating a new label (even while it represents a return to traditional anarchism) and that Newman dares to call his approach original when others have in fact already discovered these lines of flight elsewhere. However, if the fate of post-anarchism depends exclusively on the currency of its label, we shall have no fear, for post-anarchism is nothing other than *anarchism* folded back onto itself, and if the anarchist tradition by some measure demonstrates a desire to reflect back upon itself with the same amount of effort, we shall be all the better for it.

Post-anarchism describes the slow movement of this trend during the contemporary period. However, it is my belief that we will always feel the need to define a traditional anarchist discourse and an anarchist discourse that investigates its own tradition—the former is the enactment of anarchism in the non-anarchist world while the latter is the enactment of anarchism against itself. Nonetheless, there is certainly some truth in Kuhn's argument, the German post-anarchist Jurgen Mumken has agreed: "the different theoretical considerations (poststructuralist anarchism, postmodern anarchism, etc) that are nowadays summarized as 'postanarchism' are older than the term itself" (2005: 11). There is thus nothing inherently 'wrong' with Ruth Kinna and Alex Prichard's call for anarchists to return to the past rather than to embrace what is new and what is filtered through the European lens (2009: 280–9). This is what post-anarchism is all about, rewriting and rereading the past, finding things we missed along the way and highlighting things that we read/wrote wrong for so long. Our texts, just like our practices (and soon enough we shall with some confidence add, 'just like our ethics') are a system of possibility.

We may say that the critics were mostly responding to, and vitally a part of, the introductory period of post-anarchism, as described by Evren:

> [W]e tend to see that today's post-anarchism is in an introductory period. For example, all […] post-anarchist works operate with an excuse; they behave as if a justification were needed for bringing anarchist and post-structuralist philosophy into dialogue with one other. They explain their motivation for constituting post-anarchism as a distinct area of specialization by resorting to their belief that their area of study is thought to be irrelevant to both academic and anarchist circles. Legitimization of a need to identify with a post-structuralist/postmodern anarchism is felt to be required before research is further conducted (Evren, in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: 12).

This introductory period was marked by an ostensibly problematic comparison to Marxist theory. Evren argued that "they [May, Call, Newman] all legitimize post-anarchism by first trying to show that Marxist theory has collapsed or failed or it was too problematic to rely on […] This means Marxist theory was presupposed as the norm, the ground for comparison" (Evren, in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: 12.). Simon Choat, in agreement with Evren, has also argued that "[i]f we are to attribute any kind of unity to postanarchism, then we must look to other factors—one of which, I contend, is a common opposition to Marxism" (Choat, 2010: 54). I believe that post-anarchism's anti-Marxist qualification stems from its implied ethical project rather than its need

to define itself *apart* from another political discourse. Just as ethical actors reflect on their second order ethics, anarchists may reflect on their anarchism from the second order. As I have argued, anarchism has been to *ethics* what Marxism has been to *strategy.* Perhaps, then, the anti-Marxist sentiment in the introductory period of post-anarchism is derived not especially from its need for an opposed tradition upon which to ground and defend its own but precisely for the expression of its unrealized latent dimension, *ethics.* How better to qualify the uniqueness of a project if not by comparing it to a trend which fundamentally differs from its own? This does not disqualify the uniqueness of the tradition from which the comparison stems but it does allow for the realization of the unique core that constitutes each as distinct from all others.

It is the ethical standpoint that has been repressed by the anarchist tradition (and postanarchism we shall say is a return of the repressed). The anarchist reliance on ethics has the status of an absurdity, in the Freudian sense, and, truth be told, occurs as an absurd joke. The nature of this type of joke is revealed in the following punchline:

Two Jews meet in a railway carriage at a station in Galicia. 'Where are you travelling?' asks the one. 'To Cracow,' comes the answer. 'Look what a liar you are!' the other protests. 'When you say you're going to Cracow, you want me to believe that you're going to Lemberg. But I know that you're really going to Cracow. So why are you lying?' (Freud, [1905] 2002: 110).

The problematic is thus that the truth is inherent in the performance of the lie: "Is it truth," asked Freud (Freud [1905] 2002: 110), "when we describe things as they are, without bothering about how our listener will understand what we have said?" The point here is that the listener, based on previous encounters with his interlocutor, assumed that his question would be answered with a lie (from which he would deduce the truth), and so when he was told what he actually regarded to be the truth, his assumption was rendered absurd. Freud was not arguing for some naive hermeneuticism but rather for the absurd function of the truth inherent to the lie: "according to the un-contradicted assertion of the first [Jew], the second one is lying when he speaks the truth, and speaks the truth by means of a lie" (Freud [1905] 2002: 111). We may say that the ethical standpoint of traditional anarchist philosophy has the absurd status of a joke and constitutes the unique core within which marks its *c factor.* Contemporary anarchists have never much cared to develop their meta-ethical philosophy and yet they have taken care to describe it as an ethical one—so, when the anarchists tell us that they are an ethical tradition, obvious and hackneyed as this presupposition at once appears, what reason do we have to take them seriously? It is in this sense that I call the absurd ethics of anarchism its absent centre: it is the lie that sustains belief in the stability of the discourse and the tradition.

As I have argued (and as I will argue in more depth shortly), there is a presumed consensus amongst anarchist authors that 'anarchism is to *ethics* what Marxism is to *strategy',* but one might wonder why anarchists have presumed their ethics rather than developed them into a meta-ethical framework upon which to build their strategy (a question initially raised by Todd May, 1994: 64). No doubt, this is important and difficult work—returning to the ethical core of the anarchist tradition in light of contemporary issues—and very few anarchists have begun this exploration with any degree of explicitness (although Benjamin Franks is making real gains in this area; cf., Franks, 2011, 2008a, 2008b, and 2007; also see the book *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy,* Franks & Wilson, 2010), this research is central to our tradition and yet it remains largely undeveloped: what constitutes traditional anarchist meta-ethics? It appears at least that anarchists have simply adopted Petr Kropotkin's meta-ethics as their own—reenacting the discourse of 'mutual aid.'

Kropotkin and the Absent Centre of Traditional Anarchist Political Philosophy

The claim has been made *ad infinitum* that anarchism is principally an ethical tradition.[3] On this point there have been very few clear responses to the question of the meta-ethical framework of traditional anarchist philosophy. Instead, most responses have tended to assume an ethics of practice (Berkman, 1929: Chapter 28 *et passim*; Franks, 2008a, 2008b; Graeber, 2004; Guerin, 1970; May, 1994: 121–55 *et passim*). But anarchists have more often assumed their ethics rather than developed them into a coherent foundation and system (May, 1994: 64), and thus, as I shall try to show, they have a real debt to pay to the late nineteenth century writings of the Russian anarchist Petr Kropotkin.

The anarchist author Herbert Read has argued that, with Kropotkin, "[n]o better history of ethics has ever been written" (as cited in Woodcock & Avakumovic, 1971: 420). Kropotkin, whom we may say is the originator and exemplar of the trend in practical ethics, has described an ethics of 'mutual aid' as the general condition and organization of the survival of the species. According to Kropotkin, there can be discovered, beneath the destructive manifest structure of the state, an organization of life that ought to be allowed to blossom or, at the very least, to be mirrored or protected. This form of naturalism ostensibly "removes ethics from the sphere of the speculative and metaphysical, and brings human conduct and ethical teaching back to its natural environment: the ethical practices of men in their everyday concerns" (see the "Translator's Preface" in Kropotkin, 1922). It has proved important to the development of an exclusive conception of ethics as practical, positive, and orderly within traditional anarchist discourse. Kropotkin's influence is far reaching and his ideas have cast a long impregnable shadow over traditional anarchist discourse. Might I suggest, as Lacan has done with his work on 'Kant *avec* Sade', that Kropotkin's work may be read as the moral injunction which allows for a Stirnerian moment to occur in anarchist philosophy?: Kropotkin *avec* Stirner.

Two fundamental questions were to be addressed by Kropotkin in his *Ethics* and, for this reason, his book was to be subdivided into two parts accordingly (see "Introduction by the Russian Editor," in Kropotkin, 1922). He proposed first to respond to the question of place—his central question was "whence originate man's moral conceptions?" (Kropotkin, 1922)—and this motivated the writing of his first volume before his death. Kropotkin urged his readers "to consider the question of the origin and the historical development of morality" (Kropotkin, 1922). This latter question, on the historical development of morality, related to the question of process—his central question was "[w]hat is the goal of the moral prescriptions and standards?" (Kropotkin, 1922)—and was the motivation for his attempt at writing a second volume. This final book would go unwritten. We are informed by the Russian Editor that "Kropotkin planned to devote [his final book to] the exposition of the bases of realistic ethics, and its aims" and that he wanted to produce a book that would engage with the popular radical philosophies of his time (Kropotkin, 1922). Unfortunately, this venture was interrupted by his death.

Kropotkin posited a universal foundation, discoverable through the empirical method, as the basis for the moral life of the species. The problematic of positive meta-ethics in his work thus

[3] A few examples, among many, include: Anonymous, 2009; Antliff, 2007; Aragorn!, 2009a, 2009b; Berkman, 1929: Chapter 28 *et passim;* Bookchin, 2006; Bookchin, 1998; Bookchin, 1994; Bookchin, 1987: 129; Call, 2007; Critchley, [2007] 2008: 93, 125; Critchley, n.d.: 24; Franks, 2011; Graeber, 2004: 5, 12, 14, 49; Graeber, 2007: 254; Grubacic & Graeber, 2004; Kropotkin, 1922, 1910, 1902; Rocker, 2009; Tucker, 1973.

appears across two main registers: first, there is the overarching problem of universalism, and; second, there is the problem of empiricism. The former problem reveals an answer to the question of place while the latter reveals an answer to the problem of process. If, in continuing through my argument, Kropotkin's ethics have been the absent centre of traditional anarchist discourse, then it will be shown that this does not necessarily mean that Kropotkin's ethics were universal and/ or empirical in their latent determinations. Just as my approach rejects the subjectivist reduction of truth to the ethical subject, I also reject the manifest truth apparent in hermeneutical readings of ethical texts. There are at least two ways to respond (and these responses are not mutually exclusive) to Kropotkin's ethics today: one may reject Kropotkin's manifest ethics and/or one may reconstruct Kropotkin's ethical writings by revealing their latent determinations. The latter approach involves the former. I shall pursue the latter 'post-Kropotkinian' path in accordance with the latent reading of the anarchist tradition that I have been unearthing until this point.

John Slatter has argued that Kropotkin's work, especially his "La Morale Anarchiste" (written in 1890, hereafter referred to as "Anarchist Morality"), was "principally […] a ferocious attack on existing moral systems, all of which are seen as essentially self-serving justifications for the existing distribution of power and wealth" (Slatter, 1996: 261). There is thus room to suggest that Kropotkin's work now reveals a latent dimension as well as a traditional manifest dimension. If it can be demonstrated that Kropotkin's system of 'mutual aid' also called for the restriction of the free movement of the individual then it can also be argued that his work, like much of traditional anarchist philosophy, was always at war with itself. Slatter took Kropotkin at his word when he argued that "[anarchists must] bend the knee to no authority whatsoever, however respected […] accept no principle so long as it is unestablished by reason" (Kropotkin as quoted in Slatter, 1996: 261). Here, however, Kropotkin's rationalism was maintained but only to reveal a useful parallel: "The appeal to reason rather than to tradition or custom in moral matters is one made earlier in Russian intellectual history by the so-called 'nihilists'" (Slatter, 1996: 261). Like Kropotkin, the Russian 'nihilists' (or "The New People", as they were called)[4] adopted a rationalist/ positivist discourse as a way to achieve a distance from the authority of the church and consequently from metaphysical philosophies. The meta-ethics of Kropotkin's work (note: not his first order ethics) thus reveals, not 'mutual aid,' but a tireless negativity akin to the spirit of the Russian nihilists: "[according to Kropotkin, the anarchist must] fight against existing society with its upside-down morality and look forward to the day when it would be no more" (Kropotkin as cited by Slatter, 1996: 261).

The epitome of this post-Kropotkinian gesture is perhaps Allan Antliff's reading of Kropotkin's meta-ethics. According to Antliff, Emma Goldman (whom Hilton Bertalan has considered one of the foremost post-anarchists; cf., his essay "Emma Goldman and 'Post-anarchism'" in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: 208–30) "counted […] Kropotkin […] among her most important influences, so it is appropriate we turn to him for further insight" (Antliff, 2007; also in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: 161). However, given this, we must wonder to what extent the Kropotkinian influence in her writing allowed for the Stirnerian/Nietzschean tendency and vice versa—which side of the divide can we *truly* position her, for it is difficult to consolidate views unless we choose the Stirnerian pole: the Stirnerian pole does not necessarily reject the usefulness of first order ethics to the ego, but the Kropotkinian pole does not allow for the autonomy of the ego.

[4] Thanks to Aragorn! for bringing me up to speed on the history of the Russian nihilists.

One can be a subjectivist and sacrifice oneself to any number of moral systems but the reverse does not hold.

The source of Kropotkin's meta-ethics, according to Antliff, is "the libertarian refusal to 'model individuals according to an abstract idea' or 'mutilate them by religion, law or government' [and thus allowing] for a specifically anarchist type of morality to flourish" (Antliff, in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: 161). Antliff therefore reads beyond the restrictive interpretation of Kropotkin's manifest ethics and finds something buried beneath the fabric. For instance, the revolt against the 'abstract idea' was similar to the revolt against abstract moral systems in Stirner's work (cf., Newman, 2004c). What is more is that there is a tangential reference to specifically nihilist forms of ethics in Antliff's essay: "his morality entailed the unceasing interrogation of existing social norms, in recognition that morals are social constructs, and that there are no absolutes guiding ethical behavior" (Antliff, in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: 161). Interestingly, Antliff views this as Kropotkin's Nietzschean side (ibid.). Might we consider Goldman, then, a post-anarchist *proper* in that she chose the Stirnerian dimension in order to consolidate her views on Kropotkin's ethics?

There is yet more evidence provided for a post-Kropotkinian interpretation. The Russian editor of Kropotkin's *Ethics* has argued:

> Many expect that Kropotkin's *Ethics* will be some sort of specifically 'revolutionary' or 'anarchist' ethics, etc Whenever this subject was broached to Kropotkin himself, he invariably answered that his intention was to write a purely *human* ethics (sometimes he used the expression 'realistic') (italics in original; "Introduction by the Russian Editor," in Kropotkin, 1922).

We should fully consider this distinction between 'human' ethics and 'anarchist' ethics—despite that we are often led by anarchists to believe that Kropotkin's ethics were 'anarchist,' are we not now to believe that Kropotkin was primarily concerned with outlining an ethical system that responded to the dominant non-religious philosophy of the time. Kropotkin's ethics were a humanist ethics of evolution (mutual aid, we were told, is a factor of evolution) but these ethics ought not be reduced to this exclusive interpretation. In keeping with the post-Kropotkinian framework, Jesse Cohn & Shawn Wilbur (2003), and Benjamin Franks (2008a), have suggested, in each their own way, that Kropotkin's work on ethics was an attempt to "open up a space for benevolent social action against the realism of conservative social Darwinists, who held that the battle for survival determined all social behavior" (Franks, 2008a: n.p.). Brian Morris, whom has been considered a foremost scholar on Kropotkin, also supported this view and has argued that: "Darwin's evolutionary naturalism form[ed] the basis and the inspiration of Kropotkin's own ethical theory" (Morris, 2002: 427). In this sense, Kropotkin was not so much overturning the Darwinian current of his time but rather reformulating it into a more anarchistic worldview—he was negating what he felt to be the authoritarian dimension of Darwin's thesis (the competition model). Thus, if one intends to work from within Kropotkin's work (whatever its limitations), as in *post*-Kropotkinist meta-ethics, rather than to abandon his premise in full, one can perhaps begin by reinterpreting the concept 'sociality' as it was used by Kropotkin. Morris has made great advancements in this area:

> ["Sociality," in Kropotkin's writings,] did not imply that human nature and human subjectivity expressed or were manifest of some unchanging 'essence'. Indeed, the

> conflation, by postmodernist scholars, of human 'nature' as expressed in evolutionary theorists like Kropotkin, with the metaphysics of Plato and his concept of 'essence' (Eidos) is quite fallacious. For Kropotkin as for contemporary evolutionists […] humans are characterized not by some eternal, supra-natural Platonic essence (benign or otherwise) but by an evolving human nature that exhibits increasing levels of both sociality and individuality (Morris, 2002: 431).

The redefinition of 'sociality' brings ethics into the domain of sociology and cultural studies but it does not necessarily remove speculation from the domain of the empirical sciences. For this reason Morris's reinterpretation remains tied exclusively to the manifest content. Morris's interpretation finds Kropotkin to be a blatant empiricist. Any future interpretation will have to find inventive new strategies for overcoming the problem of empiricism in Kropotkin's work. In any case, the problem of the reduction of Kropotkin's metaphysics to humanism is concomitant with the problem of the reduction of science to empiricism, as Lacanians have been fond of pointing out. One might therefore find that Kropotkin's scientism was a much stronger voice than his empiricism. The empirical sciences operate from within the imaginary order and therefore encourage manifest imaginaries such as the benign human being, while constituting this as a gross reduction of truth. As Dylan Evans has put it:

> Lacan has a Cartesian mistrust of the imagination as a cognitive tool. He insists, like Descartes, on the supremacy of pure intellection, without dependence on images, as the only way of arriving at certain knowledge. […] This mistrust of the imagination and the sense puts Lacan firmly on the side of rationalism rather than empiricism (Evans, 1996: 85).

The problem of Kropotkinian ethics should therefore be layered upon a higher order of abstraction. We may say that our post-Kropotkinian reading provides us with a vantage that Kropotkin's meta-ethics were not necessarily *about* humanism nor were they necessarily *about* empiricism—these were merely strategies adopted against a highly suspect and rapidly emerging paradigm of thought. Kropotkin's adoption of empiricism was strictly a means to distance himself, through science, from religious authority. Morris described what I have termed Kropotkin's meta-ethics (or, if you like, latent ethics): "As an evolutionary naturalist, Kropotkin took it for granted that moral concepts were extremely varied and were continually developing" (Evans, 1996: 428). Morris's reading of Kropotkin is that his ethics were to some extent flexible and open to contingency. Morris continued, "Kropotkin never saw moral principles as conveying absolute truths, only as 'guides' to help us to live an ethical life" (Evans, 1996: 437). In this sense, whether as guides or as metaphors, Kropotkin's meta-ethics reveals an attack on *all* moral principles which finally frees the unique individual to live an ethical life. There is reason to believe that Kropotkin's ethics oscillated between two moments of truth: on the one hand he felt compelled to respond, reform, and/or revolutionize the dominant paradigm of the time and this was his first order ethics (a performance of his latter meta-ethical system), and on the other hand he felt compelled to underline that his manifest ethics were not set in stone, that they were merely an enactment of a certain passion for the negative.

It is therefore a safe conclusion to insist that Kropotkin's manifest ethics should not necessarily be reduced to *the* anarchist ethic for at least three reasons: first, Kropotkin himself argued

that his work on ethics was 'humanist' rather than 'anarchist' and this distinction can be read within the spectrum of the latent/manifest distinction rather than the banal interpretation of anarchist ethics as the realization of what makes us 'human.' Second, Kropotkin's ethics are a product of the time and context in which Darwin's competition thesis was gaining a foothold. In this respect, Franks (2011) has claimed that "rationalist, naturalist and to a lesser extent intuitionist, responses were adopted by classical anarchists [...] because they provided an alternative to the hierarchical and statist moral teachings justified by the church." Finally, given my second claim that Kropotkin's ethics were situated uniquely within a context, Kropotkin's ethics were only one possible manifestation of an attack on the authoritarian foundations and systems that have been influencing society—other anarchist attacks were also present during this paradigm, including, for example, the inventive meta-ethics of Max Stirner (whose work Kropotkin alludes to several times in his *Ethics*).

Yet we know very well that specifically anarchist ethics were once a concern for Kropotkin—at least while writing and publishing the individual chapters for his book *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902), a time when, before publishing in book form, he was happy to call his approach an anarchist one. In one such essay, "Anarchist Morality" (1897) he began to describe an apt understanding of latent ethics that ought not necessarily be reduced to the remainder of the text:

> The history of human thought recalls the swinging of a pendulum which takes centuries to swing. After a long period of slumber comes a moment of awakening. Then thought frees herself from the chains with which those interested—rulers, lawyers, clerics [dare we say, moralists?]—have carefully enwound her. She shatters the chains. She subjects to severe criticism all that has been taught to her, and lays bare the emptiness of the religious, political, legal, and social prejudices amid which she has vegetated. She starts research in new paths, enriches our knowledge with new discoveries, creates new sciences (Kropotkin, 1897).

However, this reading is opposed to Kropotkin's own view that "did not recognize any separate ethics; he [Kropotkin] held that ethics should be one and the same for all men" (Kropotkin, 1897). Kropotkin's latent nihilist meta-ethics thereby came into conflict with his manifest universalist ethics. Kropotkin did not want to adopt the subjectivist/relativist response to the question of process in meta-ethics. But we have learned from the postanarchists that the universal discourse is rather a *particular* discourse inscribed as hegemonic, and so, with this in mind, Kropotkin perhaps had greater ambitions in mind than simply the egoist pursuit of happiness: he wanted to subvert the dominant paradigm in full, replacing it with a softer, more anarchistic, ethic that was fuelled by the negative impulse.

The trajectory of anarchist philosophy demands that we continue through this Kropotkinian movement and envision it as a particular embodiment of a wider tendency. Anarchist ethics, guided by its meta-ethical core, also demands that we recognize Kropotkin's ethics as one node in a historical lineage of struggle rather than as *the* node upon which all of our tradition is supported, even if this node is unstable and destined to failure. During future meta-ethical readings of Kropotkin's ethics we must be guided by the following question: what is the source of *his* anarchist morality? This question, I believe, reveals answers that are much more interesting than Kropotkin's intended line of investigation (ie, 'what is the source of human morality?'). Here, the confusion is with the latent impulse of his writing within the lineage of anarchist thought and the manifest morality consigned to his name.

It is worth highlighting the authoritarian dimension of Kropotkin's manifest ethics, because Kropotkin has asked the unique individual to sacrifice herself, her very being, to the binding rules of conduct in the principle of 'mutual aid.' Meta-ethical critiques of his work, stemming as early as 1925, have focused on Kropotkin's essentialism and his disregard for the freedom of the individual. George Boas's critique is perhaps the (earliest) exemplar of this trend: "[Kropotkin] is more interested in the species than in the individual. Mutual aid, justice, self-sacrifice are, by definition, of value largely to the race. They may even prove the annihilation of the individual" (Boas, 1925: 245). Boas continued to highlight the essentialism inherent to Kropotkin's work, "[i]t is important to read [Kropotkin's *Ethics*] if only to see how it casts in high relief that pathetic faith in human beings and nature which sweetened the lives of our fathers" (Boas, 1925: 248). Boas even went so far as to argue that Kropotkin's work ignored the latent dimension of man [sic] as a creature who is by nature entered into a social relationship to an 'other' within himself (in the Kierkegaardian/Freudian sense of an unconscious) (Boas, 1925: 248). Boas's early critique is instructive but it does not follow through on its own premise: Boas failed to highlight what appeared within the unconscious of Kropotkin's writing, he restricted his reading to an objective truth, to 'symptom.' In doing so, Boas and others have produced inadequate accounts of Kropotkin's work. What follows is the revealing of this problematic reading as an account of the manifest text. We shall see that Kropotkin's ethical notion of sacrifice is quite different from the meta-ethical notion of sacrifice found in the writings of Georges Bataille.

Kropotkin argued, in "Anarchist Morality" (1897), that what "mankind admires in a truly moral man is his energy, the exuberance of life which urges him to give his intelligence, his feeling, his action, asking nothing in return" (Kropotkin, 1897). This is certainly an ethical response (to give 'without return' from the pit of one's being) and yet the authoritarian dimension of Kropotkin's imperative—epitomized, in some ways, in the Levinasian "ethics of responsibility" (cf., Zizek, 2005)—is revealed in the notion of self-sacrifice. How else to instigate anarchist morality if not by force and coercion, if not by self-repression and self-sacrifice? For, on the one hand, the Stirnerian egoist sacrifices *things* which she owns, but she does not thereby sacrifice her 'ownness': as Stirner put it:

> I can deny myself numberless things for the enhancement of *his* pleasure, and I can hazard for him what without him was the dearest to me, my life, my welfare, my freedom […] Why, it constitutes my pleasure and my happiness to refresh myself with his happiness and his pleasure […] But *myself, my own self*, I do not sacrifice to him, but remain an egoist and—enjoy him (Stirner, 1907).

The Kropotkinian mutualist sacrifices her 'ownness' in exchange for her freedom just as the academic sacrifices her being in exchange for her knowledge, and if she does not do this she is thought to be a "monster" (cf., Kropotkin, 1922), to be the 'un-man.'[5] The problem with the essentialist foundation, just as the problem with the foundationalist process, is the problem of the inability to contain this wasteful excrement— the negative that bursts out of all attempts to conceal it in knowledge. But there is also the logical problematic of altruism as outlined by John L. Mackie: "[selflessness] takes the form of what Broad called self-referential altruism—not for

[5] As Stirner has put it: "Liberalism as a whole has a deadly enemy, an invincible opposite, as God has the devil: by the side of man stands always the un-man, the individual, the egoist. State, society, humanity, do not master this devil" (1907).

others, but for others who have some special connection with oneself; children, parents, friends, workmates, neighbours in the literally, not the metaphorically extended, sense [...] It is much easier, and commoner, to display a self-sacrificing love for some of one's fellow men if one can combine this with hostility to others" (Mackie, 1977: 132).

In "The One Where Phoebe Hates PBS," a Friends episode, Phoebe raises the question: is there such a thing as a truly selfless act? Phoebe believes that there are selfless acts, and so she lets a bee sting her 'so that the bee can look cool to his bee friends.' Unfortunately, the bee died soon after stinging Phoebe. According to Mackie, altruism, self-sacrifice in favour of the other, may always be rendered a selfish act—but not the other way around. Paradoxically, every time we act in the name of an other, somewhere a little bee dies.

Kropotkin's manifest anarchist ethics can therefore only be implemented by way of the *ethical imperative;* to be sure, an ethical imperative that is sustained by the explosive selfishness of unique individuals. But one does not freely sacrifice, according to Kropotkin: one *must* freely sacrifice. Conversely, may we now say that the ethical sacrifice, according to nihilist meta-ethics, is the one that does not go philosophized? Is the ethical subject the one that does not truly sacrifice herself to knowledge as the rationalization and justification of state? Is the sacrifice the one that does not get codified into the laws of the symbolic order (a veritable 'ethics of the real')? According to Kropotkin, ethical acts are "expressed through altruism and self-sacrifice" (Morris, 2002: 425) and this attitude was "exemplified in the impulse of a person who plunges into a river to save another person from drowning, and without any thought of personal safety or reward" (ibid., 432). The veiled authoritarianism of this logic, when it is converted from the realm of descriptive ethics to prescriptive ethics, as it inevitably will be (and has been), is revealed in the metaphorical slave who renounces her own life in order to make the life of the other that much wealthier. In Morris's article on Kropotkin's ethics, he writes: "He [Kropotkin] was not therefore concerned with semantics, with the *meaning* of moral concepts, issues which fascinate contemporary philosophers leading them to emphasize what is clearly self-evident, namely that moral judgements are prescriptive, giving rise to ethical theory or prescriptivism" (italics in original; 2002: 425). The point to be taken here is that Morris, in his endorsement of Kropotkin, and critique of *semantic* meta-ethical philosophers, confesses a fundamental truth of naturalism: the descriptive inevitably collapses into the prescriptive. Phillips has likewise argued that "Kropotkin transfers his naturalistic observations into a prescription for human society" (2003: 143), and so my thesis here is not unfounded. What is more, Phillips suggests that "Kropotkin's naturalism, like that of the social Darwinists, lies not in describing nature, but in creating a metaphor for guiding human behaviour" (ibid.). This is the problem with the prescriptive extrapolation. The problem of this descriptivism is the reduction of the accidental attributes of the species: our species does not *just* go to war, nor does the species *just* give themselves away; we also shit and piss, masturbate and fuck, ... , and, in the end, the future of our species remains unwritten because the ethical logic that propels us continues also to fail us.

Despite the problems inherent to Kropotkin's manifest ethics, his work continues to influence anarchist philosophy today. One has only to research the most recent lineage of anarchist publications to glean this influence. Colin Ward's book *Anarchy in Action* began with the following provocation:

> How would you feel if you discovered that the society in which you would really like to live was already here, apart from a few little, local difficulties like exploitation, war,

> dictatorship and starvation? […] [A]n anarchist society, a society which organises itself without authority, is always in existence, like a seed beneath the snow […] [A]narchism [is] the actualisation and reconstitution of something that has always been present, which exists alongside the state, albeit buried and laid waste (Ward, 1973: 11).

Ward's provocation was steeped in the rhetoric of universal naturalism and it owed a great debt to Kropotkin's ethics. Ward continued this underlying motif until his last interview (entitled "The practice of liberty") before his death (cf., Ward, 2010).

Similarly, Uri Gordon, in his book *Anarchy Alive!: Anti-authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (2008), described anarchism as a living force in the world that can be located in everyday grassroots activism. His critique of post-anarchism was that it has no 'practical' relevance for contemporary anarchism: "It should be emphasized that post-structuralist anarchism remains an intellectual preoccupation limited to a handful of writers rather than being a genuine expression of, or influence on, the grassroots thinking and discourse of masses of activists" (Gordon, 2008: 42–3). One is tempted to raise the question of the significance of intellectual preoccupations—what does this mean? Could it not be argued that Gordon's book was also chiefly an intellectual preoccupation? If Gordon meant to suggest (as I believe he did) that post-anarchism does not speak to or influence grassroots thinking, this presumes that grassroots thinking is important (a claim that would have to be substantiated or elaborated for clarification).[6] On the other hand, we have seen that this claim is unsubstantiated and that post-anarchists *have* written about these points (for a review of this literature see Sureyyya Evren's "Introduction" in Rousselle & Evren, 2011). Spontaneously, a number of post-anarchist responses come to mind: Richard J. F. Day's attempt to describe the post-anarchism of the 'newest social movements', Tadzio Mueller's attempt to define a post-structuralist counter/ anti-hegemony, and Anton Fernandez de Rota's history of post-modern anarchist social movements all seem to respond in major ways to this point. However, there is a side to Gordon's writing that I am less prone to reject: if, as I have been trying to claim, much of contemporary anarchism *is* post-anarchism then it would follow that Gordon's book is *also* post-anarchistic. This explains the relevance of the chapter in Gordon's book, called "Anarchism Reloaded," that reflects a key post-anarchist attribute: the bringing into question of traditional anarchist philosophy. It is with some irony that the Spanish post-anarchist Anton Fernendez de Rota has also written an essay by the same name (cf., Fernendez de Rota, in Rousselle & Evren, 2011). We have also described the third section of our *Post-Anarchism: A Reader* volume as "Classical Anarchism Reloaded." Gordon explained: "[a]narchist ideas are constantly reframed and recoded in response to world events, political alliances and trends" (Gordon, 2008: 28), and this chapter of his book aimed to describe "trends and developments in social movement activity over recent decades that have led to the revival and redefinition of anarchism in its present form" (Gordon, 2008: 29). He may try to wiggle his way out of this one, but Uri Gordon *is* a post-anarchist.

However, there are further problems with the reduction of anarchism to 'activist' 'social movement(s)'. Aragorn! has argued that "[n]ot only are movement politics an explicitly European construction (with all that that implies) but the belief that as the result of some specific victory (even if that victory is at the end of a long campaign) [that] we will get a world that reflects our

[6] It is to no great surprise that the book has been described as "a user's manual for anarchist activism" (Prichard, 2008).

values is utopian at best" (Aragorn!, n.d.). For similar reasons Richard J.F. Day has argued that the anarchist currents of the 'newest' social movements are "not what sociologists would call social movements at all […] Thus there is a certain irony in my use of this term, an irony that is intended to highlight the shift away from hegemonically oriented 'movements'" (Day, 2005: 8). Finally, in a widely contentious article entitled "Give Up Activism," Andrew X has argued that "[h]istorically, those social movements that have come the closest to de-stabilising or removing or going beyond capitalism have not at all taken the form of activism. Activism is essentially a political form and a method of operating suited to liberal reformism […] The activist role in itself must be problematic for those who desire social revolution" (Andrew X, n.d.). In Gordon's work, the problem is not the content of the presupposition but that the presupposition that has gone undeveloped and has been assumed: that grassroots activism is what anarchism is all about.

Peter Gelderloos's *Anarchy Works* (2010) took "examples from around the world, picking through history and anthropology, showing that people have, in different ways and at different times, demonstrated mutual aid, self-organization, autonomy, horizontal decision making, and so forth—the principles that anarchy is founded on" (Little Black Cart, 2010). Similarly, Richard Day's *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* aimed to describe the practices of the newest social movements that "open up new possibilities for radical social change that cannot be imagined from within existing paradigms," these new possibilities come about through "an orientation to direct action and the construction of alternatives to state and corporate forms" (Day, 2005: 18). Day's post-anarchism does not necessarily lead to a Kropotkinian ethos but it certainly, through its empirical 'from practice to theory' approach to writing, lends itself to this interpretation even while ostensibly reacting against it. And, to provide one more example, the lead singer of the band Bad Religion, Greg Graffin, has published a new book called *Anarchy Evolution* (2010) that takes a naturalist position against Darwinist and theological accounts of the development of the human species.

Also, Purkis & Bowen, in their edited collection *Changing Anarchism* (2004), wrote that their "intention has been to draw upon a number of valuable pointers that exist in the work of the classical anarchists, as well as a number of its enduring principles, and to frame them in new ways" (Purkis & Bowen, 2004: 6). Undoubtedly, this makes their work firmly within the paradigm of post-anarchism but it nonetheless carries with it certain baggage: "Even though Kropotkin's views of human nature as being naturally benign and co-operative might struggle to stand the test of time […] there are still some grounds for claiming that Kropotkin is the 'classical anarchist' most worthy of continual attention" (Purkis & Bowen, 2004: 7). The concern for anarchists is that if they do away with Kropotkin's canonical work (particularly the obvious interpretation of his work), they will be confronted with the question that anarchists have consistently put to the side, a question that has been the absent centre of their political philosophy—perhaps, they will no longer be able to ignore the imaginary meta-ethical framework that has provided the lynchpin to their discourse. To bring my point to a close, we can see that Kropotkin's influence remains, as an opposing current, even within the post-anarchist discourse.

We may thus describe post-anarchism as a discourse, among others, that has risen to the surface within the last 25 years. Post-anarchism is simply a concept we have used to describe this radical current. In his introduction to the anthology *New Perspectives on Anarchism* (2010), Todd May has argued: "[w] hether as a mode of organizing resistance, as a model for interpersonal relationships, or a way of thinking about politics specifically and our world more generally, anarchist thought has once again become a touchstone […] One might want to call this the third

wave, after the wave of the late 1800s to early 1900s and the anarchist inflections of the 1960s" (May, 2010: 1). But can we not think of contemporary anarchist thought as being in a relationship to some notion of an 'outside' (the poles of which will be explained momentarily) rather than as the organization of resistance, personal relationships and politics within prepackaged slots of history? Third wave anarchism refers also, therefore, to post-anarchism— post-anarchism *is* third-wave anarchism.

I believe that I may be permitted the minor reduction of describing the discourse surrounding anarchist ethics as Kropotkinian and the actual 'always already' existing negative force of *anarchy* as the latent ethics within this discourse. We have therefore to distinguish between 'discourse ethics' and its opposite: the ethical disruption of discourse. Anarchists continue to appropriate Kropotkin's ethics, even where they misinterpret his ethics for his meta-ethics. This shorthand relieves anarchists of the difficult work of having to explain or explore their own relationship to ethical discourse. As Todd May as put it:

> [W]e can recognize that anarchism's naturalist view of human beings plays an ethical role in its political theory […] Moreover, the naturalist justification allows anarchists to assume their ethics rather than having to argue for them. If the human essence is already benign, then there is no need to articulate what kinds of human activity are good and what kinds are bad (May, 1994: 64).

It strikes me that this is precisely what makes anarchism's avoidance of meta-ethical questions so relevant: it is at once an avoidance and yet also crucially an openness or flexibility to *all* ethical foundations and systems. As Saul Newman has put it:

> [A]narchism is, fundamentally, an ethical critique of authority—almost an ethical duty to question and resist domination in all its forms. In this sense it may be read against itself: its implicit critique of authority may be used against the authoritarian currents which run throughout its classical discourse. In other words, this ethical 'core' of anarchism can perhaps be rescued, through the logic already outlined, from its classical nineteenth-century context. For instance, as I have already indicated, the critique of authority may be expanded to involve struggles other than the struggle against state domination. […] Perhaps anarchism should be read as a series of possible contradictions which can be used against one another and which can produce new possibilities. Kropotkin argues that 'inner contradiction is the very *condition* of ethics'. For something to be ethical it can never be absolute. Poststructuralism rejected morality because it was an absolutist discourse intolerant to difference: this is the point at which morality becomes unethical (Newman, [2001] 2007: 166–7).

This ostensible 'ethics of inner contradiction' runs counter to the project of manifest anarchist philosophy and yet there is a sense in which it is its guarantor. May we not, at least provisionally, presume that, for anarchism, the ethical injunction against authority in all of its forms implies a certain degree of flexibility with regards to the proper modes of conduct under varying contexts? Moreover, does it not imply, if taken to its limit, the absence of place and process—the negative foundation and system inherent to meta-ethics? The rejection of the meta-ethical framework upon which the tradition has been built, or the avoidance of the question, is ethics *proper*: a negation of the authority of morality, big or small, in all of its forms, *however respectful*, from duty

to virtue, anarchism is an endless fountain of possibilities because it is founded on the unstable foundation and system of no-thing. This is the non-absolutist core that is (and always has been) traditional anarchism. It is this core that postanarchism attempts to rescue from manifest ethics.

We can imagine an ethics that never settles upon any of the main trends in meta-ethical philosophy. It may be said that this accordance with the trajectory of a negative ethical force comes about as one possible response to the problem of the reification of anarchist identities and the growing shopping list of oppressions: the ethical anarchist subject who remains at the threshold of the latent ethical force will not be as prone as other subjects toward the reduction of anarchist practice, identity, and structures of power, to any select manifestations. In short, she will ensure the life of anarchism as a discourse. Before returning to the trends in postanarchist philosophy I would like to make two short detours through the meta-ethical philosophies of 'virtue anarchism' and 'anarchist utilitarianism.' I argue that virtue ethics are an inadequate meta-ethical framework for traditional anarchism because of an inability to conceive of non-virtuous actions as properly ethical responses to given situations. Utilitarianism, on the other hand, sacrifices the means for the ends of ethical actions and thereby poses a more obviously inadequate interpretation of traditional anarchist meta-ethics.

Post anarchist Virtue

Benjamin Franks's reply to post-anarchism was that it resulted in a form of meta-ethical relativism that is ultimately indefensible because of its subjectivist orientation (Franks, 2008a, 2008b). Elsewhere Franks has argued that post-anarchism has an authoritarian core, based on this subjectivist framework: "To universally prioritize the practices of post-anarchism would be to recreate vanguards and hierarchies, structures that both post-anarchism and more traditional anarchism reject" (Franks, 2011: 177). We must temporarily suspend our judgement of Franks's contradictory reading of post-anarchism as, firstly, a crude subjectivist relativism and then, in his conclusion, a strange universalism, in order to expose Franks's underlying prescription: "Today, a more modest version of post-anarchism is required: one that views itself as (another) modification of anarchism, more pertinent for particular social and cultural contexts, but less so in others, rather than a categorical suppression" (Franks, 2011: 176). I shall return to the problem of reading post-anarchism as a categorical suppression of traditional anarchism shortly (and I have already argued that post-anarchism is already "another modification of anarchism [that is] more pertinent for particular social and cultural contexts" (Franks, 2011: 176)). As a remedy to the problematic ethical foundation of post-anarchism, Franks outlined what he thought to be a traditionally anarchist form of ethics grounded in the social practices of ethical agents, what he called 'virtue ethics.'

Franks described a prefigurative anarchism based on virtuous social practice that was grounded in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre.[7] In this reading, Franks remained committed to the Kropotkinian meta-ethics that "identifies [the] good as being inherent to social practices, which have their own rules, which are negotiable and alter over time" (Franks, 2008b: 147). This, once again, is what Kropotkin called 'sociability.' Franks shared post-anarchism's critical attitude *vis-a-vis* universalism, and he was indeed in agreement with the post-anarchists when he

[7] Thomas Swann has argued that Franks's approach may contradict the overall trajectory of Alasdair MacIntyre's own ethical framework (cf., Swann, 2010).

argued that consequentialist, utilitarian, and deontological ethics have no place in any anarchist discourse. Yet he restricted his own ethical system to a *means* subservient to an *end*, even while he proclaimed to do otherwise:

> Elements of a virtue theory can be observed in the oft-repeated principle within anarchism that means have to be in accordance with (or prefigure) ends. Bakunin, for instance, criticised Nechaev precisely because the latter could not 'reconcile means with ends.' Prefiguration avoids the ends/means distinction of rights based and consequentialist ethics; instead the means used are supposed to encapsulate the values desired in their preferred goals (Franks, 2011).

The problem is that any *a priori* concretization of ethics, whether in terms of virtue or any loose flexibility, achieves a coherence of means *through* ends. Essentially, this is Zygmunt Bauman's argument against certain positive meta-ethical systems:

> The long search for secure [or stable] foundations of moral conduct here comes full circle. Mistrusting the sentiments declared *a priori* as fickle and mercurial, the seekers of foundations put their wager on the rational decision maker they set to extricate from the shell of erratic emotions. This shifting of the wager was intended to be the act of liberation: following the emotions was defined as unfreedom […] exchanging the dependence of action on [irrational] feelings for its dependence on reason. Reason is, by definition, rule guided; acting reasonably means following certain rules. […] By the end of the day, the moral person has been unhooked from the bonds of autonomous emotions only to be put in the harness of heteronomous rules. The search that starts from the disbelief in the self's moral *capacity* ends up in the denial of the self's *right* to moral judgement (Bauman, 1993: 69).

That which slips out from reason's grasp is the very stuff of ethics and there is no positive meta-ethical framework that can, at any time, describe or encourage ethical actions through the discourse of positivity. I would hazard to flip Franks's claim that post-anarchist subjectivism passes into the domain of authoritarianism into the claim that virtuous practical ethics, as the rational manifestation of the reasoning decision-maker who decides on what precisely these virtues amount to, subverts the virtue of autonomy held by many anarchist virtue theorists. Like all positive meta-ethical systems, they promote their own failure. Virtues are, after all is said and done, *subjective*—but we can not also say that subjectivism is itself a virtue. The problem is that Franks was hesitant to define what lists of practices are to be considered the 'good'. On this question, we are only instructed that prefigurative politics falls in line with virtue ethics. But this only postpones the question. The inevitable question one should raise to Benjamin Franks is: why this avoidance of the manifestation of these virtues, what *are* anarchist virtues? The response will come that in rejecting universalism in favour of local ethics distinct cultures and social groups are able to define these virtues using their own discursive limitations/constructs. This is the utopian dimension of Franks's project, as we know locales will always have leaders that will be uprooted by anti-authoritarian subjects and this is precisely why we philosophize about prefigurative politics—prefiguration is primarily an open method of experimentation. We do not know how to answer the question of process, that is, what the future society will look like and how to get to it. Prefiguration is the assurance that ethical principles never objectively

settle, that unique subjects are able to sort their own ethics in the midst of an everyday battle. On this topic Cindy Milstein has argued, essentially, that prefiguration, as an ethical practice, is a negative force—"anarchism as a political philosophy excels […] in its ongoing suspicion of all phenomena as possible forms of domination, and its concurrent belief in nonhierarchical social relations and organization. This ethical impulse […] to live every day as a social critic and social visionary […] certainly infuses anarchist rhetoric" (Milstein, 2007)—and as the grounding for manifest ethics: "It also underscores all those values that anarchists generally share: mutual aid, solidarity, voluntary association, and so on" (Milstein, 2007). Perhaps, to take this argument to its conclusion, the virtue of prefiguration ultimately collapses into the type of nihilistic spirit that I am describing as the system of traditional anarchism.

There is the further problem of the replacement of the place of the essential human with the place of the virtuous anarchist. For, if one can be said to act virtuously, one must as a necessity construct another categorization which far surpasses, indeed escapes, the logic of virtue: *the vice*. John L. Mackie, in his timeless work on meta-ethics, has used this logic to attack virtue ethics:

> There can be no doubt that […] courage is in general advantageous to its possessor—more advantageous than a tendency to calculate advantage too nicely. In so far as one can choose one's dispositions—say by cultivating them—this is one which it would be rational, even on purely egoistic grounds, to choose. Admittedly there will be particular occasions when rashness would be rewarded, and others when only the coward would survive. But it is hard to calculate which these are, and almost impossible to switch the dispositions on and off accordingly. To be a coward on the one occasion when courage is fatal one would have had to be a coward on many other occasions when it was much better to be courageous (Mackie, 1977: 189).

Thus, when Franks argued that "the rules of chess, which are different to those of football or poker, are not required to be imposed on the players; participants merely must share and abide by these principles in order to gain the benefits from the game, such as improved concentration and patience" (Franks, 2011), I am inclined to imagine the anarchist who disturbs the entire chess board, kicks the referee, upsets the clock, and screams 'I can play more games than you can imagine on my behalf!'

Anarchist Utilitarianism: A Minor Detour

According to Malatesta, "the end justifies the means: we have spoken much ill of that maxim […] In reality, it is the universal guide of conduct […] It is necessary to seek morality in the end; the means is [sic] fatally determined" (Malatesta, [2010]). Through this we have arrived at the underlying principle of utilitarianism: the utility of the means are valued by the consequences achieved—from within the tension of means and ends, in all utilitarian meta-ethics there is a conflation of means to ends. I do not want to spend a great deal of time writing about anarchist utilitarianism because I believe its real value for anarchists is selfevident (that is, the majority of anarchists are fully aware of the limitations of ethical utilitarianism). Instead I will briefly go over an admittedly small (extremely small) portion of the literature to arrive at an understanding of the value of utilitarianism for post-anarchist politics. This concept will be important for a later section, which explores the argument that Bataille's philosophy did not aim to consolidate ends

to means, as much of contemporary anarchist philosophy aims to do, but rather his philosophy aimed to describe an ethics without-means and without-ends. I will not refer to any of the traditional utilitarian anarchists (ie, William Godwin and others), but rather restrict my focus to Benjamin Franks's critique of utilitarianism to further elaborate this point.

The problem is rather obvious. As Franks has argued: "The [...] problem is [that] by prioritising ends over means, individuals become reduced to mere instruments, and are robbed of autonomy and dignity" (Franks, 2008a). But this problem reaches a new level of complexity under post-modernism as the preoccupation with ends are themselves no longer sustainable. As Bauman put it, during the contemporary period "[i]ssues have no predetermined solutions" (1993: 32) and this renders all attempts at prefiguring the means with which to achieve maximum consequence/utilization naive at best. How to, for example, attend to a solution which prohibits the manifestation of itself *as an issue in the first place?* Similarly, today we no longer know how to distinguish between cause and symptom—as Lewis Call has argued: "The postmodern anarchist views capitalism and statism not as causes but as effects, not as diseases but as symptoms" (Call, 2002: 117)—and symptoms have now taken the place of disease. As a consequence we achieve a sense in which "the truth of the matter is opposite to the one we have been told [...] It is society, its continuing existence and its well-being, that is made possible by the moral competence of its members— not the other way round" (Bauman, 1993: 32). Ours is a time in which utility serves only to obscure the truth of ethical origin and process, the emptiness from whence these processes have emerged:

> In as far as the modern obsession with purposefulness and utility and the equally obsessive suspicion of all things autotelic (that is, claiming to be their own ends, and not means to something else than themselves) fade away, morality stands the chance of finally coming into its own [...] no moral impulse can survive, let alone emerge unscathed from, the acid test of usefulness or profit. And since all immorality begins with demanding such a test—from the moral subject, or from the object of its moral impulse, or both (Bauman, 1993: 36).

The failure of utility, and more broadly the failure of positive meta-ethics, occurs as if it were presupposed, ironically, from within the meta-ethical system. The concept of utility collapses upon itself. The critique of this meta-ethics takes its penultimate deviation in Bauman's proclamation that:

> There are no hard-and-fast principles which one can learn, memorize and deploy in order to escape situations without a good outcome and to spare oneself the bitter after-taste (call it scruples, guilty conscience, or sin) which comes unsolicited in the wake of the decisions taken and fulfilled. Human reality is messy and ambiguous—and so moral decisions, unlike abstract ethical principles, are ambivalent. It is in this sort of world that we must live; and yet, as if defying the worried philosophers who cannot conceive of an 'unprincipled' morality, a morality without foundations, we demonstrate day by day that we can live, or learn to live, or manage to live in such a world, though few of us would be ready to spell out, if asked, what the principles that guide us are, and fewer still would have heard about the 'foundations' which we allegedly cannot do without to be good and kind to each other [...] Knowing that to be the truth [...] is to be postmodern (Bauman, 1993: 36).

Apropos of Bauman's claim that we live day-today without the ability to spell out the principles that guide us, I would like to provide a basic example. I share a class at university with some anarchists and many non-anarchists. Outside of class, we organize. During our meetings outside of the classroom we find ourselves preoccupied with the establishment of certain democratic practices of consensus: we must use a speakers list, we must all come together with an agreement about what types of behaviours are unacceptable, hostile, and so on. We never really do anything, we spend weeks planning how to organize and, as a result, nothing ever happens. One event that we planned involved a guest lecturer, a public lecture for the community. All but two nonacademicians were present. Of these two non-academicians, one was homeless and the other was a 'loud' and provocative speaker. Each interrupted the presentation in turn: the one interrupted to ask for clarification and to explain why our academic babble did not make sense to him and the other interrupted precisely to disrupt this process of clarification, to complicate things all the more. These exchanges made everybody in the room noticeably agitated, almost on the verge of disavowed excitement. The anarchists talked about the disruption for weeks, and about how to keep something like this from happening again. They decided to implement the speaker's list, and so on. The question for me is: why, when we attend class every week as students, do we not need a speaker's list? Why do we tolerate the disruptions in the classroom? Why does it work in the classroom and not in the street?

I risk the conjecture that contemporary anarchists have turned to virtue ethics and prefigurative philosophy as a way of creating a more flexible meta-ethical system. It does not strike them that perhaps the answer to place and process deserve a simpler and more obvious response: unprincipled morality that emerges from no-where in particular is the fuel that sustains this juggernaut we call social life. This is what post-anarchism reminds traditional anarchists: to no longer be seduced by the discourse of power. That is, to paraphrase and appropriate Bauman's words, post-anarchism is about the rejection of hard-and-fast principles which one can learn, memorize and enact (as virtuous practice). Our reality is messy and unlearned—and so is our meta-ethical framework. We ultimately reject positive ethical principles, abstractions from life, in favour of an ethics without positive foundations or systems and, like good post-Kropotkinians, we demonstrate day by day that we can live in such a world. Knowing that to be the truth is to be post-anarchist. We thus abandon the positive meta-ethical framework in *philosophy* and render obsolete in practice the reduction of action to traditional manifest rulebooks. The politics of the classroom is a politics awaiting the eruption of the street but never able to symbolize it into the rulebook of consensus and speaker's lists.

Trends in Post Anarchism

Post-anarchism has more commonly been associated with one of two trends over the last two decades: first, and most popularly, it has referred to the extension of traditional anarchist philosophy by way of interventions into/from post-structuralist and/or post-modern philosophy, or; second, and most prevalent in the non-anglophone world, postanarchism has been understood as an attempt to explore new connections between traditional anarchist philosophy and non-anarchist radical philosophy without thereby reducing these explorations to developments from any particular philosophical group. According to adherents of this second trend in postanarchist philosophy, post-anarchism is thought to be the description of a set of relationships between

anarchism and an outside world. There have been two related ways in which to understand the location of this radical outside, each of which is further distinguished according to the direction of its influence.

First, there is the obvious outside, the influence of which is felt to come from the 'innermost outside' of the anarchist tradition; this is the nonanarchist outside that is discovered by bringing anarchism into a relationship with disciplines outside of the narrow field of political sociology (including film, music, geography, and others; this is what the post-anarchist journal *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* has described as its *modus operandt).*[8] This refers also more generally to the 'innermost outside' of the anarchist tradition—what many have felt the need to define as 'anarchistic' so as to describe something which is *almost* anarchist—such as Situationist Marxism, anti-civilization and primitivist thought, Zapatismo, and so on. But there is also the outside whose effects are felt from the 'intimate without' of the anarchist tradition (ie, the 'extimacy'[9] of the traditional anarchist discourse), which I am moved to call (and have been calling, throughout this essay) *anarchy.* The initial phase or "introductoiy period" (Evren, in Evren & Rousselle, 2011) of post-anarchism is the exploration of this second ill-defined relationship to an 'intimate without'—the manifestation of this extimacy has brought about the interrogation of the anarchist tradition from the inside through, in the anglophone world, a questioning of the manifest interpretations of classical anarchist philosophy. In this regard, post-anarchism should not be reduced to a critique against the essentialism of classical anarchism because this describes only one of the relationships that post-anarchists seek to elaborate (although, this is probably the strongest relationship).

There are some similarities between the typology that I have outlined to describe the outside that post-anarchism seeks to explore and the tripartite typology outlined by Benjamin Franks in his article "Postanarchism and Meta-Ethics" (2007). Franks has argued that there are three main trends within post-anarchist theorizing: (1) the "*post*-anarchism that rejects traditional anarchist concerns" (Franks, 2007: 8), (2) the "redemptive post-*anarchism* that seeks the adoption into anarchism of poststructural theory to enrich and enliven existing practices" (Franks, 2007: 8), and; (3) the "postmodern account[s] of postanarchism [that] concentrate on the anarchist features of relatively recent phenomenon" (Franks, 2007: 8–9). Admittedly, the three trends that Franks outlines are beneficial for discovering manifest themes in the post-anarchist literature but they do not outline or seek to discover implicit themes that have been hinted at sufficiently by post-anarchists nor do they spell out whether these trends are mutually exclusive with regards to their particular manifestations or whether they derive in some instances from a common movement (for example, Lewis Call's work which has been a part of two of these trends rather than just one). Moreover, Franks sutures the discursive system of post-anarchism, thereby grinding it to a halt. He does this by closing the symbolic system off (rather than redirecting it into new and implied pathways) by producing a single image for the reader's consumption. The problem is that Franks has waged his critique against postanarchism from within the imaginary order—his preconceived image of the post-anarchists and their discourse reflects and further impresses upon the tradition Franks believes himself to be defending (Vanheule et al., 2003: 324)—rather than from within the domain of the symbolic order whereby, in an ironic twist, he would once

[8] See *http://www.anarchlst-developments.org*

[9] Jacques-Alain iMlller has argued that Lacan's use of the term 'extimacy' "is necessary In order to escape the common ravings about a psychism supposedly located in a blpartltlon between Interior and exterior" (Miller, 2008).

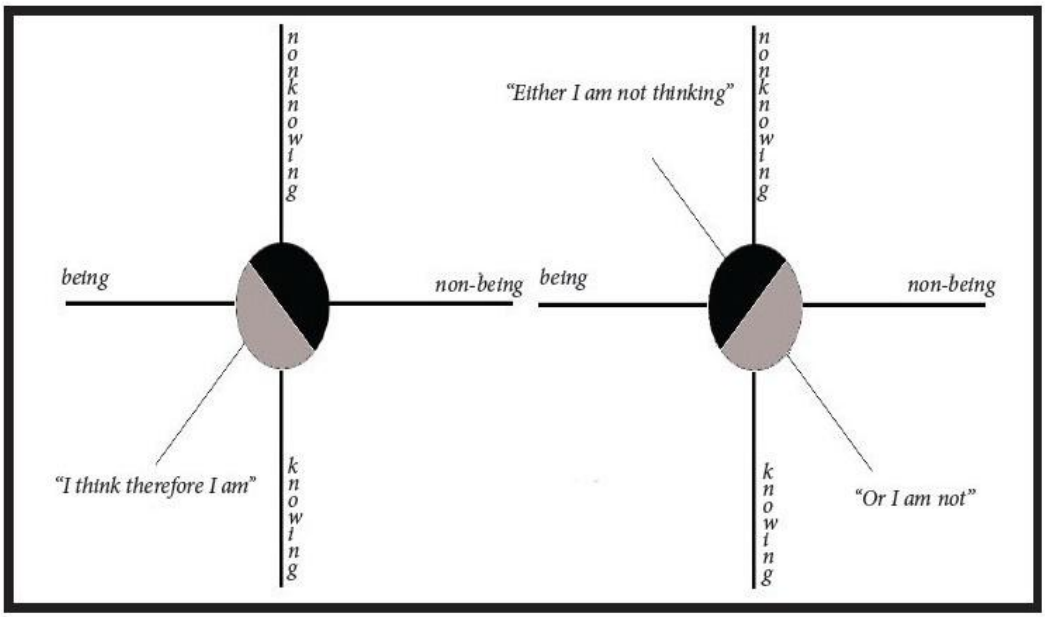

Figure 2.0 — The Symbolic Order of Anarchism

again be working from within the post-anarchist paradigm even while reacting against it. Post-anarchism has always embraced a constitutively open discourse which can not be reduced to strict imaginary representations.

A woman pointed a gun at a man's face. The man held up his hands and asked the woman for a moment to explain. He said, "You do not know me, and I have done nothing to you. Can you please just give me a moment to reflect on my life before you shoot me?" The woman nodded and in an instant was shot herself. The man, looking down at the woman, asked her if she had any last reflections. She responded, "I have lost faith in others." Does this not outline the problem that the critics of post-anarchism face today? They have lost faith in post-anarchism because of its crude reduction of the classical anarchist tradition, but, at the same time, they are only able to say this after first providing a crude reduction of post-anarchism themselves. Some critics of post-anarchism (Antliff, 2007; Cohn & Wilbur, 2003; Cohn, 2002; Day, 2005; Franks, 2011; Sasha K, 2004; Zabalaza, 2003) have rejected post-anarchism on the problematic grounds of its introductory phase whereby a caricature of the complexities of classical anarchism are presented, but they have done so in the spirit of post-anarchism through a rejection of the very practices and conditions (essentialism, reductionism) upon which post-anarchism has defined its opposition. In this sense, many of the critics of postanarchism are very much working within a time of post-anarchism. To work from within the symbolic order (rather than from within the wholeness of the imaginary order) implies a rewriting of the foundations and systems that have proved problematic or burdensome in the first place (cf., Vanheule et al., 2003; Lacanians are fond of calling this process "dialecticizing the symptom", a process that brings closed discourses into ever new relationships with *other* discourses and signifiers).

An examination of the latent content *as well as* the manifest content reveals important links between post- and traditional anarchism. I would like to take seriously the claim made by Benjamin Franks: "[postanarchism] regards certain forms of postanarchism as being consistent with the most coherent forms of practical 'classical' anarchism" (Franks, 2007). The reduction of a diachronic political tradition to its synchronic manifestations risks precisely this problematic reading: Franks assumes that the anarchist tradition is a 'practical' tradition first and foremost rather than a negative ethical imperative (whereby this 'imperative' should not be reduced to deontological ethics) animated by its latent impulse. The ethical commitment has manifested itself across differing combinations of responses to place and process and should therefore not be reduced to the practice-based ethic. The majority of post-anarchists have argued that their philosophies are firmly rooted *within* traditional anarchism (cf., Saint Schmidt, 2008) and the error of reducing classical anarchism to a caricature of its profound complexities is precisely the error of a lingering manifest classical anarchism.

Regarding the first trend that I outlined (the extension of traditional anarchist philosophy by way of interventions into/from post-structuralist and/ or post-modern philosophy), there have been two further sub-divisions. First, there have been those anarchists whose interest in post-structuralism has been to extend the domain of anarchist philosophizing through the inclusion of recent developments in either post-structuralist or post-modern philosophy. The other approach has been in the opposite direction, beginning from the standpoint of post-structuralism and garnering insights from the anarchist tradition in order to widen the scope of post-structuralist philosophy (this argument has also been made by Sureyyya Evren in Rousselle & Evren, 2011). Some post-anarchists, such as Gabriel Kuhn (who would probably reject this label), have found this approach suspect: "An anarchist engagement with poststructuralism would hence consist of an anarchist evaluation of the usefulness of poststructuralist theory for anarchism's aims" (Kuhn, 2009: 19).[10] According to Kuhn, anarchists will need to absorb what is good in the poststructuralist discourse into their own (probably ethical discourse) or else risk losing or obscuring what is central about anarchist philosophy.

Todd May, one of the most noted anglophone post-anarchists, arrived to anarchism through his exploration of post-structuralism, as Sureyyya Evren argued: "May is predominantly working on the politics of post-structuralism while gaining some insights from anarchism to create a more effective post-structuralist politics [...] Post-anarchism is better understood [...] as an anarchist theory first and foremost rather than a post-structuralist theory" (Sureyyya Evren in Rousselle & Evren, 2011). In the late 1980s, May found himself on a train heading to the Eastern Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association and he took the time to strike up a conversation about post-structuralist political theory with Mark Lance (General Director of the Institute for Anarchist Studies):

> I was trying to explain to a friend, Mark Lance, what the political theory of poststructuralism was all about. He listened more patiently than he should have and then said, 'It sounds like anarchism to me.' That comment was the seed of an article, "Is Post-Structuralist Political Theory Anarchist?"—which appeared in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* in 1989—and eventually of the present work [...] And Mark Lance has, over

[10] This same sentiment is recast for post-modernity: "An anarchist engagement with postmodernity would hence consist of an anarchist analysis of this condition—potentially helping anarchists to understand the socio-cultural dynamics of postmodern times" (Kuhn, 2009: 18).

> the years, provided me with intellectual riches far exceeding my ability to put them to good use (May, 1994: *ix-x*).

The chance encounter with Mark Lance appears to have shaped the ethical core of Todd May's post-structuralist anarchist philosophy (and it perhaps was the seed for a book on post-structuralist ethics, now with the anarchism qualifier omitted, in 2004) but anarchism has not been his primary commitment by any stretch of the imagination. One can surmise from his list of major publications—*Between Genealogy and Epistemology* (1993), *The Political Philosophy of Post-structuralist Anarchism* (1994), *Reconsidering Difference* (1997), *Our Practices, Our Selves, or, What It Means to Be Human* (2001), *Operation Defensive Shield* (2003), *The Moral Theory of Poststructuralism* (2004), *Gilles Deleuze* (2005), *(The) Philosophy of Foucault* (2006), *The Political Thought of Jacques Ranciere: Creating Equality* (2008 a), *Death* (2008b)—that May's short detour through anarchist political philosophy was only integral to maintaining the project of post-structuralism. What post-structuralism needed, what it was unable to define from within its own discursive parameters, was its anti-authoritarian ethics. May has weeded the anarchist tradition of what, by implication, has not been realized from within its own discursive boundaries and then retained the antiauthoritarian ethical commitment (translated into a critique of humanism and naturalism) by another name: Todd May, the *post*-anarchist. May has put this matter most eloquently:

> [P]ost-structuralist theory is indeed anarchist. It is in fact more consistently anarchist than traditional anarchist theory has proven to be. The theoretical wellspring of anarchism—the refusal of representation by political or conceptual means in order to achieve self-determination along a variety of registers and at different local levels—finds its underpinnings articulated most accurately by the post-structuralist political theorists (Todd May, in Evren & Rousselle, 2011: 44).

One might question the thesis that "poststructuralist theory is [...] more consistently anarchist than traditional anarchist theory has proven to be" (Todd May, in Evren & Rousselle, 2011: 44) on the grounds that May's preoccupation with post-structuralism has been founded on the latent ethical code of traditional anarchism whereas poststructuralist political philosophy, even though it very often demonstrates evidence to the contrary, does not inherently imply the anti-authoritarian injunction. Indeed, upon further inspection it becomes difficult to define what precisely is meant by the term 'post-structuralism' at all (especially considering that many of those individuals most typically associated with post-structuralism have not themselves accepted the distinction), as Simon Choat puts it:

> [W]hat is meant by 'post-structuralism' [...]? It is not insignificant that the leading representatives of [post-anarchism] have all given [their project] a different name: Saul Newman refers to postanarchism, Todd May to post-structuralist anarchism, and Lewis Call to postmodern anarchism. These different labels in part reflect disagreement about who can be termed a 'post-structuralist' (Choat, 2011: 53).

While there is certainly an anarchistic reading of select post-structuralist authors, there is also at least one other possible reading of post-structuralist ethics (from Levinas through to Derrida) that reveals a dimension that is much more akin to a crude liberal democratic ethics as opposed to

a passionate anti-authoritarian ethic of confrontation founded in the onto-ethical 'war model.'[11] If, on the other hand, one describes a particular philosopher who has often been associated with the post-structuralism movement and can relate this author to an *anarchistic* impulse, that is, to an anti-authoritarian ethos, one is typically only able to do this first by achieving a distance from the language of anti-authoritarianism: the language of post-structuralism is unclear in of itself with regards to its anarchism and this is why the relationship between the two bodies of thought is only now coming into view. If it were apparent, and obvious, it should not have prompted the ethical question that May has tried to answer in Chapter 6 of his post-structuralist anarchism book: "Two questions have stalked poststructuralist discourse from its inception: Is it epistemically coherent? and Can it be ethically grounded?" (1994: 121). May was correct in writing, then, that "the poststructuralists have always avoided [an] overt discussion of ethics" (May, 1994: 15) but where he has been insincere, from my reading, is with respect to his privileging of post-structuralist political philosophy at the expense of the anarchist underpinning. At times, May openly validated my thesis: Anarchism's naturalism in positing a human essence contains within it an insight—though not a naturalist one— that will prove crucial for understanding poststructuralist political philosophy. […] It will be seen that the poststructuralist perspective requires precisely this kind of ethical discourse in order to realize its political theory, although, as with political theory generally, a poststructuralist ethics does not by itself found the theory but, rather, interacts with the political and social context to codetermine it. […] (May, 1994: 40–1).

Based on this, there are sufficient grounds for the critique raised against Todd May by Sureyyya Evren (Evren in Rousselle & Evren, 2011).[12]

There have also been two main points of departure for post-anarchist critiques of traditional anarchist political philosophy: epistemological and ontological. The point to be made is that the critique against traditional anarchist philosophy has come from one of the two positions, epistemological or ontological, rather than from a mixture of the possibilities that may be realized by combining the two areas (as I have attempted to do in this book through meta-ethics). By way of assessing truth claims inherent in traditional anarchist philosophy (for their universalist pretensions), most post-anarchists have adopted an epistemologically grounded assault on essentialist ontology that has tended to take on the characteristics of an endorsement of democratic pluralist and philosophical relativist positions. There have also been those— the more promising of the two approaches—that have developed alternative ontological foundations grounded on the model of schizophrenic subjectivity (Newman, [2001] 2007: 103; Perez, 1990) or else the Lacanian/Stinerian model of empty subjectivity (Newman, [2001] 2007). With regards to the two trends of post-anarchist philosophizing, none have adequately elaborated the anarchist ethics that has motivated their anti-essentialism: none have described post-anarchism as a meta-ethics of traditional anarchism. Without this elaboration of ethics we are led to believe that post-anarchist philosophizing begins from either the epistemological or the ontological point of departure—which they currently appear to—rather than as a consequence of an explicit ethical foundation

[11] For an explanation of the war model see Newman ([2001] 2007: 50–1, 80–1). For a great explanation of the problems of statism inherent to the Levinasian/Derridean ethical trajectory see "Smashing the Neighbor's Face" by Slavoj Zizek (2005).

[12] A further line of questioning against May might include his critique of *both* traditional anarchism and post-structuralist political philosophy as lacking ethical expression while maintaining that they both claim to be ethical traditions. In this sense, why choose poststructuralism as the truly ethical tradition over anarchism? What is at stake in this choice?

and system that appeals to nihilist (that is, having to do with *anarchy*) responses to place and process.

Post-anarchist philosophers have been preoccupied with outlining an anti-essentialist variant of anarchist political philosophy but they have hitherto relied on relativist epistemological approaches. For example, Andrew Koch has argued that, in contrast to an ontological defence of anarchism, an epistemologically based theory of anarchism questions the processes out of which a 'characterization' of the individual occurs (Koch, in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: 26). If the validity of the representation of truth-claims can be questioned then the political structures that rest upon these foundations must also be suspect (ibid.). This epistemological defence of post-anarchism inevitably falls into a form of relativism but it does not necessarily reject the positive response to the meta-ethical question of process. For Koch, this approach received its political voice in "democratic pluralism" (ibid., 38).

Unfortunately, meaningful political engagement is precluded by this approach as anarchism becomes only one approach among many without the universal relevance required for any revolutionary discourse. Contrarily, to begin from a place of ethics presumes the possibility of political engagement and revolutionary commitment. If post-anarchism is to rise above the criticism laid against it, that it is "post-revolution" (cf., Sasha K, 2004), post-anarchists will have to remain firmly within the universalist framework rather than the relativist one currently in vogue among radicals; or else they must provide an elaboration, as I have been trying to do here, of anarchist meta-ethics in the negative dimension. To be sure, I am speaking about a universalist ethics that takes the absurd joke as truth. The trick is to move from a post-anarchism that rejects the universal dimension of ethics in favour of the relativist, toward a post-anarchism grounded in non-idealistic materialism, in *base* materialism, the forces of the base economy.

In the next chapter I shall aim to demonstrate that Bataille's approach to ethics—his beginning from the place of meta-ethics rather than from epistemology or ontology—permits him to describe a place of pure exteriority heretofore unrealized by both traditional and post-anarchisms. In this regard, Georges Bataille has written, "[t]he extension of economic growth itself requires the overturning of economic principles—the overturning of the ethics that grounds them" (1991: 25). Here we see that while post-anarchism was a destabilization of the positivity of meta-ethical responses to the question of place, the base materialism of Bataille is a destabilization of the positive meta-ethical responses to the question of process. If post-anarchism has been a paradoxical relativism grounded in the latent base subjectivist meta-ethical framework then post-anarchism *after* Bataille will be a paradoxical universalism grounded in the base materialist meta-ethical framework.

Toward an Ethics of the Outside

Three major claims have brought me to this section on Georges Bataille's meta-ethics. First, I have argued that the *c factor* of traditional anarchist philosophy is 'ethics' and that it has been brought to the fore by way of the post-anarchist discourse. Second, apropos of the first thesis, I have argued that post-anarchism has become one of the most vocal contemporary meta-ethical discourses on traditional anarchist philosophy. In this regard, post-anarchism has waged a critique against manifest anarchist ethics that has centred around the exposition of a repressed underside to its meta-ethical foundation. We have seen that this underside has also been theorized contemporaneously by the dominant school of nihilists within meta-ethical discourse. Finally, I have argued that post-anarchism, as a discourse (among discourses), has largely assumed a base subjectivist response to meta-ethical questions. This does not necessarily pose a problem for post-anarchist philosophers but in keeping with the ethical trajectory of its negative attribute there are two areas in which post-anarchists could potentially stand to benefit: they could adopt a negative, rather than a relativist, response to the problem of universalism within the question of process, and they could reject the subject as the central category of ethical agency. I shall argue that there is yet another response to the meta-ethical questions of place and process: one may respond negatively to the epistemological problem of universalism by rejecting all truth-claims and one may likewise take the ontological problematic of nonbeing to its limit by rejecting the subject as the locus of ethical agency. In doing so, post-anarchists could bring traditional anarchism's *c factor* to fruition. This latter position is correlative to the meta-ethical position of Georges Bataille.

First of all, I will defend a non-hermeneutical method of reading Bataille's work as the only possible way to unearth the truth inherent to Bataille's unstable discourse. I shall also risk the preliminary conjecture that Bataille's relationship to post-structuralist philosophy was an ironic one: he at once overcame the limitations of post-structuralist philosophy (specifically, the problem of relativism) and yet he also presupposed post-structuralist philosophy (broadly, the destabilization of universalism)—the irony of this statement is revealed by the fact that Bataille's writing came before the advent of structuralism as a general philosophy. It is therefore just as likely that postanarchism, or post-anarchism *after* Georges Bataille, has revealed a retroactive truth inherent to the traditional anarchist discourse. If it can be claimed that Bataille's philosophy is also a post-structuralist philosophy, albeit one that transcends the problem of conventional post-structuralism (relativism as the positive response to the critique of universalism), it could also be claimed that post-anarchism has retroactively revealed the truth of traditional anarchism. May we also say that post-anarchism *after* Bataille has revealed a truth about the direction traditional anarchist philosophy may now be moving—the future truth of traditional anarchism?

I will highlight some of the concepts that appear to be of primary utility for this project which I have set before me: the general economy, heterogeneity, base materialism, sovereignty, abjection, headless community, sacrifice and silence. I use each concept as a stepping stone to the final concept, tracing a movement from Bataille's meta-ethics to his even more paradoxical

first order ethics of sacrifice. I am also making the claim that the earlier concepts carry much more authority in Bataille's writing than the latter concepts.[1] Moreover, each of these concepts are taxonomically commensurate but each takes a unique point of departure within the economy of his discourse. In this sense, this chapter introduces multiple entry-points for thinking post-anarchism *after* Bataille. These concepts also help us to uncover the hidden dimension in Bataille's work, namely the anarchistic logic of 'the general state,' my own neologism. To the extent that Marxism influenced Bataille's notion of the general economy, we may also say that the latent reading of Bataille's text reveals a specifically 'headless' anarchist logic of the state. In Bataille's work on political economy the base metaphysical concept of the general state has described the law from which the general economy secures its wealth. Befittingly, I am charting out two paths by way of a dialogue between each uniquely situated philosophy. On the one hand, I shall provide entry-points or interventions into Bataille's discourse from the position of anarchist philosophy and, on the other hand, I shall provide entry-points or interventions into the anarchist discourse from the position of the innermost outside of anarchist philosophy (Bataille's discourse). I bring this section to a close by describing a baseless ethics of sacrifice. According to Bataille, the ethical act is the one that does not get coded into the symbolic order, this, I argue, is sacrifice read *a la lettre.*

The Failure of Reading Bataille

Any inquiry into the nature of Georges Bataille's troublesome relationship with Marxism appears to me to be a matter of banality. In any case, this vexing relationship is by now a matter of the common knowledge (cf., Grindon, 2010; Richardson, 1994: 1–4; Shershow, 2001; Hutnyk, 2003; for an account of the incommensurability of Marxism and Bataille's philosophy see Botting & Wilson, 1991: 9–10; Hollier, 1990) and its elaboration proves trivial if one is interested in performing in writing (and exposing through theory) the truth inherent to Bataille's *oeuvre.*[2] Likewise, recent attempts to situate Bataille as the *ex post facto* father figure of a distinctly post-structuralist/post-modernist lineage have not been met by idle pens (cf., Dorfman, 2002: *et passim*; Jay, 2005: 361–400, *et passim*; Lechte, 1994: 108–36, *et passim*; Noys, 2000: 1, 16–17, 100–2, 130–5, 168, *et passim*). For instance, not long after Bataille's death *Tel Quel*—an avant-garde literary journal operating out of Paris at the time— had incisively granted Bataille this appropriate distinction—the irony of which became exposed as the occurrence preceded the popularization of structuralist thought itself (Botting & Wilson, 1991; 5–7, esp. page 6). What remains to be excavated from Bataille's texts is the nature of his commitment to that proud adversary of Marxist thought, anarchism.

This venture resolves itself into a central problematic: one can not subscribe Bataille to *any* political philosophy while remaining faithful to the truth of his work—and yet, my claim is that there is something within Bataille's work that lends itself to an *anarchistic* interpretation.

[1] This claim has been made by Benjamin Noys in various ways (Noys, 2000: *passim*). For this reason it should be no surprise that I have heavily cited several of Noys's works throughout the entirety of this section.

[2] I am moved by Lacan's insistence on the dominance of the style of writing. In the opening sentence to Bruce Finks's 2006 edition of *Ecrits* Lacan is quoted: "The style is the man himself" (Lacan, 2006c: 3). As one blogger put it: "Lacan is incredibly concerned with style, how the person is revealed through his language, and [he] seems incredibly careful with his" (La Relation d'Objet, 2009).

I have argued in the first section of this book that the psychoanalytic tradition has revealed a hidden dimension within every discourse. There is a side that appears objectively within sight (the manifest content) but there is also a side that remains forever out of view (the latent content). While there is a truth that occurs by way of appearances, this truth is always disrupted by an aggrandized truth that refuses to be contained by appearances alone. This latter force is truth *proper*—it is the source of truth— because it temporarily sustains the cohesion promised by the appearance: "[A]ppearance constitutes a limit [but] what truly exists is a dissolution" (Bataille, 2004: 173).[3] There are thus truths which appear and also truths which elude appearances. To bring this metaphor of the appearance to its full effect, Bataille argued that "[i]t is the aperture which opens the possibility of vision but which vision cannot comprehend visually" (Noys, 2000: 30). Truth *proper,* like the aperture, is the source of the appearance which at once sustains and eludes the appearance.

The full discovery of this field occurred apropos Lacan as a retort to the failure of post-1920s analytic psychoanalysis and its inability to quell the analysand's resistance to psychoanalytic interpretation. Conventional psychoanalytic methodologies demonstrated an inability to predict and overcome the integration of their discourse into the common knowledge of the public. The analysand's resistance to analysis thereby stemmed from the predictability of the meaning ascribed to her symptom by the analyst. In a word, analysands no longer succumbed to the shock of analysis because this shock was replaced by ubiquitous predictability. Lacan believed that access to truth derived not from meaning but rather from the shock of the treatment itself. To combat the analysand's resistance to interpretation, Lacan proposed that analysts reformulate the ceremonious methodologies of Freudian psychotherapy. In point of fact, Lacan reread the truths of the Freudian tradition. Henceforth the Lacanian school of psychoanalysis called for analysts to move away from the seductive methodology of interpretation—whereby the analyst decoded the manifest content in order to reveal an objectively observable latent content— and to move toward the disruption of the meaningproduction process itself (cf., nosubject.com, 2011).

Lacan lucidly informed us that "analysis reveals the truth […] by making holes in meaning the determinants of its discourse" (Lacan, [1960] 2006d: 678). Yet, the production of meaning during analysis was always an immanent consequence of treatment—as an analyst, one can not sit quietly and expect the analysand to overcome her neurosis or perversion miraculously, similarly one can not interject into the totality of the analysand's utterances. Instead, interpretations after Lacan were to aim toward the production of 'effects' which may or may not correspond to the apparent facts of the discourse, these effects were to provide points of departure for rethinking the symbolism (or recirculating the signifiers) of the discourse at hand (nosubject.com, 2011).

Bataille shared Lacan's distrust of meaningproduction processes—Bataille's entire work depended quite fundamentally upon this distinction between the latent truth and manifest truths: "[y] ou must know, first of all, that everything that has a manifest side also has a hidden side. Your face is quite noble, there's a truth in your eyes with which you grasp the world, but your hairy parts underneath your dress are no less a truth than your mouth is" (Bataille, 1997). This is to say that Bataille's entire exposition intended to produce effects of consciousness in the reader's own discourse but also in the discourse with which Bataille conveyed this meaning. The latent truth thus cross-cuts *every* discourse precisely where they are lacking in knowledge. It is not

[3] In this sense the word "dissolution" means "frivolity, moral laxness, dissolute living" (*circa* late-14c; as retrieved from etymonline.com on January 28, 2011).

therefore at the level of appearances that anarchism and Bataille's discourse converge (or that the one appropriates the truths of the other) but it is much rather in their mutual disruption of the order of appearances from within a latent discourse that is permitted within either of the two philosophical systems. Whereas anarchist philosophy has theorized a truth that occurs outside of the logic of the state-form, Bataille's philosophy has theorized a truth that occurs outside of the logic of homogeneity.[4]

However, Bataille's use of the concept was much more of a description for a manifest way of thinking—Bataille was describing a particular discursive arrangement or a particular state of mind that manifests itself politically and socially. Bataille argued that "[h]omogeneity signifies [...] the commensurability of elements and the awareness of this commensurability: human relations are sustained by a reduction to fixed rules based on the consciousness of the possible identity of delineable persons and situations; in principle, all violence is excluded from this course of existence" (1985: 137–8). This implies that homogeneous social arrangements are sustained, firstly, by meta-ethics, whereby Bataille's reduction to 'persons' answers positively to the question of place and his reduction to 'situations' answers positively to the question of process. Apropos this description of the logic of homogeneity, in "The Psychological Structure of Fascism" Bataille unwittingly described that feature of the state-form previously held by anarchists. The restrictive stateform, according to Bataille, is a manifestation of the homogeneous logic of self-preservation, it always serves the interests of those in power—thus, the State "must constantly be protected from the various unruly elements that do not benefit from production" (Bataille, 1985: 139).

The wastage of productive processes have manifested themselves into various identities of resistance over the years, including, classically, the proletariat and, more recently, the multitude. Recently, these identities of resistance have given way to a peculiarly post-structuralist logic of social movements. By way of the description of the homogeneous state-form Bataille also described a peculiar logic employed by the heterogeneous portions of society that ostensibly break apart from the homogeneity of state logic—elsewhere, Richard J. F. Day has described this as the logic of demand:

> By [the logic of demand] I mean to refer to actions oriented to ameliorating the practices of states, corporations and everyday life, through either influencing or using state power to achieve irradiation effects [...] it can change the content of structures of domination but it cannot change their form [...] every demand, in anticipating a response, *perpetuates* these structures, which exist precisely in anticipation of demands (Day, in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: 107).

Similarly, Bataille argued that "the function of the State consists of an interplay of authority and adaptation [...] The reduction of differences through compromise in parliamentary practice indicates all the possible complexity of the internal activity of adaptation required by homogeneity [...] But against forces that cannot be assimilated, the State cuts matters short with strict authority" (Bataille, 1985: 139).

Whereas Day found an alternative to the selfpreserving logic of the state-form in the practices of the 'newest social movements,' whose autonomy was said to render state-logic redun-

[4] Homogeneity, in contrast to heterogeneity, has been described by Richardson as "an organised society based upon inflexible law and cohesion" (Richardson, 1994: 35).

dant,[5] Bataille's perspective offers little hope for autonomous ethical activity because, quite simply, there is no place from which to mount a resistance (no proletariat, no multitude, no social movements at all). For Bataille, the State depends upon all fixed ethical activity: "the State derives most of its strength from spontaneous homogeneity, which it fixes and constitutes as the rule. […] [I]solated individuals increasingly consider themselves as ends with regard to the state" (Bataille, 1985: 139). On the other hand, *real* heterogeneity can not be defined around the principles of social movement theory because it cuts through any models that would pretend to contain it—heterogeneity is the refusal of discourse *as such* (and yet it also flows through discourse). As Jesse Goldhammer has put it, "[Heterogeneity] encompasses everything that is unproductive, irrational, incommensurable, unstructured, unpredictable, and wasteful" (Goldhammer, 2005: 169). In this sense, Bataille's work criticizes any radical identity, it refuses all such attempts to translate negative truths into positive experiments. To be sure, it is also a claim made against the predictability of unpredictability, as the manifestation of spontaneous resistance or anarchist experimentation as *the law.* The proletariat in Bataille's work is thus to be regarded as one of his 'approximations' or 'effects,' rather than as the harbinger of his truth.

Bataille's refusal of the positive also led him to trace a logic of duality inherent to movements of heterogeneity. For example, Bataille has distinguished between a heterogeneity that occurs within the 'positive' content of any discourse and a heterogeneity that occurs exclusively within the 'negative' content: "the general positive character of heterogeneity […] does not exist in a formless and disoriented state: on the contrary, it constantly tends to a split-off structure; *and when social elements pass over to the heterogeneous side, their action still finds itself determined by the actual structure of that side*" (italics in original; Bataille, 1985: 141). Hence there is a determined relationship upon the positive heterogeneous social movements by the homogeneity of state logic. To the extent that manifest positive statements in social movement discourse attempt to disrupt state-logic it occurs in obverse proclamations, in their untranslated ethical systems—in secret. What room Bataille has granted to revolutionary formations, or more broadly to ethical activity, is best summarized by his insistence that, in democratic states, "it is only the very nearly indifferent attitude of the proletariat that has permitted these countries to avoid fascist formations" (Bataille, 1985: 159). There is thus ample room to conclude that the nihilist anarchism I have striven to describe converges with these readings of Bataille. However, as I have insisted elsewhere, the result of this convergence proves itself to be paradoxical. At the level of meta-ethics, the *c factor* of anarchism, and the central preoccupation of Bataille, there is an obvious parallel: an ethics that rejects *all* authority and representation, an ethics that refuses to settle into the territory of the manifest content—in a word, an ethics of disruption. Both discourses converge by way of their negative attributes, by way of what they reject in the world.

Nonetheless, my argument is that any claim of a convergence of anarchist philosophy with Bataille's philosophy must be met with suspicion. We must take seriously the question of appropriation when reading any work that attempts to fit Bataille into a pre-existing political tradition. Any approach that reduces the complexity of Bataille's *oeuvre* to a political categorization implies a fundamental misreading of the work (Noys, 2000: 52). We must also be suspicious of *any* interpretation of Bataille's work. For instance, hermeneutical investigations into the truth of the text

[5] As Day has put it: "[this] aims to reduce [the] efficacy [of state-logic] by rendering them redundant. [It] therefore appears simultaneously as a negative force working against the colonization of everyday life by the state […] and a positive force acting to reverse this process" (Day in Rousselle & Evren, 2011: 112).

have tended to oscillate between readings of the objective text and interpretations by the subject while never settling upon either of the two poles (cf., Skinner, 2002). That is, truth is found *between* the two poles rather than anywhere else—there are thus multiple/ relative truths granted to any historically situated text. Hence, political appropriations have evaded the (universal) truth inherent to Bataille's antagonistic propositions. But, as I have said, Bataille's truth also eludes *all* positive interpretations (Noys, 2000: 105) and thereby challenges hermeneutical methodologies on their presupposition of an intersubjective dimension (or of a 'letter that always reaches its recipient'). The problem of reading Bataille amounts to a central question about faith: how can it be that Bataille is being faithful if, in considering the truth of his text 'to the letter', we end up none the wiser? The paradox is that Bataille 'was' *and* 'was not' being faithful to us in his pronouncements: "A book that no one awaits, that answers no formulated question, that the author would not have written if he had followed its lesson to the letter—such is finally the oddity that today I offer the reader […] This invites distrust at the outset" (Bataille, 1991: 11). The seduction of the propositions in Bataille's *oeuvre* enters by way of the negative expression of truth rather than by way of its positive manifestations. His text is a description of its failure and his positive propositions are metaphors that allow us only a fleeting glimpse of his truth. Conversely, hermeneutical methods reduce this negative expression to a positive doctrine by rendering the heterogeneous descriptions into homogeneous utterances (or positive heterogeneities). Hermeneuticists are intent on revealing only the discoverable portions of the text. Noys was acutely aware of Bataille's struggle to write the history of the unfinished system of non-knowledge:

> The play of [heterogeneity] dominates not only Bataille's writing but also that of those who try to interpret his texts. Bataille was […] trying to describe an […] economy, one that no writing, or any other action, could reckon without and could never entirely reckon with. This means that to write about Bataille is to be forced to engage with the effects of [this] economy that is not dominated by either Bataille or his readers. […] [This] economy is an economy of difference that is irreducible either to a universal law or to a particular context or, to use the terminology of philosophy, it is neither transcendental nor empirical […] it can never be reduced to the empirical description of this play of forces (Noys, 2000: 123).

In this sense hermeneutics is the empirical examination of the manifest content that takes the form of a conclusive interpretation—a reading of the other *through the language of the other* (and, one might add, the *other* as an ontological response to place). As Demeterio has put it "[i]n its barest sense, hermeneutics can be understood as a theory, methodology and praxis of interpretation that is geared towards the recapturing of meaning of a text, or a text-analogue, that is temporally or culturally distant, or obscured by ideology and false consciousness" (Demeterio, 2007). But Noys has gone to great lengths to argue that the proper way to read Bataille is to disband with an interpretation that aims toward any meaningful conclusion (Noys, 2000: 126). Noys provided access to Bataille's truth by way of a paradox: "If we had never read Bataille at all then we would be the best readers of Bataille, but we would never know this unless we had read Bataille" (Noys, 2000: 128).

The problem of arriving at the meaningful conclusion embedded within the manifest content is also the problem of reaching an orientation in relation to the text. Like Lacanian methodologies, Bataille's epistemology aimed toward disorientation rather than orientation, as Noys has argued:

"Bataille begins reading in an experience of disorientation, of impossibility. After announcing in *Guilty* that reading is impossible and that he has lost the urge to read, Bataille starts to read" (Noys, 2000: 128). We shall also notice that this disorientation occurs at the level of meta-ethics while the ability to read a manifest truth occurs at the level of ethics—as I have said elsewhere in this essay, a nihilist meta-ethics does not preclude the possibility for ethical action. To be sure, I do not mean for this to imply that the ethical act was encoded within his meta-ethical system, it was not—it was evident only as the failure of the encoding process itself, even the descriptions of this failure have ultimately met failure. At this point I would like to begin to pose the question: at the level of politics, who fails better than the anarchist?

Bataille's writing is an attempt at failure, but we can not ignore that he also writes about this failure. The reading of the failure produces sense where there is none. To read Bataille implies that one be "led […] against those readings which try to appropriate a sense out of his heterogeneity" (Noys, 2000: 117). Bataille was not referring to a truth inherent to the difference of the text in the positive sense (a positive heterogeneity) but rather the truth of the remainder of the text, he was referring to its excremental portion which takes the appearance of the repressed content. The meaningful conclusion implied in the hermeneutic reading of the text comes as a result of an attempt to appropriate that which forever exposes a primordial incompleteness and instability. Hermeneutics therefore sutures the gap between the truth of his text (its absolute otherness) and its positive propositions as an 'other'—at the very least, interpretations of his work ought to aim toward what I have earlier described as 'effects.' Once again, on this point Noys's work has been instructive:

> [E]ven the most complete appropriation is haunted by a heterogeneity that it can never completely absorb. It is this remainder that makes reading possible, that re-opens new possibilities of reading while remaining impossible to read. Theoretical appropriation succeeds but at the cost of reducing the object to a dead thing, to freezing the play of difference into a stable arrangement (Noys, 2000: 126).

This excrement forever radiates outward from the discourse, awaiting revelation, and yet it also prevents the closure of any system or foundation which seeks to advance beyond this nihilist foundation. For this reason there is no ethical act *proper* except the one that remains uncoded. Bataille made a metaphor of this uncoded ethical gesture by way of the dying criminal: "What is not useful must hide itself (under a mask). Addressing himself to the crowd, a dying criminal was the first to formulate this *commandment:* 'Never confess'" (Bataille, 2001: 79). But whether or not one performs an ethical act does not change the original condition, this condition propels the species within their web of language. Any system of knowledge, including the most radical, is thereby destined toward failure. Noys claimed that,

> The philosopher picks through the waste of what remains *after* appropriation, and this is what attracts Bataille to philosophy. However, although philosophy does not leave anything out, including waste products, the problem is that it appropriates that waste as part of a new intellectual system. […] After Nietzsche, Bataille will no longer understand philosophy as a discourse of truth but as a discourse that is unstable and impure (italics in original; Noys, 2000: 39).

The argument that Noys was raising, through Bataille, relates also to the problem of academic knowledge (or the discourse of the university). Moreover, it relates fundamentally to the claim

made in the earlier part of my essay that the conceptual systems I have fashioned for the purposes of this thesis are destined toward failure. In this way, Noys has also argued that Bataille's work does not lend itself easily to the appropriative and/or exclusionary epistemological processes of academia (cf., Noys, 2000: 2), let alone the naive and reductive hermeneuticism that aims toward meaningful conclusions. Rather, we are met by two problematic movements which occur as if toward opposing poles. On the one hand, we may discuss the *appropriation* of the truth inherent in Bataille's *oeuvre* which occurs by way of gross reductions in an otherwise negative heterogeneous system of writing. On the other hand, the rejection of the truth inherent in Bataille's *oeuvre* occurs by way of a gross repression of the heterogeneous base force Bataille sought to describe. Whether by appropriation or rejection, the truth inherent in Bataille's text transcends all philosophical speculations that seek/ sought to reduce *being* to a presence rather than to its full spectrum of attributes. "What Bataille requires," Noys wrote, "is a reading that respects the heterogeneity of his thought, a thought that is of and at the limit" (Noys, 2000: 4). It is this reading that guides the writing of my essay.

Beneath the General Economy, The General State

Bataille distinguished between two levels of economy. On the one hand, he described the economy we are already familiar with, the one theorized by countless political economists to this day. This economy is the economy of the particular, its logic is derived from the generalization of isolatable instances. Its laws are based on calculation, profitability, and useability. But Bataille insisted that one can not discover the *general* movement of the economy with the mind of a mechanic whose knowledge about the whole comes only from his knowledge of the problems within the particular automobile. The problem of conventional economics has therefore also been the problem of the fallibility of the logic of utility. It is possible to imagine an economy whose energy is fuelled by squander rather than by profit, an economy that disrupts the logic of utility and in doing so provides the impetus for future economic arrangements. In the movement from the one economy to the other one also moves from the particular standpoint to the general standpoint. "Between [the] production of automobiles and the *general* movement of the economy," Bataille wrote, "the interdependence is rather clear, but the economy taken as a whole is usually studied as if it were a matter of an isolatable system of operation" (Bataille, 1991: 19). Hence, the restrictive economy depends upon the logic of utility within a delimited domain of material supply; restrictive economy is thereby an economy of scarcity. In classical political philosophy, this scarcity is the cause for social war which in turn has provided the need, ostensibly, for the state-form as an arbiter—if, for example, there are not enough resources to be shared there is reason to believe that those who are best able to present the appearance of threat stand to benefit the most from the social war of all against all. Conversely, Bataille argued that the general economy depends upon the logic of destructive expenditure, of useless waste, within a limitless domain of material supply; general economy is thereby an economy of excess, an economy of wealth. As Bataille has put it, "[f]rom the *particular* point of view, the problems are posed *in the first instance* by a deficiency of resources […] They are posed *in the first instance* by an excess of resources if one starts from the *general* point of view" (italics in original; Bataille, 1993: 39). To adopt the vantage point of the general economy is thus to begin from the presumption of surplus rather than scarcity—"[o]n the whole a society always produces more than is necessary for its

survival; it has a surplus at its disposal" (Bataille, 1993: 106)—and to thus undermine the *raison d'etre* of the state-form in liberal political philosophy. Moreover, as I have said, this surplus ensures the continual growth of particular economies of scarcity—"[t]he surplus is the cause of the agitation, of the structural changes and of the entire history of society" (Bataille, 1993: 106).

That the particular economies are founded upon the general economy does not imply that they are embodiments of this economy—instead, they reveal an altogether different truth whereby the particular economy takes on a short truthful life of its own independent from the underlying truth of the general economy. In contrast to the particular economy, the general economy is grounded upon an inability toward closure and thereby threatens and indeed overcomes the limits imposed by the restrictive economies. In time, the general economy is a rejection of the particular economy but it is also the assurance of the life and the regeneration of particular economies throughout time. In describing the general economy, Bataille thus undermined the privileged and long-held axioms of conventional political and economic philosophy and subjected them to a superior law and economy. He exposed the extent to which the state-form (which emerged as a supposed arbiter over the social war that ostensibly occurred by way of scarcity) and the capitalist economic form (which emerged as a supposed assurance of a life endlessly moving away from a needs-based economy; cf., Zizek, 2005b) were grounded upon the intensive logic of the latent content: within this logic it is not acquisition but expenditure which reigns. The latent content is the ungovernable portion of the state-ment, its truth is revealed by the endless disruption of manifest state-ments. For Bataille, the restrictive "state […] cannot give full reign to a movement of destructive consumption" (Bataille, 1993: 160) it must therefore obey the laws of expenditure in order to achieve a semblance of authority over a period of time with relative success. In this regard, "exchange presents itself as a process of expenditure, over which a process of acquisition has developed" (Noys, 2000: 108)—there is a primordial truthclaim being made: "For Bataille economy, and especially modern restricted economics in its capitalist form, is secondary to the primacy of this process of expenditure and loss" (ibid.).

Bataille also forced us to think outside of the narrow definition of restrictive economies and to think of economic activity as occurring across a broad range of domains, including, probably at its broadest level, discourse (Noys, 2000: 104). Here, my claim is not without warrant: "The accursed share disrupts the discourse it is being sketched out by" (Noys, 2000: 104). In this way, Bataille saw his work as an embarrassment to traditional political economy, it was interdisciplinary by design and it brought all discursive systems into question by exposing their inability to quell the forces of the general economy:

> This […] addresses, from outside the separate disciplines, a problem that still has not been framed as it should be, one that may hold the key to all the problems posed by every discipline concerned with the movement of energy on the earth— from geophysics to political economy, by way of sociology, history and biology. Moreover, neither psychology nor, in general, philosophy can be considered free of this primary question of economy. Even what may be said of art, of literature, of poetry has an essential connection with the movement I study (Bataille, 1993: 10).

We may say, with Bataille rather than against him, that the general economy also brought *his* discourse into question. Hermeneutical readings of Bataille are forced to focus on his restrictive discourse rather than his general discourse, the performance of the hermeneutical gesture

itself opposes the general truth circulating within Bataille's restrictive discourse. Hermeneutics misses the description of that which does not manifest itself within *any* text, the part of the text that connects with all other discourses into a common movement, a common (w)hole. This, Bataille has called *La Part Maudite* (translated as 'The Accursed Share'). The accursed share is the waste product of discourse that explodes forth from a radically foreign *outside* to all restrictive discourses that seek to contain it. Nevertheless, the hermeneutical misreading lies dormant, as a potentiality, within any such discourse—the medium of language always reduces the general economy to a particular arrangement of appearances:

> This close connection between general economy and existing economies always makes it possible to reduce general economy to a set of economic relations. It also means that the data that Bataille uses to provide 'approximations' of the accursed share is easily reversible and instead the accursed share can become another economic fact (Noys, 2000: 117).

The accursed share is the non-recuperable portion that exists outside of every economy, its promise is the immediate and eventual destruction of any system or foundation that appears to contain it. It is the *anarchist* current that has always existed with or without human intervention, with or without the subject as the locus of ethical agency. Any 'approximation' is a betrayal, a violence posed against the laws of the *La Part Maudite*.

Once again, there is an apparent relationship between Bataille and Marxist political philosophy. Like Marx, Bataille sought to describe the logic of failure inherent to capitalism from the perspective of political economy. However in doing so Bataille greatly surpassed the restricted logic at play in Marx's own texts (and this may very well be because Marx did not elaborate any ethical system or foundation for his work). But whereas Marxist political philosophy has centred upon its critique of conventional economics (even while it did not perform a complete break from the logic of utility, and, more problematically, from *idealism*),[6] anarchist political philosophy has centred upon a critique of the state-form. Nevertheless, one detects a peculiar omission in the writings of Georges Bataille which no doubt stems from his desire to mythologize the discourse of scarcity and endless productivity pervasive in the work of the political economists of the time. While it was no doubt important to explore the notion of general economy founded upon the metaphysical principles of excess and limitless consumption, Bataille's work does not give a name to the metaphysical principles regulating this economy. At the restrictive level, this problem has the analogy best exhibited by the traditional anarchist critique against the political logic of the Marxists.

The oft-cited nineteenth century anarchists (shamefully, I will restrict my focus to Mikhail Bakunin and Petr Kropotkin) set out to discover a fundamentally different political logic which was to be distinguished from the Marxist logic of class inherent in the base/superstructure synthetic pair. What they found was that the Marxist analysis of political oppression neglected the self-perpetuating and independent logic of the state and that, according to Bakunin (and echoed by countless anarchists to this day), the Marxists "do not know that despotism resides not so much in the form of the state but in the very principle of the state and political power" (Bakunin, 1984: 220). For the classical anarchists, the State—as the fundamental apparatus of

[6] *An implicit critique of Marxism's idealism was provided in Bataille's "Base Materialism," an essay available in the Visions of Excess* collection.

power in society—represented the barbarity of the transfer of power from the people (the repressed content) to the tyrannical group. The classical anarchists thereby argued that the state was the ultimate riddle of power and must therefore be understood as the guarantor of wealth for the bourgeoisie.

With Bataille, we may carry the discoveries of the classical anarchist logic even further. In the restrictive sphere we may say the following: if, for the classical Marxists, the domain of class referred also to the domain of utility then, for the anarchists, we may properly deduce that the domain of the state referred also to the domain of routine. With this interpretation we might understand anew the connection Kropotkin envisioned between capitalism and the state when he proclaimed that "the state […] and capitalism are facts and conceptions which we cannot separate from each other […] [i]n the course of history these institutions have developed, supporting and reinforcing each other" (Kropotkin, [2005]: 159). The state therefore instituted into logical time what was previously cast to the instant, outside of the authority of time. The instant as a movement outside of means *and* ends. Thus, we have found that it is not the restrictive economy that poses the greatest threat to sovereignty, but the restrictive state: "what is sovereign in fact is to enjoy the present time without having anything else in view but this present time" (Bataille, 1993: 199). It is therefore a matter of separating, analytically, that which manifests itself co-constitutively in the restrictive economy and restrictive state, where the logic of each occur or are the seeds for the other. As Saul Newman has put it, "[a]narchism sees the state as a wholly autonomous and independent institution with its own logic of domination" ([2001] 2007: 21). Bakunin, perhaps the classical anarchist with the most to say about the state-form, has similarly put it:

> The State is authority, it is force, it is the ostentatious display of and infatuation with Power. It does not seek to ingratiate itself, to win over, to convert. Every time it intervenes, it does so with particularly bad grace. For by its very nature it cannot persuade but must impose and exert force. However hard it may try to disguise this nature, it will still remain the legal violator of man's will and the permanent denial of his liberty (Bakunin, 1953).

The problem of focusing only on problems of the economy is also the problem of ignoring the independent self-serving logic of the state-form. Anarchists have long argued that it is in the interest of the state to maintain its legislating power over the people—it is short-sighted to provide a *telos* of revolution without taking the autonomous and selfserving logic of the state-form into account.

I have shown that Bataille has outlined a general economic model that intervenes into the restrictive capitalist economic model, it shall now be demonstrated that there is an independent logic of the state-form which also occurs from within the general perspective. Just as one can speak about matters of the general economy, one may also speak of matters of the general state. Bataille sufficiently intimated the logic of the general state but he did not give it a name (such as he did with the 'general economy'). In the second chapter of *The Accursed Share* he described the "Laws of General Economy" and hence argued that the general economy is the one that is governed by an authority far greater than its own (Bataille, 1993: 27). To the extent, therefore, that the restrictive state, according to Bataille, is homogeneity and routine, the general state is heterogeneity and disruption.

We may say that the logic of the economy occurs within the range of responses to the question of process in meta-ethical philosophy whereas the logic of the state-form occurs within the range of responses to the question of place. Processes occur by way of economies, they are circulations and have all the properties of movements/*telos.* Places occur by way of state-forms, they are locations and have all the properties of spaces/categorizations. The economy originates, according to Bataille, in a place and that place is the sun: "The origin and essence of our wealth are given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy—wealth—without return. The sun gives without ever receiving" (Bataille, 1991: 28). Bataille continued, "the brilliance of the sun […] provokes passion. It is not what is imagined by those who have reduced it to their *poverty;* […] the least that one can say is that the present forms of wealth make a shambles and a human mockery of those who think they own it" (italics in original; Bataille, 1991: 76). Unpacking all of this, it becomes clear that, at the very least, economies concern themselves with production and consumption, but states concern themselves with distribution. In the general perspective, there is a state that distributes scarce matter and there is a solar state (approximately), or aperture, that distributes the wealth. In this sense, the economy does not emerge from within the circulation of its own energy but much rather from a place outside of our living sphere, a place of pure externality. The economy emerges from a foreign place that is too hot to touch and too bright to see. We can only come to know the general state from afar, through plays with language, through approximations, through failure. We may never own this place because it is not an objective entity, but neither is it subjective. It is *abject,* it cuts through the subject and the object from a location of pure intimacy.

Bataille provided several approximations of the general economy, from sacrifice and war to gift and potlatch, but his overall point was to expose the general economy as a movement of pure waste. However, as I have suggested, there is also the problem of distribution in the restrictive sphere. In the restrictive sense, then, we may say that there are, broadly, communist, totalitarian, and liberal stateforms. In form they embody the logic of the state, in content they vary widely. I have described the logic of the restrictive state-form earlier. Now we may add that there are *anarchist* state-forms and that these can only occur through the general perspective. To the extent that Bataille was outlining a non-foundationalist epistemology through the negative response to the question of process, he was also describing a non-essentialist and non-representative ontology through the negative response to the question of place. And therein one may discover his anarchistic elaboration of the general state-form. Just as there is a lack that sustains the economy of our knowledge (language), there is also a lack that sustains the state of our being. Thus, while postanarchism exposed the underside to traditional anarchist meta-ethics as that which sustains its discourse, Bataille exposed the full range of the meta-ethical framework: an underside to the question of place *and* process. Next, I shall aim to elaborate the implications of the general state for the realization of the negative response to the question of place.

A Subject Without A State

To argue that Bataille's work was primarily about ethics—ethics of the second order—may appear banal to the advanced reader of Bataille but it shall prove important to establish this claim—my argument very much depends upon it. Allan Stoekl has argued that "Bataille […] exerts a strong appeal because he […] seems to hold onto the possibility of an ethics" (Stoekl,

1990: 2). To the extent that this claim is true it merits considerable elaboration in as much as Bataille was primarily interested in overturning all ethical systems:

> I will simply state, without waiting further, that the extension of economic growth itself requires the overturning of economic principles—the overturning of the ethics that grounds them. Changing from the perspective of *restrictive* economy to those of *general* economy actually accomplishes a Copernican transformation: a reversal of thinking—and of ethics (italics in original; Bataille, 1991: 23).

But Bataille's project was not a transformation of ethical philosophy. Rather, it was a disruption of all ethical claims-making and a rejection of morality as such. Benjamin Noys also endorsed this interpretation of Bataille's work: "If we read Bataille as an ethical thinker […] we […] are not conceding to the recent ethical turn in contemporary Continental philosophy, which rehabilitates theology or moralistic conceptions of the human subject" (Noys, 2005: 125). Contrarily, with Bataille we may firmly reject all ethical conceptions of the subject in order to "transgress the limits of ethics, as it is usually conceived" (Noys, 2005: 125). Rather than rejecting restrictive ethical systems in favour of other positive conceptions, Bataille exposed the extent to which all ethical systems have been subservient to a greater power than they sought to describe. He thereby exposed an underside to meta-ethical frameworks.

The meta-ethical claim that Bataille made, *apropos* the general state, was that the subject is no longer a place from which to gauge appropriate human activity—she is ceaselessly subordinate to general state power. To the extent that the general state exists, it exists always elsewhere, in an absolute otherness relation to consciousness. The general state can never be encapsulated within the play of signifiers but is instead the laws or grammar of the disruption of this play. Unlike in Lacanian or post-anarchist meta-ethics, whether or not one gets into accord with this complex matters little in the grand scheme of things. For Bataille, there is no ethical act *proper*. Hence, unlike in traditional anarchist philosophy, the subject no longer holds the privileged place of political activity, rather her actions are always encoded in her place by the state-ment. Even considering this, this is still an inversion of the deterministic conceptions of power in relation to the restrictive state and the humanist subject in traditional anarchist philosophy.

At times it appears as though Bataille has adopted a base subjectivist response to the question of place. There is a paradoxical relationship to the general state that appears to become elucidated by the ethical activity of self-reflection: "Doubtless it is paradoxical to tie a truth so intimate as that of *selfconsciousness* (the return of being to full and irreducible sovereignty) to these completely external determinations" (italics in original; Bataille, 1991: 189). Self-consciousness is the subject's last resort to overcome the anxiety of giving up control of a world that is much rather controlled elsewhere and yet it is also a means for the subject to overcome this anxiety. Thus, self-consciousness takes on a different meaning in Bataille's work. It appears that in Bataille's work the intimacy of the world without the authority of the subject can be achieved by the subject:

> If *self-consciousness* is essentially the full possession of intimacy, we must return to the fact that all possession of intimacy leads to a deception. A sacrifice can only posit a sacred *thing*. The *sacred thing* externalizes intimacy: it makes visible on the outside that which is really within. This is why *self-consciousness* demands finally that, in connection with intimacy, nothing further can occur. This comes down in fact, as

> in the experience of the mystics, to intellectual contemplation, 'without shape or form,' as against the seductive appearances of 'visions', divinities and myths" (italics in original; Bataille, 1991: 189).

The seduction of the subject as the locus of ethical activity, according to Bataille, occurs because the subject is the place for the construction of 'myths' — there is hence a parallel to the Lacanian methodology. And yet intimacy occurs "without shape or form" and thereby without myths. All of Bataille's myths are approximations of intimacy, they serve only as pathways toward intimacy or as forms that are intended to seduce us into intellectual contemplation. All positive elaborations on meta-ethics go "against consciousness in the sense that [they try] to grasp some object of acquisition, *something,* not the *nothing* of pure expenditure. It is a question of arriving at the moment when consciousness will cease to be a consciousness of *something*" (italics in original; Bataille, 1991: 190). It is only in the failure to think that Bataille's subject of intimacy comes into being.

Bataille was interested in releasing the subject from the prison of her own subjectivity and this accounts for his insistence that the subject ought to aim toward "a consciousness that henceforth has *nothing as its object*" (italics in original; Bataille, 2001: 190). Here, we are provided a useful point of departure for rethinking and extending the base subjectivist meta-ethics of such anarchists as Max Stirner, Renzo Novatore, and others who argued that "Nothing is more to me than myself!" (Stirner, 1907) in Stirner, and, in Novatore, the Nietzschean proclamation that one ought to move "toward the creative nothing" (Novatore, 1924). Yet the base subjectivists have retained the corporeal subject as the locus of ethical activity. They have proclaimed with so much confidence: "I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but I am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything" (Stirner, 1907). Bataille's sovereign subject, on the other hand, is grounded upon a nothingness of pure exteriority: "sovereignty is NOTHING, a nothing that is a slipping away of the subject […] This slipping away is not secondary because it does not happen to a subject who is secure or has integrity, instead it reveals the unstable status of the subject" (Noys, 2000: 75). To be sovereign is not to make a conscious ethical choice, it is to recognize the sovereignty of being that already exists and to give oneself away to it from within the imaginary of everyday consciousness. The sovereign subject can thus not be reduced to the individual ego (Noys, 2000: 65) rather it is at once the movement of consciousness that compels the subject to disrupt her authority over her being, to take the proclamation of non-being seriously (Noys, 2000: 65), *and* it is the revelation of this accidentalism. There is thus a shifting of priorities in the text of Renzo Novatore when he insisted that he was an anarchist because he was also a nihilist: "I call myself a nihilist because I know that nihilism means *negation*" (italics in original; Novatore, 1920), and then he claimed that "[when] I call myself an individualist anarchist, an iconoclast and a nihilist, it is precisely because I believe that in these adjectives there is the highest and most complete expression of my willful and reckless individuality" (Novatore, 1920). There is a refusal in base subjectivist responses to the question of place to think beyond the agency of subject. For the base subjectivist, it is *she* who is responsible for the negation and it is *she* who is responsible for the creation that results from this evacuation of place. The great battle is between the subject of the statement and the creative subject of the no-thing. Contrarily, there is an anti-authoritarian dimension to Bataille's meta-ethical system in his subversion of the authority of the conscious subject: "Sovereignty is the contestation of authority, a reversal of our traditional concepts of sovereignty" (Noys, 2000: 65). Just as the subject's actions always

fall within the pervasive logic of the restrictive state, the sovereign subject's (in)activity always falls within the pervasive logic of the general state.

There have been arguments against this reduction of sovereignty to an ontology of place (cf., Noys, 2000: 66 *et passim*). The problem is that some readings of Bataille reduce sovereignty to an ontology of the ego. Against this compulsion toward the ontological, Derrida has argued that one ought to 'read Bataille against Bataille': "this diffusion resists being condensed into an individual or into being" because it operates "at the limit" of the subject (Noys, 2000: 66). However, the question remains, in moving toward a faithful reading of Bataille that rejects his manifest truth in favour of his latent truth, in rejecting the ontology of the subject, what *remains?* To be sure, this remainder can only be thought within the domain of meta-ethics because Bataille's heterogeneous writing crosscuts the ontological and epistemological domains and exposes their mutual constitution as meta-ethical frameworks. The subject is subservient only to the general state-form. She serves the authority of the solar non-place. Benjamin Noys's argument that Bataille's subject can only be thought as 'an effect' or 'temporary dam' implies that it can only be reduced to the homogeneity of the manifest content. It is *a* truth, but not *the* truth of Bataille's text. Fittingly, Noys's acute description of Bataille's subject as 'an effect' fits into the logic of the 'effect' that Lacanian psychoanalysts have striven to induce in their analysands. The solar non-place is thereby meta-ethics proper: it includes the authority and place from whence ethics originate *and* the knowledge and process through which this authority speaks. As Noys put it: "Sovereignty does not integrate into absolute knowledge but is the nonknowledge that undermines it" (Noys, 2000: 79). Sovereignty introduces the subject, fleetingly, to that which is outside of herself, to that which is neither 'individual' nor 'social' (Noys, 2005: 128), "neither subject nor object" (Kristeva, 1982: 1), to that which horrifies the subject and brings her to her limit in death. It is precisely this thinking that destabilizes the base subjectivist position (cf., Noys, 2005: 128 *et passim,* on the 'psychoanalytic subject'). The refusal of the subject is itself an ethics of disruption and Bataille has called this ethics, 'abjection'.

The question remains: if, as I have attempted to demonstrate, Bataille's meta-ethics are nihilist in the strict sense of the term, then what may we say about his first order ethics? Two further lines of thought are required to develop a response to this question. First, I shall aim to describe Bataille's ethics of abjection as the limit of the subject within the domain of meta-ethical discourse and second I shall aim to demonstrate that Bataille's notion of 'sacrifice' offers us a chance to reformulate the challenge of first order ethics.

From Abjection to Sacrifice, From Life to Death and Back Again

The question remains, if the preoccupation of the meta-ethical discourse hitherto described aims only toward the disruption of ethical claims-making and if Bataille's meta-ethics rejects the subject as the locus of ethical agency, then, I hesitate to ask, on what basis might there be any pertinent political involvement? To the extent that this question merits a response I shall provide one based on the notions of 'abjection' and 'sacrifice' in Bataille's work. I shall argue that sacrifice rescues ethics from the destructive trajectory of meta-ethics. After the slipping of the subject in nihilist meta-ethics there is still room for one to engage ethically in the world. However, the response, once again, will prove itself paradoxical.

I have argued that the general state destabilizes the subject as an ontological category and in doing so it exposes the object of ethics proper—an ethics of the outside that is mythologically associated with the sun. According to Bataille, ethical activity is not something the subject performs but rather it is something performed upon (and against) the subject by the forces of an external nature. We may say that the abject is the object of Bataille's meta-ethical inquiry and that it crosscuts positive conceptions of place and process. Abjection is the effect of the general economy on positive notions of place: "What opens in this rupture, in this shattering of the subject, are those states of abjection [...] They include death, excretions, objects of horror, ecstatic enjoyment (*jouissance*) and so on, and are 'things to be embraced, not exactly willingly, but that must be addressed in their horror'" (Noys, 2005: 131). The abject is what remains after the imposition of the subject; fleeting glimpses of this object are available through reductions in useful knowledge. It is only where knowledge is lacking that the subject *proper* (Bataille's intimate or sovereign subject) comes into view.

I have also argued that Bataille's meta-ethics must be distinguished from base subjectivist understandings of place on the basis of this ethics of abjection. Whereas base subjectivists have retained the ethical agency of the subject, the base materialist philosophy of Georges Bataille rejected the subject entirely and replaced it with the solar economy. Noys has broached this topic in various ways, he has argued, for example, that "psychoanalysis inclines to recover the subject" from the effects of the Real, but "Bataille puts the subject into free fall" (Noys, 2005: 131). It is therefore only a matter of convenience that scholars have traced a lineage from Bataille to Lacan, from abjection to the Real. But one must distinguish between the ethics of psychoanalysis and the ethics of abjection on the basis of the subject's lost intimacy with the world that surrounds her. As Noys has put it,

> [C]ritics [have] assimilate[d] Bataille's thought to that of Lacan, especially seeing it as a prefiguration of Lacan's concept of the Real [...] The problem with these arguments is that they tend to reduce Bataille to a precursor to Lacan, missing the complexity of Bataille's own writings. In particular, they risk subsuming Bataille back within the Freudian field, rather than attending to what in his work 'eludes psychoanalysis' (Noys, 2005: 132).

The crucial distinction between Bataille's concept of abjection and Lacan's concept of the Real is that Bataille's abjection "escapes the subject [...] For Bataille the shattered subject is not gathered up, even into the subject of the unconscious or the subject of abjection" (Noys, 2005: 132–3). How does Bataille's philosophy expose what is *more Lacan than Lacan?* Bataille's *more Lacan than Lacan* is, precisely, in his ontologization of Lacan.

To the extent that an ethics beyond abjection is possible it shall depend upon an elaboration of the notion of sacrifice. I do not intend to perform this daunting task here but I do intend to provide a pathway for future work into the area. In "Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh," Bataille described Van Gogh's ethical sacrifice as the one that "spat in the faces of all those who have accepted the elevated and official idea of life that is so well known." To the extent that ethical activity exists in the world there shall never be a meta-ethical system of knowledge to account for it unless it is the description of its failure. My claim is that sacrifice occurs where servitude is assumed.

Sacrifice occurs where servitude is assumed: Bataille argued that sacrifice always "appears in our eyes as servitude" (Bataille, 1985). If it is true that sacrifice occurs where servitude is assumed

perhaps the appearance of servitude is the ethical act of sacrifice *proper.* The process of gift-giving, for example, abides by a logic which exchanges "the materially valuable for that which is culturally meaningful [...] Sacrifice is the act of exchanging that which is valued for meaning" (Thought Factory, 2004). The ethical act is the one that gives up on trying to overcome the problem of place and process and, instead, concedes purposeful activity only to the abject. There is thus a violence inherent to the ethical act but it is a violence that radiates from the restrictive economies and states of idealist culture rather than the violence that disrupts these frameworks. To be sure, the meta-ethical task falls into nihilism by virtue of a violence that exceeds the frameworks of any discourse that seeks to contain it, but the ethical task is to give in to the restrictive systems and foundations that sustain life and to hence expose a violence against the sacred intimacy that destabilizes the subject. As Noys argued, "Bataille wants to express a violence that is radically beyond language, and he searches for *examples* of this violence in acts of sacrifices [...] The difficulty is that these examples reduce violence back into language and into a particular historical moment of subject [...] Violence exists somewhere in the play of the example, existing through examples but also ruining the idea of the example through a violent opening" (italics in original; Noys, 2000: 10).

To give way to the abject implies two consequences: on the one hand, it implies that all activity is grounded upon failure and so too are the frameworks which are presumed descriptions of this activity. *Fail again, fail better.* The anarchists have never had a victory and yet we find some pleasure in this defeat. We fail better than any other political agent. But this also means that there is a violence inflicted, in the restrictive sense, through this activity. This thereby explains the meaning of the following: "Sacrifice exposes us to death but also saves us from death" (Noys, 2000: 13). For the anarchist—it is a crime to go to graduate school, get married, have children, or otherwise reproduce the existing homogeneity, and yet we know that the existing order is sustained by a force much greater than the restrictive states and economies that come and go through time. There is an order of the symbolic that compels us into servitude. Anarchists are often asked: what in this life *is* anarchist? We may say that very little in life is *anarchist* because every act is absorbed by the symbolic order and provided with meaning and value. The great sacrifice *for an anarchist* is thus to give oneself away to tolerable systems and foundations and to be stoned to death by her family, other anarchists, and so on, for doing so. It means that there are sacrifices that one has to make violently by both refusing meta-ethical systems and foundations but also in accepting certain ones as effects or approximations of anarchism. *The ethical task is not to sacrifice a king, but to sacrifice ourselves to the king, to find in our sacrifice to the king a sabotage of the king.* Several years ago I found myself in the middle of a political campaign at my university. Anarchists were teamed with avowedly Leninist political organizers on the political platform 'United for Change.' I was saddened by the amount of recuperation happening in my milieu. I put up posters in support of the group. However, I did so before the permitted time and in volumes not permitted by union regulation: I accepted their platform *too much.* They were very nearly disqualified. As a consequence, my anarchist friends called the police on me, threatened legal action against me, and so on.

I was threatened with violence. Fireworks were shot at my home, where my newborn baby slept. Letters and photographs were placed all around the internet. I was ex-communicated from the milieu. My publisher was notified that I was an *agent provocateur,* working and being paid by the state. Nothing that the sacrificed anarchist can say shall allow her to return to intimacy, and yet everyday she strives to build a better world anyway — a dying anarchist performs this

function in secret, much like the dying criminal who "[a]ddresses himself to the crowd, a dying criminal was the first to formulate this *commandment:* 'Never confess'" (Bataille, 2001: 79). The anarchists never ran for presidency again.

For Bataille, "[t]here is no [ethical] project; […] only the defeat of all accomplishment" (Stoekl, 1990: 4), we may also say that we have arrived at a crucial paradox in the work of Bataille, one that makes *his* ethical system tremble: as Stoekl has put it: "therein lies the problem, because any 'saying' or 'writing' [or doing], no matter how disjointed or disseminated, is already the product of a project, of a constructive activity not different in kind from that of the most servile 'committed' writer" (Stoekl, 1990: 4). The problem is that Bataille's meta-ethical system appears to imply that the intimate subject ought no longer to act in the world. Certainly, inactivity has its place in any political program, but, at the same time, one can imagine scenarios in which this negative proposition also falls flat into a stable doctrine. For Stoekl, "Bataille can only be the 'nothing' *and* the imposition and betrayal of that 'nothing' through the coherent project of writing" (italics in original; Stoekl, 1990: 4). This betrayal, which occurs, I have argued, as sacrifice, "opens, in turn, even larger vistas of betrayal" (Stoekl, 1990: 4). Stoekl has taken this logic to its limit:

> So perhaps in Bataille there is the necessity of morality and representation, no matter how 'accursed', along with its impossibility. There is the […] betrayal of the […] 'nothing', elaborated at the expense of the ethical, and there is, in and through that very writing, the impossibility of maintaining its purity, and thus the consequent, incessant, re-positing of the ethical, even in the representation of its defeat or sundering (Stoekl, 1990: 5).

Stoekl's point is that through positive sacrificial ethical acts there is the potential, but not the conclusion, of ever new opportunities for the exposition of the nothing which founds and propels the species. This claim is not without warrant: according to Heimonet & Kohchi (1990) sacrifice, like the logic of heterogeneity, occurs across two counterposing dimensions. Heimonet & Kohchi describe sacrifice as an "opening, a rendering apart, quartering of a subject tensed for the leap but nevertheless held back on the verge of the abyss of total alterity" (Heimonet & Kohchi, 1990: 227). The 'leap' carries strong connotations with Soren Kierkegaard's 'leap to faith' whereby the intimate subject leaps into uncertainty and thereby returns once again to intimacy. Bataille's infamous ethical imperative is that one must 'recoil in order to leap forward'. For Bataille, one must move away from meta-ethics precisely to understand meta-ethics but, without having jumped into meta-ethics, he would have never arrived at this conclusion! Inevitably, one must disrupt meta-ethical systems to once again partake in ethical practice.

There are thus two meanings by the concept 'sacrifice' in Bataille's work. Heirmonet & Kohchi have argued that these two concepts of sacrifice "which are actually one, double or dual, at once antithetical and complementary […] correspond to two moments in the experience and thought of Bataille" (Heirmonet & Kohchi, 1990: 227). The authors have argued that the first moment—what I have called his meta-ethics—was characterized by negativity. This was his radical or activist *political* movement. The second moment was his theoretical movement. This was his secret, his silent, moment.[7] It should be noted that the first moment is political only to the

[7] According to etymonline.com, theory, from the Greek *theoria* (c.1590) means "contemplation, a looking at"—we may reformulate this to imply a contemplation on intimacy, as described by Bataille through the concept of sovereignty.

extent that it gives voice, however negative, to resistance whereas the latter moment exists only within a theoretical domain, uncoded, untranslated, without recuperation by the symbolic order—a sacrifice *proper*. The second moment does not provide any words on activity in the world—it is a simple performance without law. In the end, these two moments only exist by way of appearances (Heimonet & Kohchi, 1990: 228), there is actually no separation of these movements—rather, they are a "dialectically complimentarity" (Heimonet & Kohchi, 1990: 228). Sacrifice is thus the dialecticalization of Bataille's meta-ethical system and foundation, it is the putting into practice of a failed proclamation: "he [Bataille] suggests becoming silent and putting into practice the excesses represented by the divine Marquis" (Heimonet & Kohchi, 1990: 228).

The practice of sacrifice brings us to an understanding of the role of silence in radical activity. Silence is a practice, but it is not the sort of practice that is performed by intimate subjects, rather it is that which interrupts the noise of ethical activity.

Silence is hence, according to Bataille, "a question of speaking, silence being the last thing that language can silence, and which language cannot nonetheless take as its object without a kind of crime" (Bataille in Mitchell & Winfree, 2009: 199). To the extent that sacrifice is a violence that is inflicted upon the subject, it is also a refusal to "declare either its own existence or its right to exist; it simply exists" (Bataille, 1986: 188). After years of contemplation on the subject of silence, Bataille was forced to admit: "I know this now: I don't have the means to silence myself" (Bataille, 1986: 68). The problem is that in the description of the failure of language one performs the contradiction of expressing silence through language. I have hence failed, as a criminal, to perform in secret the sacrifice of graduate life, for example. The sacrifice that occurs, therefore, is the one that gets on with its day with all of the violence that this entails, including the violence against the sacred art of sacrifice itself. A sacrifice, without words. A sacrifice I could not perform today. A sacrifice, I ask, indeed beg, of all anarchists who read this volume: learn the fine art of pretending to be an anarchist. Hide this book. Do not let the other anarchists read it.

Conclusion

Georges Bataille aimed to describe the sacred principles of the general economy. However, in the preface to the first volume of *The Accursed Share,* he admitted that his work always failed at this task. To the extent that his work articulated the sacred it did so only through betrayed 'approximations' (Noys, 2000: 117). In this sense, Bataille was writing through the Lacanian 'analyst's discourse': his discourse "trace[d] a contour around that which it hovers about, circles, and skirts" (Fink, 1997: 28). More than anything else, Bataille's writing approximated silence. In his essay "The Method of Meditation" (a chapter from *The Unfinished System of Non-Knowledge,* 2001), he described silence as the practice of sovereignty: "The sovereign is in the domain of silence, and if we talk about it we incriminate the silence that constitutes it. […] We can certainly execute the study, but only in the worst, the most painful conditions" (Bataille, 2001: 126). It has been under this painful condition that I have executed my study of the intersections of three philosophical traditions.

I have attempted to satisfy two mutually exclusive demands that have been imposed upon me from opposite locations: the demand to construct a system of knowledge about Bataille from the position of the academy (the discourse of the university) and the demand to sabotage this system of knowledge about Bataille through the faithful reading of his work. Moreover, in succumbing to the former demand I have also failed in my sovereign task (the latter demand): "Even, as far as talking about it, it is contradictory to *search for* these movements […] Insofar as we seek something, whatever this might be, we do not live sovereignly, we subordinate the present moment to a future moment, which will follow it" (italics in original; Bataille, 2001: 126).

I have thus come to acknowledge that there are at least two ways in which failure ought to be understood in relation to my essay. First, I have failed in the putting-into-practice of Bataille's ethics of failure. By constructing a system of knowledge for the academy I have failed to perform the sovereign function of silence. Likewise, Bataille's work "aimed at the acquisition of a knowledge," even where this knowledge was discovered to be "that of an error" (Bataille, 1991: 10–11). For my part, I have aimed to demonstrate that a knowledge of the failed ethics of anarchism can be elaborated in reference to the failed knowledge of Bataille. Second, I have also realized that the failure to perform *failure,* productive as it may be, nonetheless necessitates future reductions of useful knowledge. It therefore dawns upon me that failure operates across two planes: the general *and* the restrictive economies. Bataille's reduction of the general economy to the restrictive economy has proved essential to a full understanding of the ethics of failure. Bataille had to fail so that he could approximate the sacred relationship and to promote movements toward sovereignty—Bataille could not be silent. Similarly, post-anarchists had to fail by producing a reductionist discourse in order to demonstrate the problems of reductionism. We get the sense that the first moment of failure is evident in the following passage from the preface to the first volume of *The Accursed Share:*

> In other words, my work tended first of all to *increase* the sum of human resources, but its findings showed me that this accumulation was only a delay, a shrinking back from the inevitable […] Should I say that under these conditions I sometimes could only respond to the truth of my book and could not go on writing it? […] A book that […] the author would not have written if he had followed its lesson to the letter […] This invites distrust at the outset (italics in original; Bataille, 1991: 10–11).

However, there is a second moment in Bataille's thought that continued after the outset, one that brings us to a fuller understanding of the two economies:

> This invites distrust at the outset *and yet,* what if it were better not to meet any expectation and to offer precisely that which […] people deliberately avoid […] It would serve no purpose to neglect the rules of rigorous investigation, which proceeds slowly and methodically (italics in original; Bataille, 1991: 11).

There is an initial failure that occurs when the sovereign attempts to elucidate the principles of the general economy through the restrictive economy of the state-ment *and* there is the secondary failure that occurs when the sovereign employs the restrictive economy of the statement in order to approximate the silence of the general economy. In providing a knowledge of the elusive truth inherent to the general economy Bataille also temporarily betrayed it and this is an inexcusable contradiction for many keen interpreters. But, as a second moment of failure, Bataille argued that his writing *performed* failure ("what if it were better not to meet any expectation and to offer precisely what which […] people deliberately avoid […] It would serve no purpose to neglect the rules of rigorous investigation").

According to Jeremy Biles, it is this latter performance that evoked the sacred truth of Bataille's work (Biles, 2007: 27): that one fails in order to succeed. There is thus a dualism implied in the enactment of sacrifice—Bataille performed the failure while simultaneously exposing it and in doing so he destroyed the coherence granted to the performance. Biles continued, "the sacred at once fuses what the profane had rendered distinct" (Biles, 2007: 28; this is a point elaborated considerably by Hollier, 1990): "[S]acrifice is the enactment of an attitude of thought that is doomed to failure, dissatisfaction, and imperfection" (Biles, 2007: 28). Or, as Michael Richardson has put it: "In order to treat the sacred, must we not by definition turn it into something that is profane and, by doing so, does it not destroy the very object it wants to study?" (Richardson, 1994: 48). To bring this to point, Lacan has suggested that the symbolic order precludes the possibility of a return to the intimacy of the Real. This therefore raises the following problematic: one can only perform approximations of the primordial failure without ever accessing it. I began my essay by claiming that my conceptual systems have already failed me, however I shall now end with the proposition that my classification systems also intended to *perform* failure.

I have claimed that Georges Bataille's ethical philosophy converges in interesting ways with recent readings of the anarchist tradition from the standpoint of an emergent body of thought known as post-anarchism. My first confession, that my classification systems intended to perform a failure, consisted of the following objective: I aimed to defy the contemporary codes of what it means to be an anarchist in the academy. I shall now end with a final confession: over the course of almost two decades of higher education I have learned that to be an anarchist in the academy

is to consequently occupy a liminal zone between two (admittedly unstable) identities. On the one hand, as an *anarchist* one's object of investigation is immediately rejected by academics as naive and contradictory; to be an anarchist in the academy is to have one's research mocked—it means avoiding social encounters with other academics for fear of constant humiliation. On the other hand, as an *academic* one is immediately dismissed by anarchists for ostensibly speaking the "discourse of the university"; to be an academic within the anarchist milieu is to have one's research mocked as well—it means being excluded from social encounters with other anarchists for fear of having their *radical epistemologies* recuperated by academic systems of knowledge.

To be sure, there are also advantages to this insider-outsider position. Patricia Hill Collins ar-gued that black feminists in the university often occupy a strange insider-outsider relation to the academic community and the black community (cf., Collins, 2000), as if torn between two epistemologies. But, according to Collins, this position allows one to remain distrustful of both identities and to put them both into question—it allows a unique vantage point from which to critically evaluate aspects of both communities. It has been my expressed purpose to question both of my identities (as an anarchist and as an academic) from another standpoint. This standpoint remains not in-between but unsettled, unsure, and perpetually suspicious of both identities (without, necessarily, remaining neutral). In this respect my thesis has been an attempt to come to terms with my own position in between two worlds and to problematize the manifest ethical discourses of both in order to arrive at something new. What I have discovered is only 'new' in the sense that it is the object of multiple traditions that has hitherto been repressed. I have discovered a meta-ethics that opens up the discursive system of traditional anarchism rather than pinning it down to any meta-ethical discourse (resistance to closure). By way of concluding this essay, I shall now describe what brought me to this position. It is only by *going to the end* that we truly mark a beginning:

I began with the argument that post-anarchism and traditional anarchism ought to be considered a part of the same tradition, linked by a shared latent ethical imperative. The move toward post-anarchism has highlighted the ethical preoccupation of traditional anarchist philosophy. Post-anarchism is therefore a meta-ethical discourse on traditional anarchism. I argued that contemporary meta-ethical discourse has elaborated nihilist responses to meta-ethical questions. The method of the meta-ethical nihilists has been to hold all positive responses to place and process under contempt. However, various nihilist meta-ethical discourses have held either place or process under more suspicion. It is for this reason that I defined two nihilist discourses in relation to contemporary anarchism: first, ethical skeptics suspect positive responses to the question of process but they do not reject the subject as the locus of ethical activity, and; second, deep nihilists reject the political category subject entirely. The former classification has contributed to base subjectivist possibilities and the latter classification has contributed to base materialist possibilities.

I focused specifically on post-anarchist metaethics and found that it largely adopted the base subjectivist response to the questions of place and process. I have argued that this perspective may be limited in that the discourse aimed squarely to problematize the essentialism of traditional anarchism without giving equal attention to the problematization of foundationalism. To the extent that essentialism responds positively to the question of place, foundationalism is the positive answer to the question of process. Many post-anarchists have adopted relativist epistemologies—whereby a multiplicity of truth-claims has been preferred to universal truth-claims—and pluralist political positions. I have argued that there is a false choice between relativism and universalism

and that the 'third way'—evident in the latent tradition that links post-anarchism to traditional anarchism—is a rejection of all truthclaims in favour of uncertainty. I also argued that the anarchists insistence that their tradition's *c factor* is 'ethics' comes as a bit of a surprise—to the extent that it has been ethical it has also consistently failed to codify positive ethical prescriptions. Paradoxically, it is precisely this failure to consistently elucidate an ethics that has been the ethical move *par excellence.*

I brought post-anarchist discourse into a relationship with the philosophy of Georges Bataille. To the extent that post-anarchism problematizes traditional anarchist philosophy, Georges Bataille's philosophy may be used to problematize post-anarchist philosophy and to offer yet another point of departure: an anti-essentialist *and* anti-foundationalist philosophy that I have classified as *nihilist* anarchism. The nihilist anarchist, like Nietzsche's passive nihilist, demonstrates "strength" in that her "previous goals ('convictions,' articles of faith) have become incommensurate (for a faith generally expresses [...] submission to [...] authority)" (Nietzsche, 1968: 17–18). Where once constraint was thought to be exercised by the state, the contemporary anarchist finds this power to be manifested in a whole range of places, reducible only to the subject of the state-ment. But Nietzsche also described an "active nihilism" and this problematizes the "lack of strength" that nihilist anarchists may feel toward "oneself, [and] productively [toward] a goal, a why, a faith" (Nietzsche, 1968: 18). Consequently, the *active* nihilist creates her own values in life and leaves them uncoded—her ethical act is performed in silence. Similarly, Bataille's ethical act is the one that does not get recuperated by meta-ethical discourse. My conclusion is that nihilist anarchism, as the tradition that lurks always beneath anarchism, maintains that all ethical acts are the ones that do not get reified by language—precisely, this is its meta-ethics.

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The accursed share is the **non-recuperable** portion that exists **outside** of every economy, its promise is the immediate and eventual **destruction** of any system or foundation that appears to contain it. It is the **anarchist** current that has **always** existed with or without human intervention, with or without the subject as the locus of ethical **agency**.

Duane Rousselle
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