



Towards Another Anarchism

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Rough transcript of a talk given by Andrej Grubic as part of the Life After Capitalism forum (WSF3, Porto Alegre, 2003.)

A friend of mine has written recently that: "no one needs another -ism from 19th century, another word which imprisons and fixes meaning, another word that seduces a number of people into the clarity and comfort of a sectarian box and leads others in front of the firing squad or a show trial. Labels lead so easily to fundamentalism, brands inevitably breed intolerance, delineating doctrines, defining dogma, and limiting the possibility of change."

It is really difficult not to agree with this attitude. However, today it is exactly my pleasant duty to present an -ism, and that is the -ism which is the dominant perspective of today's post-Marxist global social movement. It is anarchism. This idea, the idea of anarchism, has colored the sensibility of the "movement of movements" of which we are the participants, and has stamped it with an essential inscription. Anarchism, its ethical paradigm, represents today the basic inspiration of our movement, which is less about seizing state power than about exposing, de-legitimizing and dismantling mechanisms of rule while winning ever-larger spaces of autonomy and true self-management.

It is my intention, in this couple of minutes that I have at my disposal, to present to you in short the history of anarchism, to be able to subsequently suggest a model of modern anarchism and strategic implications which follow from accepting such a model.

I am inclined to agree with those who see anarchism as a tendency in the history of human thought and practice, a tendency which cannot be encompassed by a general theory of ideology, that strives to identify compulsory and authoritarian hierarchical social structures by posing the question of their legitimacy: if they cannot answer to this challenge, which is most often the case, then anarchism becomes the effort to limit their power and to widen the scope of liberty.

Anarchism is, therefore, a social phenomenon and its contents as well as its manifestations in political activity change with time. One thing that is special about anarchism is that, unlike all major ideologies, it could never have had a stable and continuous existence on the ground through being in government or a part of a party system. Its history and contemporary characteristics are therefore determined by another factor – cycles of political struggle. As a result, anarchism has a 'generational' tendency in the sense that you can identify pretty discreet phases of its history according to the period of struggle in which they were shaped. Naturally, as any other attempt at conceptualisation, this one is also doomed to be simplified. I hope that, regardless of this, it will be useful for the understanding of this social phenomenon.

Historically, the first phase was shaped by late 19th century class struggles in Europe and is exemplified both theoretically and practically by the Bakuninist faction in the 1st international. It starts in the run-up to 1848, peaks with the Paris Commune (1871), and dwindles through the 1880's.

It is quite an embryonic form of anarchism, mixing together anti-state tendencies, anti-capitalism and atheism, while retaining an essential dependence on the skilled urban proletariat as a revolutionary agent. Bakunin, that magnificent dreamer, that "dynamite, not a man", who, in 1848, shouted that "Beethoven's Ninth symphony should be saved from the coming fires of the world revolution at the price of giving up one's life", has bequeathed to us one of the most beautiful and perhaps the most precise descriptions of a single leading idea within the anarchist tradition: "I am a fanatic lover of liberty, considering it as the unique condition under which intelligence, dignity and human happiness can develop and grow; not the purely formal liberty conceded, measured out and regulated by the State, an eternal lie which in reality represents nothing more than the privilege of some founded on the slavery of the rest; not the individualistic, egoistic, shabby, and fictitious liberty extolled by the School of J.-J. Rousseau and other schools of bourgeois liberalism, which considers the would-be rights of all men, represented by the State which limits the rights of each — an idea that leads inevitably to the reduction of the rights of each to zero. No, I mean the only kind of liberty that is worthy of the name, liberty that consists in the full development of all the material, intellectual and moral powers that are latent in each person; liberty that recognizes no restrictions other than those determined by the laws of our own individual nature, which cannot properly be regarded as restrictions since these laws are not imposed by any outside legislator beside or above us, but are immanent and inherent, forming the very basis of our material, intellectual and moral being — they do not limit us but are the real and immediate conditions of our freedom".

The second phase, from the 1890's to the Russian civil war, sees a considerable shift to Eastern Europe and is thus of a clearer agrarian focus. Theoretically this is where Kropotkin's anarcho-communism is the most dominant feature. It peaks with Makhno's army and carries over, after the Bolshevik victory, to a central-European undercurrent. The third stage, from the 20s until the late 40s, is again focused on Central and Western Europe and is again industrially oriented.

Theoretically it is the peak of anarcho-syndicalism, with much of the work being done by exiles from Russia. In this moment the differentiation between two basic traditions in the history of anarchism has become clearly visible: anarcho-communist and one might think, say, of Kropotkin as a representative — and, on the other hand, the one of anarcho-syndicalism which simply regarded anarchist ideas as the proper mode for organization of highly complex, advanced industrial societies. And that tendency in anarchism merges, or inter-relates, with a variety of left wing Marxisms, the kind one finds in, say, the Council Communists that grew up in a Luxembourgian tradition and that is later represented, in a very exciting fashion, by Marxist theorists like Anton Pannekoek.

After WW2 anarchism had a major downturn due to economic reconstruction and surfaces only marginally in anti-imperialist struggles in the South that are, however, quite dominated by a pro-Soviet influence. The struggles of the 60s and 70s did not contain a serious upsurge of anarchism, which was still carrying the dead weight of its history and could not yet adapt to a new political language that was not class-oriented. Thus you may find anarchist leanings in very diverse groups ranging through the anti-war movement, feminism, situationism, black power etc., but not anything that is positively identifiable as anarchism. Explicitly 'anarchist' groups from this period were more or less a restatement of the previous two stages (communist and revolutionary syndicalist), and quite sectarian — instead of engaging with these new forms of political expression they closed themselves off to them and usually adopted very rigid charters like the anarchist of so called "platformist" Maknoist tradition. So this is a 'ghost' fourth generation.

Arriving at the present, we have two co-existing generations within anarchism: people whose political formation took place in the 60s and 70s (which is actually a reincarnation of the second and third generations), and younger people who are much more informed, among other elements, by indigenous, feminist, ecological and culture-criticism thinking. The former exists as various Anarchist Federations, the IWW, IWA, NEFAC and the like. The latter's incarnation is most prominent in the networks of the new social movement. From my perspective Peoples Global Action is the main organ of the current fifth generation of anarchism. What is sometimes confusing is that one of the characteristics of current

anarchism is that its constituent individuals and groups do not usually refer to themselves as anarchists. There are some who take anarchist principles of anti-sectarianism and open-endedness so seriously that they are sometimes reluctant to call themselves 'anarchists' for that very reason.

But the three essentials that run throughout all manifestations of anarchist ideology are definitely there – anti-statism, anti-capitalism and prefigurative politics (i.e. modes of organization that consciously resemble the world you want to create. Or, as an anarchist historian of the revolution in Spain has formulated "an effort to think of not only the ideas but the facts of the future itself".) This is present in anything from jamming collectives and on to Indy media, all of which can be called anarchist with the understanding that we are referring to a new form. There is quite a limited degree of confluence between the two coexisting generations, mostly taking the form of following what each other is doing – but not much more.

The basic dilemma that permeates contemporary anarchism, therefore, is the one between traditionalist and modern conceptions of anarchism. In both cases we are the witnesses of the "escape from tradition" of its kind.

I dare say that "traditionalist anarchists" have not fully understood the tradition. The very word "tradition" has two historical meanings: namely, one is more familiar and more widespread, and that is the meaning of folklore – "tales, beliefs, customs and behavioural norms", while the other meaning is less familiar, and that reads: pass on, hand down, articulate, confer, recommend.

Why do I call attention to, but also over-emphasize, this difference in the explanation of the word tradition? Exactly because of the possibility that the term tradition can, in the history of ideas, be comprehended in two different ways. One way (probably a more common one) is that tradition is accepted as a completed structure that cannot or should not be changed further on, but should be preserved in its solid state and passed on into the future, unchanged. Such an understanding of tradition is connected to that part of the human nature which is referred to as conservative, and which is prone to stereotypic behavior, Freud would even say "the compulsion of repetition". The other meaning of tradition, which I advocate here, relates to the new and creative way of reviving the experience of tradition. Such a, let us say immediately, positive way of conveying, has been put into effect of the other side of the general human nature, provisionally deemed revolutionary, along the lines of paradoxically expressed truth: a wish for a change and, at the same time, a healthy need to remain the same.

Another form of the "escape from tradition" is the one that takes refuge in various post-modern interpretations of anarchism.

I think it is high time for a certain, to quote Max Weber, "dis-illusioning" of anarchism, an awakening from the dream of post-modernist nihilism, anti-rationalism, neo-primitivism, cultural terrorism, "simulacrum". It is time to restore anarchism to the intellectual and political context of the Enlightenment project that is nothing else but understanding that "objective knowledge is a tool to be used so that individuals could take informed decisions on their own". Reason, says the famous Goya's painting, doesn't produce monsters when it dreams, but when it sleeps

I would say that today the dialogue between different generations within the modern anarchism is necessary. Modern anarchism is imbued with countless contradictions. It does not suffice to surrender to the habit of the majority of contemporary anarchist thinkers who insist on dichotomies. It would be good to abandon the exclusiveness of the "or – or" way of thinking, and enter into discussions, in search of synthesis. Is such a synthetic model possible? It seems to me that it is.

A new model of modern anarchism, which can be discerned today within the new social movement, is the one that insists on widening the anti-authoritarian focus, as well as on deserting the class reductionism. Such a model endeavors to recognize the "totality of domination", that is, "to highlight not only the state but also gender relations, and not only the economy but also cultural relations and ecology, sexuality, and freedom in every form it can be sought, and each not only through the sole prism of authority relations, but also informed by richer and more diverse concepts. This model not

only doesn't decry technology per se, but it becomes familiar with and employs diverse types of technology as appropriate. It not only doesn't decry institutions per se, or political forms per se, it tries to conceive new institutions and new political forms for activism and for a new society, including new ways of meeting, new ways of decision making, new ways of coordinating, and so on, most recently including revitalized affinity groups and original spokes structures. And it not only doesn't decry reforms per se, but it struggles to define and win non-reformist reforms, attentive to people's immediate needs and bettering people's lives now as well as moving toward further gains, and eventually transformational gains, in the future."

Anarchism can become effective only if it contains three, encompassed, components: worker's organizations, activists, and researchers. How to create a basis for a modern anarchism on intellectual, syndicate, and popular level? There are several interventions in favor of another anarchism, which would be capable of promoting the values I mentioned above. First of all, I think it is necessary for anarchism to become reflexive. What do I mean by this? Intellectual struggle must reaffirm its place in modern anarchism. It appears that one of the basic weaknesses of the anarchist movement today is, with respect to the time of, say, Kropotkin or Recluse, or Herbert Read, exactly the neglecting of the symbolic, and overlooking of the effectiveness of theory.

Instead of the anarchists' criticizing of the popular Marxist's post-modern fairy-tale "Empire", they should write an anarchist Empire. Marxist religion has, for a long time, referred to the theory and, by this, has given itself a scientific appearance and the possibility to act as a theory. What anarchism today requires is the overcoming of extremes of anti-intellectualism and intellectualism. Like Noam Chomsky, I also have neither sympathy nor patience for such ideas. I believe that the antagonism between science and anarchism should not exist: "Within the anarchist tradition there has been a certain feeling that there is something regimented or oppressive about science itself. There is no argument that I know for irrationality, I don't think that the methods of science amount to anything more than being reasonable, and I don't see why anarchist shouldn't be reasonable". Like Chomsky, I have even less patience for an unusual trend that has spread, in various manifestations, within anarchism itself: "It strikes me as remarkable that left intellectuals today should seek to deprive oppressed people not only of the joys of understanding and insight, but also of tools of emancipation, informing us that project of Enlightenment is dead, that we must abandon the illusions of science and rationality – a message that will gladden the hearts of the powerful..."

Before us, further on, lies the assignment to envision a type of an anarchist researcher. What would be the role of an anarchist researcher? She would certainly not lecture, like the old left intellectuals do. She should not be a teacher, but someone who envisages a new and a very difficult role: she must listen, explore and discover. Her role is to expose the interest of the dominant elite carefully hidden behind supposedly objective discourses.

She has to help activists and to supply them with facts. It is necessary to invent a new form of communication between activists and activist scholars. It is necessary to create a collective mechanism that would connect liberterian scientists, workers and activists. It is necessary to found anarchist institutes, reviews, scientific communities, internationales. I believe that sectarianism, unfortunately a very widespread phenomenon in modern anarchism, would in this way loose its power, as the consequence of such an effort. One of the organized attempts to resist sectarianism in modern anarchism is the outline of the new anarchist international, which I have recently been given, and which I will now read to you.

THE ANARCHIST INTERNATIONAL is an initiative meant to provide a venue for anarchists in all parts of the world who wish to express their solidarity with each other, facilitate communication and coordination, learn from one another's efforts and experiences, and encourage a more powerful anarchist voice and perspective in radical politics everywhere, but who wish to do so in a form which rejects all traces of sectarianism, vanguardism, and revolutionary elitism.

We do not see anarchism as a philosophy invented in 19th century Europe, but rather, as the very theory and practice of freedom – that genuine freedom which is not constructed on the backs of others – an ideal that has been endlessly rediscovered, dreamed and fought for on every continent and in

every period of human history. Anarchism will always have a thousand strands, because diversity will always be part of the essence of freedom, but creating webs of solidarity can make all of them more powerful.

***** HALLMARKS: *****

- 1) We are anarchists because we believe that human freedom and happiness would be best guaranteed by a society based on principles of self-organization, voluntary association, and mutual aid, and because we reject all forms of social relations based on systemic violence, such as the state or capitalism.
- 2) We are, however, profoundly anti-sectarian, by which we mean two things:
 - a) we do not attempt to enforce any particular form of anarchism on one other: Platformist, Syndicalist, Primitivist, Insurrectionist or any other. Neither do we wish to exclude anyone on this basis – we value diversity as a principle in itself, limited only by our common rejection of structures of domination such as racism, sexism, fundamentalism, etc.
 - b) since we see anarchism not as a doctrine so much as a process of movement towards a free, just, and sustainable, society, we believe anarchists should not limit themselves to cooperating with those who self-identify as anarchists, but should actively seek to cooperate with anyone who are working to create a world based on those same broad liberatory principles, and, in fact, to learn from them. One of the purposes of the International is to facilitate this: both to make it easier for us to bring some of those millions around the world who are, effectively, anarchists without knowing it, into touch with the thoughts of others who have worked in that same tradition, and, at the same time, to enrich the anarchist tradition itself through contact with their experiences
- 3) We reject all forms of vanguardism and believe that the proper role of the anarchist intellectual (a role that should be open to everyone) is to take part in an ongoing dialogue: to learn from the experience of popular community-building and struggle and offer back the fruits of reflection on that experience not in the spirit of the dictat, but of the gift
- 4) Anyone who accepts these principles is a member of the Anarchist International and everyone who is a member of the Anarchist International is empowered to act as a spokesperson if they so desire. Because we value diversity, we do not expect uniformity of views other than acceptance of the principles themselves (and, of course, acknowledgement that such diversity exists)
- 5) Organization is neither a value in itself nor an evil in itself; the level of organizational structure appropriate to any given project or task can never be dictated in advance but can only be determined by those actually engaged in it. So with any project initiated within the International: it should be up to those undertaking it to determine the form and level of organization appropriate for that project. At this point, there is no need for a decision-making structure for the International itself but if in the future members feel there should be, it shall be up to the group itself to determine how that process should work, provided only that it be within the broad spirit of decentralization and direct democracy.

Furthermore, anarchism must turn to the experiences of other social movements. It must be included in the courses of progressive social science. It must be in collusion with ideas that come from the circles close to anarchism. Let's take for example the idea of participatory economy, which represents an anarchist economist vision par excellence and which supplements and rectifies anarchist economic tradition. It would also be wise to listen to those voices that warn of the existence three major classes in advanced capitalism, not just two. There is also another class of people, branded coordinator class by these theoreticians. Their role is that of controlling the labor of the working class. This is the class that includes the management hierarchy and the professional consultants and advisors central to their system of control – as lawyers, key engineers and accountants, and so on. They have their class position because of their relative monopolization over knowledge, skills, and connections. This is what enables them to gain access to the positions they occupy in the corporate and government hierarchies.

Another thing to note about the coordinator class is that it is capable of being a ruling class. This is in fact the true historical meaning of the Soviet Union and the other so called Communist countries. They are in fact systems that empower the coordinator class.

Finally, I believe that modern anarchism has to turn to envisioning of political vision.

This is not to say that various schools of anarchism did not advocate very specific forms of social organization, albeit often markedly at variance with one another. Essentially, however, anarchism as a whole advanced what liberals are calling 'negative freedom,' that is to say, a formal 'freedom from,' rather than a substantive 'freedom to.'

Indeed, anarchism often celebrated its commitment to negative freedom as evidence of its own pluralism, ideological tolerance, or creativity. Medjutim, failure of anarchism to enunciate the historical circumstances that would make possible a stateless anarchic society produced problems in anarchist thought that remain unresolved to this day. One friend has, not so long ago, told me that "you anarchists always strive to keep your hands clean, so that eventually you are left with no hands at all." I believe that this remark relates exactly to the lack of more serious thinking about political vision.

Pierre Joseph Proudhon attempted to formulate a concrete image of a libertarian society. His attempt turned out to be a failure, and viewed from my perspective, utterly unsatisfactory. However, this failure shouldn't discourage us, but point to the path followed by, for example, social ecologists in North America – a path leading to the formulation of a serious anarchist political vision. Anarchist model should also encompass the attempt to answer the question: "what are the anarchist's full sets of positive institutional alternatives to contemporary legislatures, courts, police, and diverse executive agencies." To "offer a political vision that encompasses legislation, implementation, adjudication, and enforcement and that shows how each would be effectively accomplished in a non-authoritarian way, promoting positive outcomes would not only provide our contemporary activism much-needed long-term hope, it would also inform our immediate responses to today's electoral, law-making, law enforcement, and court system, and thus many of our strategic choices."

Finally, what would be the strategic implications of promoting of such a model?

I have, several times in contact with anarchist activists, heard a strategic proposition for which I have neither sympathy nor explanation. We should, they say, to make an effort and live worse in order for things to be better. As opposed to this extraordinary logic, which reads "the worse, the better", I think it would be wiser, and far more sensible, to listen to the advice of Argentinean anarchists which advocate a strategy of "expanding the floor of the cage". Such a strategy will understand, instead, that it is possible to fight for and win reforms short of revolution in way that both improve people's conditions and options now, and that also create opportunities for further victories in the future. This strategy will understand, that is, that to be an advocate of a new society does not warrant ignoring people's current pain and suffering, but does warrant that when we work to address current ills and work to make things immediately better, we should do so in ways that raise our consciousness, empower our constituencies, and develop our organizations and that therefore lead to a trajectory of on-going changes culminating in new defining economic and social structures. Expanding the floor of the cage will not dismiss people's short run struggles for higher wages, an end to a war, affirmative action, better work conditions, a participatory budget, a progressive or radical tax, a shorter work week with full pay, abolishing the IMF, or whatever else – because it will respect the reality of how people's consciousness and organizations develop through struggle, and, aggressively avoid the kind of contempt among activists for people's courageous efforts to improve the quality of their lives.

To conclude, I think that such a model of modern anarchism could have a significant role which is to build, amidst the current horrors of capitalism, a post- Marxist movement that would reclaim the values of the Enlightenment and make them finally realize their full potential.

Thank you.

* I would like to thank my friends David Graeber, Uri Gordon and Michael Albert. Any idea you read here might very well actually have been invented by one of them.