Georges Bataille's Post-anarchism

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11 October 2012

Contents

Abstract

Post-anarchist philosophy has widely been regarded as an attempt to challenge the ontological essentialism of the traditional anarchist discourse. The problem for the post-anarchists is that by focusing exclusively on the critique of ontological essentialism and universalism inherent in the ideology of traditional anarchism, post-anarchists have demonstrated that they are unable to envision a response to meta-ethical questions that occur outside of the universalism/relativism pair. As a result most post-anarchists have retreated into an epistemological defence of relativism. In keeping with the ethical trajectory of post-anarchist philosophy, post-anarchists could stand to benefit by responding nihilistically rather than relativistically to the epistemological problem of universalism. They could also take the ontological problematic of non-being to its limit by rejecting the subject as the locus of ethical agency. I shall aim to demonstrate that this latter position is correlative to the meta-ethical position of Georges Bataille.

Introduction

Post-anarchist philosophy has been widely regarded as an attempt to challenge the ontological essentialism of the traditional anarchist discourse. The problem for the post-anarchists is that by focusing exclusively on the critique of ontological essentialism and universalism inherent in the traditional anarchist discourse, postanarchists have demonstrated that they are unable to envision a response to metaethical questions that occur outside of the universalism/relativism pair. The postanarchist suspicion of universal ethical frameworks exposes the extent to which, as Slavoj Zizek maintains, cynical ideology 'leaves untouched the fundamental level of ideological fantasy'.[1] In other words, the post-anarchist fantasy of a sensible ethical system structures the reality of their cynicism towards ethical universalism. This commitment to sensibility is itself the ideological gesture that remains to be interrogated.

Contemporary meta-ethical philosophy shines a light on the thread that connects universalist and relativist meta-ethical ideologies. By retreating into a form of epistemological relativism, the post-anarchists have only demonstrated the extent to which they have inherited the ideology of the prevailing ethical systems. In keeping with the ethical trajectory of post-anarchist philosophy, postanarchists could stand to benefit by responding nihilistically rather than relativistically to the epistemological problem of universalism. They could also take the ontological problematic of non-being to its limit by rejecting the subject as the locus of ethical agency. I shall aim to demonstrate that this latter position is correlative to the meta-ethical position of Georges Bataille.

The Ideology of Post-anarchism

Post-anarchism has been commonly associated with one of two trends over the last two decades: first, and most popularly, it has referred to the extension of the traditional anarchist discourse by way of interventions from post-structuralist and post-modernist philosophy; or second, and most prevalent in the non-anglophone world, post-anarchism has been understood as an attempt to explore new connections between the traditional anarchist discourse and other non-anarchist radical discourses without thereby reducing these explorations to developments

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[1] Slavoj Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology (New York: Verso, 1989), pp. 28–30.

from any particular philosophical group (i.e. post-structuralist, post-modernist and so on). In either case what has been at stake has been the discovery of an outside, a place of agency, to ideological systems. According to adherents of this second trend in post-anarchist philosophy, postanarchism has been thought to be the description of a set of relationships that occur at the intersection of anarchism and some notion of an outside. Anton Fernandez de Rota has described post-anarchism as:

> being-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 fountains. Rather, it is a flag around which to express the desire to transcend the old casts, of becoming-other.[2]

There have been two related ways in which to understand the location of this radical outside, and each should be distinguished from the notion of an 'outside' to radical politics as outlined by the post-anarchist Saul Newman.[3] There is first the obvious 'outside', the influence of which is felt to come from the extimacy[4] of the anarchist tradition. This is the anarchist-ic outside that is discovered by bringing anarchism into a relationship with disciplines outside of the narrow field of political economy. This refers also, more generally, to those bodies of thought or practices that have recently been described as being 'anarchist-ic' so as to describe something that is almost anarchist but also not quite anarchist.

But there is also the real 'outside' whose effects are felt from the intimate and yet unintelligible core of the tradition. The initial phase or introductory period of post-anarchism, described eloquently by Evren,[5] is the exploration of this second ill-defined relationship to a real outside. In the anglophone world, the manifestation of this outside has brought about the interrogation of the anarchist tradition from the inside through a questioning of the ontological essentialism inherent to much of classical anarchist philosophy. Andrew Koch and Todd May, for example, each in their own way, have argued that any ontological conception of human nature or community carries authoritarian implications. Post-anarchism, on the other hand, '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'.[6] Todd May has similarly argued that ontologically rooted conceptions of power in traditional Marxist philosophy (what he called 'strategic philosophy')[7] have served to legitimate vanguardist interventions into politics: 'if the fundamental site of oppression lies in the economy [or, as in the

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[2] Anton Fernendez de Rota, 'Acracy_Reloaded@post1968/1989: reflections on postmodern revolutions', in Duane Rousselle and Süreyyya *Evren* (Eds) Post-Anarchism: A Reader (London: Pluto Press, 2011), p. 147.

[3] Saul Newman, From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, [2001] 2007).

[4] I adopt this word from Jacques Lacan. As Dylan Evans has put it, 'The resulting neologism, which may be rendered "extimacy" in English, neatly expresses the way in which psychoanalysis problematises the opposition between inside and outside, between container and contained' (Dylan Evans, An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 58).

[5] Süreyyya Evren, 'Introduction: how new anarchism changed the world (of opposition) after Seattle and gave birth to post-anarchism', in Rousselle and Evren (Eds), op. cit., Ref. 2, p. 12.

[6] Andrew Koch, 'Post-Structuralism and the Epistemological Basis of Anarchism' (1993), in Rousselle and Evren (Eds), op. cit., Ref. 2, p. 24

[7] Strategic philosophy describes an epistemological orientation towards power (i.e. the idea that power emanates from a central location in space and operates uni-directionally to repress an otherwise creative human nature). Cf.

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'.[8] In this way, post-anarchism should not be reduced to a critique of the essentialism of classical anarchism because this describes only one of the relationships to an outside that post-anarchists have sought to elaborate.

Some critics of post-anarchism[9] have questioned post-anarchism on the problematic grounds of this introductory phase whereby a caricature of the complexities of classical anarchism was presented. But these critics have done so quite in the spirit of post-anarchism through their rejection of the very practices and conditions (essentialism, reductionism and so on) upon which post-anarchism has situated its discourse. In this way, many of the critics of post-anarchism are very much working within a moment of post-anarchist philosophy. We might claim that the ideology of contemporary anarchism is best thought as post-anarchism.

With regards to the first trend that I outlined (the extension of the traditional anarchist discourse by way of interventions from post-structuralist and postmodernist philosophy), there have been two further sub-divisions of type. 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-modernist philosophy. The other approach has moved in the opposite direction, beginning from the standpoint of post-structuralism and garnering insight from the anarchist tradition in order to broaden the scope of post-structuralist philosophy—this latter argument was originally made by Sureyyya Evren.[10] Gabriel Kuhn has found this approach suspect: 'An anarchist engagement with post-structuralism would [...] consist of an anarchist evaluation of the usefulness of post-structuralist theory for anarchism's aims'.[11] According to Kuhn, anarchists will need to absorb what is good in the post-structuralist discourse into their own discourse or else risk losing or obscuring what is central about anarchist philosophy—its ethics.

By way of example Todd May—one of the most noted anglophone postanarchists—confessed to arriving at anarchist philosophy through his exploration of post-structuralism. As Sureyyya Evren argued, 'May is predominantly working on the politics of post-structuralism while gaining

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Todd May, The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

[8] Todd May, The Political Thought of Jacques Ranciere: Creating Equality (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008c).

[9] See Allan Antliff, 'Anarchy, power, and poststructuralism', Substance, 36(2) (2007). Also available in Newman, From Bakunin to Lacan, op. cit., Ref. 3; Jesse Cohn and Shawn Wilbur, 'What's wrong with postanarchism?' (2003), available at theanarchistlibrary.org Wilbur__What_s_Wrong_With_Postanarchism_.html (accessed 14 October 2010); Jesse Cohn, 'What is postanarchism post?' Postmodern Culture, 13(1) (2002), available at pmc.iath.virginia.edu 13.1cohn.html; Richard J.F. Day, Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements (London: Pluto Press, 2005); Benjamin Franks, 'Postanarchism: a partial account', in Rousselle and Evren (Eds), op. cit., Ref. 2; Sasha K., 'Post-anarchism or simply post-revolution?' Killing King Abacus (2004), available at theanarchistlibrary.org (accessed 14 October 14 2010); Zabalaza, 'A platformist response to postanarchism: sucking the golden egg, a reply to Newman' (2003), available at info.interactivist.net (accessed 18 September 2008).

[10] Evren, 'Introduction', op. cit., Ref. 5, pp. 9–10.

[11] This same sentiment is recast for the usefulness of post-modern philosophy: '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.' Cf. Gabriel Kuhn, 'Anarchism, postmodernity, and poststructuralism', in Randall Amster, Abraham DeLeon, Luis A. Fernandez, Anthony J. Nocella, II., and Deric Shannon (Eds) Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 18–19.

some insights from anarchism to create a more effective post-structuralist politics'.[12] In the late 1980s, May found himself on a train heading to the Eastern Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association, and he took it upon himself to strike up a conversation about post-structuralist political theory with the general director of the Institute for Anarchist Studies, Mark Lance. In his own words:

> I was trying to explain to a friend, Mark Lance, what the political theory of post-structuralism 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 [...] in 1989 and eventually of the present work [The Political Philosophy of Post-Structuralist Anarchism]. And Mark Lance has, over the years, provided me with intellectual riches far exceeding my ability to put them to good use.[13]

This chance encounter with Mark Lance shaped the ethical core of May's poststructuralist anarchism—perhaps it was even the seed for a later book on poststructuralist ethics (crucially, now with the 'anarchism' qualifier, and the rich tradition that founded such an ethics, omitted).[14] I should qualify my claim here: it is not May's labour for anarchism that is my point in all of this; it is precisely the relationship that May's work has tended to exhibit with the central anarchist discourse. What post-structuralist political theory needed, and 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 as a critique of humanism and naturalism—by another name: post-structuralist anarchism. May has put this 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 selfdetermination along a variety of registers and at different local levels—finds its underpinnings articulated most accurately by the post-structuralist political theorists.[15]

One might question this thesis on the grounds that May's preoccupation with poststructuralism has been founded on the latent ethical code of traditional anarchism, whereas post-structuralist political theory, even though it very often demonstrates evidence to the contrary,

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[12] Evren, 'Introduction', op. cit., Ref. 5, p. 10.

[13] Cf. May, Political Thought of Jacques Ranciere, op. cit., Ref. 8, pp. ix–x.

[14] Cf. Todd May, The Moral Theory of Poststructuralism (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004). One can surmise from May's list of major publications that anarchist philosophy was only integral to maintaining the project of post-structuralism: 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 (2008a), and Death (2008b).

[15] Todd May, 'Is post-structuralist political theory anarchist?' in Duane Rousselle and Su¨reyyya Evren (Eds), op. cit., Ref. 2, p. 44.

does not inherently imply an anti-authoritarian ethos. Upon further inspection it becomes difficult to define what precisely is meant by the term 'post-structuralism'—especially in consideration of the fact that many of those individuals most typically associated with the post-structuralist moment have not themselves accepted the designation. To the post-anarchists, Simon Choat has posed the question: 'what is meant by "post-structuralism" […]?'[16] A response, I suspect, is not forthcoming (and why should it?).

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 that reveals a position much more akin to a crude liberal democratic ethics of 'responsibility'. If, on the other hand, one describes a particular philosopher who has often been associated with the post-structuralism movement, and if one can relate this author back to an anarchistic impulse, one is typically only able to do so by first achieving a distance from the ethical language of anarchism: the language of post-structuralism has been unclear in of itself with regards to its anarchism and this is why the relationship between the two bodies of thought only now comes into view. If the relationship were immediately apparent, it should not have prompted the question of ethics that May has tried to answer in the sixth chapter 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?'[17] May was correct in writing that the 'post-structuralists have always avoided [an] overt discussion of ethics',[18] but where he appears insincere is with respect to his consistent privileging of post-structuralist political philosophy at the expense of the anarchist ethical underpinning.

Post-anarchists have been motivated by an overarching ethical injunction against the ideological fantasies of representation inherent to anarchist discourses that have been imagined as positive ontological foundations or systems. 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,[19] 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. Lewis Call confessed: '[i]t is becoming increasingly evident that anarchist politics cannot afford to remain within the modern world. The politics of Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin—vibrant and meaningful, perhaps, to their nineteenth-century audiences—have become dangerously inaccessible to late twentieth-century readers'.[20]

I have suggested that post-anarchism presents a new reading of the traditional anarchist discourse. The development of a distinctly post-anarchist discourse was thought to have emerged out of what David Graeber has called 'new anarchism'.[21] The supposed newness of

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[16] Simon Choat, 'Post-anarchism from a Marxist perspective', Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies, 1 (2010), p. 53.

[17] May, 'Is post-structuralist political theory anarchist?' op. cit., Ref. 15, p. 121.

[18] May, ibid.

[19] See, for example, Day, Gramsci is Dead, op. cit., Ref. 9, pp. 14, 127; May, 'Is post-structuralist political theory anarchist?' op. cit., Ref. 15, p. 57.

[20] Lewis Call, Postmodern Anarchism (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), p. 117.

[21] Evren, 'Introduction', op. cit., Ref. 5. Any umbilical cord that once attached David Graeber to the term 'new anarchism' has since 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

post-anarchism has been put into question for at least three interrelated reasons. First, there is the problem of the abandonment of the traditional anarchist discourse in favour of some 'fresh' and 'contemporary' discourse—the implication is that traditional anarchist philosophy becomes replaced by post-structuralist political philosophy. Second, there is the problem of the appearance of superiority by the post-anarchist discourse. Third, there is the belief that post-anarchism represents a newness that cannot be discovered from within the traditional discourse as it is read today—as Jesse Cohn and 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'.[22]

But the real question that must be raised, in relation to these three reactions to post-anarchism, has to do with the constitution of the anarchist canon and at which point of exhaustion one can be said to have been representative of such a tradition. I risk the conjecture that post-anarchism is merely the contemporary realization of what it was that made traditional anarchism a unique ideology—this is what constitutes its novelty. Others have described this new form of anarchism as a 'paradigm shift within anarchism'.[23] My own opinion is that one ought to reject the position that anarchism is a tradition of canonical thinkers—rather, one should think of it as a tradition based on canonical practices which are, in turn, premised upon a canonical selection of ethical premises. If this is the case, then 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 as an attack on the authority of essentialist ontologies. This is the ethical imperative that was grounded in the anarchist tradition and that found new expression in post-structuralist concerns.

The critics of post-anarchism,[24] whether by directing their criticism exclusively towards post-anarchism's prefix (as well as the '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 first manoeuvre, the critics have fluctuated between two mutually exclusive arguments. The first of which was that post-anarchism represented an attempt to rescue classical anarchism, a supposedly stale orthodoxy, from its presumed inadequacies.[25] This critique focused on the implied claim that post-anarchism has attempted to abandon classical anarchism while at the same time it has attempted to rescue traditional anarchism from its own demise. The obvious question one should ask 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 ideology. It should be noted that most of these critiques have aimed squarely at Saul Newman—and in particular, they have taken aim at just one of his books, *From Bakunin to Lacan*[26]—rather than more broadly at the post-anarchists as a whole (excluding,

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Review], since you never to make up your own titles in journals like that), that would be a total disaster!' See David Graeber, 'The new anarchists', New Left Review, 13 (2002), available at http:// newleftreview.org/A2368 (accessed 25 October 2010); David Graeber, 'New Journal, Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies', Email Correspondence with Duane Rousselle (2010).

[22] Cohn and Wilbur, 'What's wrong with postanarchism?' op. cit., Ref. 9.

[23] See Jonathan Purkis and James Bowen (Eds), Changing Anarchism: Anarchist Theory and Practice in a Global Age (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 5. See also Evren, 'Introduction', op. cit., Ref. 5, p. 4.

[24] In particular those referenced in Ref. 10. The relationship between critics, proponents and ambiguous endorsers of post-anarchism is a complicated one. Critics also demonstrate support at times and vice versa.

[25] Cohn and Wilbur, 'What's wrong with postanarchism?' op. cit., Ref. 9.

[26] Newman, From Bakunin to Lacan, op. cit., Ref. 3.

for example, the nonanglophone post-anarchists out of Spain, Italy, Brazil, Germany, France and Turkey, whose contributions have been enormous). A word of caution is in order: to reduce post-anarchism to only that which has been expressed by Saul Newman, or to anglophone post-anarchists, is to fall victim to precisely the attitude Newman sought to avoid. Critics should be made aware of their own reduction of the post-anarchist body of thought.

Sureyyya Evren's argument is that the reduction of the classical tradition to any number of select representatives or readings has already been there within all of the traditional texts (it is not the invention of post-anarchists)—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. This tendency to reduce the tradition continues today within the anarchist studies milieu and it goes largely unchallenged. For example, in a recent publication, Contemporary Anarchist Studies,[27] the editors delineate three forms of anarchism in the introduction of the book, as its foundation: 'Classical Anarchism',[28] '1960s–1970s Anarchism'[29] and 'Contemporary Anarchism'.[30] Why does the reduction of classical anarchism here to a monolithic whole founded within a particular lineage of time, or as the reduction of classical anarchism to a selection of philosophers (Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin) go unchallenged as the problematic of contemporary anarchist studies? Incidentally, what the editors describe as 'Contemporary Anarchism' has strong affinities with today's post-anarchism: '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'.[31] Despite this, Gabriel Kuhn's contribution to the book raised the following problem: 'much of [the post-anarchist] critique of "traditional/classical" anarchism seems to focus on an effigy rather than a vibrant and diverse historical movement'.[32] Here it strikes me that Evren is correct, the reductionist strategy pursued by the post-anarchists was already there within our traditional anarchist texts, and it will be long before this problem disappears. It is a problem we all share as anarchist philosophers and this is precisely what marks it as an ideological system.

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. They have therefore exposed the extent to which they share in the defining attitude of postanarchism. Far from an 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 been going on within the anarchist discourse.[33] Kuhn argued that '[t]here is difficulty with the post-anarchist label, namely the suggestion that the junctions of anarchism and post-structuralism/post-modernity as laid out by Newman [...] are new, when, in fact they are not'.[34] What I have argued is that this newness is in fact never sensu stricto new, but rather it is a redefinition/reconstitution of something that was previously thought unimportant of hidden among the old. What bothered Kuhn, it seems, was the audacity of creating a new label—even while it

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[27] Amster et al., Contemporary Anarchist Studies, op. cit., Ref. 11.

[28] Amster et al., ibid., pp. 2–4.

[29] Amster et al., ibid., p. 4.

[30] Amster et al., ibid., pp. 4–5.

[31] Amster et al., ibid., p. 5.

[32] Kuhn, 'Anarchism, postmodernity, and poststructuralism', op. cit., Ref. 11, p. 21.

[33] Purkis and Bowen, Changing Anarchism, op. cit., Ref. 23, pp. 15–17.

[34] Kuhn, 'Anarchism, postmodernity, and poststructuralism', op. cit., Ref. 11, p. 21.

represents a return to and development of the ethics of traditional anarchism—and that Newman dares to call his approach original when others have already discovered these lines of flight elsewhere. It is my belief that we will always feel the need to define a traditional anarchist discourse and an anarchist discourse that investigates the outsidedness of its own tradition—the former is the enactment of an anarchism in the non-anarchist world, while the latter is the enactment of a self-reflexive anarchism against and beyond itself. Nonetheless, there is certainly some truth in Gabriel Kuhn's argument. Here, the German post-anarchist Jurgen Mu¨mken has agreed: '[T]he different theoretical considerations (post-structuralist anarchism, post-modern anarchism, etc.) that are nowadays summarized as "post-anarchism" are older than the term itself.[35] But this is precisely what post-anarchism is all about: rewriting and rereading the past to find things we missed along the way.

The introductory period of post-anarchism was also marked by an ostensibly problematic comparison to Marxist theory. Evren argued that 'they [May, Call, and Newman] all legitimize post-anarchism by first trying to show that Marxist theory has collapsed or failed or [that] it was too problematic to rely on [...] This means Marxist theory was presupposed as the norm, the ground for comparison'.[36] Simon Choat, in agreement with Evren, has also argued that '[i]f we are to attribute any kind of unity to post-anarchism, then we must look to [its] common opposition to Marxism'.[37] I believe that post-anarchism's anti-Marxist qualification stems from its implied ethical project rather than its need to strictly define itself apart from another ideological system. The comparison to Marxist political philosophy is useful to the extent that any tradition can be uniquely situated in reference to another tradition with which it closely aligns itself. In any case, there is a presumed consensus among anarchist scholars that anarchism is to ethics what Marxist has been to strategy. For example, David Graeber has argued, as Simon Critchley retells it, 'Marxism is typically a theoretical or analytical discourse about revolutionary strategy, whereas anarchism can be understood as an ethical discourse about revolutionary practice'.[38]

It is this ethical standpoint that has been repressed by the anarchist tradition (and post-anarchism is, if I may be permitted, one example of the return of the repressed). According to Todd May, contemporary anarchists have never much cared to develop their meta-ethical philosophy,[39] and yet they have taken great care to describe their tradition as an ethical one. So when the anarchists tell others that theirs is an ethical tradition, obvious and hackneyed as this presupposition at once appears for the rest of us, what reason do others have to take us seriously? It is in this sense that I call the absurd ethics of anarchism its absent centre. The ethical task set before the anarchists is one of either discovering the latent impulse anew in manifest content—a questionable enterprise as this subordinates the unique attribute of anarchism, its ethics, to a theory—or else rejecting the premise that radical politics depends essentially upon caricatures of ontology or epistemology through which truth and non-being are positively exaggerated in order to uphold certain authoritarian political effects.

Post-anarchist philosophers have been preoccupied with outlining an antiessentialist variant of anarchist political philosophy, but they have hitherto relied on relativist epistemological ap-

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[35] Jurgen Mu¨mken, Anarchismus in der Postmoderne (Frankfurt/Main: Edition AV, 2005), p. 11.

[36] Evren, 'Introduction', op. cit., Ref. 5, p. 12.

[37] Choat, 'Post-anarchism from a Marxist perspective', op. cit., Ref. 16, p. 54.

[38] Simon Critchley, Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance [2007] (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2008), p. 125.

[39] May, 'Is post-structuralist political theory anarchist?' op. cit., Ref. 15, p. 64.

proaches. 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.[40] If the validity of truth-claims can be questioned, then the political structures that rest upon these foundations must also be suspected.[41] For Koch, this approach receives its political voice in the ideology of 'democratic pluralism'[42] whereby 'the plurality of languages and the individuated nature of sensory experience suggest that each denotative and prescriptive statement must be unique to each individual'.[43] For Saul Newman, post-anarchism's reliance on a radical outside to power opens anarchism up to a truly 'radical democratic politics': 'This democratic ethics of radical pluralism is possible because it does not start by presupposing an essential[ist] identity as its foundation and limit [...] This is the democracy both demanded, and made possible, by the politics of post-anarchism'.[44] According to Sasha K.,[45] meaningful political engagement is precluded by such an 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 without necessarily collapsing into prescriptivism or, relatedly, relativism. If postanarchism is to rise above the criticism laid against it—that it is 'postrevolution'[46]—post-anarchists will have to remain firmly outside of the universalist and relativist ideology currently in vogue among post-structuralist political thinkers—it is for good reason, therefore, that Benjamin Franks has argued that much of post-anarchism is reducible to a crude subjectivist ethics.[47] An alternative option may be to provide an elaboration of anarchist meta-ethics in the negative dimension (as in meta-ethical scepticism, anethicism, nihilism and so on) whereby epistemological responses to meta-ethical questions are no longer subservient to any stable truth-claim. Allen Wood has argued that ethical scepticism 'is the diametrical opposite of ethical relativism [because] relativism denies that anyone can say or believe anything false'.[48] Relativism asserts the ostensibly autonomous individual's 'right' to make a truth-claim, but relativists always endorse the truthfulness of this claim. This amounts to the self-refutation of the relativist position. Otherwise, relativism retreats into universal prescriptivism in claiming that others must also hold the relativist position. We have finally laid the foundation required for an introduction to the philosophy of Georges Bataille. For the post-anarchists, the trick is to move away from a post-anarchism that replaces ethical universalism with relativism[49] and to move towards a post-anarchism grounded in some version of Bataille's paradoxical meta-ethics. In the next section, I shall aim to demonstrate that Bataille's approach to ethics—his beginning

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[40] Koch, 'Post-structuralism and the epistemological basis of anarchism', op. cit., Ref. 6, p. 26.

[41] Koch, ibid., p. 26.

[42] Koch, ibid., p. 38.

[43] Koch, ibid., p. 37.

[44] Newman, From Bakunin to Lacan, op. cit., Ref. 3, p. 174.

[45] Sasha K., 'Post-anarchism or simply post-revolution?' op. cit., Ref. 9.

[46] Sasha K., ibid.

[47] Benjamin Franks, 'Anarchism: ethics and meta-ethics', Anarchist Studies Network (2008), available at www.anarchist-studies-network.org.uk. doc.

[48] Allen W. Wood, 'Attacking morality: a meta-ethical project', in Jocelyne Couture and Kai Nielsen (Eds) On the Relevance of Metaethics: New Essays on Metaethics (Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 1996), p. 3.

[49] The problem of ethical universalism is also obscured by such a position. I have argued this in my thesis 'Kropotkin is dead: a second order reading of ethics in the philosophies of post-anarchism and Georges Bataille'. See Duane Rousselle, 'Kropotkin is dead: a second order reading of ethics in the philosophies of Georges Bataille and post-anarchism' (University of New Brunswick [Dissertation]: Harriet Irving Library, 2011).

from the place of meta-ethics rather than from the particularist dimensions of epistemology or ontology—permits him to describe a outside to ideological systems—a non-place that exists at the heart of any place. Bataille's philosophy introduces post-anarchists to another way of conceiving the 'real outside' while simultaneously updating post-anarchisms' extimate relationship.

The Failure of Reading Georges 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[50] and its elaboration proves trivial if one is interested in performing in writing the truth inherent to Bataille's oeuvre. Likewise, recent attempts to situate Bataille as the ex post facto father figure of a distinctly post-structuralist and post-modernist lineage have not been met by idle pens.[51] 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.[52] 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 cannot ascribe any political philosophy to Bataille 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 anarchist-ic interpretation.

The psychoanalytic tradition has revealed a hidden dimension that occurs within every discourse—its outside. 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 a larger truth that resists containment by the appearance. This latter force is truth proper—it is the source of truths—because it temporarily sustains the cohesion promised by the appearance. As Bataille put it, 'appearance constitutes a limit [but] what truly exists is a dissolution'.[53] In this sense the word 'dissolution' means 'frivolity, moral laxness, dissolute living'.[54]

To bring this point to its full effect, Bataille argued that '[i]t is the aperture which opens the possibility of vision but which vision cannot comprehend visually'.[55]

[50] Cf. Gavin Grindon, 'Alchemist of the revolution: the affective materialism of Georges Bataille', Third Text, 24(3) (2010), pp. 305–317; Michael Richardson, Georges Bataille (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1–4; Scott Cutler Shershow, 'Of sinking: Marxism and the 'general' economy', Critical Inquiry, 27(3) (2001), pp. 486–492; John Hutnyk, 'Bataille's wars: surrealism, Marxism, fascism', Critique of Anthropology, 23(3) (2003), pp. 264–288. For an account of the incommensurability of Marxism and Bataille's philosophy, see Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Eds), Bataille: A Critical Reader (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), pp. 9–10; Denis Hollier, 'The dualist materialism of Georges Bataille' (H. Allred, trans.), Yale French Studies, 78 (1990), pp. 124–139.

[51] Cf. Ben Dorfman, 'The accursed share: Bataille as historical thinker', Critical Horizon, 3(1) (2002), Cf., www.equinoxpub.com as Retrieved August 15th, 2012; Martin Jay, Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme (Berkeley/Los Angelas: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 361–400 et passim; John Lechte, Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: From Structuralism to Post-Structuralism (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 108–136 et passim; Benjamin Noys, Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction (London: Pluto Press, 2000), pp. 1, 16–17, 100–102, 130–135, 168 et passim.

[52] Botting and Wilson (Eds), Bataille: A Critical Reader, op. cit., Ref. 50, pp. 5–7, esp. p. 6.

[53] Georges Bataille, On Nietzsche (London: Continuum International Publishing Group), p. 173.

[54] See etymonline.com (accessed 28 January 2011).

[55] Noys, Georges Bataille, op. cit., Ref. 51, p. 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 by way of 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. To combat the analysand's resistances to interpretation, Lacan proposed that analysts reformulate the ceremonious methodologies of Freudian psychotherapy.

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 towards the disruption of the meaning-production process itself.[56] Lacan lucidly informed us that 'analysis reveals the truth [...] by making holes in meaning the determinants of its discourse'.[57] This means that the other side of truth, non-sensical speech, reveals a key to the analysand's symptom. Yet, the production of meaning during analysis was always an immanent consequence of treatment—as an analyst one cannot sit quietly and expect the analysand to overcome her perversions miraculously, similarly one cannot interject the totality of the analysand's utterances. Rather, interpretations after Lacan were to aim towards the production of 'effects' which may or may not correspond to the apparent facts of the analysand's discourse. These effects were to provide points of departure for rethinking the symbolism—or recirculating the signifiers—of the discourse at hand.[58]

Bataille shared Lacan's distrust of meaning-production processes. We have reason to believe that Bataille and Lacan, because they were close friends, were hovering around the same understanding of truth. Consequently, while the texts of Lacan and Bataille demonstrate real differences, there is reason to believe that reading the texts of the one will help to reveal something about the other. Like Lacan, Bataille's entire work depended quite fundamentally upon this distinction between latent and manifest truths: 'You must know, first of all, that everything that has a manifest side also has a hidden side. Your face is quite noble, there is 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'.[59] This is to say that Bataille's entire exposition intended to produce effects of consciousness in the reader. The latent truth thus cross-cuts every discourse precisely where they are lacking in knowledge. It is not therefore at the level of appearances that the ideology of anarchism and Bataille's discourse converge (or that the one appropriates the truth 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 discursive systems. Whereas post-anarchist philosophy has theorized a truth that occurs outside of the logic of the state-form as the place of power, Bataille's philosophy has theorized a truth that occurs outside of the logic of 'homogeneity'.

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[56] Cf. No Subject, 'Interpretation', available at nosubject.com (accessed 23 January 2011).

[57] Jacques Lacan, 'The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious', [1960] in Ecrits, 1st edn, trans. Bruce Finks (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), p. 678.

[58] Lacan, ibid.

[59] Georges Bataille, «Un Sie'cle d'E´ crivains» (France 3; by Andre´ S. Labarthe). [Video, 1997], available at www.youtube.com ¼ ivNTIeNIQ8I&feature ¼ related (accessed 31 December 2010).

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'.[60] Apropos of this description of the logic of homogeneity, in 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', Bataille unwittingly described that logic of the state-form previously held by anarchists. What I hereafter refer to as the restrictive state-form 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'.[61] The unproductive element here becomes the determinant of revolutionary agency and has strong affinities with the anarchist emphasis on the role of the lumpenproletariat in revolutionary strategy.[62]

The wastage of productive processes has manifested itself into various identities of resistance over the years including, classically, the proletariat and, more recently, the multitude. More 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 or restrictive state-form, Bataille also described a curious logic used by the heterogeneous portions of society that ostensibly break apart from and react to the homogeneity of state logic. Richard J.F. Day has similarly described this as 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.[63]

Adopting the same logic, 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 cutes matters short with strict authority'.[64] Whereas Day found an alternative to the self-preserving logic of the state-form in the practices of the post-anarchist 'newest social movements', whose autonomy was said to render state-logic redundant,[65] Bataille's perspective offers little hope for autonomous ethical activity because, quite simply, there is no place from which to safely mount a resistance from the State. Rather, 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

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[60] Georges Bataille, Visions of Excess (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 137–138.

[61] Bataille, ibid., p. 139.

[62] See Mikhail Bakunin, 'Marxism, freedom and the state' (1950), available at theanarchistlibrary.org HTML/Michail_Bakunin__Marxism__Freedom_and_the_State.html (accessed 14 April 2011).

[63] Italics in original; Richard J.F. Day, 'Hegemony, affinity and the newest social movements: at the end of the 00s', in Duane Rousselle and Su¨reyyya Evren (Eds), op. cit., Ref. 2, p. 107.

[64] Bataille, Visions of Excess, op. cit., Ref. 60, p. 139.

[65] 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, 'Hegemony, affinity and the newest social movements', op. cit., Ref. 63, p. 112).

[...] [I]solated individuals increasingly consider themselves as ends with regard to the state'.[66] On the other hand, real heterogeneity cannot be defined around the principles of social movement theory because it cuts through any models that would attempt to contain it—heterogeneity is the refusal of discourse as such (and yet it flows through discourse as its constitutive lack). As Jesse Goldhammer has put it, '[Heterogeneity] encompasses everything that is unproductive, irrational, incommensurable, unstructured, unpredictable, and wasteful'.[67] In this sense, Bataille's work criticizes any radical identity; it refuses all such attempts to translate negative truths into positive appearances unless to provide approximations of the truths of general state power (I will return to this concept of the 'general state' shortly).

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'.[68] Hence, there is a determined relationship upon the positive heterogeneous social movements by the homogeneity of restrictive State logic. To the extent that social movements attempt to disrupt the logic of the state, they do so in obverse proclamations, in their untranslated ethical systems which remain outside of ideological justifications. In this sense, Bataille's truth and anarchism's truth converge by way of their rejection of what currently exists in the world (contra the naturalism of Petr Kropotkin et al.). 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 truth to a political categorization implies a fundamental misreading of the work.[69] We must also be suspicious of any interpretation of Bataille's work. For instance, hermeneutical investigations into the truth of the text have tended to oscillate between readings of the objective text and interpretations by the reader of the text while never settling upon either of the two poles.[70] For the contemporary hermeneutic methodologist, there are thus multiple truths granted to any historically situated text. But Bataille's truth challenges hermeneutical methodologies on their presupposition of a transparent intersubjective dimension to communicative acts.

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, we end up none the wiser?—the paradox is that Bataille 'was' and 'was not' being faithful to us through his writing: '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 [...] This invites distrust at the outset'.[71] The seduction of the propositions in Bataille's oeuvre enters by way of the negative expression of truth rather than by

[66] Bataille, Visions of Excess, op. cit., Ref. 60, p. 139.
[67] Jesse Goldhammer, The Headless Republic (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 169.
[68] Bataille, Visions of Excess, op. cit., Ref. 60, p. 141.
[69] Noys, Georges Bataille, op. cit., Ref. 51, p. 52.
[70] See, for example, James Tully, Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).
[71] Georges Bataille, The Accursed Share, Vol. 1, trans, Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 11.

way of its positive manifestations—his text is a description of its failure and his positive propositions are metaphors that allow us only fleeting glimpses 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.

Hermeneutic methodologists are intent on revealing 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 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 [...] it can never be reduced to the empirical description of this play.[72]

In this sense hermeneutics is the empirical examination of the manifest content, 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 toward the recapturing of [the] meaning of a text [...] that is temporally or culturally distant, or obscured by ideology and false consciousness'.[73] But 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'.[74]

Bataille was not referring to a truth inherent to the difference of the text in the positive sense of heterogeneity but rather to the truth of the remainder of the text. He was referring to the excremental portion of discourse which takes on the appearance of its repressed content. The meaning-production of hermeneutic methodologies comes as a result of an attempt to appropriate that which forever exposes a primordial incompleteness and instability. Hermeneutics sutures the gap between the truth of Bataille's text and its empirically deducible content. This excrement radiates outward from within the discourse or ideology, awaiting revelation, and yet it also prevents the closure of any system or foundation which seeks to advance any further. We are met by two problematic movements which occur as if towards opposing poles. On the one hand, we may discuss the appropriation of the truth inherent to Bataille's oeuvre which occurs by way of gross reductions in an otherwise 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 economy that Bataille forever sought to describe.

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

[72] Noys, Georges Bataille, op. cit., Ref. 51, p. 123.

[73] F.P.A. Demeterio, 'Introduction to hermeneutics' (2007), available at www.curragh-labs.org teaching/j08/zombies/docs/demeterio-intro.pdf (accessed 24 January 2011).

[74] Noys, Georges Bataille, op. cit., Ref. 51, p. 128.

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 usability. But Bataille insisted that one cannot discover the general movement of this 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 economic philosophy 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 logic of the one economy to the logic of the other, one also moves from the particular standpoint to the general standpoint.[75] 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 liberal political philosophy, this scarcity is the cause for social war which, in turn, has provided the requirement, 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, of wealth.[76] To adopt the vantage point of the general economy is thus to begin from the presumption of surplus rather than scarcity[77] and to undermine the *raison d'être* 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'.[78]

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 of the underlying truth of the general economy. In contrast to the particular economy, the general economy is grounded upon an inability towards closure and thereby threatens and indeed overcomes the limits imposed by restrictive economies. In describing the general economy, Bataille thus undermined the privileged and long-held axioms of conventional political and economic ideology and subjected them to a superior law and economy: the latent content. The latent content is the ungovernable portion of the ideology, its truth is revealed by the endless disruption of manifest ideological systems. For Bataille, the restrictive 'state [...] cannot give full reign to a movement of destructive consumption',[79] and so it must therefore obey the laws of expenditure—even while trying incessantly to counteract them—in order to achieve a semblance of authority over a period of time with relative success.

Bataille forced his readers 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.[80] According to Noys, the general economy disrupts the dis-

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[75] Cf. Bataille, Accursed Share, Vol. 1, op. cit., Ref. 71, p. 19.

[76] Cf. Georges Bataille, The Accursed Share, Vols. 2, 3, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1993), p. 39.

[77] Bataille, ibid., p. 106.

[78] Bataille, ibid.

[79] Bataille, ibid., p. 160.

[80] Noys, Georges Bataille, op. cit., Ref. 51, p. 104.

course which attempts to capture it.[81] In this way, Bataille's work was an embarrassment to political economy as such, 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.[82]

Hermeneutical readings of Bataille are forced to focus on his restrictive economy. These readings miss 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 (hereafter, it shall be referred to 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 within any such discourse—the possibility always exists, and indeed it presents itself as an imperative, to reduce the general economy to a particular arrangement:

> 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.[83]

The accursed share is the non-recuperable portion that exists outside of every economy; its promise is the immediate and eventual destruction of any ideological system that appears to contain it—it is the anarchistic current that has always been existing with or without human intervention, with or without the subject as the locus of ethical agency.

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 texts. Whereas classical 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),[84] classical anarchist political philosophy has centred upon a critique of the state-form. 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 his time. While it was no doubt important to explore the notion of the general economy, Bataille did not give a name to the metaphysical laws 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 19th-century anarchists (I shall 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 autonomous logic of the state-form and that, according to Bakunin (and echoed by countless

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[81] Noys, ibid.

[82] Cf. Bataille, Accursed Share, Vols. 2, 3, op. cit., Ref. 76, p. 10.

[83] Noys, Georges Bataille, op. cit., Ref. 51, p. 117.

[84] A critique of Marxism's idealism was provided by Bataille in his essay 'Base Materialism' (in Visions of Excess, op. cit., Ref. 60).

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'.[85] For the classical anarchists, the State—as the fundamental wielder of power— 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 bourgeoises. Saul Newman also described the state-form as the unique subject matter for the anarchists: '[classical] [a]narchism sees the state as a wholly autonomous and independent institution with its own logic of domination'.[86] The problem of focusing only on problems of economy is also the problem of ignoring the autonomous self-perpetuating logic of the state-form. Anarchists have long argued that it is in the interests of the state to maintain its legislating power over the people—it is short-sighted to provide a telos of revolution without taking this logic into account.

I have shown that Bataille has outlined a general economic model that intervenes into the restrictive capitalist economic model. I shall now demonstrate that there is a 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 about matters of the general state. To be sure, the general state and the general economy, like their restrictive counterparts, are co-constitutive of the logic of domination: according to Kropotkin, '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'.[87] Bataille sufficiently intimated the logic of the general state-form, but he did not give it a name. In the second chapter of The Accursed Share (Volume 1), 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.[88] To the extent that the restrictive state-form, according to Bataille, is homogeneity, the general state is the no-thing that circulates flows of disruptive heterogeneity.

We may say that the logic of the economy occurs within the range of responses to the question of epistemology in meta-ethical philosophy, whereas the logic of the state-form occurs within the range of responses to the question of ontology.

Epistemological systems occur by way of economies, they are circulations and have all the properties of movements/telos; ontological foundations occur by way of state-forms, they are locations and have all the properties of spaces/categorizations. The general economy originates 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'.[89] Bataille continued, 'the brilliance of the sun [...] provokes passion [...] the least that one can say is that the present forms of wealth make a [...] human mockery of those who think they own it'.[90] It becomes increasingly clear that 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

[85] Mikhail Bakunin, Political Philosophy: Scientific Anarchism, ed. G.P. Maximoff (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1984), p. 220.

[86] Newman, From Bakunin to Lacan, op. cit., Ref. 3, p. 21. See also Mikhail Bakunin, 'The Immorality of the State' (1953), available at theanarchistlibrary.org the_State.html (accessed 24 January 2011).

[87] Petr Kropotkin, 'Modern science and anarchism', in Irving Louis Horowitz (Ed.) The Anarchists (New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 2005), p. 159.

[88] Bataille, Accursed Share, Vol. 1, op. cit., Ref. 71, p. 27.

[89] Bataille, ibid., p. 28.

[90] Bataille, ibid., p. 76.

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 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 it from afar, through plays with language, through effects and approximations—and, ultimately, through failure.

Bataille provided several approximations of the general economy, from sacrifice and war to gift and potlatch,[91] but his overall point was to expose the general economy as pure waste. 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 state-forms. In form they embody the logic of the state, and in content they vary widely. We may now add that there are anarchist state-forms and that these can only occur through the general perspective. Similarly, 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 post-anarchism exposed the underside to traditional anarchist metaethics as that which sustains its discourse (ethics), Bataille exposed the full range of the meta-ethical framework: an underside to questions of both epistemology (foundationalism) and ontology (essentialism).

A Subject Without a State

To argue that Bataille's work was primarily about ethics may appear banal to the advanced reader of Bataille, but it shall prove important to establish this claim. Allan Stoekl has argued that Bataille remains appealing because he 'seems to hold onto the possibility of an ethics'.[92] 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.[93] Bataille's meta-ethical project was to expose that which disrupts all ethical claims-making, as a rejection of morality as such.[94]

Rather than rejecting restrictive ethical systems in favour of other positive alternatives, Bataille exposed them to 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 all meta-ethical frameworks. The meta-ethical claim that Bataille made apropos of the general state was that the subject is no longer the place from which to gauge appropriate ethical 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. Hence, for Bataille, there is no ethical act proper and therefore, 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 statement.

At times it appears as though Bataille has adopted a subjectivist response to meta-ethical questions. There is a paradoxical relationship to the general state that becomes elucidated by the ethical activity of self-reflection: 'Doubtless it is paradoxical to tie a truth so intimate as that of

[91] Noys, Georges Bataille, op. cit., Ref. 51.

[92] Allan Stoekl, 'Editor's preface' (Special Issue: On Bataille), Yale French Studies, 78 (1990), p. 2.

[93] Bataille, Accursed Share, Vol. 1, op. cit., Ref. 71, p. 23.

[94] Benjamin Noys, 'Shattering the subject: Georges Bataille and the limits of therapy', European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling, 7(3) (2005), p. 125.

self-consciousness (the return of being to full and irreducible sovereignty) to these completely external determinations'.[95] 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:

> 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 of form', as against the seductive appearances of 'visions', divinities and myths.[96]

The seduction of the subject as the locus of ethical activity occurs, according to Bataille, because the subject is the place for the construction of 'myths' but is herself also a myth—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 towards intimacy or as forms that are intended to seduce others 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'.[97] It is only in the failure to think that Bataille's subject of intimacy, his sovereign subject, comes fleetingly into being.

This idea about having 'nothing' as its object comes painfully close to the postanarchist, and egoist anarchist, emphasis on the 'creative nothing'. Here we are provided with a useful point of departure for rethinking and extending the subjectivist meta-ethics of post-anarchism,[98] as well as contemporary readings of the egoist anarchists such as Max Stirner, Renzo Novatore and others. Yet, it must be highlighted that Bataille's ethics are not subjectivist or relativist; they do not aim to describe a moment of creativity as the elaboration of a positive *episteme*.

The 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'.[99] On the other hand, Bataille's sovereign subject is grounded upon the 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'.[100] To be sovereign is not to make a conscious ethical choice; rather, 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

[95] Bataille, Accursed Share, Vol. 1, op. cit., Ref. 71, p. 189.

[96] Bataille, ibid.

[97] Bataille, ibid., p. 190.

[98] Franks, 'Anarchism: ethics and meta-ethics', op. cit., Ref. 47.

[99] Max Stirner, The Ego and Its Own (1907), available at theanarchistlibrary.org Max_Stirner__The_Ego_and_His_Own.html (accessed 2 November 2010).

[100] Noys, Georges Bataille, op. cit., Ref. 51, p. 75.

cannot be reduced to the individuated ego;[101] rather, it is at once the movement of consciousness that compels the subject to disrupt her authority over her being (rendering her existence into meaningful/useful knowledge), to take the proclamation of nonbeing seriously.[102] 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',[103] 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 wilful and reckless individuality'.[104]

There have been arguments against this reduction of sovereignty to an ontology of place.[105] The problem is that some readings of Bataille reduce sovereignty to an ontology of the ego (in Lacanese, this is the imaginary subject, the 'I' of the statement; i.e. Novatore's 'I'). Against this compulsion towards the ontological, Derrida has argued that one ought to 'read Bataille against Bataille'. As Benjamin Noys has put it, 'this diffusion resists being condensed into an individual or into being' because it operates 'at the limit' of the subject.[106] It is in this way that 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. Sovereignty introduces the subject, fleetingly, to that which is outside of herself, to that which is neither 'individual' nor 'social',[107] 'neither subject nor object',[108] to that which horrifies the subject and brings her to her limit in death. It is precisely this thinking which destabilizes the subjectivist position of much of classical anarchism[109] as well as the restrictive interpretation of postanarchist meta-ethics. The refusal of the subject is itself an ethics of disruption but it is not based on the ideology of cynicism.

Conclusion

There are opportunities to challenge the subjectivist reading of post-anarchism (a la Benjamin Franks) by drawing from a range of continental philosophical texts. Post-anarchists can forge con-

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[101] Noys, ibid., p. 65.

[102] Noys, ibid.

[103] Renzo Novatore, 'I am also a nihilist' (1920), available at theanarchistlibrary.org Renzo_Novatore__I_Am_Also_a_Nihilist.html (accessed 25 January 2011).

[104] Novatore, ibid.

[105] Noys, Georges Bataille, op. cit., Ref. 51, p. 66 et passim.

[106] Noys, ibid., p. 66.

[107] Noys, 'Shattering the subject', op. cit., Ref. 94, p. 128.

[108] Julia Kristeva, Power and Horror: An Essay on Abjection (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 1.

[109] Noys, 'Shattering the subject', op. cit., Ref. 94, p. 128, on the 'psychoanalytic subject'.

nections with other radical philosophers whose work has challenged epistemological foundation-alism. For example, Saul Newman and Lewis Call have both read post-anarchism alongside the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan. However, both Newman and Call have perhaps failed to follow through on a crucial insight from Lacan's theories regarding the structure of the un-conscious: the subject's conscious affects and ego semblance are subservient to an unconscious intersubjective structure. This intersubjective structure disrupts the foundations of subjectivist meta-ethics. Franks' argument that post-anarchism is reducible to subjectivism, the belief that 'right and wrong are based on individual opinion', relates precisely to this misreading of Lacanian theory.

In other words, the problem that I am pointing out relates to this definition of subjectivism and the imaginary lure of the affect or the cogito.

To conclude, post-anarchist philosophy should not be reduced to the interpretation of its introductory period. Rather, it must be understood as bringing the traditional anarchist discourse into a relationship with an outside. The critique of ontological essentialism in post-anarchist philosophy has had its point of departure in a crude form of epistemological relativism and meta-ethical subjectivism. I have aimed to demonstrate that George Bataille's anarchistic philosophy offers postanarchists another understanding of a radical outside to ideology. Post-anarchists must break out of the universalist/relativist meta-ethical trap and embrace Bataille's paradoxical ethics as the precondition and realization of anarchist ethics. It is my belief that the future of post-anarchism depend upon it.

Acknowledgements

Notes and References

Duane Rousselle
Georges Bataille's Post-anarchism
11 October 2012

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