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**Postanarchism from a  
Marxist Perspective**

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## Abstract

Postanarchists have tended to portray Marxism as an anachronism, taking the alleged redundancy of Marxism as a starting point for their revitalization of classical anarchism via post-structuralism. Critical assessments of postanarchism have so far failed to interrogate this portrayal of Marxism. This is unfortunate, I argue, because Marxism plays an important function within the postanarchist project, and because it allows postanarchist characterizations of Marxism and post-structuralism to go unchallenged. The first part of this paper delineates the role of Marxism in postanarchism, before examining connections between post-structuralism and Marxism: I argue that Marx's work anticipates post-structuralist concepts of power and subjectivity. The aim of the paper is not to offer a Marxist critique of postanarchism but to establish equal relevance for both anarchism and Marxism to contemporary political thought and practice.

## Introduction

The postanarchist attempt to revitalize classical anarchism by rereading it through the lens of post-structuralism has not gone unchallenged. Critics have raised questions concerning both the relevance of post-structuralism to anarchist thought and the accuracy of postanarchist readings of classical anarchism — questions which in turn bring up broader issues about the impact of post-structuralism, the direction and significance of contemporary anarchism, and the relations between theory and practice. One element that has remained largely unquestioned, however, is the place of Marxism within postanarchism. This is perhaps understandable: it is to be expected that not everyone will welcome a Marxist perspective on postanarchism; in fact, it is possibly the last thing that some anarchists want. When Marxists have intervened in debates around anarchism, they have often adopted the condescending and hectoring tone that Marx himself used when dealing with Bakunin, Proudhon, et al: anarchism has been derided by Marxists as a naive or utopian creed that fails to understand present conditions and is forced to resort to a crude voluntarism as its basis for political action. It is not my desire, however, to extend this patronizing dismissal of anarchism to cover postanarchism: to the contrary, it is my contention that postanarchists have been too quick to dismiss Marxism.

The lack of attention that has been given to Marxism's role within postanarchism is troubling for at least two reasons. First, it effaces the extent to which — as I shall argue below — opposition to Marxism is a key component of the

postanarchist project. Thus Marxism is not being introduced here as an alien perspective from which postanarchism can be measured, but elicited as a significant but under-discussed element of postanarchism itself. Second, uncritical acceptance of postanarchist assessments of Marxism obscures the fact that Marxism still has much to offer: Marxism, I argue, has been unfairly represented by postanarchism. This challenge to postanarchism's understanding of Marxism should not be confused with a Marxist critique of postanarchism. There is much to respect in postanarchism, and its attempt to link contemporary post-structuralist theory with radical nineteenth-century currents of thought is admirable: the problem is that postanarchism's reevaluation of classical anarchism comes at the expense of Marxism. My aim is not to prolong or revive the dispute between anarchists and Marxists that now stretches across three centuries, but rather to stake a claim for the importance of *both* anarchism and Marxism to contemporary political thought and practice. This is therefore a Marxist engagement with a current of anarchism that is offered in the spirit of reconciliation rather than denunciation. What follows is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis of the relations between postanarchism and Marxism: it is intended to open up an area of study that hitherto seems to have been closed, and is thus offered as a preliminary investigation rather than the final word. Drawing on postanarchism's own characterization of post-structuralism as a theory that reconceptualizes power and subjectivity, I shall re-examine these concepts as they appear in the work of Marx, challenging postanarchism's dismissal of Marxism and its reading of post-structuralism. I begin, however, by examining the place of Marxism within postanarchism, delineating three key functions that the critique of Marxism performs for postanarchism.

## The Place of Marxism within Postanarchism

Although the number of writers and activists who identify themselves as postanarchists is relatively small, it is a surprisingly varied current of thought. The basic coordinates are clear enough: 'the central contention of postanarchism is that classical anarchist philosophy must take account of new theoretical directions and cultural phenomena, in particular, postmodernity and poststructuralism.' (Newman, 2008: 101) According to postanarchists, post-structuralism can be understood as a radicalization of classical anarchism — meaning both that post-structuralism is in the tradition of classical anarchism and that post-structuralism can act as a remedy to the faults and flaws of classical anarchism without betraying its spirit and aims. But this begs two obvious questions: what is meant by 'post-structuralism' and what is meant by 'classical anarchism'? It is not insignificant that the leading representatives of this project have all given it a different name:

Saul Newman refers to postanarchism, Todd May to post-structuralist anarchism, and Lewis Call to postmodern anarchism. These different labels in part reflect disagreement about who can be termed a ‘post-structuralist’. To take only one example: Jacques Lacan plays an important part in Newman’s postanarchism, but he is not discussed by May or Call. Similar problems greet attempts to define ‘classical anarchism’, itself a notoriously elusive category. Who were the classical anarchists, and what did they believe? For Newman (2005: 3), Max Stirner is a ‘sort of “proto-poststructuralist”’, whereas Call and May barely mention Stirner.

These disagreements over definitions and personnel are of course not specific to postanarchism: it is difficult to draw the boundaries of any intellectual movement, but particularly ones as fluid as post-structuralism and classical anarchism — difficulties that anyone will face, whether they are a postanarchist or not.<sup>1</sup> In turn, this fluidity is not a flaw of either post-structuralism or classical anarchism: one of the great strengths of both currents of thought is their variety and depth. Nor do I mean to suggest that the postanarchist project is incoherent from the start, or that postanarchists fail to define their terms adequately: on the whole they are all careful to explain what they mean by post-structuralism and classical anarchism, and themselves draw attention to the difficulties I have outlined. All I wish to argue here is that it is hard to define a movement in reference to intellectual currents as nebulous as post-structuralism and classical anarchism — or, at least, hard to define it only in reference to these. To say that postanarchism is (for instance) classical anarchism filtered through post-structuralism does not actually tell us much about what it is to be a postanarchist. Of course, this missing content is fleshed out in the detailed studies undertaken by the postanarchists — but these detailed studies differ from one postanarchist to the next. If we are to attribute any kind of unity to postanarchism, then we must look to other factors — one of which, I contend, is a common opposition to Marxism.

This, then, is the first function of Marxism within postanarchism, of three roles that I shall identify: it helps provide coherence to the postanarchist project. Though they may draw upon different thinkers and seek to combine anarchism and post-structuralism in varying fashions, the postanarchists are united in their rejection of Marxism. It might even be said that it is the (alleged) failure of Marxism that is the main motivation behind the entire postanarchist project. Marxism, it is claimed, is in terminal decline: the problems of exploitation and oppression that Marxism sought to address, however, have not gone away (and have if anything intensified). Hence there is a need, according to postanarchism, to rediscover and develop alternative avenues for radical thought and practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding these difficulties, for the purposes of consistency and clarity I shall refer throughout this essay to ‘post-structuralism’ and ‘postanarchism’.

The problem with Marxism, according to postanarchism, is not so much that it is no longer able to provide the appropriate critical resources, but that it was never able to do so: it is not that Marxism is outdated or took a wrong turn somewhere, but that from the start Marxism was on the wrong path. In May's terms, Marxism is a 'strategic' rather than a 'tactical' philosophy: its analysis focuses on a central problematic and it aims at a single goal. For Marxism, 'there is a single enemy: capitalism.' (May, 1994: 26). Like all strategic philosophies, Marxism is reductive: there is one source of oppression (capitalism), only one theory that can accurately understand this oppression (Marxism), and only one possible agent of struggle (the proletariat, guided by a vanguard party). Tactical philosophies, in contrast, recognize that there is no single site of oppression, and that resistance must take the form of specific, local analyses and interventions. Marxism is thus reductive in two senses, postanarchists argue: it reduces the scope of political analysis by focusing only on capitalist economic relations, and it reduces politics to economics, effectively effacing politics altogether. In terms that May borrows from Jacques Rancière, Marxism is a form of 'metapolitics': the real truth of politics lies in economic relations, and political institutions and ideologies merely conceal that truth (May, 2008: 44-5).

Postanarchists claim that to an extent classical anarchism shares these problems with Marxism, though in a different way: whereas the reductionism of Marxism manifests itself as an urge to interpret everything in terms of economic relations, anarchism performs a statist rather than an economic reduction, tending to lapse into an analysis that focuses on the state as the primary locus of power. But in anarchism this tendency is in tension with another trend: anarchism wavers between strategic and tactical thought. Although it focuses on the state, classical anarchism recognizes that there are many other sites of power, and advocates diverse and specific small-scale struggles of resistance against power wherever it manifests itself. This ambivalence marks the advantage of classical anarchism over Marxism: despite its flaws, classical anarchism has advanced the analysis of power, making it a more suitable avenue for contemporary politics than Marxism. This leads us to the second role of Marxism within postanarchism that we can identify: the rejection of Marxism offers a link to classical anarchism.

As we have seen, classical anarchism is itself a diverse and fluid current of thought: in many ways it is easier to define it by reference to what it opposes rather than what it advocates. Newman (2005: 33), for example, suggests that anarchists are united 'by a fundamental critique and rejection of political authority in all its forms.' It is the rejection of political authority and representation (especially but not exclusively in the form of the state), rather than any positive political programme outlining an alternative vision of society, that is perhaps

the key characteristic of classical anarchist thought. This is not to say that anarchists have failed to think about how a stateless society should be organized: to the contrary, they have offered an incredibly diverse range of visions for how stateless societies might be organized. But it is the very diversity of these visions that makes them poor candidates if we are looking for what *unites* classical anarchists. The thread that binds anarchists is not a uniform political programme but a common opposition to political authority.<sup>2</sup> Classical anarchism can be defined not only in terms of an opposition to authority, but also in opposition to other political ideologies, in particular Marxism. Anarchists are anarchists, we might even say, because they are not Marxists. This is not to denigrate the originality of anarchist thought – to suggest that it can only ever be a pale shadow of Marxism and defined in terms of the latter – but only to highlight the fact that one way to isolate the identity of anarchist thought is to distinguish it from Marxism. There is much common ground between Marxists and anarchists in the fight for a stateless society free from economic exploitation and political oppression, and historically most anarchists have been communists (with obvious and important exceptions such as Stirner). But anarchists have distanced themselves from Marxism’s organizational and revolutionary strategies: for classical anarchism, Marx is one those ‘doctrinaire revolutionaries’ identified by Bakunin (1990: 137), ‘whose objective is to overthrow existing governments and regimes so as to create their own dictatorships on their ruins’. Classical anarchists have argued that Marxism’s economic reductionism is dangerous in at least two ways. First, because it posits the state as a mere reflection of economic relations, it does not recognize that the state is a source of power in its own right, and so even a so-called ‘workers’ state’ will be oppressive. Second, the identification of the economic realm as the key site of oppression facilitates the emergence of a vanguard party distant from the oppressed masses – a point well made by May in some critical comments on Marxism: ‘If the fundamental site of oppression lies in the economy, it perhaps falls to those who are adept at economic analysis to take up the task of directing the revolution’ (May, 2008: 80).

These classical anarchist objections to Marxism anticipate those formulated by the postanarchists, who in turn have identified the strengths of classical anarchism in explicit contrast to Marxism. Whereas Marxism is supposedly economically reductionist, viewing all power as merely an expression of class domination, postanarchists argue that classical anarchism correctly saw that power must be analysed in its own right: irreducible to the workings of the economy, power

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<sup>2</sup> Many anarchists have defined themselves in these terms. Think of Proudhon’s response to the question ‘What will you put in place of the state?’: ‘Nothing’ (Proudhon cited in Rucker, 1937).

relations exist throughout society and need to be analysed in their specificity, without reference to a uniform model of domination. While Marxism (it is claimed) privileges certain political actors – identifying the industrial working class as the sole possible instrument of political transformation, because of its unique place within the only kind of power relations that really matter for Marxism, namely the relation of exploitation between labour and capital – classical anarchism, in contrast, does not limit revolutionary potential to a single class, instead supporting agents dismissed by Marx, such as the peasantry and *lumpenproletariat*. If Marxism privileges not only a particular revolutionary actor, but also a particular path to revolution, supporting an authoritarian party and proposing a dictatorship of the proletariat, classical anarchism on the other hand consistently opposes all state forms and all hierarchies, including those of the party. To a great extent, therefore, the postanarchist attitude towards Marxism replicates the standard anarchist criticisms of Marxism, centred on its supposedly reductive analysis of the political situation and its authoritarian organizational structures. Rejection of Marxism places postanarchism firmly in the anarchist tradition.

Where postanarchism goes beyond these standard criticisms, it draws its weapons from post-structuralism, which brings us to the third role that Marxism plays within postanarchism: it provides one point of engagement with post-structuralism. The postanarchists see in post-structuralism a model for their own anti-Marxism. Post-anarchism identifies two key characteristics of post-structuralism. First, is anti-humanist: rather than taking the human subject as something that is given, it reveals the textual and material practices that constitute the subject. As May (1994: 75) puts it: ‘If poststructuralist political thought could be summed up in a single prescription, it would be that radical political theory, if it is to achieve anything, must abandon humanism in all its forms.’ Secondly, it is argued that post-structuralism rethinks the concept and analysis of power: the aim is no longer to establish the legitimate boundaries of power, placing limits between the individual and the state, but to demonstrate that power is coextensive with social relations, acting not merely to suppress a pre-existing subject but also and more fundamentally to constitute subjects in the first place. Power and subjectivity are thus intimately linked within post-structuralist thought. This is contrasted by postanarchists with Marxist thought, where power and subjectivity are also linked, but in a very different way: instead of a productive power that is constitutive of subjectivity, Marxism conceives of a repressive power that constrains our essential nature as human subjects.

This view of power and subjectivity, argue postanarchists, is not unique to Marxism: it is shared by many of the philosophies that developed out of the Enlightenment, including classical anarchism. ‘Like Marxism and most other forms of nineteenth-century radical thinking, classical anarchism purports to liberate



some kind of authentic human essence which has supposedly been repressed by capitalism and/or the state' (Call, 2002: 14–15). Although it may broaden the scope of power, classical anarchists still see subjectivity as given and power as oppressive: like Marxism, postanarchists argue, classical anarchism posits a notion of human nature that both acts as a standard by which forms of power can be criticized and explains the existence of resistance to power. In classical anarchism (it is argued), the relation between subject and power is formulated as an opposition between two poles, with the naturalness of the human subject within an organic community on one side and the artificial power of the state on the other. According to postanarchists, then, post-structuralism moves beyond both Marxism and classical anarchism. But classical anarchism, because it at least begins to rethink power — broadening the scope of analysis beyond both the state and the economy — retains its contemporary relevance where Marxism does not. A shared 'anti-authoritarian *ethos*' (Newman, 2007: 194) makes classical anarchism and post-structuralism appropriate partners, while Marxism is dismissed as incompatible with post-structuralism. Indeed, it is argued that to a great extent post-structuralism developed *against* Marxism: 'thinkers in this tradition — including Foucault, Lyotard and Deleuze — were all deeply influenced by the political experience of May '68, and they became critical of what they saw as the totalizing and universalizing logic of Marxist theory' (Newman, 2007: 3). Whereas anarchism still has something to teach us, Marxism 'is not nearly radical enough to confront adequately the exigencies of the postmodern condition' (Call, 2002: 6). An opposition to Marxism therefore provides postanarchism with a point of contact with post-structuralism. It is true that this portrayal of post-structuralism as an anti-Marxist theory is often an implicit or undeveloped assumption within postanarchist writings — but this is perhaps because there is little textual support for the claim: as we shall see next, if one actually looks at what the post-structuralists say about Marx then one can see that they are very far from being anti-Marxist.

## Post-Structuralism and Marxism

The critique of Marxism thus plays a key function in postanarchism: it lends the whole project coherence, it provides continuity with classical anarchism, and it helps connect postanarchism to post-structuralism. Given this, it is noticeable how little attention has been paid to the postanarchist critique of Marxism. The reason for this lack of attention, I think, is because although post-anarchist thought has generated some lively discussion, this discussion has so far largely been confined to the anarchist community. An anarchist is unlikely to question postanarchism's

critique of Marxism because — as we have seen — that critique largely echoes standard anarchist charges against Marxism. The accusations of reductionism and authoritarianism that postanarchism levels at Marxism are effectively the same as those directed at Marxism by nineteenth-century anarchists: they have long been received as self-evident truths within the anarchist community, and thus in need of no further discussion. But what of the additional accusations that postanarchism brings against Marxism? These supplement the standard anarchist critique of Marxism with a critique of Marxism's Enlightenment essentialism. It cannot be claimed that anarchists have remained silent on these because they merely reproduce classical anarchist criticisms of Marxism. Why then has so little comment been passed? The answer is clear: it is because when these charges of essentialism are introduced, the terms of the debate shift entirely, for they apply equally to classical anarchism. More than this, it can be said that they are directed primarily by postanarchists at classical anarchism, and in a sense apply only secondarily to Marxism (which has already been condemned for separate reasons). Anarchist commentators have therefore been far more interested in the application and relevance of this critique of essentialism to anarchism — partly because they have no interest in defending Marxism against charges of essentialism and every interest in defending anarchism, and partly because these charges are directed by the postanarchists themselves principally at anarchism.

The outcome is that critical discussion of postanarchism has so far focused on its understanding and interpretation of classical anarchism. A number of commentators have argued that the anarchist tradition has been unfairly and misleadingly represented: anarchism, it is argued, is a far more varied tradition than post-anarchism claims, and far less beholden to essentialist and humanist philosophies. This has led some to conclude that anarchism already has more in common with post-structuralism than has been acknowledged, and even that post-structuralism might have something to learn from anarchism.<sup>3</sup> With very few exceptions, however, there is silence on postanarchism's representation of Marxism.<sup>4</sup> Yet if this neglect is understandable, it is also unfortunate. In light of the analysis offered above, it can be said that the effect is threefold: it effaces what is a key element of postanarchism; it allows its criticisms of Marxism to go unchallenged; and it mischaracterizes post-structuralism. I have already tried to

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<sup>3</sup> For arguments of this type, see Cohn (2002), Cohn and Wilbur (n.d.), and Antliff (2007). For critical assessments of post-anarchism from a position much more sympathetic to post-structuralism, see Jun (2007) and Glavin (2004).

<sup>4</sup> One such exception is Benjamin Franks (2007), who while reviewing some of the common anarchist critiques of post-anarchism also offers a short defence of Marx and class politics.

counter the first of these, by demonstrating the place of Marxism within postanarchism. It remains to challenge the remaining two effects. I shall begin this task by briefly considering the place of Marxism within post-structuralism, before looking in more detail at the work of Marx himself.

One reason why we might be suspicious of the alignment of anarchism and post-structuralism at the expense of Marxism is that even the most cursory glance at the work of the major thinkers of post-structuralism suggests that they were far more involved with the Marxist tradition than with the anarchist tradition. It is a struggle to find any references to classical anarchist thinkers anywhere in the writings of post-structuralist authors. Where classical anarchists are mentioned, the references are not usually favourable. In his book *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, for example, Deleuze offers modest praise for Max Stirner. But ultimately Deleuze concludes that Stirner is the thinker who reveals the nihilism at the heart of dialectical thinking. Given that dialectics is the central target of *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, this hardly amounts to an endorsement of Stirner's position: 'precisely because Stirner still thinks like a dialectician, because he does not extricate himself from the categories of property, alienation and its suppression, he throws himself into the nothingness which he hollows out beneath the steps of the dialectic' (Deleuze, 1983: 163).<sup>5</sup> Stirner also makes an appearance in Derrida's *Specters of Marx*. In a subtle and intriguing analysis, Derrida argues that Stirner and Marx are united in a common polemic against 'the spectre' (a figure used by Derrida to indicate that which cannot be accounted for in classical ontology). Derrida deconstructs both Stirner and Marx, trying to show that both remain wedded to a metaphysical ontology. But the focus of this analysis – which, after all, is found in a book on Marx – is the critique of Stirner found in *The German Ideology*: Stirner is only discussed to the extent that he can throw light on Marx. We would find much the same if we looked at the writings of other post-structuralists: where classical anarchist thinkers appear, it is only in passing; certainly there is no sustained engagement with the anarchist tradition.

There are two potential objections here that can be anticipated. First, it might be argued that the absence of references to classical anarchist thinkers in post-structuralist thought does not invalidate the postanarchist attempt to link classical anarchism and post-structuralism: the postanarchists do not need to claim that post-structuralism has been directly influenced by classical anarchism – only that

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<sup>5</sup> Deleuze's conclusions are in stark contrast to postanarchist attempts to reclaim Stirner as a forerunner of post-structuralism: see Koch (1997) and Newman (2001, chapter 3; 2005, chapter 4). It is true that in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* Deleuze is somewhat ambiguous about Marx's relation to the dialectic – but his use of Marx elsewhere surely demonstrates that he finds something beyond dialectics in Marx.

a potential alliance might be formed between the two, on the basis of theoretical affinities rather than explicit citation. I accept this argument, but in a sense it is not relevant to my own thesis: I am not claiming that the attempt to link post-structuralism with classical anarchism is misguided — rather that it is misguided to attempt to pursue this link at the expense of Marxism. If it is worth investigating connections between classical anarchism and post-structuralism even though no explicit connections already exist — because the post-structuralists have little to say about classical anarchism — then it seems to me that it is certainly worth investigating potential connections between Marxism and post-structuralism — precisely because the post-structuralists have quite a lot to say about Marx. This brings us to a second potential response, however. It might be argued that the presence of Marx in post-structuralist writings, far from indicating a fidelity to Marx amongst post-structuralist thinkers, is testament only to a critical attitude: Marx is cited only in order to reject him. This argument has some validity. It is clear that post-structuralism in many ways developed in opposition to Marxism. In part this was a response to the concrete political situation. The French Communist Party had at best a mixed political record: rigidly pro-Moscow, it provided qualified support for French imperialism in Asia and Africa and failed to support the worker-student uprisings of May 1968. In attempting to formulate new modes of theory and practice, post-structuralist thinkers therefore tended consciously to distance themselves from the institutional forms of Marxism that existed in France in the mid-twentieth century. Moreover, this distancing was a result not only of pragmatic political exigencies: it is clear that there were substantial theoretical reasons for moving away from Marxism. The post-structuralist subversion of reductionist, teleological, and dialectical forms of thought necessarily involved subverting certain versions of Marxism, not least the version propounded by the PCF.

But although post-structuralism developed in opposition to certain forms of Marxism, this opposition should not be confused with an outright rejection of all Marxisms, still less of Marx himself. Again, even a cursory glance at the works of the major thinkers of post-structuralism would indicate how far they were from rejecting Marx. It is well known that Deleuze's final (unfinished) book was to have been on the *Grandeur de Marx* (Deleuze, 1995: 51), and the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* that he co-authored with Félix Guattari are saturated with Marxian concepts. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida does not stop affirming Marx's contemporary relevance; more than simple recognition of Marx's profound influence upon the present, Derrida's call is for a *political* Marx, 'to prevent a philosophico-philological return to Marx from prevailing'

(Derrida, 1994: 32).<sup>6</sup> Even Foucault, who often seems to go out of his way to disparage Marxism, is careful to emphasize that while much of his work subverts traditional Marxist concepts, he nonetheless continues to draw upon Marx himself: 'I quote Marx without saying so, without quotation marks, and because people are incapable of recognizing Marx's texts I am thought to be someone who doesn't quote Marx' (Foucault, 1980: 52). These brief excerpts are of course no substitute for a detailed analysis of the place of Marxism within post-structuralism, which is beyond the scope of the present work. But they do begin to complicate the postanarchist narrative. Rather than trying to establish beyond doubt that all post-structuralists are indebted to Marx, however, I want instead to think about what it is that post-structuralism might have seen in Marx. To do this, we shall draw upon postanarchism's own characterization of post-structuralism, and interrogate Marx's views on power and subjectivity. We shall focus on Marx not because he is the touchstone of 'true' Marxist theory, but because his is the most innovative and important thinker within Marxism.

## Power and Subjectivity in Marxism

As postanarchists have correctly claimed, post-structuralism offers a radically new way of understanding power. There are perhaps two key elements to the post-structuralist reconceptualization of power. First, rather than emanating from a single central source (like the state or the bourgeoisie), power is everywhere, because we are all involved in relations of power. This means that power relations must be analysed in their specificity, at a local level, and without reference to a homogeneous model. Second, rather than repressing a given essence, power constitutes the very subject to which it is applied. In their search for forerunners of post-structuralism within the classical anarchist tradition, postanarchists have tended to focus on the first of these elements: although classical anarchists viewed power as repressive rather than constitutive, they nonetheless made great advances in undermining the idea that power springs from a single source. Postanarchists acknowledge that there is a tendency in classical anarchist thought to focus on the state as the centre of power. But in the first place this is seen as an advance on Marxism, for it unmasks political power in its own right rather than subordinating it to the economy. In addition, this tendency is in tension with a recognition amongst classical anarchists that there are numerous sites of power

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<sup>6</sup> Whether Derrida is successful in his aim, or whether he himself only reproduces a 'philosophico-philological' Marx, is a separate issue: the point is that far from rejecting Marx, Derrida explicitly affirms his contemporary political and philosophical relevance.

(clerical, educational, familial, etc.) that need to be criticized on their own terms. It is in this light that Marxism's own theory of power is viewed by postanarchism: Marxism is judged according to the extent to which it can follow classical anarchism's recognition of the decentred and autonomous nature of political power. For May, the story of Marxism in the twentieth century is the story of a current of thought that offered ever more refined accounts of power, but could ultimately never escape its own reductionist premises. In this way, 'Marxism, in dealing with successive disappointments, kept reformulating itself in ways that edged ever closer to – but never entirely coincided with – the perspective embraced by anarchism' (May, 1994: 18). Newman, on the other hand, sees in Marx's own work the potential for a non-reductionist account of power: in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* we can find the beginnings of a theory of the specificity of political power, irreducible to economic factors. Like May, however, Newman suggests that Marxism remained tied to its own limits: 'within [Marx's] theory of Bonapartism lay the theoretical foundations for an "epistemological break" with Marxism itself'. In other words, Marxism itself could never fully realize its own conceptual potential: it was classical anarchism that 'took the theory of Bonapartism to its logical conclusion, and was able to develop a concept of the sovereign state as a specific and autonomous site of power that was irreducible to capitalist economic relations' (Newman, 2004: 37). Thus according to postanarchism, classical anarchism is, so to speak, halfway between Marxism and post-structuralism: it broadens and deepens the analysis of power beyond that which Marxism is capable of, but it does not yet achieve the insights into power developed by post-structuralism.

This analysis by postanarchism is not wholly incorrect: from a post-structuralist perspective, there are clearly a number of flaws with the Marxist concept of power. In Marxist theory 'power' tends to refer to a property that is used by one class to oppress another class: under capitalism power belongs to the bourgeoisie and is exercised repressively via the state. It is no wonder that Foucault, for example, decries the 'economism' of Marxism's view of power: it appears that in Marxism power is never analysed in its own right but only to the extent to which it maintains economic relations of domination (Foucault, 1980: 88). But the picture is more complicated than this, for we can find in Marx's work an analytics of power much closer to post-structuralism. Like the postanarchists, Marx thinks that the classical anarchists focus too much on the state. Whereas for postanarchism this focus on the state is to the neglect of other forms of power in society, for Marx it is to the neglect of economic conditions (he berates Bakunin for this fault, for example [Marx, 1989: 506]). But by emphasizing economic conditions over the state, Marx is not *reducing* political power to the economy, in a move equivalent to classical anarchism's tendency to reduce political power to the state. Marx's move is quite different: he is *broadening* the scope of political power, politicizing

areas of life that had previously been characterized as apolitical. Classical political economists saw the market as an apolitical realm of natural harmony opposed to the artificialities of the state – a stance not dissimilar to the distinction made by classical anarchism between the natural order of society and the artificial order of the state. Marx, in contrast, demonstrates that the supposedly neutral fields of production, distribution and exchange are permeated by relations of domination, thereby at once expanding the analysis of power into realms hitherto thought to be outside politics, and undermining the naive distinction between naturality and artificiality. In this way it could be said that it is Marx rather than classical anarchism who appears a forerunner of post-structuralism. There is a further way in which Marx seems to anticipate the post-structuralist view of power, however. In arguing that classical anarchism comes closer than Marxism to the post-structuralist view of power, postanarchists focus on one element of that view of power: the idea that power is everywhere rather than restricted to a single site. But the most novel aspect of the post-structuralist view of power is the second element identified above, namely the idea that power is constitutive – and it is here in particular that Marxism anticipates post-structuralism. For Marx does not merely broaden the scope of power, he initiates a reconceptualization of ‘power’ itself. To appreciate this conceptual revolution properly, we need now to turn to the other feature of post-structuralism highlighted by postanarchism: its decentring of subjectivity.

Just as Marx in many ways remains tied to a conventional concept of power, so in many ways he remains tied to a conventional view of subjectivity. This is nowhere more evident than in Marx’s early writings, in which there is an alienated human nature that requires liberation: there is no doubt that works like the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* operate within a humanist problematic. Whether or not we agree with Althusser’s postulation of an ‘epistemological break’ in Marx’s work, however, it is clear that from about 1845 there is a shift in Marx’s work: at the very least, after 1845 we can find in Marx’s work the resources for an alternative reading – the possibility of a Marx who is not tied to humanism. As early as the ‘Theses on Feuerbach’, ‘the essence of man’ is displaced into ‘the ensemble of the social relations’ (Marx, 1976b: 4): in effect, there is no human essence, because what was taken as essential is shown by Marx to be mutable and historically contingent. Marx goes further than this, however. Newman (2001: 14) correctly argues that one way to distinguish post-structuralism from structuralism is that whereas the latter dissolved the subject into a determining structure, for the former the subject is *constituted* rather than merely dissolved or determined. This is precisely what Marx also demonstrates: the subject for Marx is not the empty, shifting centre of a network of social relations; the subject for Marx is *produced*. In order to appreciate this aspect of Marx’s work, we should turn not to

*The Eighteenth Brumaire*, or other works usually designated as ‘political writings’, but to the very book that is so often dismissed as ‘economistic’, namely volume one of *Capital*.

The vast bulk of this book is dedicated to a concrete analysis of the operation of capitalism within manufacture and large-scale industry — to what actually goes on in workshops and factories. A central focus of this analysis is the manner in which capitalism creates the very subjects that it needs in order to operate: capitalism as it is portrayed in *Capital* does not repress a given essence (such as the human capacity for creative labour), but must constitute the subjects over whom its power is exercised. One of the essential preconditions of capitalism is a propertyless mass that has nothing to sell but its labour-power. The final part of *Capital*, on primitive accumulation, details the various ways in which such a mass of potential workers was produced: the enclosure of land, the seizure of Church estates, the clearing of the Highlands, and so on. But this expropriation in itself was not enough, for at first it merely created masses of ‘beggars, robbers and vagabonds’ (Marx, 1976a: 896). These masses then needed to be *disciplined* in order to be utilized as wage-labourers. Marx’s section on primitive accumulation outlines the ‘grotesquely terroristic laws’ (Marx, 1976a: 899) that were necessary initially to force the expropriated into wage-labour, by preventing them from making a living from begging or petty theft and thereby leaving them with no choice but to sell their labour-power. But once the capitalist mode of production is established a different kind of discipline — the ‘barrack-like discipline’ (Marx, 1976a: 549) of the factory — is needed. It is not enough that the proletariat is forced by economic circumstances to sell its labour-power to the capitalist: the worker needs to be shaped and moulded in certain ways, so that there develops ‘a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws’ (Marx, 1976a: 899). Moreover, as capitalism advances, the type of subject that is required continues to change. In capitalism’s early stages, there exists only what Marx calls ‘formal subsumption’, in which the capitalist production process ‘takes over an *existing labour process*, developed by different and more archaic modes of production’ (Marx, 1976a: 1021). Only later do we arrive at what Marx calls ‘real subsumption’: ‘there now arises a technologically and otherwise *specific mode of production — capitalist production — which transforms the nature of the labour process and its actual conditions*’ (Marx, 1976a: 1034–5). Real subsumption refers not only to an increased use of an ever-growing range and number of machines, but to the development of a different kind of worker. The aim for the capitalist cannot be to repress a natural essence, nor even simply to accommodate the worker to the requirements and rhythms dictated by the machine — but rather in a sense to create a new subject out of



both worker and machine, *augmenting* the power and capacities of the worker rather than repressing them.

The use of disciplinary power to create a subject with augmented capacities: a description that could of course apply just as much to Foucault as to Marx. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Foucault explicitly and repeatedly cites *Capital Volume One* in *Discipline and Punish*, and that certain passages in both books are practically interchangeable.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to postanarchist claims, we find in Marx something much like what we find in post-structuralism: not a repressive power that denies an essential human nature — as we find in classical anarchism — but a power that operates by generating different subject positions. This does not mean that Marx is some kind of proto-post-structuralist, or that the post-structuralists were really Marxists in disguise: key differences remain. Newman (2001: 14) suggests that post-structuralism can be distinguished from structuralism not only by the fact that the former views the subject as constituted and not determined, but also because ‘for the post-structuralists, the forces which constitute the subject do not form a central structure — like capitalism, for instance — but remain decentralized and diffused’. This claim cannot so readily be accommodated to Marx, who analyses the constitution of subjectivity not only just within capitalism but, even more narrowly, primarily within the factory. Indeed, the decentralized and diffused nature of power is better captured by classical anarchism. But this only serves to reinforce my central point: a contemporary politics informed by post-structuralism will be at its strongest if it draws upon *both* Marxism and anarchism.

## Conclusions

I have argued that the neglect of postanarchism’s attitude towards Marxism is damaging, because it overlooks the key role that Marxism plays within postanarchism and because it perpetuates misunderstandings of both post-structuralism (characterized as anti-Marxist) and Marxism (characterized as a dangerous anachronism). To counter this damage, I have sought to elucidate the place of Marxism within postanarchism, and to show that if we are looking for forerunners of or partners for post-structuralism then Marxism is just as viable a candidate as classical anarchism. This should not be taken as a Marxist attempt to colonize other fields of thought — a possibility that some postanarchists clearly fear: ‘Just as it thoroughly eclipsed anarchism during the struggle for control over the First International during the nineteenth century, Marxism now attempts to eclipse

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<sup>7</sup> For Foucault’s references to Marx in *Discipline and Punish*, see Foucault (1977: 163–4, 175, 221).

postmodernism as well' (Call, 2002: 7). My purpose has not been simply to reverse the postanarchist position, demonstrating that it is Marxism that has contemporary relevance and anarchism that should be condemned as an anachronism. Instead I have tried to show that Marxism deserves an equal hearing alongside anarchism. This is not an uncritical endorsement of Marxism in which we take it as it is and incorporate its insights as they stand. On the contrary, just as postanarchists argue that post-structuralism can offer a rereading of anarchism, so it is to be hoped that Marxism can be transformed by an encounter with post-structuralism. This will necessarily mean that many elements of Marxism are discarded, as we pick and choose from the Marxist tradition. But this should not be a problem; after all, this selective approach is exactly the approach that postanarchists themselves take to classical anarchism: rejecting the residual essentialism in classical anarchism, postanarchism nonetheless finds much else that is valuable in this tradition. Moreover, it is an approach that fits well with post-structuralism. When the post-structuralists read Marx — or any other thinker, for that matter — they do not treat him as a homogeneous whole to be accepted or rejected *en bloc*, but as a heterogeneous resource that can be used in many ways: as Derrida (1994: 91–2) says, any reading of Marx must be an 'active interpretation', 'a critical, selective, and filtering reaffirmation'. In its straightforwardly dismissive attitude towards Marxism, postanarchism risks contravening the spirit of post-structuralism. Moreover, it risks placing itself in a rather strange position whereby it values classical anarchism in spite of classical anarchism's failure to recognize the productivity of power and the decentering of subjectivity, while simultaneously rejecting Marxism even though Marxism does recognize these things. The very reasons that postanarchists give for needing to supplement classical anarchism are in fact good reasons for turning to Marxism.

In the end, I do not think that my defence of Marxism is incompatible with postanarchism. At the end of his critical review of the history of Marxism, May (1994: 44) states: 'It is [. . .] possible that there are as yet untraveled paths within Marxism that might yield more benefit than those which have been taken.' Despite its own intentions, it may be that postanarchism can help us find those paths.

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