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Reality is becoming - but the self still exists

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Optional @ntology of Anarchism, by Grigory Komlev, Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies 2025, volume 1.

This is a speculative piece dealing with the structure of being and of life-experience, using the philosophers Deleuze and Guattari along with various other approaches (mainly poststructuralist) to make a case for anarchists to adopt a particular type of practice. The author, Grigoriy Komlev, is based in Tbilisi, Georgia, but the article is in a special issue on anarchism in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Georgia isn't in any of these, but it used to be part of the USSR, and there's lots of Russian draft dodgers and dissidents there at the moment, meaning the anarchist scene is blossoming. If they're the same Grigoriy Komlev who made the film *Luzhayka* in 2015, then they're probably an exile from Russia. They describe themselves as an "independent philosopher, poet, and writer."

The article largely belongs to the field of Continental philosophy. Continental philosophy is often more insightful than the analytical variant, but tends to be suggestive rather than justifying its claims. Like most of its kind, this piece is written

in a verbose way with frequent references to historical terms from philosophy, and in this case also to ancient Greek philosophers such as Heraclitus and Anaximander. The term “ontology” in this context refers to ways of seeing and experiencing, which are assumed to constitute subjective reality; the argument is close to that of the “ontological turn” in anthropology and to Derrida’s “hauntology.” The paper is not, therefore, dealing with ontology in the same sense as analytical philosophers.

Ⓐntology is an invented word (ontology with a circle-A) which is largely used to refer to Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of schizoanalysis. Like hauntology, it both is and isn’t ontology. Anarchism is juxtaposed to *arche*, a Greek term from which it is derived. *Arche* is taken to mean ontological authority as well as political or social power. It’s common in poststructuralism to assume that anarchists should be equally or more concerned about fighting fixed meanings and textual authority as about political or social authority. They also go in the direction of rejecting the primacy of concepts of Self, personality, subject, etc. in western philosophy.

In a sense, the author thinks we’re all already ontologists. The author believes that issues regarding failures of voluntary agency – unconscious desires, demon-possession, etc. – or of entities such as souls necessarily lead into the field of ontology. In other words, ontology is taken to encompass issues around the unconscious and desire.

The author also believes that multiple ontologies exist (in effect, different people live in different realities). These are all ‘real’ but don’t have a ‘monopoly on truth.’ Yet there must be some overlap, since a shaman talking to spirits might still fall off a cliff. Also, ‘the same is not identical to itself.’ This is a Derridean premise, which undermines all conceptual systems equally. However, the author also seems to be using it in a Stirnerian or Korzybskian way, to indicate that two entities in the same set or with the same name are distinct (e.g. all humans are not alike). The author also rejects being and the verb

“to be”, because objects and subjects are effects of what they call ontologies. What someone creates or discovers as their ontology shapes what they experience as real. This happens in some kind of relation with a sensuous reality in which some dangers are real. The author calls for the modification of psychoanalysis to make it a practice of anarchist self-care. They seem mainly to mean the Lacanian variant.

This text develops a philosophical intervention into anarchist theory by arguing that anarchism requires sustained ontological reflection, particularly through engagement with the unconscious and schizoanalysis. The authors contend that tensions within anarchism, especially between “left” and “right” variants, can be understood ontologically through differing assumptions about the unconscious. Where the unconscious is denied, subjectivity is framed as fully autonomous and self-possessed, aligning with anarcho-capitalist logics of property and responsibility. Conversely, acknowledging an intersubjective or collective unconscious undermines claims to absolute self-ownership and supports anarchist-socialist orientations grounded in relationality and shared desire. The ancaps say “Self am Self” and the ancoms say “Self am the Other.”

Rejecting the possibility of a single, universal ontology compatible with anarchism, the authors propose instead an “@ntology”: a plural, provisional, and non-totalising ontology consistent with anarchism’s anti-authoritarian ethos. This @ntology does not claim truth but functions as a situational framework through which anarchist subjectivities can reflect on how they are constituted. Without such reflection, the authors argue, anarchist projects risk collapsing into irresolvable disputes grounded in unexamined ontological assumptions. The author thinks different psychotherapies (Lacanian, Jungian, Gestalt, CBT, etc.) involve different ontologies, and this is why they work for some people and not others.

Schizoanalysis, drawing on Félix Guattari, is advanced as a key practice suited to ontological anarchism. Rather than a fixed methodology, schizoanalysis is presented as an open, experimental, and continuously reinvented practice of metamodelling that redistributes flows of desire, produces new subjectivities, and resists totalisation, fascism, and hierarchical power. Unlike classical psychoanalysis, schizoanalysis rejects rigid distinctions between analyst and analysand and between conscious and unconscious, extending beyond clinical settings into collective, political, and cultural practices. The author considers schizoanalysis to be an exercise in “meta-modelling” and not a general ontology of reality. It’s a way of building particular useful “machines” so to speak. And it should be optionally adopted by some people as anarchist self-help.

The author discusses Deleuze and Guattari’s distinction between psychotic (they actually say “schizophrenic”) and paranoid personality-formations, and adds the third term of neurosis. They suggest that psychosis is ‘the language of being’ and the initial position of infants. Neurosis is the language of description, and paranoia is a position which results when psychotics fight over the power to name things.

To illustrate this, the text presents a case of “schizoanalytic dissociation” through a non-hierarchical, non-industrial film collective. This collective has no boss and uses circulating roles in a similar manner to Guattari’s practice of institutional therapy (in which patients and other staff exchanged places with doctors). In this example, filmmaking operates as a collective process of becoming rather than representation: there is no fixed script, no central director, and no monopoly on creative authority. The camera functions as a mediating device that enables the coexistence of multiple ontologies and subjectivities, facilitating mutual transformation, cooperation, and ethical re-orientation. The group is understood as finite and experimental rather than permanent, emphasising experience over institutionalisation.

model if ever there was one). Rather, they should look at the relationship between their conceptual lenses, sensuous reality, and their desire and will – at whether they are being spooked, believing in things that don’t exist, helping their enemies, etc. This process is much more solid and worldly than poststructuralism usually permits, but it is also continuous with the experiment approaches Guattari in particular used. Also, outside of a rigid other-centrism which seeks to subordinate people to a collective project, anarchists don’t seem to need common ontological assumptions to work together; the dynamics of their practical projects and interaction are more important. Most people don’t have explicit ontological views (i.e. views on the ultimate nature of reality) at all, and their implicit ontology reflects their psychodynamic structure. Most people aren’t very interested in talking about ontology. And it’s quite possible to grow or gather food together, to drink or fight or play together, without differences in ontologies becoming a problem.

of socialism which downplay individuality and insist the collective is more real than the individual.

Schizoanalysis leads to a practice close to autonomous Marxism or post-left anarchy, with a focus on politics of desire, free affiliation, diversification, escape from all controlling systems, and the subordination of “social production” (including economics, norms, meanings, etc.) to “desiring-production” (the flows by which desire produces cathexes). Deleuze and Guattari’s political orientations are close to autonomous Marxism and their work overlaps strongly with Situationism and with the work of Hakim Bey.

I’m basically an empiricist and nominalist about reality. In other words, all reality-claims are rooted in experiences of (and relations to) sensuous reality. When people’s experiences of sensuous reality overlap, one gets straightforward empiricism, nominalism, or local knowledge. When they do not (more common in altered-consciousness experiences than in ordinary ones), one gets different lenses and ways of seeing (“ontologies” in Komlev’s sense), but these still arise from particular kinds of sensuous experience. It is precisely because different experiences can be situated in different personality-structures accessible to psychoanalytic or schizoanalytic theory that they are *not* distinct ontologies, but rather, relate to each other. Now, sensuous experience only makes sense as a category if there is someone or something (an ego, an id...) which experiences. Refusing to believe that people are just passive nodes receiving “information” from other nodes does not entail being a liberal or pro-capitalist. It’s necessary to resist the elision of individual uniqueness and agency, and the communitarian bias, which is buried in the no-self ontologies of many poststructuralists.

I’d also add that, while it is valuable for anarchists to question their assumptions, they should not do this on the assumption that they are constructed “subjectivities” looking for external discourses which play them like puppets (a paranoid

The authors conclude that schizoanalysis should not be treated as a blueprint for anarchist society, but as an optional yet meaningful practice for producing anarchist subjectivities capable of coexisting within ontological multiplicity. Anarchism, they argue, is sustained not through unity or permanence, but through the ongoing production of difference, finitude, and new forms of collective becoming.

What it means for radicals: It’s fashionable at the moment – and has been for a long time – for people trying to theoretically enrich anarchism to look mainly to poststructuralism. It’s not surprising, since poststructuralism is both dominant in leftfield academia and rooted in the revolts of 1968. However, the orthodox version of poststructuralism which is today prevalent often imparts as many false lessons as true ones.

Komlev is doing several of the things I object to in a lot of current poststructuralist writings, in postanarchism, in identity-political anarchism, and in Anglo-American receptions of Deleuze: the establishment as an axiom that reality and truth do not exist and must not be talked about; the belief that the self or individual doesn’t exist or is of minor importance; the conflation of models of becomings and flows with external, cybernetic models of interconnected nodes; the deflection of concern from fighting external control to deconstructing the power of texts or discourse; other-centrism and identification of self and other; and a great emphasis on doing away with, or changing, everyday forms of speech in a way which makes our speech less clear. I have seen in practice that these tendencies often have similar effects to the older, Marxist emphasis on external relations as constitutive of selves, and that they often encourage authoritarianism or undermine effective action in practice. Poststructuralist philosophy affirms difference, diversity, becoming, etc., and yet the axiom that the self is the other leads to the reduction of everything to a basic sameness.

Ontologies, here, means something like fundamental fantasies or root-metaphors. This isn't so much a model of ontology as a use of language to forbid discussions of ontology in the traditional sense. By calling these "ontologies" (rather than, say, worldviews), many authors imply that each specific formation is the highest level at which one can speak; there is no way to talk about or between different ontologies, no criteria by which they can be ranked, etc. But this always leads to problems, because the *model of what an "ontology" is* has to operate universally and between different ontologies. And also, crypto-normative or crypto-ontological language persists in a contradictory way. If something does not claim truth, how can it shed light on how something else is constituted? Isn't it just a speculation or a story about how it's constituted? How can a certain way of seeing be posited as desirable for anarchists or any other group, if it is simply one of many equally valid ways of seeing?

One ends up tied in knots, because one has to make general claims about the inter-ontological situation that are *de facto* universal, while at the same time denying they are universal. For instance, the claim that everyone has an ontology structuring their experience of reality is universal (at least to humans). The claim that these ontologies are bundles of molecular becomings rooted in unconscious formations of desire is universal. The claim that certain real effects happen regardless of ontology is universal. Such claims are better made openly so they can be debated and tested. In poststructuralism today, they are often hidden behind linguistic conventions and prohibitions on using particular kinds of language (e.g. "essentialism") in ways which make them more-or-less tyrannical. If someone disagrees with these claims, the response is usually to say in effect, "you're not allowed to say that!" – and this is an *increase* in authoritarianism compared to a situation where people hold different views of what is or is not universally true.

I'm also a fan of Deleuze and Guattari, but I read them in a manner close to Stirner. They do not believe unitary individuals ultimately exist, but they *do* believe that pre-individual flows exist both inside and outside individuals, and that the "molar" individual exists as an effect of these flows. In my view, Deleuze and Guattari's work challenges dominant epistemology, rather than ontology. The ontology they adopt is a model in which reality is composed of molecular forces and flows, and molar aggregates are composed of combinations of these flows, sometimes in congealed, alienated, or reactive forms. At the level of knowledge, however, these forces tend to be invisible to dominant sciences and a different kind of "nomad" science is needed to relate to them. I'm not sure they would concede that, say, a statist who believes in the substantial reality of the state as an external sacred value just has a "different but legitimate ontology." This kind of thing appears when people read Lacan and Derrida into Deleuze and Guattari, as if they all had the same basic philosophy (they didn't).

I'm not sure a molecular ontology which recognises the unconscious (i.e. psychodynamics) leads to socialism. It certainly undermines the rationalism found in most forms of anarcho-capitalism, but I've also seen ancaps and libertarians ground their arguments in diversity of motives. Socialism usually requires a belief that the determinants of life are *external* to the people involved (as in Marx's "objective social relations"), and many academic Marxists, poststructuralists, and identity politicians deny that the inner self or space of interior psychodynamics even exists. Everything proceeds as if individuals are just effects of outer forces. This typically reflects a particular authoritarian complex: the fantasy that the self is a part of the body of the parent, who is omnipotent and omnibenevolent, and a resultant orientation to passing the "test" of this reality, which by definition one cannot reject or leave. Not all socialists believe this or hold this complex, but it underpins those forms