

# **Anarchism, Ethics and Art: A Politics of Peculiarity**

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## Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	4
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	5
<b>Introduction</b> .....	7
<b>Chapter 1 Max Stirner: What am I to you?</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Introduction.....	22
The Unique.....	27
Young Hegelian?.....	29
Egoism and Hegelianism.....	32
Newman and Stirner.....	37
Identity Politics and Ethical Nihilism.....	41
Alienation, Irony and Spirit.....	46
Prefiguring Poststructuralism.....	53
Conclusion.....	59
<b>Chapter 2 The Question of Power</b> .....	<b>63</b>
Introduction: Why does the issue of power matter?.....	63
The Problem of Power.....	69
The Need for Postanarchism.....	79
What are the problems with the current conceptions of power?.....	84
Postanarchist Problems of Power.....	89
How Postanarchism Addresses the Problem of Power.....	96
Ontological Anarchy.....	102
Conclusion.....	110
<b>Chapter 3 Freedom</b> .....	<b>115</b>
Introduction: Why Freedom is Important.....	115
Political Freedom and Personal Liberty.....	118
Republicanism.....	123
Isaiah Berlin and Russian Egoism.....	127
Ownness and Newman.....	137
Conclusion.....	147
<b>Chapter 4 Estética: Art, Ethics and Me</b> .....	<b>153</b>
Introduction.....	153
Ownness.....	156
Power: The indignity of speaking for others.....	164
Subjects and Objects.....	174
Conclusion: Ethics and Aesthetics.....	179
<b>Chapter 5 From Aesthetics to Ethics</b> .....	<b>181</b>
Introduction.....	181
There Are No Objective Values.....	182
The Split in Ontology.....	187
Production as Prefiguration as Negative-dialectic.....	194
Returning to Rancière.....	200
<b>Chapter 6 Meta-Ethics</b> .....	<b>206</b>
Introduction: An attempt to find anarchy in a chaotically unjust world.....	206

Politics of Peculiarity.....	209
After Rousseau's Post-post-anarchism.....	218
The Taxonomy of Meta-Ethics.....	221
Humour and the Intersubjective.....	234
You Must be Joking.....	240
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>247</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>258</b>

## Abstract

This thesis seeks to enunciate a meta-ethics for anarchist praxis. Postanarchism has identified that authoritarianism and hierarchy are lurking in our structures and patterns of thought in the form of essentialism and foundationalism, and has attempted to make use of the lessons of poststructuralist philosophy. Essential visions of the subject can recreate hierarchical thought and encode oppressions into our political structures. Who, then, is to decide what the subject is? And how will this knowledge be operationalised? Foundationalist thought can compound these problems, providing us with an unfounded certainty in our epistemological reasoning. These are positive answers to questions of both where our meta-ethics come from, and how we arrive at our ethics. What is required is the shifting, opaque and critical denial of these forms of knowledge.

This thesis explores what happens when we put postanarchist thought into practice, offering an original contribution in the area of postanarchist ontological politics. It will provide a consonant anarchist meta-ethics which will provide the underpinning for liberatory praxis. It does this through the development of original methods, arts practices, and pedagogies that take seriously the power that we hold in the world and the systems of power we exist in. Beginning from a position of ontological pre-freedom, we can fix an intersubjectivity into this practice by foregrounding *you*. By placing *you* back at the centre of our ethico-political tactics, I will posit a radical politics which answers the question: what is of *use* to *you*.

Drawing on the lessons of postanarchism, and advancing a new reading of Stirner's thought, I propose a 'politics of peculiarity', or of the "things" which are peculiar to you. Left without foundations to our knowledge we have only the world we encounter, without recourse to essentialism. You, stripped of neoliberal categories and positivist truth-claims, are the only vehicle for your politics.

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This research has involved work with other organisations and they have all given me their time and their resources to help with my project. Special mention should go to Anne Culverhouse-Evans and Miranda Ballin of Valleys Kids who have been with me for the entire journey of this thesis. I would also like to thank Astor College, Dover, and Dover smART Project.

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## Introduction

This thesis wants to place *you*, the reader, back within anarchist praxis. When we engage in anarchism there is an inescapable intersubjective realm, based in who we are and what we do, which can be lost in political theory and debate. This research has rediscovered the need to place the ‘actual human beings’ - not “humanity” or a *priori* accounts of “human spirit” - at the core of our politics.<sup>1</sup> This is a journey we must make together.

The thinkers who form the basis for a significant portion of this theorising – Max Stirner, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan – are all working within this paradigm. These are thinkers who focus on the experience of our lives and seek to remove us from abstracted discourse. The question I am looking to explore is: what is *of use* to you? Postanarchism is ‘concerned with the theorization of contemporary post-statist forms of radical politics’<sup>2</sup> and this thesis is no different. However, I do not wish to show the way we can find new currents and interesting phenomena in radical politics, but to put *you* at the heart of the radical politics that we already know and practice. In order to achieve this, this work will question which forms of political existence are consonant with the actual people who produce it. This is a difficult process to capture on the page and I shall endeavour to make clear the tensions and problems that this creates.

Anarchism stands outside the usual canon of political thought: the paradoxical outside of political theory, critiquing without offering positive visions of Politics and profaning the accepted wisdom of politics as an academic discipline. Anarchism sits on the margins. It seeks to find the oppression, domination and unacceptable flows of power in all we think and do. In every discipline, from Geography to Computer Science, there is an anarchist critique and a body of theory which seeks to escape the narrow confines of orthodoxy. Anarchist politics recognises that the world may be in chaos, but this doesn’t prevent hierarchy and authority imposing itself upon it. This

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<sup>1</sup> G. Edward [Max Stirner], and Widukind De Ridder. "The Philosophical Reactionaries: ‘The Modern Sophists’ by Kuno Fischer" In *Max Stirner*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 146

<sup>2</sup> Saul Newman, *Postanarchism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 1

thesis is part of the quest to find anarchy in this chaotically unjust world. Note here that I am not seeking justice, but anarchy. This is an important distinction. I am not engaging in debates over the existence and application of justice as a concept, but seeking to find a way of life outside of oppressive hierarchies and authority altogether. The postanarchism within which this thesis operates in is not one of the “first stage” of postanarchist thought. That is to say, this is not a theory which hopes to supplant or to deny anarchist thought, but to add to it – it works with, and as part of, anarchism. I shall avoid, as far as is practicable, the use of erroneous ideas such as an anarchist canon, or traditional anarchism. There can be no unified school of thought in a branch of political praxis which seeks to undermine hierarchical thought, and so it is an impossible and, perhaps, undesirable task to identify a “traditional” anarchism. There is no clear set of ideas or concepts which compose anarchism; it intentionally resists this form of categorisation. For some anarchists, human nature is the basis for our liberation, and for some it is the basis for our oppression. Even for those thinkers who are most identified with this position, there can be debate over their commitments to an essential human nature. Anarchism seeks to operate on an opaque and shifting terrain – to resist attempts at definition – one which is designed to best reflect its constituent parts in a particular place and time. I am not seeking to categorise or compartmentalise anarchism, but to expand and expound it. I wish for it to be practiced, as well as discussed.

There are a number of key points which I will need to explain before we begin. Firstly, the methods which I have engaged in and the reasons for choosing them. Secondly, the importance which is accorded to language and how this will operate within the terms of the study. Thirdly, the boundaries of this research. This is my attempt to advance the work of postanarchist authors: I stand on their shoulders and without their hard work and honesty I would not have found this project, let alone found an area where I was able to contribute. This research is born of anarchism and seeks to offer an alternative vision for our politics based in ethical insurrectionary praxis. For this reason, I shall not be engaging in debates on the need for anarchism or justifying this position, beyond this introduction. There are many texts which look to “convert” people to anarchism: polemics which hope to prove its validity, or



projects to advance an anarchist politics within mainstream political practice.<sup>3</sup> This thesis is not one of these. I am expressly working within anarchist thought broadly, and postanarchist thought specifically. Anarchism has maintained a focus on the ethical component of ethical-politico tactics and this is where I shall begin my study. I am not looking to “convert” you to my cause, but to convince you of my argument. I do not set out to supersede what has come before me, but to add to it. My hope is that you will find something useful on the following pages. As I shall argue, this is a thesis based in a fundamental rejection of ontologies of measure<sup>4</sup> and research which focuses on the parts that we can see.<sup>5</sup> I also wish to outline here that although the thesis makes use of the work of Hakim Bey I in no way endorse the deeply problematic deployment of power he has engaged in to promote intergeneration sexuality. Bey claims that anarchy is chaos.<sup>6</sup> This couldn’t be further from the truth. Chaos is hierarchical, it “plays favourites”. Anarchy is what is shaped from chaos. Anarchy is not life without captains, but life with *only* captains. Chaos is when we are pulling in separate directions and anarchy is found when we are able to work together.

The key method which underpins the thesis is the development of practice as part of the theorising. During completion of the early stages of the research it became apparent that staying within the bounds of traditional theorising was not going to offer the ability to develop something political, something of use. This thesis is one which, to some extent, is focused on philosophy. However, as part of what I believe to be the postanarchist project, it was necessary to politicise this philosophy. In order to move from thought to action, or from speaking to being, I needed to develop forms of practice which could investigate and evaluate the form of ontological philosophy

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<sup>3</sup> For an overview of anarchism and some “key” anarchist texts see: Errico Malatesta, “Anarchy” in *The method of freedom: An Errico Malatesta reader*, ed. Davide Turcato (London: AK Press, 2014), 109-148; Peter Kropotkin, *The conquest of bread* (Oakland: AK Press, 2007); Cloin Ward, *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Ruth Kinna, *Anarchism: A beginner’s guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005)

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 354

<sup>5</sup> Tania Bruguera, (Tate Modern, London) interview with the author, 2019

<sup>6</sup> Hakim Bey “Post-Anarchism Anarchy” in *TAZ. The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 2003)

which is needed to accord postanarchist politics a level of consonance. To explore new theories, I needed to develop new practices and arts practice suggested itself.

The border between art and politics is thin and contested. It provides a way for us to investigate political practice in a manner which is tied to ethics. Anarchism can be understood as an ethical tradition and postanarchism as an attempt at a form of meta-ethics for this wider tradition (see chapter 6). Aesthetics is also an inherently ethical field and it was from this key finding that I developed the practice which is the method employed by the thesis. This practice was collaboratively developed alongside artists, academics and participants and has fed back significantly in to the research presented here. This is a form of participatory art we have titled politically engaged artistic practice. It explores the way we can mobilise around questions of ontology, is founded upon the postanarchist belief that we should “ignore” the state and create our own solutions to the problems we find, and is expressly prefigurative. Politically engaged artistic practice is a form of participatory social practice art which foregrounds a series of ethical and political commitments. These commitments will be explored in greater depth as they are developed throughout the thesis. Here I will provide a brief overview of the practice itself and the communities and participants who contributed to the development and creation of the model. The “site” of this work was mainly in Tate Modern, on London’s Southbank. That said, a lot of the preparatory discussions, workshops and meetings took place in Kent between Canterbury Christ Church University and Astor College, Dover. Young people from Astor College were the main group of participants in this practice and I remain grateful to them for their creativity, enthusiasm and hard work. Valleys Kids, from the Rhonda valley in South Wales, have also contributed heavily to this model of practice and some of this work has taken place there.

The practice began with a series of open workshops with artists, academics and members of the public. Alongside my collaborators, we decided that bringing together groups who were involved in this manner of research gave us the opportunity to check the influence of arbitrary expertise and hierarchy. By asking groups of artists and researchers, alongside former participants of this kind of project and members of the public, to contribute we were able to critique and develop our process before we began to deploy our power. This is a method which is consonant

with the ethical commitments of anti-essentialism and anti-foundationalism, and one which allows for the possibility of assessing which power relations were acceptable and which were not. Our language was critiqued by academics, artists questioned and helped develop our artistic practices, and members of the public shared their experiences of problematic behaviour in previous projects.

In these workshops we co-produced a series of provocations which informed how the project was to progress. These ranged from 'joy can be an act of resistance', to 'political art should seek to create spaces of refusal' and 'don't thrust your politics down other people's throats'. This was a process which was created in order to undermine possible hierarchical relationships and "expertise" which could have led to us imposing our vision for the research or affecting our participants negatively. It was important, as part of our commitment to prefigurative tactics, to build in this critical function before we involved young people in our practice. Political theorists and arts practitioners shared their experiences with us - their successes and failures - and gave us a way to begin creating with and alongside communities.

After this we moved the project to Astor College, a place where we had already become embedded and trusted members of the community through two years of work. We had previously worked on two programmes of live art, led by artist Kelly Green, and were then able to make use of this as a foundation for our research. Here the programme was shaped and the skills developed, alongside the "objects" which would feature in the project – but not become its focus. The knowledge exchanged here and the skills developed focused on the aesthetics' ability to communicate our politics. Consensus meetings were used to develop the ideas and practices of the work and the participants decided that this should be the key method used as part of the practice. This allowed the participants to demonstrate the power already held in this community and to open this up to members of the public.

The third stage of this practice took place at Tate Modern as part of its social outreach programme: Tate Exchange. A convivial space of joy and play was created around a heavily decorated area designed to mimic a political "square", echoing the 'Movement of the Squares'. Political grievances were collected from members of the public, including anti-sugar tax sentiments and the rise of knife-crime. The group

then held consensus meetings to discuss and decide which themes would feature in a 'pop up protest'. This involved dancing and chanting around the space with placards, musical instruments and fancy dress. Alongside this, spaces for art production and political conversation were created which allowed members of the public to become active participants in the work.

This is a practice which seeks to undermine notions of expertise and curation. It is inherently prefigurative and seeks to foreground the power which is held in the communities and groups it operates in. It begins with freedom: indeed, as I shall argue, it is ontologically grounded in freedom. It is born of a critical relationship with social practice art and hopes to offer a positive vision of postanarchist political practice. In my descriptions of this work throughout the thesis I will occasionally swap between I/we and my/ours. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, this work was co-produced and it would be problematic for me to claim ownership of it. Similarly, it would also be wrong of me to read in *my* political intentions to the co-authors of the work. My key collaborator throughout has been Professor David Bates, a prominent Marxist scholar, and it would be incorrect to attribute anarchist intentions to his work. Secondly, as part of our commitment to co-production and anti-hierarchy, authorship is intentionally left opaque and unclear. It is not important whose intellectual property something is, but that we produced it.<sup>7</sup>

The language and expression of the thesis form part of the meta-aesthetics which the research has determined. Rancière notes that art generates its own meta-politics and I will demonstrate that politics spawns its own meta-aesthetics. This is in the sense that aesthetics stands in for the symbols which ultimately delineate the boundaries of our possibilities. If we want to communicate with others, we are forever trapped within the confines of language and we can extend this to how we negotiate our existence in the world. As an example of how this principle operates in this work, you will find instances where, following Rousselle, words will be repeated and broken down in parenthesis: nothing is followed by the split (no-thing) and

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed discussion of politically engaged artistic practice see: David Bates and Thomas Sharkey, "Politically Engaged Artistic Practice: Strategies and Tactics", *Tate Papers* 34 (December 2020) 2020, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/34/politically-engaged-artistic-practice>, accessed 27 August 2021

representation by (re-presentation). I am not attempting to prescribe how you are to read this work, but trying to make clear the roots and meanings of the symbols I have to deploy. Nothing may mean ‘not anything’ in general parlance, and to some extent it does so here, but the root also presents us with a double meaning. I am attempting to highlight the lack of thingness, or *object* present within the word itself. It is pointing us toward another conception and one which helps me to destabilise its use. This is a similar project to Stirner’s and I hope this helps to make clearer my meaning when, following Stirner, I am forever trapped in the language of my opponent.<sup>8</sup>

It is necessary to explain how I am interpreting the word politics. Politics is used in this work to indicate two separate contexts. I am making the distinction between “big P” Politics and “little p” politics. “Big P” Politics here stands in for what has come to be understood as mainstream politics; the business of states, parties, and representation. This is an important field, but as an anarchist, not one with which this thesis is concerned – other than with its destruction. The politics of this research is more akin to how Todd May discusses micro-politics, working on and within the ‘lines’ and nodes of power relations.<sup>9</sup> Postanarchism profanes the unitary place of power – the state, the palace, the tyrant – and so my vision of politics also refuses this vision of power. Consequently, politics here signifies all of these micro interactions and, therefore, all of how we negotiate with the world. This ranges from the conversations we have to how we behave with our loved ones. This has at its heart my reading of Stirner, which is based in how he tells us to ignore the ‘spook’ of objective reality and to dissolve this into our possession. This sets the parameters of our politics and our reality; it can only be composed of what we encounter and interact with. So all of *how* we interact with our reality – separate from how we view this – falls into my category politics. It is for this reason that I am comfortable positing this research as political and do not share the anarchist rejection of the term. The convention the thesis follows regarding inverted commas and quotation marks has been developed to make clear where I am quoting, or making reference to, the

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<sup>8</sup> Edward [Max Stirner] and De Ridder, *The Philosophical Reactionaries*, 138

<sup>9</sup> Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1994), 96

thought of others and where I am indulging in “scare quotes”. It is important to me, as a critical scholar, to demonstrate that I am not comfortable with certain labels and categories - such as “developed” countries, for example - and these shall always appear in double quotation marks. When I am quoting or referring to the work of others this shall appear in inverted commas.

The structure of the thesis breaks down in to two broad sections. The first provides a detailed analysis of the conceptual work and the second introduces the practice and the findings of this study. This is not to say that this research works within the paradigm of political or social science. I am not advancing a hypothesis which I shall look to test or falsify. As part of the ontological and epistemological commitments of the work I reject this methodology. As we shall see, there is a meta-ethics at work here and not a concise and measurable ‘research paradigm’. The ontological grounding and epistemological process of the work have been arrived at through an engagement with them as separate branches of philosophy which are united through our meta-ethics. In the first half of the thesis, I present my reading of Stirner and the ontological focus that this has given my research. We shall investigate how postanarchism has conceptualised power and freedom and look to establish how these concepts can be *of use* to us.

With the conceptual universe of the thesis laid out, the second half of the thesis will provide an overview of the arts practice which I have developed in order to explore the theorising from the first three chapters and take the necessary step of translating it into practice. This will be accompanied by a discussion of the relationship between art and ethics. Original interview material from internationally recognised artist Tania Bruguera will be presented to investigate the question: why is the artists’ perspective useful? Bruguera’s contribution is the only interview which makes a significant contribution to the thesis and there are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, it has been through working alongside Bruguera that the arts practice presented here has been developed. Secondly, I am not looking to “prove” that every artists’ perspective *is* useful, merely that the artist’s perspective *can* be of use. Thirdly, her contribution is an interesting one and one which I believe should be looked at by anarchist thinkers. The final chapter shall posit my theory of postanarchist meta-ethics which gives the thesis its title: a politics of peculiarity.

Following Rousseau, I believe that postanarchism is an attempt at a meta-ethics of anarchism. A meta-ethics here being our ontological and epistemological suppositions, or where our ethics come from and how we arrive at them.

Postanarchism has gone some way to providing a satisfactorily negative, or empty, answer to the question of ethical process and I will present a vision of postanarchist meta-ethics which returns a similarly negative answer to the question of place, and the urgent need for this. By a negative vision I do not mean negative in the pejorative sense, but one which does not posit an essentialism or foundationalist answer to the questions of our ethics. Moving on from early stage postanarchism, I do not believe that ontology is inherently representative and, from my reading of Stirner, we can postulate a politics which is grounded in ontology.

In the first chapter I will present a reading of Stirner which forms the basis for the rest of the thesis. Stirner's unique is a vision of the subject which I will extend and develop as I believe that this is where we can begin to see the potential negative answer to the ethical question of place. It may be a contradiction to describe the unique as a conceptualisation of the political subject, as it is Stirner's attempt to enunciate what is outside of signification. His intention is to move outside of philosophical concretisation in order to destabilise essential grounding of the subject, and it is for this reason I believe that it is of use to postanarchism. Postanarchism takes seriously the hierarchal thought and authoritarianism present within essentialist reasoning or naturalism. It rejects the "traditional anarchist" view of people as essentially good-natured and disbarred from this reality by representation and power. As May argues, this 'allows anarchists to assume their ethics rather than having to argue for them';<sup>10</sup> or in the terms of this thesis, to return a positive answer to the questions of ethical place. Stirner's unique is the manifestation of this rejection of naturalism based in an indeterminacy.<sup>11</sup> His rejection of universalism and conceptualisation of the subject, beyond what can be contained within the statement "you are you", prefigure the poststructuralist and postanarchist rejection of representative subjectivities. Newman uses the term 'singularity' in order to delineate

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<sup>10</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 64

<sup>11</sup> Max Stirner, *Stirner's Critics*, trans. Wolfi Landstreicher (Oakland: LBC Books, 2012), 55

his development of this concept.<sup>12</sup> He is seeking to posit a vision of the subject which similarly escapes definition and determinacy and it is in this tradition that I situate the political reading of Stirner which is the foundation for my politics of peculiarity.

Indeed, for Stirner, the 'fixed ideas' which 'possess' us, such as gender, humanism, or morality, function to distract us from ourselves and any basis for a politics of which we can truly be a part. He implores us not to waste our time on these abstractions or, more accurately, not to hold over ourselves what he describes as 'spooks'.

Combined with his rejection of essential human nature, this places *you* as the revolutionary subject. Not you as proletarian, woman or human: simply you, elevated no higher than you already are. This is Stirner's rejection of the world of things, or objects. He both begins and ends his key work with the statement 'all things are nothing to me' and we can understand this as the manifestation of this rejection. Here, all *things* are *no thing*. The implication is that they are not outside of ourselves. From Stirner, we are left only with ourselves and how we are to take possession of the world we encounter. This is not within the bounds of bourgeois property relations where ownership guarantees a *power over*, but more akin to how property relations have operated for most of human history as a *power to*. This gives us the right to use, not to destroy, and highlights to us that Stirner's thought does not operate within an ethical vacuum.

For us to take possession of what we wish it is necessary for us not to coerce it: rather we must participate, posit, work with and alongside. This is the operation of Stirner's negative-dialectic, reversing the logic of Hegelianism and rejecting the spirit (*Geist*) of authentic humanity. For Stirner, there is no resolution to this: we are to take the world we encounter and to dissolve this into ourselves. This sets the terms of our political engagement as the *things* we encounter and how we encounter them. Stirner makes use of humour and parody to reverse the logic of Hegel and give us a way to practice our politics based in nothing more than ourselves. This forms the ethical nihilist commitments of this research and is the key component of the practice and ontological politics which form the second half of the thesis.

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<sup>12</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 35



Chapters two and three cover the conceptualisation of power and freedom respectively. These are concepts which should be explored together as they are the key concepts for anarchist thought and ethics. They ask us the questions: what are we to have dominion over? and, what are we free to do with this power?

Postanarchism takes the poststructuralist conceptualisation of power as key to its critique of politics: power is not held in a one place for us to storm, but is found everywhere. The implication here is twofold: we need to practice our politics everywhere and at all times, and if we are indeed powerful we must be careful how we deploy that power. Postanarchism has found utility in providing a critical function for anarchist thought and when we are faced with stories of abuse and violence within anarchist practice it becomes clear why this is necessary. It is vital for us never to think we have “finished the work” of being anarchists, or to settle into complacency over our organising. If we do so, we are in danger of using our ethical position to increase harm, not diminish it. Postanarchism’s task is to force us to justify our ethics and our organising methods, and never to idealise our politics or our thought.

The reading of Stirner I present in the first chapter outlines a vision of postanarchist subjectivity. Power shapes what this subject is and freedom delineates its boundaries. Poststructuralist thought, most notably in the work of Foucault, presents a dual operation of power in the formation of our subjectivities: subjection and subjectification. Subjection is how we traditionally consider power: to operate as a force of domination, operating over us to tell us what we are and what we can do. We are told we are naughty children, useless women, or undeserving poor. The limits which power places on us constitute our subjectivity through this manoeuvre - a hopeless and depressing one. Subjectification is the opposite of this affect, where we recognise the source of false statements and the limits these place upon us, and respond to them by positing ourselves with a positive vision – for example, we become feminists as opposed to furthering the oppression of women through our everyday actions. This begins to demonstrate why postanarchism takes domination to be, to some extent, a representation of essentialism and foundationalism. Essentialism creates the negative vision of *woman* based in an alleged nature and foundationalism operationalises this “natural state” as knowledge of *women*.

Postanarchism has put these ideas to use and the key question which chapter two seeks to answer is: what is useful in these accounts of power? The emphatic answer it returns: we are already powerful. The places an imminence within the politics this produces. We must not disregard questions of our role in the world as either colonial or debilitating. We must explore which lines of flight and nodes of power we encounter and evaluate which power relations are liberating and which dominate, perpetuating hierarchy.

Lines of flight here refers to the concept as developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuze and Guattari apply the concept to the assemblages which they posit compose our social reality. Lines of flight are one of the lines which form the rhizomes of power found within a mechanic assemblage.<sup>13</sup> Capitalism is presented to us as the socio-political assemblage of modernity, and it is the lines of flight which form the genesis of these assemblages and present the form of their transformation. As opposed to the other lines which form these assemblages, or the nodes with which they intersect, the line of flight is that which 'is an operation or a breakdown of a mechanic assemblage, and instigates a mutual process of becoming, by which transformations occurs'.<sup>14</sup> It is the possibility of transformation which is of interest to my thesis as this is where the possibility for political and ethical tactics which postanarchism is focused on. This is where postanarchist thought more broadly, and the model of practice presented in the thesis specifically, brings together the rhizomatic, intersecting understanding of power relations with the actions of power on the subject. As will be discussed later, the dual operation of power on the subject can provide us with a way to understand the positive creation of subjectivity through subjectification (see Power chapter). Deleuze and Guattari use the example of the Jewish flight from Egypt where the negative line of flight of the Jewish slaves – when seen from the perspective of the Egyptian masters, is taken and transformed by the Jewish affirmation 'we will change its sign, we will turn it into the positive line of our subjectivity'.<sup>15</sup> As the line of flight is the fundamental signification of an assemblage it is also where we must focus in order to account for power within a broader set of ethical, or meta-ethical, principles.

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<sup>13</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 12-16

<sup>14</sup> Edward Thornton, "On Lines of Flight: The Theory of Political Transformation in *A Thousand Plateaus*, *Deleuze and Guattari Studies*, 14.3: 438

<sup>15</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 135

This vision of subject-formation intrinsically ties ontology to this discussion. This is why freedom, and how it is conceived, forms an extension of this investigation. Stirner's concept of ownness gives us a consonant way to begin to look at this question. As opposed to liberal and republican forms of freedom, ownness is the grounding and beginning of our actions. Discussions of freedom which look at the false binary between negative and positive visions of freedom begin from a position of unfreedom, as illustrated by Isaiah Berlin's questions: 'who governs me?'; and 'over what areas am I master?'.<sup>16</sup> Both questions are underpinned by the assumption of governance. Ownness provides a tactic by which to reject both of these conceptions. If power is to be found already existing in the communities and organisations we are part of and plays a role in how we are formed as subjects, then it becomes important to understand freedom in a way which accounts for these actions. Ownness is the basis for this understanding and should be the foundation for our political practice. This gives us a view of freedom as being based in our ontology; this is then used as the grounding for our politics, and all that is left in the floating signifier is poetics. Freedom is exposed as an abstraction which only finds use in bringing the focus for our politics back to the role we play in the formation of subjects, both ourselves and those we interact with. We must not take this role lightly and the mode of political artistic practice I propose mobilises around this view.

The way that the practice accounted for this interpretation of ownness demonstrates how we might begin to realise an ontologically-grounded form of politics, and has formed the first plank of the politics of peculiarity. In our practice we became embedded, long-term members of the communities we were to practice in. It is vital for us not to impose hierarchical projections of "expertise" nor to use this authority to leave behind the communities and groups we operate with and alongside of. This is both a question of ethics and of efficacy. Short-term projects, or "helicoptering in" as practitioners, creates problematic power imbalances and, moreover, denies us the possibility of operating at the ontological level with our participants. Politically engaged artistic practice involved the development of a pedagogy in order to work

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<sup>16</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 177

with participants in forms of ‘embedded knowledge’.<sup>17</sup> This is knowledge which is inherently tied to forms of practice and works within the process of Stirner’s negative-dialectic, dissolving the world of objects into the subjective realm of the participants. To account for our view of power-relations, this practice involved “profaning” of hierarchical approaches to art, and curation in particular. Curation acts as the arbiter between art and non-art, or what we may consider art. The practice I will outline makes use of this to expose the operation of power and to demonstrate for its participants the freedom with which they need to operate. This will be founded upon the removal of the final object from the artistic production. In a prefigurative move, this shifts the focus of the work to dissolve the means and ends distinction, or the distinction between what is to be produced and its production.

The chapter outlined above (chapter 4) describes the move from theory to practice, investigating the political possibilities of the postanarchist conception of power alongside my reading of Stirner and the implication for how we are to mobilise around an understanding of freedom. The chapter that follows (chapter 5) looks to reverse this manoeuvre by exploring what practice can add to this theory. This will look at the movement from aesthetics to ethics. It will make use of politically engaged artistic practice alongside the work and thought of Bruguera to evaluate what arts practice can contribute to anarchist ethics. Only through practice can we put to use our double negative response to the questions of ethical place and process: it is in practice where these must be brought together. From Rancière we have the lessons of the ‘aesthetic regime of art’ for our political practice, where the removal of spectacle allows for the autonomy of experience and forms of political life to be grouped together. Both of these seek to undermine the potential split in the ontology of art – that between participant and spectator – and, more pertinently, in the potential split in the ontology of our politics.

The final chapter will advance a theory of meta-ethics which I have titled a politics of peculiarity. This brings together the threads of the thesis into a consonant – but not coherent – meta-ethics, which is an attempt to underpin anarchist ethics. This is grounded in the ontological pre-freedom of ownness. My central argument is that

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<sup>17</sup> Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (New York: Springer, 2013), 40

Stirner's negative-dialectic has radical implications for postanarchist readings of anarchist ontology. Through the breaking or profaning of knowledge in order to create knowledge (something this thesis has set out to achieve), we are able to give form to the creative nothing that is at the core of postanarchist ethical thought. The chapter will expand on Rousseau's ethical taxonomy in order to demonstrate the use of Stirner's unique and find a deeply intersubjective politics based in my conceptualisation of *you*. This is a positive vision of negative ethics. The nihilist response is the only way that we can avoid essential visions of the subject and foundationalist truth-claims, but it does not offer us something to do. Taking you as the basis for my ethical reasoning, I outline what happens if we are to reject structural reality and leave you only with yourself.

In order to actualise a prefigurative politics of the negative-dialectic, we cannot take possession through domination. Rather, we must *own* this in a manner which is *peculiar* to us. I use the term peculiarity as this is a more satisfactory translation of Stirner's *eigenheit* and is rooted in those things which pertain only to the subject. Your way of speaking, thinking and interacting with those around you are all peculiar to you. You are the basis for my politics.

## Chapter 1

### Max Stirner: “What am I to you?”

For the time being he is drinking beer,  
Soon he will drink blood as if it were water;  
As soon as the rest cry savagely “Down with kings!”  
Stirner immediately goes the whole hog: “Down with laws too!”<sup>18</sup>

#### Introduction

Max Stirner remains a contested and suitably opaque figure in the history of philosophy and anarchism. Although there has been somewhat of a revival of explorations of Stirner’s thought, there remains confusion over how we should ‘situate’ his thought and how we might find utility in re-approaching Stirner from within postanarchism. Stirner’s name can be found in histories of nihilism, anarchism, German philosophy and in the geneses of Marxism, but it is the repurposing and political re-reading of Stirner by Newman as part of his postanarchist project that has established Stirner as the basis for this chapter and my enquiry. Stirner is an important foundation stone of postanarchism, especially as developed by Newman, whose vision of radical individualism (perhaps radical uniqueness, with all of its inherent contradictions, would be more appropriate) has formed the basis for bringing together the epistemological critiques of poststructuralism and the ontological suppositions of current anarchist practice.<sup>19</sup> I maintain that Stirner retains his importance beyond postanarchism, nihilism and Hegelianism as his project of dissolution (*Auflösung*) offers us a critique of even the political projects which are inspired by his thought.

This chapter will bring together the re-reading of Stirner that postanarchism has posited and the political implications of his thought. This will serve as a form of literature review of Stirner’s thought and will follow a genealogical approach. I wish to explore Stirner’s thought in order to provide the conceptual tools that will be needed

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<sup>18</sup> David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 118

<sup>19</sup> Here I am thinking of affinity groups and what I would term ‘Peculiarity politics’ such as the Green Anti-capitalist Front.

for the rest of my enquiry. Stirner's thought has been misappropriated by anarcho-capitalists used to justify the fixed ideas to which he writes in direct opposition and I will use this chapter to re-establish Stirner as an important keystone in the development of anarchist ethics more broadly, and postanarchist meta-ethics in particular. It is necessary to explore how his work responds to the thought of his contemporaries and the prevalent debates during his lifetime, but also to look to how Stirner prefigures many of the discourses present within modern "culture wars". From the rejection of gender as a spook to the profaning of authoritarian truth-claims and foundationalism, his work gives us a solid basis for the discussions of ethics I will develop throughout the rest of the thesis.

Postanarchism has made use of radical re-readings of anarchist thinkers to identify the 'latent' content which may be of use to current anarchist praxis. Newman finds in Stirner an ethics of insurrection and ownness, and I wish to continue this movement to find what may be "useful" to postanarchism. This thesis posits postanarchism as an attempted meta-ethics of anarchist praxis and it is from Stirner, and the reading of him I develop here, that this position will be built.<sup>20</sup> This reading of Stirner will provide an escape from authoritarian truth-claims and essential visions of the subject. These are key to the theory I wish to develop. These two negations stand in for negative answers to the meta-ethical question of place and process; where we get our ethics from and how we develop our ethics. Postanarchism identifies the epistemological authoritarianism inherent within enlightenment liberalism as analogous to the oppression accorded to the state by the 'old masters' of anarchist thought: it is a diagnosis of a broader issue that permeates more than simply our political institutions. This is an impulse we can recognise in Stirner. In Engels' poem, which

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<sup>20</sup> It is important to note at this stage that Stirner is not smuggling in a form of covert universalism, or a normative account of his ethics. One might worry that he is contradicting himself, re-establishing a subjectivist form of meta-ethics through his assertion of the subject as the 'place' of ethical enquiry, but it is from what Stirner rejects that I am building my interpretation of postanarchist meta-ethics. The anti-foundationalism and anti-essentialism which I believe to be key to a consonant form of anarchist ethics more broadly, are based in Stirner's epistemological rejection of fixed ideas and ontological rejection of spooks. It is the nothing (no-thing) at the core of this vision of the subject which allows me to extrapolate a, potentially, social reading of Stirner's egoism – without a grounding in essential foundations and always in flux.

introduces the chapter, we can already see that Stirner is rejecting the inherent political logics, not simply their manifestations. He wishes to do away with laws, not just those who are currently in charge of making them. We might think here of Malatesta's refusal to name his attacker when shot, not wanting to become part of the systems and drives of social oppression. I want to look again at what Stirner's non-concept of the Unique and his negative-dialectic of the object can offer to postanarchist meta-ethics. From these positions there seems to me to be one area which is not sufficiently developed in postanarchist thought and now is the time to address this. Postanarchism has built an epistemological critique and I wish to develop this to look at how we should theorise a postanarchist approach to ontology.

Stirner forces us to look again at how we conceive of our relationship with all that affects us and all that we effect. Stirner's project is one which takes aim directly at any notion of the objective and asks us to think again about why things are important *to us*. If there is no structure to reality, how can there be a science? If there is no such object as "woman", what are the implications for women? To follow the course of Stirner's egoism we are left with an uncomfortable fact: if we are to reject what exists outside us, nothing (literally no-thing, or object) can be used as a justification for our knowledge. From this I have drawn the conclusion that things must be *of use* to you and I.<sup>21</sup> Science does not need to approach the "truth" in order for it to save my life through medical advances or engineering measures. The essentialised vision of Woman is not necessary for the women in my life to exist and have a clear impact on my life. Stirner takes from us all of our certainty and leaves us without the spooks of science, religion or politics to hide behind. This suggests to me that we must explore these ideas through practice, or praxis. To find out what is of use, and more importantly, what is not, we must "do" something. I shall take this as the basis for my enquiry and I shall explore these questions and how my reading of Stirner suggests a politics which we can recognise as explicitly (as far as this is possible) postanarchist. I will base this in the radical form of pre-freedom Stirner proposes, ownness, and look to develop a form of meta-ethics which is consonant with the negation, not merely a rejection, of the place and process of ethical formation.

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<sup>21</sup> I use these categories as they retain the emptiness found in Stirner's Unique.



This chapter shall situate Stirner as a radical emancipatory voice needed now as much as ever. Stirner's 'devastating assault on the philosophical tradition'<sup>22</sup> is one which is still pertinent especially in the face of growing discomfort with liberal politics and a return to radical politics in a context resembling those of the March revolution more each day.<sup>23</sup> Stirner's thought will be evaluated alongside Hegelianism, Poststructuralism, Nihilism and Existentialism in order to demonstrate that the ethical-nihilism he develops should be taken as the basis for any postanarchist meta-ethics. Stirner was a member of the *Freien* alongside other prominent members of 'left-Hegelianism' such as Bruno Bauer, Ludwig Feuerbach and Friedrich Engels and is often characterised as a Young Hegelian.<sup>24</sup> However, a number of authors have demonstrated the futility of categorising Stirner merely as a Hegelian thinker.<sup>25</sup> It is more fruitful to explore his links to the poststructuralist thought of the twentieth century. He certainly poses questions which Foucault, Deleuze and Lacan sort to answer, albeit indirectly, such as the epistemological basis for truth and the power/knowledge nexus. However, it is incorrect to describe him as a poststructuralist (much as Foucault rejects the term). Stirner's project is anti-philosophical in nature and we should be careful to avoid the trap he has set us of not dealing with him on his own terms.

In a nod to the latent poststructuralist content of his thought, part of this project is to destabilise the meaning of language commonly associated with liberal-humanism and Christian morality. It is Stirner's work on subjectivity which is especially useful here as postanarchist ethics have been accused of latent humanism<sup>26</sup> and thin relativism.<sup>27</sup> Stirner's 'Unique' (*Der Einzige*) is an anti-philosophical non-concept

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<sup>22</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 40

<sup>23</sup> Here I refer to the series of uprisings in 1840s which followed in the years after the publication of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*.

<sup>24</sup> McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, 117

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Koch, "Max Stirner: The Last Hegelian or the First Poststructuralist" *Anarchist Studies* 5, no. 2 (1997), 95-108. or Widukind De Ridder, "Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians" *History of European Ideas* 34(3), 285-297

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Swann, "Are Postanarchists Right to Call Classical Anarchisms 'Humanist'?" in *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy* eds. Benjamin Franks and Matthew Wilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 226-242

<sup>27</sup> Benjamin Franks, "Postanarchism and Meta-Ethics", *Anarchist Studies* 16, no. 2, (2008), 135-153

which develops from his ontological assertions of ownness, and epistemological questioning of fixed ideas or spooks (*Geist*). In other words, Stirner rejects the normative truth-claims of transcendental<sup>28</sup> ideas or meta-narratives and replaces them with nothing, but more than that it is a 'creative nothing'.<sup>29</sup> This thesis seeks to explore the ontological grounding of this creative nothing and ask what are the implications for postanarchist thought?

Before we continue a few words on translation and etymology. Stirner's key work, upon which most readings of Stirner (certainly in English) are based is often translated as 'The Ego and its Own' and this does a poor job of expressing Stirner's intention. Clearer interpretations of this have been made such as *The Individual and his Property* or *The Unique and Its Own*, but, as with most of Hegelian thought the routes of words are very important and Stirner often makes use of parody and irony using this formation. The root *eigen*, or own, is used to suggest a property relation in the title (*eigentum*) and this is expanded to become the basis for the vision of radical pre-freedom, ownness (*eigenheit*).

This is not a thesis in linguistics or language, however, I shall make use of the language Stirner employs as part of his method. I hope by bringing together sources from within the German and English-speaking traditions we can achieve a level of clarity which some may find useful. A lot of Stirner's work is in response to his contemporaries, as evidenced by the collection of articles commonly titled "Stirner's Critics" in English, and I shall endeavour to explain and illustrate the technical detail from within these debates where possible. Historical and personal context is key to gaining some level of insight on Stirner's thought and an archaeological method will be employed to uncover the relevant personal details to achieve this.

To describe Stirner's project as anti-philosophical, certainly to critically examine it in the terms of a thesis on political philosophy, may seem like folly. However, the specific approach of postanarchist 'anti-politics' seems the most appropriate home

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<sup>28</sup> Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* ed. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 37

<sup>29</sup> A reference to *Toward the Creative Nothing* by Renzo Novatore an individual anarchist inspired by Stirner

for an anti-philosopher. Newman posits links between the Lacanian split subject (something we will return to later) and the politics of anarchism. He describes 'politics' and 'anti-politics' as two sides of a coin, or, perhaps, more appropriately, as the inside and outside of the same object using the phrase "'inclusive' disjunction".<sup>30</sup> I will argue that postanarchism itself is an "inclusive disjunction", one which mirrors Newman's assertions that 'Politics, at least in a radical emancipatory sense, has only a consistent identity if an anti-political, indeed utopian, dimension is also present'.<sup>31</sup> Anarchism, as a politics of radical emancipation needs the opposing proposition of postanarchist philosophy to fulfil its ethical commitments. As previously demonstrated by other authors, anarchism is a collection of ethical discourses, something which postanarchist authors have been concerned with,<sup>32</sup> and it seems apt that in the anti-philosopher we should find the basis for our position of ethical critique. Here is the true potential of Stirner's thought. His consistent appropriation of language and constant use of ironic formation to highlight the logical flaws of the morality, often implicitly – sometimes explicitly - present in liberatory politics is precisely what is required in order that we do not turn from the path of anti-authoritarianism and essential understandings of the subject.

## The Unique

The concept of the Unique is a good illustration of this anti-philosophical position, one which highlights the caution we must take when making Stirner's thought our 'property'. Stirner admits that he is creating a problem for himself by naming the unnameable and goes to great length to explain this disjuncture. He makes clear that 'Unique' is merely a placeholder representing the totalising nature of language where true description of the indescribable is foreclosed. Stepping temporarily into the paradigm of Lacan's thought on the unconscious mind, we may think of the problem of using the symbolic to represent the Real:<sup>33</sup> we may be able to explain to our

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<sup>30</sup> Newman, "Postanarchism: A Politics of Anti-Politics", *Journal of Political Ideologies* 16.3 (2011), 323

<sup>31</sup> Newman, "Postanarchism: A Politics of Anti-Politics", 323

<sup>32</sup> See May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* and Duane Rousselle, *After Post-Anarchism* (Berkeley: Repartee, 2012)

<sup>33</sup> For Lacan there are three 'registers' of the unconscious; the Real, the symbolic and the imaginary. See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* trans. Bruce Fink (London: Norton, 2006)

interlocutor what it is we mean, but we are always stuck within the language of symbols and representation (re-presentation) and are unable to truly articulate what is sensuously existent. The Unique is also an illustration of the creative nothing at the core of its conception:

...as I am the Unique, I know nothing of the duality of a presupposing and a presupposed ego (an “incomplete” and a “complete” ego or man); but this, that I consume myself, means only that I am. I do not presuppose myself, because I am every moment just positing or creating myself, and am I only by being not presupposed but posited, and, again, posited only in the moment when I posit myself; *i. e.*, I am creator and creature in one.<sup>34</sup>

To be both ‘creator and creature’ illustrates the illusory, shifting terrain of this concept, one which Stirner is positing against the individual of liberal humanism. The Unique is an “un-thought”, something which exists but which cannot be defined. This appears to be an impractical idea, one which is merely word play in order to avoid critique. However, definitions exist in order to set limits and often the subjects of this definition wish to exceed or experiment with these limitations. Raekstad and Gradin include the creative experimentation, outside of defined parameters, as fundamental to an ethic of prefiguration— a key plank of anarchist praxis – and we can look to cultural institutions for our evidence of this.<sup>35</sup> Stand-up comedy is a popular and growing form of popular performance, one which has only recently been taken seriously as a form of high art,<sup>36</sup> and is an art form which, by its very nature escapes definition. Stand-up comedy is also a practice which some consider to be potentially prefigurative<sup>37</sup> and one which contains a form of first-order practice ethics.<sup>38</sup> As a

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<sup>34</sup> Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* ed. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 135

<sup>35</sup> Paul Raekstad and Sofa Saio Gradin, *Prefigurative Politics: Building Tomorrow Today* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), 36

<sup>36</sup> Sam Friedman, *Comedy and Distinction: The Cultural Currency of a ‘Good’ Sense of Humour* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 24

<sup>37</sup> Sophie Quirk, “Comedy Clubs That Platform Marginalised Identities: Prefigurative Politics in Sophie Duker’s Wacky Racists”, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (Forthcoming)

<sup>38</sup> Sophie Quirk, *The Politics of British Stand-up Comedy: The New Alternative* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 27

form of prefigurative practice stand-up creates and profanes its definition through its existence. It changes what it is, through changing what it is. It posits itself and it is this positing which serves to create it – it is not presupposed, or within a definition, but ‘posited only in the moment’ when it posits itself.

Attempts have been made to tie down exactly what makes stand-up, stand-up. However, due to the flexible, constantly changing boundaries of the performance – something often played with by the performer – it is impossible to write a definition to which exceptions cannot be found. The name itself implies the performer is to literally ‘stand-up’ to be considered a comic, however it is easy to find examples which conflict with this from Dave Allen to Shelley Berman. Stand-up comedy is also often considered to be a live, art form, however, recordings of stand-up are still considered such; how important is the presence of laughter for stand-up? This is exactly the problematic of the Unique as presented by Stirner: ‘What Stirner says is a word, a thought; what he *means* is neither a word, nor a thought, nor a concept. What he says is not the meaning, what he means cannot be said’.<sup>39</sup> Stirner himself admits that this formation is ‘clumsy’, alluding to the fact that he is trapped in the language and signification of that which he is attempting to mitigate.<sup>40</sup>

### Young Hegelian?

In his work on the Young Hegelians, David McLellan describes *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum* as Hegelian in form being ‘dialectical and divided into triads’, and he notes that ‘particular attention is paid to language and the roots of words’ and Stirner is described as the last of the Hegelians.<sup>41</sup> McLellan is careful to distinguish Stirner’s thought from that of his contemporaries reasoning that only the form of the book is Hegelian, but he still maintains that Stirner’s thought is merely a thin dialecticism, albeit one stripped of a theory of history and class struggle. McLellan’s study is not of Stirner’s thought and consequently does not focus on the irony in his formations and the *post*-Hegelian stance which this affords him. However, McLellan misdiagnoses

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<sup>39</sup> Stirner, *Stirner’s Critics*, 55

<sup>40</sup> Stirner, *The Philosophical Reactionaries*, 138

<sup>41</sup> McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, 118

the ethics of *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum* arguing that ‘the ethical sphere was left empty’ and this led Stirner to expropriate ‘Feuerbachian naturalism’.<sup>42</sup>

Stirner is what we may posit as an ethical-nihilist. This is not an ethical position of total rejection, but a denial of the ‘spook’ of morality which he describes as having an oppressive effect on the subject. The distinction I wish to make is between emptiness and nothing. There is not an emptiness at the core of Stirner’s ethics, by this I mean there is not an absence or lack, there is simply no object, no positive answer he can give. We are welcome to organise however we wish, to think in whatever way we want to, but we are forbidden from according this any foundation or essence. This stands against Feuerbach’s nominalism where, despite the rejection in his later work of a post-Kantian rational account of morality, there is still an ontology of human essence. This finds its form in the intersubjective realm, literally constructed between you and me, and is a positive answer to both place and process of ethics. Stirner develops his (non)concepts of the Unique and ownness to directly refute this approach. There is a similarity in how Feuerbach and Stirner dismiss the abstraction of freedom and the will, but Stirner utterly rejects the meta-ethics of Feuerbach’s idealised community. This is important for us as this minor distinction is the basis for the ontological approach to postanarchism I wish to develop. We must reject, ontologically, the naturalisation of our sociality and materiality: even when we find ways of organising and thinking which *appear* liberatory we must reject the potential idealisation of these formations. The most open consensus meeting, or village commune, holds within it the potential for authoritarianism and oppression, and it is at these moments of, apparent, victory when we must be at our most vigilant. Stirner gives us the conceptual tools to reject the potential truth-claims and essentialised visions of subjectivity and it this important distinction which McLellan misses.

Within the debates of Hegelian morality, De Ridder identifies the manner in which Stirner makes use of irony in his approach to his contemporaries, especially Bauer and Feuerbach, as he ‘ridicules the emancipatory project (and its implicit morality) of

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<sup>42</sup> McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, 119

his contemporaries'.<sup>43</sup> It is the word "ridicule" which is important here. Stirner's work often mirrors the form or use of language of his contemporaries and the tone of the authorial voice is often flippant and sarcastic. Stirner takes the logic of Hegelianism to its extreme and Socratically exposes any potential contradictions. Stirner takes aim at the conception of "man" in humanistic thought – specifically that of Feuerbach – making use of humorous tone and provocative grammar. Taking issue with the opposing of the concept of man with the Unique, Stirner exclaims: 'You – Unique! What thought content is here, what sentence content? None!'.<sup>44</sup> We shall examine the content of Stirner's anti-humanism later in the chapter; it is the form of this work that demonstrates to us the manner of Stirner's critique. It is this use of ironic formation which he employs as analysis that begins to show how, far from being 'the last Hegelian', Stirner is Hegelianism's great opponent. This is not to totally dismiss the links between Stirner and Hegelian philosophy (to do so would strip the content of its meaning) but we should see Stirner as similar to the anti-political inclusive disjunction of Newman. Stirner is, to paraphrase Newman, the anti-philosophical, perhaps utopian, consistent identity against which Hegelianism, and perhaps Materialism more broadly (certainly as an ethical framework) form their consistent identities. Stirner is the outside which defines the limits, and articulates the contents of the inside.

This does not mean that we can simply dismiss Stirner as the "antithesis" to Hegel's "thesis". Stirner makes clear that any attempt to resolve the distinction between thought and being is folly: 'reason seeks itself, only troubles itself about itself, loves only itself – or rather, since it is not even an Object to itself – does not love itself but simply is with itself'.<sup>45</sup> Here Stirner is refusing the metaphysics of Hegelianism, something which is necessary for the creation of his non-concept, the Unique. This formal, ontological divide, where Stirner addresses the basis for human spirit (*Geist*) or essence, and Cartesian dualism, demonstrates that it is not useful, nor reasonable to assess Stirner as 'the last Hegelian'. Stirner's refutation of Hegel's dialectic of

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<sup>43</sup> Widukind De Ridder, "The End of Philosophy" in *Max Stirner* ed. Saul Newman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 154

<sup>44</sup> Stirner, *Stirner's Critics*, 59

<sup>45</sup> Max Stirner, "Art and Religion" in *The Young Hegelians* trans. Lawrence Stepelevich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 334

‘absolute spirit’ and the Object is based in the rejection of this developmental ontology. For Stirner, there is no *telos* or guiding principle in ontology.

De Ridder identifies in Stirner a denunciation of Hegel as ‘the relation between thought and being is, in his opinion, a metaphysical question and any attempt to find a new solution for it, or to criticise it philosophically, will inevitably fail’.<sup>46</sup> So while for Hegel we can overcome alienation through sublimating the object/subject dichotomy, for Stirner this must involve a negation through the dissolving of the objective into the subjective. This is an important distinction for it is in this rejection of Hegel where we begin to see the negative-dialectic, something covered below. What is important here is that this demarcates the key move away from Hegelian thought: Stirner is knowingly using this language and these formulations in order to undermine them. He does not attempt to redefine the discourse or to advance a new one, his project is one of total destruction.<sup>47</sup> Stirner here is able to step outside of the debates of left-Hegelianism viewing it as inherently foundational, and it is this that distinguishes him as interesting for our postanarchist meta-ethics. Stirner denies any solid base from where we might find a positive answer to the question of where our ethics come from. It is also this that demonstrates how Stirner’s ethical-nihilism steps outside of the bounds of subjectivism, or any form of critical ethics.

### **Egoism and Hegelianism**

In order to illustrate the distance between the thought of Stirner and the other Young Hegelians it is useful to explore how egoism is conceptualised. Throughout Feuerbach’s thought we can detect a rejection of egoism – finding its expression through the personal relationship with God in Christianity and the ‘earthly concerns of Judaism’. This critique of egoism and of the political-theology of mid-nineteenth century Germany appears in much of the output of the Young Hegelians and, in particular, in the work of Bruno Bauer and will become key for a contextual understanding of Stirner’s egoism and ownness. This is made clear in a letter to Hegel from Feuerbach where he states: ‘... it is a question of overthrowing from its

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<sup>46</sup> De Ridder, “The End of Philosophy”, 154

<sup>47</sup> De Ridder, “The End of Philosophy”, 154



throne the ego, the *self* in general, which, especially since the beginning of Christianity, has dominated the world'.<sup>48</sup> Feuerbach's *Thought's on Death and Immortality (Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit)* is his first major contribution, and one which highlights a commitment to religion that dominates his whole output.<sup>49</sup>

Through his Hegelian phenomenology of 'being-toward-death' Feuerbach attacks the egoism of the Christian church through its notion of 'personal immortality'.<sup>50</sup> This represents Feuerbach as an orthodox Hegelian, dependent on Hegel's dialectical-panlogism and his commitment to idealism.<sup>51</sup> Feuerbach elevates the Hegelian concept of 'love' as the key in the relation between the human and the divine, something Stirner would see as a 'fixed idea'. Indeed, for Stirner, any conceptualisation – such as that of panlogism - that connects ontology to any form of *logos*, must be rejected in favour of egoism. Feuerbach's removal of the rational for 'feeling' is furthered in his work *The Essence of Christianity (Das Wesen des Christentums)* where he states: 'The basic dogmas of Christianity are the fulfilled wishes of mankind. The essence of Christianity is the essence of feeling.'<sup>52</sup> Here human finitude is rejected as being projected through 'feeling' to the universality of a personal god. In other words, we are alienated from our essential nature by viewing this nature as belonging to God. It is through this personalisation of the relationship of both the finite individual to the infinitude of the species that a *known* and *knowable* human essence are fixed and the egoism which Feuerbach seeks to undermine is characterised.

Bruno Bauer, a committed republican-liberal, advanced a concept of infinite self-consciousness in response to Feuerbach as part of his development of 'a theory of

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<sup>48</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach in Warren Breckman, *Marx, The Young Hegelians and the Origins of Radical Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1

<sup>49</sup> McLellan, *Marx and the Young Hegelians*, 85

<sup>50</sup> Feuerbach in Widukind De Ridder, "Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians: A re-assessment", *History of European Ideas* 34, no. 3 (2008), 286

<sup>51</sup> This is a view which would not sit well with orthodox Marxists, however the themes of the theological relation of the subject and human finitude are all present in the determinism of his later work.

<sup>52</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, xix in McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, 88

popular sovereignty and citizenship.<sup>53</sup> Bauer's project was an intended continuation, not a re-appropriation, of the objectives of the French revolution and represented a 'culmination' of Kant and Hegel's 'transcendental project'.<sup>54</sup> His work has the stated aim of creating a republic that operates in opposition to liberalism and socialism which 'translated freedom into particularistic interests' and disposed of 'universal freedom'.<sup>55</sup> This was to be achieved through a triumph over egoism by the "true" universality of universal freedom. Stirner, however, asserts that the zenith of 'universal freedom', as advanced by Bauer, would represent the zenith of human oppression.<sup>56</sup> By creating the ideal species-idea as a universal, we ignore the individual of which being a "man" can only form one small fraction of our identities, or, for Stirner, merely part of our 'property' (*Eigentum*), or what is "peculiar" to us. He makes the implications for this clear telling the reader that he would be offended to be regarded as only a "man" or as a "Berliner" (Stirner's home during much of this writing) as this 'would have regard for one of my *qualities*, not for *me*' (Emphasis original).<sup>57</sup> There is no "true" freedom for Stirner, much less a universal one, and this is a fundamental problem in our political institutions where we are lost beneath categories such as "human" or "worker".

Bauer makes clear his opposition to egoism in his scathing attacks on both Christianity and Judaism; *Christianity Exposed (Das entdeckte Christentum)* and *The Jewish Question (Die Judenfrage)*. For Bauer, Religion represents the proclamation of a 'transcendental universal, which results in and sustains a narrow practical particularism'. This, Bauer posits, is manifested in the *private* attitude of religion.<sup>58</sup> However, for Bauer, the universal is a creation of thought, where self-consciousness is able to transcend into a rational, universal freedom. Religious consciousness refutes the idea that the self can be elevated to the universal on its own and Bauer equates this with an abandonment of the individual to egoism. Moggach and De Ridder demonstrate that Bauer's ethical idealism is reliant upon his conception of

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<sup>53</sup> Douglas Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1

<sup>54</sup> Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer*, 1

<sup>55</sup> De Ridder, "Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians: A reassessment", 288

<sup>56</sup> Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 135

<sup>57</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 157

<sup>58</sup> Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer*, 13

“autonomy”, one which has its foundations in post-Kantianism and aims to suspend the ‘particular interests, transcendental universals and reigning institutions that claimed autonomy over self-consciousness.’<sup>59</sup> From this we can see how Bauer rejects egoism as a representation of particularism, or the privatism of religious consciousness. He contrasts this with a conception of autonomy developed through his historical idealism and commitment to republicanism. In *The Jewish Question* Bauer equates Judaism with egoism, asking ‘[w]hat, in itself was the basis for the Jewish religion?’ and answering ‘[p]ractical need, *egoism*’.<sup>60</sup> Leaving aside the strong anti-Semitic motivation in his writing, Bauer makes clear his objection to egoism making this “self-interest” his key criticism of Judaism arguing:

Christian egoism of heavenly bliss is necessarily transformed into the corporeal egoism of the Jew, heavenly need is turned into world need, subjectivism into self-interest. We explain the tenacity of the Jew not by his religion, but, on the contrary, by the human basis of his religion – practical need, egoism.<sup>61</sup>

Marx also uses a criticism of egoism in *On the Jewish Question* where he takes political emancipation as a catalyst for the spread of the ‘sphere of egoism’.<sup>62</sup> Marx is responding to Feuerbach’s theological treatment of “the Jewish question” as it is religion – both Christian and Jewish – that gives legitimacy to its ‘egoistic aim and purport’.<sup>63</sup> De Ridder argues it is the defeat of egoism that ‘is clearly at stake in Hegel, Feuerbach, Bauer and the young Marx’ and it is this concept which is required to form an understanding of Stirner’s egoism.<sup>64</sup> It is from this that we can trace the arguments of Stirner; it is in his understanding of ownness and egoism that

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<sup>59</sup> De Ridder, “Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians: A reassessment”, 288

<sup>60</sup> Bruno Bauer, *The Jewish Question* (Braunschweig, 1843), 19 (emphasis added)

<sup>61</sup> Bauer, *The Jewish Question*, 21

<sup>62</sup> Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” in *The Marx-Engels Reader* ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 35

<sup>63</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* trans. George Eliot (Walnut: MSAC Philosophy, 2008), 298; see also De Ridder, “Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians: A reassessment”, 289

<sup>64</sup> De Ridder, “Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians: A reassessment”, 289

he develops his critique of Hegelianism and the entire field of philosophy in *The Ego and Its Own*.

We can begin to separate the manifest and latent content in Stirner's Hegelianism. Rousselle categorises postanarchism as the latent ethical content of traditional anarchist thought,<sup>65</sup> a position which I believe has merit and I will continue to use and develop throughout the thesis. He identifies the dual underlying meta-ethical "pathways" of postanarchism as what he describes as 'base subjectivism' and 'base materialism'.<sup>66</sup> What is important here is his recognition of the ethical-nihilism at the root of both positions. He describes ethical-nihilism as the underlying meta-ethics of postmodernity, a position which immediately underlines the importance of Stirner for this discussion. Rousselle's project is based in a Lacanian paradigm of enquiry which recognises the distinction in ethical content between what is manifest and what is latent, in anarchist philosophy. This distinction is useful to us here as this division also relates to the content of Stirner's thought and the epistemological 'ethical scepticism' and, I would argue, contra Rousselle, a latent ontological ethical-nihilism. Beyond the ethical commitments of Stirner it is important to state the form that this manifest-latent distinction also applies across both the form and content of Stirner's work, especially in regards Hegelianism. It is clear that the manifest content of Stirner's work is Hegelian in form and in its use of language. Stepelevich notes that little effort is required 'to discover that Stirner enjoyed a deep and lengthy familiarity with the philosophical ideas of both Hegel and his followers'<sup>67</sup> and that Stirner's writing is in response to the debates within contemporary German philosophy broadly and Hegelianism in particular is no secret.

Stirner's writing is often addressing specific authors or themes from within this. For example, in *Stirner's Critics* he addresses Bauer and Feuerbach by name; in "Art and Religion" he is dismissing philosophy from Hegel's dialectic triad 'art-religion-philosophy' (*Kunst-Religion-Philosophy*) and begins *The Ego and Its Own* with an ironic formation which pokes fun at both Bauer and Feuerbach: after quoting both

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<sup>65</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 33

<sup>66</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 73

<sup>67</sup> Lawrence Stepelevich, "Max Stirner as Hegelian" *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1985), 602

authors on “man” Stirner compels us to ‘take a more careful look at this supreme being and this new discovery’.<sup>68</sup> My argument here is that Stirner’s manifest content is Hegelianism, but the latent content is his radical anti-philosophy – as paradoxical as that sounds, much as Newman constructs a conceptualisation of the subject which is based around the ‘paradoxical outside’ of subjectivity,<sup>69</sup> or the creative nothing which creates itself in Stirnean terms. The latent and manifest content of Stirner’s thought are interconnected and demark the limitations of each other. Without the specific Hegelian context, far from merely misunderstanding his meaning, the project of dissolving which Stirner is involved in is impossible. As Freud posits, it is impossible to separate the form and content of dreams, as what is lost in content is re-expressed in form, the same can be said of Stirner’s writing. This is important for a number of reasons, firstly, the nature of Stirner’s writing – using ‘his opponent’s language’ – can be, as we shall see, appropriated for political projects which we can say with some certainty do not meet the commitments of ethical-nihilism. Secondly, the manifest content of his work offers an explanation for authors such as McLellan situating Stirner outside of this paradigm. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, in order to establish the importance of Stirner to anarchist thought we need to explore the specific nature of his critique and to bring together the existing postanarchist and anarchist readings of Stirner in a way which is of use to anarchist praxis. Stirner’s egoism is a defence of particularism and a rejection of the authoritarian truth-claims of universalism and the essential vision of the subject of Bauer’s autonomy.

## **Newman and Stirner**

Newman and De Ridder have both offered good accounts of Stirner’s thought. Newman has utilised the political project of Stirner to find a philosophical basis for the postanarchist critique of foundationalism and essentialism. Newman uses the Unique to scaffold his postanarchist theory of the subject – the singularity. Newman removes the Unique from a thin, liberal conception of the individual which gives birth to an identity politics and its desire for recognition at the table of neoliberalism. He

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<sup>68</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 11

<sup>69</sup> Saul Newman, *Unstable Universalities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016)

identifies in Stirner the anti-essentialism that dominates poststructuralist enquiry and how this is also directed at 'liberal political regimes' and the ways in which they have 'constructed certain figures of the individual as bearers of rights, who were supposedly free, or needed to be freed, and yet we, through these fictions were tied ever more tightly to the state'.<sup>70</sup> Newman brings together ontological nihilism with epistemological nihilism and uses this for his political end – postanarchism as a basis for liberatory politics. De Ridder gives us access to a reading of Stirner which is, possibly, more appropriate for this postanarchist vision of the subject. De Ridder takes a close reading of Stirner from within Hegelian thought and identifies some key clarifications and themes. For Newman, egoism and ownness are synonyms, for De Ridder egoism is the method Stirner suggests we follow in order to achieve ownness. De Ridder also places greater emphasis on the use of irony and humour in Stirner's writing and, perhaps most importantly, gives us a reading of Stirner's negative-dialectic: the rejection of the subject grounded ontologically in an objective reality.

Newman does identify the ontological implications of Stirner's conception of ownness, and does posit this within a 'philosophy of egoism',<sup>71</sup> however, he fails to observe how ownness and egoism relate to each other and to the liberal concepts of freedom and autonomy. De Ridder argues that egoism, philosophically speaking, is an ontological critique on its own terms; it is 'the relation between the individual and the whole of reality as his [the unique] property'.<sup>72</sup> While not completely distinct from Newman's reading of egoism as a synonym for ownness, the attention De Ridder gives to the operation of egoism and its relationship to Bauer's republicanism provides us with a deeper reading, which has explicit links to Stirner's critique of the 'fixed idea' and therefore the anti-essentialism of poststructuralism. This is key as this dismisses the possibility of a reading of Stirner which merely reinscribes the Cartesian dualism of thinking and being - either I am thinking or I am not – which

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<sup>70</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 42

<sup>71</sup> Saul Newman, "'Ownness created a new freedom': Max Stirner's alternative concept of liberty." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 22, no. 2 (2019), 159 DOI: 10.1080/13698230.2017.1282801

<sup>72</sup> De Ridder, "Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians: A reassessment", 293

allows for the subject to think itself into being. This is the basis for the relativism which Stirner's thought has been accused of.

Newman's radical reading of Stirner is key for us here for a number of reasons. Firstly, and perhaps obviously, Newman's use of Stirner to scaffold a number of key postanarchist concepts places him at the centre of any discussion of postanarchist theory. Newman uses Stirner to add an anarchist voice to the critiques employed by poststructuralist authors. As opposed to De Ridder, Newman's use of Stirner is strictly political and this has led to the problems I outline below. However, by tying Stirner's thought to current anarchist practice, Newman is able to demonstrate how Stirner is useful to us politically, not merely philosophically. Similarly to Rousselle, Newman demonstrates the links between Stirner's Unique and Lacan's split subject. In the development of the practice and further theorising of the later chapters of this thesis these ideas, and the use of Stirner, have provided me with a consonant way to approach questions of ontology. It is not apparent how forms of participatory art can hold ontology as its basis, but the way in which Newman attaches this thought to political practice, and De Ridder extends this reading to find a coherent ethical-nihilism, gives us a way of working with participants which does not assume anything of them and avoids the inscription of essentialism or the promotion of authoritarian truth-claims.

Newman foregrounds Stirner in his work in poststructuralist philosophy<sup>73</sup> alongside his use in his work on postanarchism. I shall go into further detail on the issues with the political nature of Newman's reading, but these should not diminish the detailed and structured way Newman has mobilised Stirner's thought. In his comparative piece on ownness and freedom Newman uses Stirner to construct a theory opposed to, what he describes as, 'the anarcho-republicans' Ruth Kinna and Alex Pritchard. The philosophical implications of Newman's argument will be explored in greater detail in the chapter on freedom. For now, what is important is the manner in which Newman utilises Stirner against the arguments of Kinna and Pritchard. Kinna and Pritchard's work involved analysis of the Occupy Movement to identify 'post-

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<sup>73</sup> See Newman, *Unstable Universalities*,

sovereign', or anarchist models of 'constitutionalising'.<sup>74</sup> Newman accuses them of a conception of 'freedom dependent on set of normative conditions and ultimately on an idealised community'.<sup>75</sup> Ownness is applied as a critical concept, one which highlights the freedom offered by this constitutionalising as not post-sovereign at all; it is still a spook (*geist*) which is held above you (I choose the second person here carefully to mirror Stirner) and, therefore 'takes freedom out of the hands of individuals'.<sup>76</sup> Newman is mobilising the radical form of pre-freedom Stirner describes in order to demonstrate that *any* form of political organising must reject any form of idealisation. This is the rejection of *telos*, or, for Stirner, spooks, even within a form of political practice which is created, principally, to reject guiding principles. This is the shift from first-order to second-order ethics, or meta-ethics, which postanarchism is formed around. If, for Stirner, criticism cannot be defeated through criticism, or thought negated through thinking, then we must not allow our ethics to become idealised through a process of rejecting our ethics. If we reject *telos*, then we must not let even this become a guiding principle. It must remain a negative answer to how we should decide upon our ethical strategies.

The political projects and 'movements' which Newman highlights as potentially aligning with postanarchist politics are based in an understanding of opaque singularities – subjects which escape subjection – and which aim at insurrection (*Empörung*)<sup>77</sup> as opposed to revolution. Examples he uses include the black bloc,<sup>78</sup> the Arab Spring and the Zapatistas. Newman is writing to create a political vision which includes Stirner's ethical scepticism as its basis, something this thesis is also concerned with. Newman doesn't give an explicit account of the issues presented by the anarcho-republican conception of freedom, but those of us who have run the long consensus process and enforced the constitutionalising 'rules' are aware of both the problems engendered in this form of politics, and that this is far from the

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<sup>74</sup> See Ruth Kinna and Alex Prichard. "Anarchism and non-domination." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 24, no. 3 (2019): 221-240

<sup>75</sup> Newman, "Ownness created a new freedom: Max Stirner's alternative conception of liberty", 168

<sup>76</sup> Newman, "Ownness created a new freedom: Max Stirner's alternative conception of liberty", 168

<sup>77</sup> Direct translation: 'Uprising'

<sup>78</sup> An anarchist tactic, not a specific group.



only liberatory form of politics. Indeed, to suggest that to achieve a non-coercive or non-authoritarian politics must follow the premises and instructions of anarcho-republicanism would be to dismiss a wide variety of anarchist tactics and political possibility, which would directly contradict the inherently experimental nature of prefigurative politics.<sup>79</sup>

## Identity Politics and Ethical Nihilism

We have seen above that Newman does not realise the full liberatory potential of Stirner by not fully exploring the distinction between egoism and ownness and his reading also moves away from the consistent critique necessary for ethical-nihilism. Newman's postanarchism is based in his wish to rehabilitate the enlightenment project of universal emancipation.<sup>80</sup> This is outside of the bounds of liberal accounts, and Newman identifies what he considered to be the latent content of anarchism as a form of universal particularism, characterised by Stirner. My area of contention with Newman's political reading of Stirner is the arguments on what is described as "identity politics" and how Stirner would view this. I am not making the claim that I can, through some hermeneutical magic-trick, divine Stirner's *true* meaning – that would be a fruitless task. What I am proposing, and what I take issue with in Newman's application of Stirner, is the consistent use of ethical-nihilism or the negative meta-ethics which I believe is necessary for coherence with a rejection of essentialism and foundationalism.

Newman takes aim at 'identity politics' in his philosophical work and in his postanarchist writing.<sup>81</sup> He is addressing what he sees as a competition for third generation or group rights under, and within, neoliberalism. While I agree that to merely ask to be recognised under an oppressive and coercive system is hardly liberatory politics, I believe that this is a misrecognition by Newman of current

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<sup>79</sup> See Raekstad and Gradin, *Prefigurative Politics*

<sup>80</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 4

<sup>81</sup> See Newman *Postanarchism*, 30-31 and Saul Newman, *Political Theology: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 2018), 7

political practice. In *Political Theology* he takes aim at the trans community along with, what he sees as commensurate, identifying as a 'white Christian male'. The politics he outlines here is one where 'the identity being promoted is associated with certain moral position'.<sup>82</sup> Newman claim is that the identities being 'promoted' are what Stirner would see as 'fixed ideas' or spooks, i.e. moral ultimates which make demands above you. We can see evidence of this in what he terms as 'identity politics of the right' and in the achievements of the New Social Movements, from Gay rights to religious freedom, both adhere to his vision of morally constructed identities. However, where his argument becomes problematic, even potentially troubling, is the inclusion of what Richard Day has termed the 'newest social movements'.<sup>83</sup>

Even 'trans' identities, of which we have been hearing so much about these days, do not necessarily break with the essentialism of identity but, on the contrary, insist even more fervently on the 'truth' of one's gender, to which one's physical body must be made to conform. Moreover, the problem with basing one's political position and moral attitude upon a certain identity is that politics is reduced to a series of representable categories... this kind of politics has become a dead end.<sup>84</sup>

I agree that a politics which seeks only recognition within a coercive or authoritarian politics, such as in the neoliberal, or post-capitalist state does represent somewhat of a 'dead end'. I do not agree that this is the primary form of politics within the trans community or that the movements and individual political acts which compose this community can be represented by this sentiment. Moreover, this does not take seriously Stirner's project of dissolving in his '*Vergegenständlichungsdiagnostik*' (negative-dialectic of the object or, more precisely, comparative dialectic of the object). This denies the possibilities it presents for exactly this form of politics, one which at first glance may appear to be similar to previous incarnations of queer politics (that before queer entered the vocabulary of liberatory politics). However, I would argue that the nature of 'queer' politics, whether this is in the trans community

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<sup>82</sup> Newman, *Political Theology*, 7

<sup>83</sup> See Richard JF Day, "From hegemony to affinity: The political logic of the newest social movements." *Cultural studies* 18, no. 5 (2004): 716-748

<sup>84</sup> Newman, *Political Theology*, 7

or in the disabled community within the field of crip-queer theory, found within these movements and communities often shares the logic of affinity and seeks a breakdown, or dissolving, of the categorisations of themselves. Far from re-affirming moral categories of identity, radical trans politics and non-binary gender positions can be seen as 'not presupposed, but posited'.<sup>85</sup>

These movements are what I would term the politics of peculiarity. Moving beyond the singular identities, analogous with the liberal individual, seek to involve other marginalised subjects along affinity logic and to rupture the symbolic system which creates and normalises them. This is a refutation of the singular place of power, something similar to how Newman himself conceives of insurrection, acknowledging the power-knowledge nexus and productive nature of power (as covered in the chapter on Power) and encourages the subjectification process described by Foucault and expanded upon by Newman himself. A good example of this is the use of race as a critical concept. If we accept that race is socially contingent and is not part of some "natural order" or is in anyway "scientifically proven" and that there is nothing naturally or essentially occurring which forms as a unitary group all that may be termed 'black', 'white' and so on, the only use it may have is to dissolve itself. I am not denying the right of people of colour to their culture when defined along racial lines (here we can think of 'Music of Black Origin' or 'Jewish History') but that these applications exist to define against the dominant or hegemonic-dominant group. It is for this reason we can talk about the existence of 'black culture' but not satisfactorily point to 'white culture'. Stirner's non-concept, one which exists in order to determine 'its own predicates and is not guided by any general ideal or essence'<sup>86</sup> which is dissolving the subject-object dualism, not merely sublating it, is consistent with the use of these forms of identity in their perversion and destruction. This is similar to the 'parody' which Butler describes in *Gender Trouble*.<sup>87</sup>

Newman's reading is remarkably similar to Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where both the master and the slave are seeking

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<sup>85</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 135 (This distinction is discussed above on page 27).

<sup>86</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*

<sup>87</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 163

recognition. For Hegel, the battle between slave and master are struggles for recognition and the creation of freedom through this opposition. Kohn argues that 'ultimately Hegel wants to show that the problem of self-certainty can be solved only by reciprocal recognition and reciprocal recognition can be achieved only by agents who identify with their universal (rational) selves'.<sup>88</sup> This is comparable with Newman's description of identity politics and trans identities, where trans identities only reaffirm the gender norms they 'seek' to undermine. For Newman this process reveals how trans identities are a composite of universalism and rationalism which seeks a changing of conditions, not freedom from them. Stirner is critical of this dialectical reasoning and he develops his *Vergegenständlichungsdiagnostik* of egoism as an ironic parody of Hegelian logic and, through this manoeuvre, exposes the *teleological* or religious content of this thought.<sup>89</sup> Stirner's project of dissolving the objective world into the 'possession' of the subject is the reverse of this logic through insurrection, or people's dissatisfaction with themselves. An example of this process, and one where we can link Stirner's thought with decolonial projects, is in Frederick Douglass's accounts of his fight with the slave breaker Edward Covey. Kohn has demonstrated the importance of this event in developing Douglass's freedom – here we might read ownness – from his fight and, more importantly, an analysis of these events. Similar to Stirner, Douglass is inverting the logic of Hegel. In Hegel's version of the master-slave dialectic one opponent prefers the rationality of his interlocutor to death, and submits to this. Whereas in 'Douglass's version, the slave prefers death and thereby achieves freedom'.<sup>90</sup>

Newman never makes clear the distinction between egoism and ownness in Stirner's writing and this illustrates the key disjuncture which allows for his non-liberatory position on trans identities. For Stirner, egoism is the ontological foundation for ownness. This is why the two terms appear interchangeable in his thought. However ownness is a descriptive term for the owner (the Unique/you) which is opposed to freedom. Douglass expresses this when he describes how he dissolves his alienation, not during the fight, but during the night before where he developed the

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<sup>88</sup> Margaret Kohn, "Frederick Douglass's Master-Slave Dialectic", *The Journal of Politics* 67, no. 2 (2005), 508

<sup>89</sup> De Ridder, "Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians: A reassessment", 292

<sup>90</sup> Kohn, "Frederick Douglass's Master-Slave Dialectic", 508

feeling that 'life, in itself, had become almost burdensome'.<sup>91</sup> We shall return to the theme of alienation in greater detail, however, we can see here that the development of freedom for Douglass does not take place at the submission to the fear of death, but begins with his dissatisfaction with himself (insurrection) which leads to the awakening of egoism, which in turn leads him to the conclusion it is better to die than submit to the logic/rationality of the slave master. This is an ontological position based in the rejection of rationality and the metaphysics of Hegel's thought. In Hegel we have a positive vision of the subject looking to fulfil the promise of universal spirit, here we have the empty ego or Unique which can never "complete" (or conversely "incomplete").

Douglass describes this process as a feeling that all 'outward relations' were against him, including God and religion, and Douglass was unable to prey.<sup>92</sup> The objective, outside world is foreclosed to him, the world of slavery, servitude and the whip, and he develops from this his desire for freedom. Note here how in a similar move to Stirner, Douglass is not looking to 'rid' himself of Covey, but his violent break with the norms and conditions of slavery drive him to wish to 'become' free. Douglass describes attaining his freedom three years prior to his escape to the north and the legal freedom it promised.<sup>93</sup> Far from the development of universal spirit (*Geist*) through dialectics, Douglass grows an insurrectionary turn towards himself; finds an egoism in his rejection of the spooks of the world he had inhabited, and claims his ownness by taking possession of himself and the world around him. Stirner does use the master-slave relationship in his description of ownness, but does not give us an historical account. Here we can plot the development of these ideas in the writing and action of a prominent former slave and abolitionist. Indeed, Douglass's move from slave to owner of himself is the perfect illustration of this move. If ownness is to be interpreted as literally "self-owner" then the change in Douglass from owned property, or object, to 'autonomous subject' (I do not mean to invoke any Kantian notions here) provides us with a concrete example of this.

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<sup>91</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994), 278

<sup>92</sup> Douglass, *Autobiographies*, 278

<sup>93</sup> Douglass, *Autobiographies*, 286

Douglass's description of his development of this dissatisfaction with himself and subsequent rejection of Hegel's logic<sup>94</sup> forms the basis for my assertion that Newman and other postanarchist authors do not fully utilise Stirner's ethical nihilism. Returning to our earlier discussion of race as a critical concept, and indeed that of trans identities, we can see that this process which places Stirner's *Vergegenständlichungsdiagnostik* at its heart offers us a vision of liberatory politics which rejects Newman's thin reading of these movements. This reading places ontology at the centre of postanarchist practice and leads us to question how this may become what Todd May understands as a form of tactical politics. How can a rejection of any ontological grounding of the subject form a solid basis for liberatory practice? We must develop forms of practice which have this process at their heart, forms of practice which seek to undermine stable identities and morally constructed subjectivities through *profaning* them. For these practices to gain any purchase they must be formed within and from the communities which compose them. In a later chapter I develop a form of participatory artistic practice to explore these questions in greater depth. For now, we might think of how the EZLN became embedded in the local communities of Chiapas before they were able to begin formal operations.

### **Alienation, Irony and Spirit**

Stirner does not fit easily into the categories and histories we find him in. In anarchist history he is a totem of individualism but requires his own distinct heading as 'egoist-anarchist'<sup>95</sup> and he by no means describes himself as a "big-A Anarchist" in his writing. We read Stirner as an anarchist based on what he rejects – laws, the state, authority – not what he proclaims. As much is true for the Existentialist and Hegelian readings of Stirner, despite, similarly to the anarchist interpretations of Stirner, there being clear links in the logos and genealogy of Stirner's thought. Where we do see a fruitful line of enquiry is in his conceptualisation of alienation. In *Marx and Alienation* Sayers describes the existentialist understanding of alienation as being used 'primarily to refer to a psychological, perhaps even spiritual, kind of malaise which is

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<sup>94</sup> Douglass did not engage directly with Hegel, but is known to have read Feuerbach.

<sup>95</sup> David Bates, "Anarchism" in *Political Ideologies* ed. Paul Wetherly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 181

pervasive in modern society but not specific to it'.<sup>96</sup> Sayers' project is a comparison of the materialist and existentialist interpretations of alienation focusing on Heidegger and Kierkegaard with little reference to Stirner other than to discuss Marx and Engels attack on 'Left Hegelian philosophers'.<sup>97</sup> However, it is impossible to discuss the anti-philosophy of egoism/ownness without considering how alienation is conceptualised.

There are a number of reasons this discussion is important. First, Stirner's project of self-ownership is one of the Unique alienated through fixed ideas and spooks (*Geists*). These are to be dissolved<sup>98</sup> through the method of egoism in order to realise, or understand, our self-ownership or ownness. Therefore, ownness can be interpreted as the mitigation of alienation in existentialist terms. Second, the language used here draws us back to the discussion of spooks and spirits. Stirner's "spooks" are often mocked as a contradiction where, as opposed to profaning essential visions of the subject, the Unique posits a human essence.<sup>99</sup> This underlines a key misreading of Stirner, one which has not been given much (if, indeed any) attention in the literature, that *Giest* is translated as 'spook' as opposed to the literal translation 'spirit'. This is more than an aesthetic or linguistic point; as I have noted a number of times throughout this chapter within Hegel's thought spirit is directly linked to human essence. Within the context of Stirner's ironic presentation of Hegelian philosophy, it is not incongruous to suggest that Stirner intentionally uses this term in parody. Third, and related to this point, this leads us to how irony is mobilised by Stirner. I believe that irony is an excellent method for egoism as it is premised in its rejection of currently existing conditions. The form of irony undermines notions of true communication through language and any sort of 'authenticity' and in content it is a rejection of prevailing norms. It is important for us to contextualise Stirner's thought, but it is equally important to understand the role that irony has in his writing. Golomb describes this as the 'unmasking by means of 'honest', 'objective' convention, namely language'.<sup>100</sup> Here we can draw a direct

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<sup>96</sup> Sean Sayers, *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1

<sup>97</sup> Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*, 137n.

<sup>98</sup> Here we may read made soluble, or made to disappear.

<sup>99</sup> Bates in ed. Weatherly, *Political Ideologies*, 131

<sup>100</sup> Jacob Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity: Existentialism from Kierkegaard to Camus* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 16

comparison with Stirner's apology that he is using the 'clumsy language of his opponent'<sup>101</sup> or as Golomb perceives it: 'Irony succeeds because it uses the rhetoric according to which one lives one's life'.<sup>102</sup> We may use the language and reflect everyday norms in our ironic speech, but we must destabilise them in order for our language to be considered ironic.

Sayers posits two readings of alienation based in Hegel's thought: the materialist or Marxist tradition, this is the real focus of his work, and the existentialist conceptualisation as interpreted by Heidegger and Kierkegaard. Here, the materialists place too much emphasis on the objective nature of alienation and the existentialists too little. He notes that both areas of thought reject 'the Hegelian idea that in the modern world the individual can find reconciliation and alienation is overcome'.<sup>103</sup> However, what is key to Sayers' account, for us, is that existentialism is unable (unwilling?) to formulate an historical account of the self and authenticity. Instead, authenticity, on a purely individual basis, is the only measure of the overcoming of alienation, but without the objective nature of social creation 'any link between the spiritual and social aspects of alienation is thus severed'.<sup>104</sup> Stirner is also clearly engaged in what we might describe as a project of self-realisation, albeit, one which would view the social reading of alienation as beholden to fixed ideas and the spiritual as transfixed by spooks, or as a rejection of an essential reading of the subject: we are only alienated from ourselves, nothing "outside", "above", or "authentic to us" is there to be realised. If we are posited and not presupposed, as Stirner argues, then there can never be a category or standard that we can be held to.

My intention thus far has been to inscribe the distinction between the use of language by Stirner and the theoretical "schools" he operates in and this continues here. Stirner's project could be described as the individual overcoming alienation through self-realisation. However, Stirner's objective manoeuvre and subjective positioning are always based in an ethical rejection. In place of objective conditions, there is only property. Instead of self-realisation there is only (ontological) self-

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<sup>101</sup> Stirner, *The Philosophical Reactionaries*, 135

<sup>102</sup> Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity*, 17

<sup>103</sup> Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*, 5

<sup>104</sup> Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*, 9



ownership. There is no individual, in the literal sense – the individual is a spook which does not describe you and a fixed idea which stands in for all individuals – and in the figurative sense that the egoist individual is nothing, although a creative nothing.<sup>105</sup> Stirner uses the language of both existentialism and materialism in his critique. In *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* Marx discusses objectification or *Vergegenständlichungs* in a manner which Stirner addresses in his negative dialectic of *Vergegenständlichungsdiagnostik*. Marx argues that ‘the product of labour is labour embodied and made material in an object, it is the *objectification* of labour’.<sup>106</sup> Stirner engages in a direct reversal of this logic by dissolving the dichotomy between object and subject, or more precisely dissolving the object into the subject – what is meant by ‘making the world and everything in it my property’, claiming the whole of reality as my object.<sup>107</sup> Stirner does not dispute Marx’ argument that alienation translates as the individual making themselves inferior to its own production and the apparent transcendent power held by this objectification over the subject. It is the specific and materialist nature of Marx’ claim that does not go far enough. De Ridder identifies in Stirner that egoism is ‘the relation between the individual and the whole of reality’.<sup>108</sup>

The relationship in labour relations is mirrored in other forms of power relations as “I” can be ‘possessed’ by the object and as I do not own the object, I also do not own myself.<sup>109</sup> Moving closer to the existentialist reading of alienation Stirner considers the ‘individual’ as an alienated product which should, indeed must, be dissolved in to the Unique or “I”. Only through egoism, or the relationship between the subject and reality, is the whole of reality made property of the subject, thus avoiding the possibility of objects being held over the subject or possessing it. Moving away from existentialism, Stirner’s Unique can have no essence or spirit to be realised. The authenticity of Heidegger is what Stirner refers to above as ‘possessedness’. Here Stirner is resisting any philosophy or metaphysics of ‘subject-object’ he tells us that possessedness ‘lies in the alienation of the subject, or in my powerlessness against

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<sup>105</sup> Here we see the direct link in Stiner’s though to the Daoist concept of ‘no-thing’.

<sup>106</sup> Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts” in *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 324

<sup>107</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 125

<sup>108</sup> De Ridder, “Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians: A reassessment”, 293

<sup>109</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 259-261

its alienness and supreme power' and that only for the egoist 'nothing is high enough for him to humble himself before it'.<sup>110</sup> This is much more radical than either of the existentialist or materialist variants of alienation: we are being implored to make the whole of reality our property in order to avoid this trap or possession by a spook. Stirner implores us to accept that this is the only method we can employ to avoid this possession as to do otherwise is only a reinscription of essentialist views of materialism and the metaphysical, and therefore essentialist, reading of the existentialists.

This discussion of essentialism is also key to my second argument, that there is a basic, but important line of flight to be drawn from *spirit* in Hegel to *spooks* in Stirner. Both use the German *Geist* and it is clear that the latent content of the language is not equivalent. For Hegel 'finite spirit' is the human self and is not pre-existent, but historically and socially dependant. It is this spirit which is alienated through its externalisation and is then dialectically resolved and 'thereby raises itself to infinity, by grasping nature in thought through theoretical activity bringing about a harmony between nature and the spiritual idea, reason, and the good'.<sup>111</sup> While Hegel rejects that there is an objective, universal human nature to be realised, the social basis and construction of the spirit is, at its base, a vision of the authentic individual - just not one that is able to resolve itself. Stirner is directly concerned with this as his project, *contra* Kierkegaard and Heidegger, retains the subject as its ethical foundation, or place, only to reject *telos*; in Hegel's case the *telos* of absolute spirit and dialectic of history. Ethical-nihilism is premised around epistemological and ontological emptiness where 'truth-claims are pre-mised upon failure'.<sup>112</sup> Stirner directly refutes the ontological grounding of Hegel's spirit where he argues:

I on my part start from a presupposition in presupposing *myself*, but my presupposition does not struggle for its perfection like "Man struggling for his perfection," but only serves me to enjoy it and consume it. I consume my presupposition, and nothing else, and exist only in consuming it.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 261

<sup>111</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* trans. Thomas Malcolm Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 454

<sup>112</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-Anarchism*, 71

<sup>113</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 135

Stirner's subject is not an equivalent to the common mathematical conception of the number zero. For Stirner, the emptiness which prevents the possibility of being presupposed is closer to a blank sheet of paper which could contain anything (anything), as it is itself nothing (no-thing). This means that the subject is always in flux, conditioned – but not determined – not by objective conditions, but by the ontological relationship to objective conditions. Sayers notes that '[a]ccording to Hegel, self-conscious spirit evolves through a series of different historical and social forms' and by overcoming alienation through a recognition of this alienating process 'the self eventually comes to be at home with itself'.<sup>114</sup> Stirner rejects this as metaphysics as he is radically unseating the ontological relationship between subject-object. It is for this reason I believe that it is important to note that Stirner makes ironic use of 'Geist'. Hegel tells you that there is spirit (as in human spirit or spirituality) so Stirner proclaims that all must, therefore, be haunted and we must find and expose these ghosts lest we ourselves become possessed. This is clearly an ironic, even comic, parody of Hegel's thought on human essence:

Have you ever seen a spirit? "No, not I, but my grandmother." Now, you see, it's just so with me too; I myself haven't seen any, but my grandmother had them running between her feet all sorts of ways, and out of confidence in our grandmothers' honesty we believe in the existence of spirits.<sup>115</sup>

As opposed to the authenticity of the existentialists, Stirner deconstructs Hegelian logic and alienation through his use of irony. De Ridder has argued that the key relationship in *The Ego and Its Own* is coloured by humour as 'humour marked the relation of "der Einzige" to his "Eigentum" which marks the dissolution of any absolute authority of any "truth"'.<sup>116</sup> It is a well-established principle in humour studies that joking seeks to expose and undermine the norms operating within a space. The premise of a joke will, tacitly or explicitly, acknowledge the prevalent norms and truth-claims in order to play with them.<sup>117</sup> Interestingly for this discussion,

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<sup>114</sup> Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*, 4

<sup>115</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 35

<sup>116</sup> De Ridder, "Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians: A reassessment", 295

<sup>117</sup> See Sophie Quirk, *Why Stand-up Matters*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 33; Kenneth Lash, "A Theory of the Comic as Insight." *The Journal of Philosophy* 45, no. 5 (1948), 117

German playwright Bertolt Brecht makes use of alienation, or strangeness, as key to expose our ethical processes. By making strange, or alienating us from his performers' actions, Brecht hopes to move our ethical reasoning from our subconscious into our conscious decision making.<sup>118</sup> While Brecht is not directly addressing the operation of humour, Kenneth Lash identifies how this operates during joking. For Lash, humour creates an awareness of the norms dominant in a discourse by presenting them as outside or incongruous.<sup>119</sup>

In Stirner's *Art and religion (Kunst und Religion)* De Ridder identifies that there is a similar operation taking place. Here Stirner takes aim at Hegel's dialectic through this process of making strange. This is a text primarily concerned with the wider effect of the art of religion and the relation between the two. However, Stirner claims that art represents both the beginning and end of religion. It creates religion first through the foundation of the "ideal", but uses comedy to bring it to its conclusion. What is important here is not Stirner's argument with Bauer on the creation of religion, but the comic use of irony to probe 'into every holy area exposing the emptiness to which man should no longer hold.'<sup>120</sup> Irony and humour are repeatedly used by Stirner to distance himself from the formations of the Young Hegelians, while remaining within their paradigm. Indeed, in his address to Kuno Fischer he even goes as far as to invent a wife for Fischer whom he gives the name 'Kunigunde', a pun on a slang term for female genitals.<sup>121</sup>

It is also important to note that for Stirner the dissolving (*Auflösung*) of thoughts into thoughtlessness creates the property (*Eigentum*) of the owner. If thought can only be defeated through thoughtlessness, as opposed to more thought, then we must use practices such as joking to expose the authoritarian nature of social and political norms. Comedy is seen here as an end in itself, one which is capable of creation and dissolution. We can see the link here with Stirner's Unique, positing itself and erasing itself in the same moment, with the same gesture. De Ridder goes as far as claiming

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<sup>118</sup> Bertolt Brecht, "On Chinese Acting", *The Tulane Drama Review*, Sep., 1961, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Sep., 1961), 130-136

<sup>119</sup> Lash, "A theory of the Comic as Insight", 117

<sup>120</sup> De Ridder, "Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians: A reassessment", 295

<sup>121</sup> Stirner, *The Philosophical Reactionaries*, 9

that Stirner's use of the comic 'should be interpreted as exposing the outwornness of the whole of Hegelian thought' particularly as interpreted through Bauer.<sup>122</sup> It is not important to restate the argument in its entirety as its function serves to show the subversion of Hegelianism – something which has already been demonstrated above – but what is key for us is the importance which Stirner accords to humour and the comic and an end to be sought as part of the process of dissolution of everything into the I: '...it is not that the ego *is* all, but the ego *destroys* all, and only the self-dissolving ego, the never-being ego, the — *finite* ego is really I.'<sup>123</sup>

### **Prefiguring Poststructuralism**

In many ways Stirner can be seen as “prefiguring” poststructuralism in that he offers ‘the first epistemological critique of the way in which state power is legitimated through the nexus of power/knowledge contained in the dominant culture’.<sup>124</sup> Stirner asks why we should not be free to divorce, or to not marry at all, lest it make the mutual interest of the shared relationship – or union of egoists as Stirner would describe it – a ‘*sacred* relationship’.<sup>125</sup> One might ask if this commitment should not be a “sacred” one, prized above ownness or egoism? Stirner answers that this sacred or absolute ideal is held over me, against myself by a universal which is held as law which, necessarily, oppresses me. Consider forced marriages as a good example of this sacred absolute, where the “moral” argument is made that the subjects of the forced marriage should ignore their ‘private interest’ – which is considered a sin – and follow a moral code which owes nothing to the person it is being wielded over. We would struggle to find justification for forced marriages in contemporary scholarship, however we can find examples of the “sacred” being valued over the individual still in many areas of our lives.

Stirner implores us to reject these ‘fixed ideas’ and to love ‘within a selfish and egoistic interest’, to reject social norms as we are “raw”, “particular” subjects [who] want to love, because we feel love, because love is pleasing to our hearts and our

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<sup>122</sup> De Ridder, “Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians: A reassessment”, 295

<sup>123</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 163

<sup>124</sup> Koch, ‘Max Stirner: The Last Hegelian or the First Poststructuralist’, 4

<sup>125</sup> Stirner, *Stirner's Critics*, 64 (Emphasis added)

senses, and in the love of another being, we experience a greater self-enjoyment'.<sup>126</sup> This is an illustration that ethical-nihilism – the rejection of 'sacred' fixed ideas, or social norms – does not operate in a moral vacuum. Within a union, Stirner implores us, enjoy all that you can, treat this enjoyment as your own, and be aware that the intersubjective nature of your enjoyment precludes us from abusing this love, as it will then cease to be our 'property'. Stirner uses the example of work to further underline this point making the argument that '[w]ork has no merit *in itself* and does no honour to anyone, just as the life of the idler brings him no disgrace'<sup>127</sup>, which again appears to prefigure the current academic debates over the morality of work.<sup>128</sup>

The egoism of Stirner's ethical-nihilism has led to accusations of a latent humanism. Thomas Swann argues that postanarchist thought is underpinned, through subjectivism, by a form of humanism characterised by a commitment to self-determination and reason.<sup>129</sup> Swann categorises all of postanarchism as being based in the egoist ethics of Stirner and, for Swann, this egoist position is based in an *a priori* belief in essential human nature, or a positive answer to the question of where our ethics come from. Swann categorises Stirner's ethico-political strategy as part of 'egoistic virtue ethics' where an 'action is right if it is what a freely determined virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e. acting in character) do in the circumstances'.<sup>130</sup> Swann's conclusions demonstrate to us the importance of the ideas of Stirner and Foucault. More precisely, it is *how* these ideas are mobilised that is of importance for this discussion. Swann concludes there is a commitment to the freewill of a knowing moral-agent where Stirner writes: 'I am unique. [...] I set myself to work, and develop myself, only as this. I do not develop man, nor as man, but as I, I develop – myself.'<sup>131</sup> Swann does mention a defence from Saul Newman (whom he is substituting for the whole field of postanarchism), however Stirner

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<sup>126</sup> Stirner, *The Philosophical Reactionaries*, 9

<sup>127</sup> Stirner, *Stirner's Critics*, 65

<sup>128</sup> See David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2018) and David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (London: Melville House, 2015)

<sup>129</sup> See Swann, "Are Postanarchists Right to Call Classical Anarchisms 'Humanist'?"

<sup>130</sup> Swann, "Are Postanarchists Right to Call Classical Anarchisms 'Humanist'?", 239

<sup>131</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 319

himself makes clear that the 'self' in his writing is a non-concept, something which escapes signification – which he directly opposes to 'man', 'human' or, we may extend this to include, any morally constructed form of subjectivity. Swann here is attempting to re-inscribe a positive answer to the place of ethics in Stirner's thought. Stirner dismisses moral construction of the subject and suggests in its place nothing (no-thing). There cannot be a morally-determined nature grounding the subject, as Swann insists, as this is reliant upon a presupposed form of being. Stirner's Unique is built outside the bounds of the site of definitions of being. Stirner deals with this line of criticism in *Stirner's Critics* where he views arguments such as that advanced by Swann as wilfully misunderstanding him. Stirner's Unique is developed specifically to avoid this trap of understanding laid out by an analytical approach to questions of subjectivity. It is a category which exists only to show the 'nonsense' of categories:

...it appears as a completely empty and undetermined name, and thus refers to a content *outside of or beyond* the concept. If one *fixes* it as a concept — and the opponents do this — one must attempt to give it a *definition* and will thus inevitably come upon something different from what was *meant*. It would be distinguished from other *concepts* and considered, for example, as “the sole complete individual,” so that it becomes easy to show it as nonsense. But can you define yourself; are you a concept?<sup>132</sup>

Stirner would always reject the classical Kantian notion of freedom for its reliance on universalist and essentialist conceptions of the subject, becoming a “sacred” freedom. Stirner is developing what has been termed as ‘in a Foucauldian sense, tools to dismantle’.<sup>133</sup> Here we can see the beginning of the relationship of the ideas of Stirner and Foucault – himself rejecting Kantian notions of freedom on similar grounds to Stirner, but finding this oppressive sanctity of reason in the modern principle of punishment where positivistic medical norms assume the role of reason. Both Stirner and Foucault reject totalising notions of freedom, their critiques of essentialism both identify moral and universal structures and relations which are

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<sup>132</sup> Stirner, *Stirner's Critics*, 55

<sup>133</sup> Widukind De Ridder, “Max Stirner: The End of Political Subjectivity”, 143

spawned by them.<sup>134</sup> Foucault understands our actions as *inherently* political refusing to answer the question why he is interested in politics, instead redefining the question as 'how' he is interested in politics.<sup>135</sup> Foucault exposes the boundary between ethics and politics as purely illusory in his discussion of how we should respond to reports of oppression in other countries. He uses soviet Poland as an example of a situation where we could easily be drawn to saying that 'there's nothing we can do' as we are not able to 'send armoured cars to liberate Warsaw'.<sup>136</sup> Foucault explains how, through refusal or 'nonacceptance', we can take an ethical position and make it a political one:

I think this attitude is an ethical one, but it also political; it does not consist of saying merely: "I protest" but in making of that attitude a political phenomenon that is as substantial as possible, and one which those who govern, here or there, will sooner or later be obliged to take into account.<sup>137</sup>

These ethical and political ties represent, for Foucault, a 'technology of the self' which we can see holds similarities to Stirner's ontological pre-freedom or ownness. Both Foucault and Stirner mobilise similar ethic-politico strategies in their approaches. This is a conscious move to critique Kantian conceptions of freedom and autonomy. If, for Kant, freedom is that which can be only realised through an expression of autonomy based in an *a priori* relationship to rationality, Stirner and Foucault reject the *a priori* nature of the enquiry. They reject the reliance on reason and our ability to posit a moral code from this reasoning and instead move the focus to an ethno-politico understanding of the self which can only be developed through an *a posteriori* relationship with our own subjectivity, placed in its social context. This is a critique of epistemological ties activated through a shift in the ontological ground. For Stirner this is the rejection of freedom for ownness, and autonomy for egoism.

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<sup>134</sup> See Saul Newman, "Stirner and Foucault: Toward a post-Kantian freedom." *Postmodern Culture* 13, no. 2 (2003)

<sup>135</sup> Michel Foucault and Noam Chomsky, "Human Nature: Justice versus Power" in *Reflexive Waters: The Basic Concerns of Mankind* ed. Fons Elders (London: Souvenir Press, 1974), 171

<sup>136</sup> Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New York Press, 1994), 299

<sup>137</sup> Michel Foucault, *Foucault Reader* Paul Rabinow ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 377



Foucault's is a thinner criticism; he shares the epistemological commitment of Stirner, but does not address how ontology is key in politicising our ethical position. Ownness allows for freedom to be considered outside of the boundaries created by the categorical imperative. Kant is claiming that unless we deny moral law is based in truth, we must agree that it applies to everyone and for this to be true it cannot be based in experience. Stirner rejects this categorically and epistemologically, and alongside Foucault would find it rather difficult to agree to the concept of one, or hierarchically constructed, truth.

Stirner calls not for revolution, but for insurrection (*Empörung*) which aims to encourage the individual to transgress their own identity in order to address power relations. Stirner states that, as opposed to revolution, insurrection will result in '...a transformation of circumstances, yet does not start from it but from men's discontent with themselves, is not an armed rising, but a rising of individuals, a getting up, without regard to the arrangements that spring from it.'<sup>138</sup> Here we can see the links with the practices of freedom of Foucault. The philosophical ethos of Foucault is also predicated upon notions of the creative subject 'producing himself'<sup>139</sup> in a similar undertaking to Stirner's Unique positing itself as both creature and creator. Foucault builds on Baudelaire's ideas of the heroic attitude of modernity manifested in the modern subject. He asks us to re-invent ourselves and to explore '...the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying'.<sup>140</sup> Foucault is encouraging us to critically reflect on the limitations of our social relations and to understand the restrictions of our subjectivity as speech-beings. If power-relations work on an assumption which ties to an essential identity, Foucault's is a call to create a new politics which responds to this through a personal freedom, or an ethics for, and from, the self in an open-ended project that can only be engaged by the subject.

Stirner and Foucault extend what power is, how we find it, how it operates and, perhaps most importantly, how we interact with it. For Foucault, this is an

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<sup>138</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 279

<sup>139</sup> Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", in Rabinow (ed.), *Foucault Reader*, 42

<sup>140</sup> Foucault, *Foucault Reader*, 45

understanding of the positive nature of power in our social and political relations, and its rhizomatic networked nature; for Stirner it is the achievement of ownness through a process of egoism – or put more bluntly: 'I no longer do anything for it "for God's sake," I do nothing "for man's sake," but what I do I do "for my sake"'.<sup>141</sup> Stirner identifies that, through a process we may understand as normalisation, the state is able to rule *through* the subject. It is for this reason why we may claim the self – be it care of the self of Foucault, or the radical self-ownership of Stirner – is a deeply political concept. The self in Stirner's writing is not a unitary or transparent concept, but is closer to the subject in the work of Jacques Lacan – the subject radically split between being and thinking. Stirner's *Unique* is built on the premise of a lack of something, something absent in the abstractions which serve to create the normative conditions of our social and political relations. It is built through recognising that the subject is *the* creative element which is missing from the symbolism of language and interaction.

So, what the self is/can be understood as is key. Through Stirner's dismissal of the subject/object dichotomy we are given a clear understanding of the self, stripped back to its corporeal presence and the "property" it consumes through its intercourse with the world.<sup>142</sup> If the 'object' of the world is to become my property then it is through my interactions with reality that this process must occur. The political implications of this are not at first clear. Of course Stirner is not asserting an authoritarian vision of a world constructed through force, but through all that is in your power. This leads us to a conception of politics reduced to how we negotiate our lives with the world we encounter. Stripped from abstractions, the UN, or any political organisation we are not directly involved with, becomes nothing more than some people having a meeting in a room, something we only have second-hand reports of. It is we who create what the political world is for ourselves, we a fundamental part of it. As we posit ourselves we are positing our social and political relations: 'As you are, so you present yourself, so you behave toward men: a hypocrite as a hypocrite, a Christian as a Christian. Therefore the character of a

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<sup>141</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 282

<sup>142</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 282

society is determined by the character of its members: they are its creators.<sup>143</sup> We might think here of Graeber's assertion that 'the hidden reality of human life is the fact that the world doesn't just happen. It isn't a natural fact, even though we tend to treat it as if it is—it exists because we all collectively produce it'.<sup>144</sup>

## Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to establish the use of Stirner's thought to the postanarchist project. Building on Newman's work interpreting Stirner for a postmodern politics we have developed a reading which is based in the rejection of positive answers to the questions of how and where we acquire our ethics, or ethical-nihilism. Newman has established Stirner as the basis for a politics of insurrection and the rejection of essential categories of subjectivity. This is a more radical claim than is often discussed; for example, as early as the 1840s, Stirner rejects gender as nothing more than a spook, a fixed idea which is held above us. Indeed, many of the struggles of postmodern politics can be found in Stirner's output. Stirner is a suitable basis for postmodern anarchisms; moving away from critiques of power located in one unitary place to examine how the state is able to rule through us and the construction of our identities. Stirner's project is one which seeks to undermine both the foundational epistemologies of liberal-humanism and the enlightenment, and essential visions of subjectivity. It is of little surprise that these ideas failed to gain purchase in the political milieu of the mid-nineteenth century, but they respond directly to the discourses and tensions present within current political debates. The key contribution here is the rejection of meta-narratives and authoritarian truth-claims to centre *you* back in revolutionary political discourse. This is not the abstract universal "one", but the empty and negative "you". Stirner constructs his vision of the Unique in order to achieve this, something he tells us is not presupposed, but posited. You are not the categories which you may be placed in – woman, French, conservative, etc. – you are, simply, you. Moreover, you are you in the moment of your creation – you are going out live!

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<sup>143</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 188

<sup>144</sup> Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules*, 54

There are a number of interesting political implications here. Firstly, Stirner is taking away from us our comfortable defences for our behaviour. We cannot say that it we are simply a product of our culture or of our epoch; we are forced to acknowledge that we are creating ourselves and contributing to the construction of these 'spooks' and the reality which others inhabit. This is a liberating, but potentially daunting proposition and one which appears based in a form of authenticity or self-realisation which implies a "correct" or "real" self. Stirner is clear that this is not the case, subjectivity here is not characterised by an interpellation as it is only the owner who is able to create the content:

The unique is an expression with which, in all frankness and honesty, one recognizes that he is expressing nothing. Human being, spirit, the true individual, personality, etc. are expressions or attributes that are full to overflowing with content, phrases with the greatest wealth of ideas; compared with these sacred and noble phrases, the unique is the empty, unassuming and completely common phrase.<sup>145</sup>

This denial of essentially grounded subjectivity is key for how postanarchist ethics is to be developed and has shifted the focus of postanarchist enquiry. Stirner gives us a way to tackle questions raised by ontological philosophy in a manner which is not inherently representative. It is something empty, a blank sheet of paper, potential as yet unfulfilled. This is distinct from Hegelian logic where the division between subject and object can be overcome through sublimation; instead the divide must be *consumed*. Stirner gives us the negative-dialectic as the egoist method to achieve this. We must make the world our property. This does not mean property in the bourgeois-liberal sense where we have absolute ownership, supported by the coercive structures of the state and allowing us the right to destroy, but a form of property rights more akin to traditional agrarian cultures. We have the right to use, to enjoy, but without coercive force to maintain these relationships we are left with only what is in our power. If we wish for our loved ones to remain our property, then we

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<sup>145</sup> Stirner, *Stirner's Critics*, 57

must continue to act in a manner which they will wish to keep us as *their* property. The language here can feel a little uncomfortable, making property of our friends and lovers may sound itself coercive or authoritarian. However, Stirner's project is to strip the language from its morality and the fixed ideas which dominate them.

Stirner constructs an anti-philosophy which echoes and reaffirms the 'anti-politics' of anarchism. I am not arguing that all anarchist praxis must be based in a reading of Stirner – there are already too many reading groups and not enough direct action groups – but that the question which Stirner asks are important critiques for the development of our thought. By bringing together his ontological critique of the Hegelian project and the epistemological rejection of 'fixed ideas' Stirner undoubtedly forms the basis for the foundation of postanarchist ethical reasoning. However, his radical approach to freedom and non-coercive social relations asks political questions which poststructuralist authors are unable to answer. All liberatory praxis must have a 'toolkit' of theory in order to maintain a commitment to prefiguration and anti-authoritarianism. Stirner moves beyond rejecting liberalism's conceptualisation of freedom and equality, the social construction of norms, and the operation of power with - despite how I have presented it here - some incredibly simple arguments: *you*, as opposed to any class position or element of your subjectivity, are the revolutionary subject; you are you – in that this is an empty statement without the categories which are mechanics of the power-knowledge nexus; you are a blank sheet of paper, conditioned, but not determined by your relationship to objective conditions, and these 'objective conditions' can only be 'overcome' through an ontologically grounded freedom (ownness) which, to the extent they serve you, must be internalised and made your 'property'.<sup>146</sup> Indeed we may posit Stirner as the ultimate materialist: stripped of our epistemological foundations and ontological essences there is nothing ideal to hide behind.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> For example, Stirner has no issue with you attending Church or being a member of a religious community. He rejects the 'spooks' which hold these ideas above us and reminds us 'the whole world is haunted!'

<sup>147</sup> David Graeber, "Turning modes of production inside out: Or, why capitalism is a transformation of slavery." *Critique of Anthropology* 26, no. 1 (2006), 84  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X06061484>



## Chapter 2: The Question of Power

### Introduction: Why does the issue of power matter?

As for Foucault, I think that he completely underestimates the importance of separation [*la séparation*]. Among his disciples this tendency only gets worse. If there is now a convergence between “Foucauldianism” and “Negritude,” if Agamben relies on Foucault, etc., it’s because they all share the philosophical axiom that resistance is only the obverse of power. Resistance is coextensive with power itself. In particular, you begin thinking politics through consideration of the forms of power. I think that this is completely wrong. If you enter politics by thinking the forms of power then you will always end up with the state (in the general sense of the word) as your referent. Even the famous “multitudes,” which is only a pedantic word for mass movements (and in particular petit-bourgeois mass movements) are thought as “constituent” with regard to domination. All this is only a historicism painted in fashionable hues.<sup>148</sup>

The question of power and the debates around sovereignty which follow from it are vital discussions which are central to radical political thought, and anarchism in particular. Radical politics must find an axiom, if only a transitory one, on the locus and functioning of power if it is to stand a chance of answering questions around: what forms of current political power exist; how this is distributed (both, ‘through what means’ and ‘to what extent’), and how it operates. If radical politics is to offer emancipation as its goal, we must know what are we to be emancipated *from* and if we are to devise tactics for radical change, ‘what is to be done’ (Lenin’s formulation) about power? At this point it is useful to briefly outline that when I am discussing power this is not to be confused with the concept of authority, although in contemporary political discourse the two appear almost as synonyms, this is not the case. I shall address this in greater depth below when exploring constituted and constituent power, and the ever-changing and unstable concept of sovereignty. However, for now the distinction made by anarchist collective *Crimethinc* serves as

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<sup>148</sup> Alain Badiou, “Beyond Formalisation an Interview”, *Angelaki*, 8.2, (2003), 125

an adequate summary of the discourse in contemporary anarchist thought and its presuppositions offer us a way of approaching the topic of power from within current anarchist activism.<sup>149</sup> In their basic introduction to anarchism, 'To Change Everything', they assert '[t]he workers who perform the labour have power; the bosses who tell them what to do have authority. The tenants who maintain the building have power; the landlord whose name is on the deed has authority. A river has power; a permit to build a dam grants authority'.<sup>150</sup> This is quite obviously an over-simplification. However, it is interesting to note how contemporary activism handles the question of power and offer us a clear message: *we hold the power!*

If we are to understand how activism in radical politics has moved from "taking the power back" to developing an awareness to the productive nature of power and the socially constructed essence of authority, it will be necessary to explore how postanarchist thinkers have dealt with the question of power, and the work of the poststructuralist authors who have influenced this thought. However, there is by no means consensus on whether we should be discussing power at all, as Badiou asserts: 'If you enter politics by thinking the forms of power then you will always end up with the state (in the general sense of the word) as your referent.'<sup>151</sup> Here Badiou is intimating that understanding resistance and power as, in the Foucauldian sense, inseparable means there is no chance of emancipation. My argument is that in a postanarchistic approach to the question of power, and the discourses of power and sovereignty, using the non-reductive reading of the work of Max Stirner, we can find a conception of power which is useful, which goes beyond the false dialectic of power/resistance and which offers us the foundation for the topic of the next chapter: freedom - another floating signifier. I shall explore the problems with current theories of power within postanarchism and the potential solutions offered. The goal of the chapter is to provide an answer to the question: **what is a useful way of thinking about power?**

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<sup>149</sup> I am not claiming that the *amoralist* Crimethinc represent anarchist activism more broadly, merely that they represent a very public and certainly active branch of anarchist action.

<sup>150</sup> "To Change Everything", Crimethinc, accessed 6<sup>th</sup> January, 2019  
<https://crimethinc.com/tce>

<sup>151</sup> Badiou, "Beyond Formalisation an Interview", 125



Power returns as a key theme in the of postanarchist authors for good reason: the ethical processes which underpin postanarchist thought are reliant upon ontologies of the subject – much as many of these authors would reject the charge. It is the operation of power on, and through, the subject which finds itself at the centre of postanarchist ethical discourse. As I shall discuss in this chapter, Todd May and Andrew Koch reject ontological enquiry for a purely epistemological critique. This is based in the epistemological account of power given by poststructuralism which seeks to reject representative ontologies as essentialist and oppressive.<sup>152</sup> This is, of course, a position which this thesis takes as the presupposition of its enquiry, building on the postanarchist rejection of foundationalism and the ‘spooks’ of moral philosophy. What we have seen in the discussion of Stirner is that we must take this question of ontology seriously, and conceptualisations of power provide us with an approach which will give us the opportunity to evaluate the importance of these dialogues. If, for Badiou, politics of power will always lead us back to the state then my argument is that ethics of power will always lead us back to the subject. This is one of the reasons I am proposing the reading of Stirner I have developed from De Ridder, grounded in the ontological non-concept of the Unique and embracing the negative dialectic as the operation of egoism. If postanarchism is to be read as an attempted meta-ethics, then we must return to the question of the subject and how power is best conceived in a manner which we might consider ‘useful’. Later in the thesis the practical manifestations of this conceptualising will be used to explore and question the ‘use’ of postanarchist politics, and it is here where we shall build the philosophical underpinnings of that project. Being ‘of use’ within anarchist praxis has led me back to practice and activism, but without this survey and analysis it would have been impossible to execute any form of practice which could be consonant with postanarchist meta-ethics, indeed it would make it impossible to even arrive at the correct questions.

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<sup>152</sup> For a wider discussion see: Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 46; May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 72

This chapter will first examine the need for conceptualisations of power. As outlined above, this is a return to the base questions of liberatory, or emancipatory politics – who is being liberated, and from what? We shall examine how the structures of power intersect and give us the field of our enquiry and how poststructuralist understanding of the operation of power provides the process. This (I argue, ethical,) process is reliant on the ‘place’ of power for its basis and draws us back towards questions of ontology. We shall explore how postanarchism has tackled questions of power and advanced theories which focus on the epistemological deployment and critique of power through an understanding of power relations. Saul Newman’s discussions of ontological anarchy show us how we might begin to unpack the tensions and contradictions in these arguments and lead us to a form of postanarchist action. Postanarchism has contributed much to these debates, but it is Newman’s work on the ontological implications which takes most seriously the need to readdress our approach to the subject.<sup>153</sup> The politics I will propose in the later chapters of this thesis are based in the importance given here to the question of ontology, something later identified as important in our discussions of ethical ‘place’. It is important, then, to give an account of power which can demonstrate the utility in the poststructuralist critiques of foundational epistemologies and the need for a more developed anarchist ontology. This is something which I believe must be based in the ethical-nihilism of Stirner and expressed through praxis.

In response to the collapse of the Soviet project, the apparent success of the Thatcher/Reganite neoliberal programme and advances in social liberalism (gay rights, women’s liberations, the rise of popular anti-racism movements), Francis Fukuyama proclaimed that Hegel’s vision of the ‘end of history’ had become reality. The idea that we were arriving, through liberal capital and social liberalism, at the ultimate and complete form of social governance, which recognises the indisputable universality of the liberal project, now seems so laughable as to be suitable material in comedy shows.<sup>154</sup> However, these forms of liberalism have dominated western political thought since the 1980s. The effect of the so-called liberal consensus still

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<sup>153</sup> See Newman, *Postanarchism; Unstable Universalities, and Political Theology*

<sup>154</sup> John-Luke Roberts, *The End of History*. Pleasance Beneath, Edinburgh, 17<sup>th</sup> August, 2017 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abRWHHk4\\_KQ&t=305s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abRWHHk4_KQ&t=305s)

represents the dominant paradigm of western and geopolitical political thought and constitutes what is sold back to us as ‘the centre ground’. Indeed, the construction of norms is still clear in ‘centrist’ politics today, making claims of common sense which are ‘evidence based, not led by ideology, taking a long-term perspective to challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century’.<sup>155</sup> It seems difficult to argue with a commitment to evidence based, long-term thinking. This is the language of the enlightenment and of the academy. No one is arguing for a politics of speculation or short-termism, and this highlights why it is that power must be taken seriously as a concept for action as well as thought: *who gets to set the rules of the game?* These dual liberal forces have been put into the service of the centralised state and the globalised market and while bringing opportunity and greater freedoms for some, have also served to atomise our social relations and concentrate global capital into fewer hands.<sup>156</sup>

The above claim to a politics lacking in ideological presupposition is clearly designed to attract us to what *must* be the truth, cleaned from the distorting effect of ideology. Žižek demonstrates that this negation of ideology is nothing more than an ideological truth-claim itself (although he might object to my use of poststructuralist language).<sup>157</sup> We can trace the line of this argument on the separation of truth and science from polluting ideology in the works of Marx and Engels to Žižek’s work on ‘ideological perversions’. I wish to re-approach this discussion from the perspective of Stirner’s Unique, rejecting truth-claims as fixed ideas and spooks, but placing the negative dialectic at the heart of any discussions of ideology. The categorisation and interpretation of ideology as political concept is not the basis for my discussion, but it is useful to think about how these ideas are roughly analogous: ideology as ontological relationship between subject and epistemology. For Žižek, ideology is taken as being equivalent to the ‘quilting point’ or *objet petit a* from Lacan. Ideology operates to fundamentally condition how subjects are to relate to their environment and through the negative dialectic we see again the process of altering this relationship.

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<sup>155</sup> The Independent Group, “Statement of Independence”, accessed on 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2019 <https://www.theindependent.group/statement>

<sup>156</sup> John Milbank and Pabst, Adrian. *The Politics of Virtue: Post-liberalism and the human future*. (Rowman & Littlefield International: London, 2016), 1

<sup>157</sup> See, Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989)

This is an ontological relationship, acting almost as an *a priori* in our relationship with the world. I admit that 'almost' is doing a lot of work in the previous sentence and I'm prepared to concede that this would be an impossible manoeuvre: how could what conditions and creates the subject be what the subject *is*? This is a contradiction which is the basis for postanarchism's use, building on Stirner, of empty signifiers, or the 'paradoxical outside', to form their basis for the place of power's operation. I differ here from Benjamin Franks' analytical understanding of anarchist ideology. Franks uses Freeden's conceptual approach in order to distinguish the normative principles which constitute social-anarchist morphologies. Franks is using this approach to build a conceptual basis for his study in anarchist ethics which identifies social anarchisms as distinct from individualist anarchisms.<sup>158</sup> My proposal is that forms of anarchism, specifically postanarchisms, which we might consider to have egoism as their 'conceptual basis', may also fit within the category of social anarchisms. For Franks, 'ideologies are expressed through, and constituted by, words or other signs... (t)hey also structure responses and the identities of political actors'.<sup>159</sup> For our discussion of power, then, we must return to how these signifiers come to condition the subject and what role they have in the structuring of political subjectivities.

Žižek is making use of Lacanian psychoanalysis; something I will return to later. However, this illustrates the potentially pernicious operation of power. The incongruity between the claim to a lack of ideology and the positive assertion of the 'social market economy' is an illustration of the discursive creation of social norms. This creation of norms of understanding or *normalisation*, as described by poststructuralist authors, illustrates why this matters: who is controlling these narratives which, undoubtedly, have social affect? It is our social interactions and structures which influence how power can operate and dictate that we must analyse this from an anti-foundationalist position, which is a project begun by

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<sup>158</sup> Benjamin Franks, *Anarchisms, Postanarchisms and Ethics* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020), 29

<sup>159</sup> Franks, *Anarchisms, Postanarchisms and Ethics*, 31

poststructuralism and given greater prominence in the work of postanarchist scholars. The anti-authoritarian commitments of anarchist thought are dependent on this analysis of the distribution and operation of power. The anarchist claim for the primacy of ethics in these relations denotes the importance of the relationship between theories of power and theories of ethics. The creation of societal norms is synonymous with notions of morality or moral philosophy, and it is in poststructuralist and anarchist thought that this is at it clearest.

### **The Problem of Power**

Foucault, in what he terms 'societies of discipline', identifies the interrelated nature of knowledge and power, moving beyond the *affect* of discourse to examine how institutional power operates extra-institutionally. Foucault highlights the practices of subjection beyond the demonstrations of state force, such as public hangings or violent responses to revolt. He explores how these societies of control - which we are now merely 'post' and not 'after' or free from - redefined what was to be controlled. Now expanding their control, not merely 'treating the body, *en masse*, 'wholesale', as if it were an indissociable unity, but of working it 'retail', individually'.<sup>160</sup> Institutions such as the school and the prison are identified as places where bodies are treated 'retail' where even 'movements, gestures, [and] attitudes' are regulated through measures such as the panopticon.

Foucault's dyad of power/knowledge is a conception of power which is productive, in the Nietzschean sense. This means that the subject cannot exist, as subject, without the operation of power. Foucault denies the ontological grounding of the subject until it is formed through the projection of power and its operation over/on the subject. The vision which is accorded to power by Foucault is represented through an exploration of panopticism, itself a development of Bentham's panopticon.<sup>161</sup> My argument here is not that the prison is projected in to our lives through this manoeuvre, but that any exploration of power is inherently related to questions of

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<sup>160</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, (London: Penguin, 1977), 137

<sup>161</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham vol. 10*, ed. John Bowring (William Tait: Edinburgh, 1843), 4

ontology. In the panopticon a position is created in the prison from which one can see, but not be seen. This is designed to have the effect of creating self-censorship, as the inmate is never sure if they are being watched. It is not surveillance, but the threat of surveillance, which is the operation of power and domination. I wish to explore how this finds its modern operation in late modern capitalism and in neoliberal society. However, what is clear from the panopticon itself – as well as, but separate from panopticism – is the return to questions of the ontological grounding of the subject. It is an attempt to work within the subject's relation to the self. It is for this reason that Foucault develops his 'technologies of the self' as a response to this question of ontology and subject formation in his later work.

Panopticism has been used as a metaphorical representation of surveillance for much of the twentieth century and is still debated, although contemporary discussions are more concerned with data capture than with direct surveillance.<sup>162</sup> Recent developments in data capture, algorithmic analysis and software design bear close relation to the 'retail' approach to control. We can think of the way in which content and advertising is now "pushed" to us. The constant lure of "content creation" controls and captures our 'movements, gestures, [and] attitudes'. This enforces the rules of the game because these 'movements, gestures, [and] attitudes' are combined with the discursive operation of power to reinforce social norms, and afterwards a media is provided to both display the signification of these norms and for criticism and critique. For example, platforms such as Instagram provide a constant feed of visual confirmation of rules such as the "correct" way to shape one's eyebrows or facial hair. A platform for the user to demonstrate their acquiescence - or transgression - of these rules and comments and replies can be left to support or denounce this. This level of control is identified by Deleuze and is explored below. The operation of power through devices such as panopticism highlights the modality of control, the 'uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the process of activity rather than its end result'<sup>163</sup>: It is a focus on means over ends.

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<sup>162</sup> See Roy Boyne, 'Post-panopticism', *Economy and Society*, 29 (2), (2000): 285-307 <https://doi.org/10.1080/030851400360505>; Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1990)

<sup>163</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1977), 137

What this begins to highlight to us is the philosophical roots of the problems postanarchism is addressing. There is an anti-foundationalism within this view of power and an important focus on the potentially essentialising nature of post-enlightenment ontologies. This is to say Foucault, and other thinkers of “postmodernism”, provide for anarchist thought the basis for a re-assessment of which postanarchism forms a key plank. What Foucault highlights in societies on control, Deleuze extends into postmodern society. In examining this extension we are able to identify the philosophical tensions which postanarchism attempts to dissolve. The postanarchist deployment of poststructuralist theory is an attempt to transcend anarchism in a manner similar to the poststructuralist transcendence of Enlightenment philosophy.<sup>164</sup> Key for the poststructuralist move is the conceptualisation of power and, therefore, the conceptualisation of power must be important for postanarchism as both a body of theory and as a politics. Postanarchism is a political response to the philosophical problems of postmodern society: the breakdown of ‘meta-narratives’, the questioning of representative ontologies, and the authoritarian truth-claims of “science”. Newman argues that ‘[p]ostmodernity can be seen in terms of a certain approach to knowledge: it takes its distance from grand narratives, from the notion of a scientifically verifiable objective truth and from the idea that the world is becoming more intelligible through advances in science’ and that anarchism must explore these links between the non-neutrality of knowledge and political authority.<sup>165</sup>

The operation of normalisation through the structures of knowledge is inherently linked to questions of power and, returning to panopticism, it is the ‘gaze’ which is interesting to us here. The biopolitical nature of the ‘gaze’ is first conceptualised as part of a medical culture of control in *The Birth of the Clinic*. Both Foucault and Derrida use this concept to highlight the operation of power-relations *within* social relationships. The gaze is the representation of the unequal distribution of power in the relationship between doctor and patient,<sup>166</sup> much as it is between men and

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<sup>164</sup> Newman, *The Politics of Postanarchism*, 47

<sup>165</sup> Newman, *The Politics of Postanarchism*, 49

<sup>166</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012)

women in the 'male gaze' and between women in 'the feminist gaze'.<sup>167</sup> As a result the 'gaze' gives us a way of exploring the potential imbalances of power in any social relationship, but it also acts to highlight the subject-object relationship key to Stirner's negative dialectic. As a resolution to Hegel's master-slave dialectic the intersubjective observation and mutual confirmation of the gaze comes to be, erroneously, regarded as the expression of universal freedom.<sup>168</sup> Kojève understands that through 'viewing' the external object, and affirming together, we are able to recognise freedom in this mutual recognition. There is a direct relationship here with the vision of freedom which I shall discuss in the following chapter, but one which has Stirner's *negative* dialectic at its heart. For Stirner, the most we can hope for is the 'ownership' of the other's views and nothing more.

This is contrasted with the existentialist view, that the gaze of the other fixes us within our subjectivity, or alienates us from ourselves.<sup>169</sup> For Sartre, being viewed by the other fixes us as object within a level of permanence that denies us our existential possibilities. This is a position which is closer to my reading of Stirner, closely anchored within the subject-object dualism, but with the opposite outcome: for Stirner we are left with nothing but subject; for Sartre, nothing but object. My argument is that the gaze operates as both normative instrument and as fundamental in any subject-object relationship. As we shall see when we discuss how Deleuze applies these ideas to contemporary society, there is an assumption of first-order ethics present within the gaze. However, the gaze also acts not to affirm universal freedom, but to highlight the nothingness (no-thing-ness) present within the signifier *you* – as opposed to *other*.

The gaze here is analogous with Lacan's discussion of the subject's creation within the symbolic order during the 'mirror stage'.<sup>170</sup> The mirror stage is the age (roughly six to eighteen months) where an infant recognises itself in a reflection and its function is 'a particular case of the function of imagos, which is to establish a

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<sup>167</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*

<sup>168</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, (New York: Basic Books, 1969)

<sup>169</sup> See Jean-Paul Sartre, "Being and Nothingness", in *Central Works of Philosophy Volume 4* ed. John Shand (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 155-176

<sup>170</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 75-81



relationship between an organism and its reality'.<sup>171</sup> We can see here how this may be important for our previous discussions of ideology and I wish to draw further parallels between Lacan's thought and the poststructuralist understanding of power. For Foucault, these processes which serve to create the subject are mediated through the law's imposition on the individual creating the subject. Political power acts on the individual, in this case bodily, to inscribe norms and standards which are internalised and to create the subject. This is, for Lacan, a move from the 'register of accuracy' to the 'register of truth'. This is important for us as this moves our discussion of truth-claims from the purely epistemological to an ontological enquiry. The register of truth is constructed intersubjectively where 'the subject can grasp nothing but the very subjectivity that constitutes an Other as an absolute'.<sup>172</sup> The alterity present within this formulation will be crucial when interrogating postanarchism as meta-ethics, the intersubjective which forces us to consider the other (literally *you*).

Deleuze has critiqued the disciplinary mode of power described by Foucault, identifying 'societies of control' which move beyond the operation of disciplinary societies. The disciplinary societies detailed by Foucault operated within the 'vast spaces of enclosure' in prisons, schools, barracks and hospitals. Deleuze's critique describes societies of control which rely on open-ended, ambiguous networks of modulated control, where the structures of control move outside the prison walls or the boundary of the schoolhouse through technological developments able to 'help' guide us to the 'correct' choices. In our daily lives the 'freedom' of choice we have over which consumer group to join, albeit temporarily, is sold to us as a demonstration of our power and freedom. However, buying a pencil case which promotes feminist slogans, but which is produced in exploitative conditions, can hardly be described as empowerment or creating freedom.

This is what Deleuze highlights as a key differential to the disciplinary societies where the 'capitalism of concentration', centralising production, and property creating the complete enclosure of production in the factory is replaced with a move

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<sup>171</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 78

<sup>172</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 13

to 'capitalism of higher-order production'.<sup>173</sup> Here, we see production as "outsourced" to exploited communities of cheap labour in places such as China and Bangladesh where all of the raw materials and even the processes of complicated production, such as the components of modern smartphones, are no longer a part of capitalism, according to Deleuze. Instead Deleuze observes that capitalism '...no longer sells the finished products: it buys finished products... What it wants to sell are services and what it wants to buy is stocks'.<sup>174</sup> Returning to the smartphone, we can think of the companies who have 'sold' us these products: we very rarely purchase these finished products directly, instead we purchase the use of the network (bundled in with any number of finance packages) from our *service* provider. Apple, the second largest mobile phone company in the world as of 2018,<sup>175</sup> has focused on outsourcing the procurement of the materials and production of its iPhone, instead concentrating on its control of the market and potential takeovers of/from rivals. I am not prepared to agree with Deleuze that this is evidence of being to any extent post-capitalism. However, his manoeuvre sheds light on how power, and our understanding of it, has modified in response to the postmodern world: atomistic, networked, and affective.

Deleuze outlines how the sovereign institutions of the disciplinary societies have modulated to continue a pattern of domination, one that is no longer enclosed in their walls or that relies upon sticky notions of sovereignty. He highlights the coming market rationalisation of academic research – something which seems especially prescient nearly thirty years after its writing - and the coming of the *dividual*: we are no longer individuals, but merely 'the code of a "dividual" material to be controlled'.<sup>176</sup> David Graeber points us to the insidious way that technologies of simulation (information technologies) form the principal technological advances since the

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<sup>173</sup> Giles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *October* 59 (1992): 6

<sup>174</sup> Deleuze, "Societies of Control", 6

<sup>175</sup> "Top 10 Largest Mobile Companies in the World 2018", *Research Snipers*, accessed 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2019 - <https://www.researchsnipers.com/top-10-largest-mobile-companies-in-the-world-2018/>

<sup>176</sup> Deleuze, "Societies of Control", 7

1970s, forming what Jean Baudrillard described as the “hyper-real”.<sup>177</sup> Certainly within this line of thought we could make the argument that these technologies have made the move from simulation to simulacrum. In other words, computational technology and advances in fields such as virtual reality could be argued to be copies with no original. Graeber offers further evidence to substantiate Deleuze’s assertions that technology is, under the state/market, always shaped by the will of domination and capital, demonstrating the rise of technocratic and bureaucratic systems of control, but is careful to warn us that he is no ‘technological determinist’.<sup>178</sup>

From these examples we can see the way that power can be deployed in systems of coercion and domination: not simply at the top, in a unitary location ruling over us - subjecting us – but the power is distributed through and throughout them. Our relationship with each other is integral to our relationship to the state/market. What Foucault and Deleuze demonstrate is the way that the creation of these norms is instrumentalised, described here as normalisation. This normalisation plays a key role in the social project, used by neoliberal capitalism’s political-economic programme, in order to justify its hegemonic assemblage. The ontological grounding of the subject is placed back within the discussions of power through the construction of norms and morals. What is identified in both accounts is a critique of Enlightenment epistemology as creating these moral ultimates – what Stirner refers to as spooks – but, similarly to our discussion on Stirner, demonstrates that to reject any discussion of ontology as inherently representative actually increases the prospect of essential identification. What I am questioning here is how this might be explored and what a politics which responds to this might look like. This is something which postanarchism aims to construct. The underpinning of poststructuralist theories of power always contains the possibility for politics, much as its proponents may disagree, and that is what postanarchism, and this thesis, is addressing. We shall see how the ontology developed in response to the theorising of Foucault and Deleuze can manifest itself in practice, and then we can return to our question of

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<sup>177</sup> David Graeber, “Of Flying Cars and the Declining Rate of Profit”, in *The Utopia of Rules: On technology, stupidity, and the secret joys of bureaucracy*, (London: Melville House Publishing, 2015): 112

<sup>178</sup> Graeber, “Of Flying Cars and the Declining Rate of Profit”, 145

use. This conceptualisation of power has been deployed as part of the artistic practice which also forms a component of this research, and it has been in trying to explore these ideas that much of the praxis that informs the politics of peculiarity I propose has been developed. Without the critique of normalisation, I would not have been able to create a mode of practice which is able to account for the imbalances of power and approach them pedagogically.

If we are to accept that anarchist praxis is committed to the denial and displacement of domination, then the above examples give us reason to believe that the operation of power is key to *all* anarchist thought (which shares these commitments). The political problem which we are presented with in this analysis shifts our focus from being against power and against the state to being *within* power and responding to the state and institutions which follow the logic of individualisation. In response to this, for Foucault, we must 'promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality' which itself presents some interesting potential avenues to explore.<sup>179</sup> As I shall demonstrate, a political and social critique, based in an assessment of power, provides a productive way of assessing current political and social phenomena in a way consonant with liberatory ethics. It is important to establish how postanarchism has approached questions of power and its operation. The tendencies of power as identified above by Deleuze and Foucault serve to illustrate how the understanding of power has developed beyond the Hobbesian paradigm, to explore how power can operate through the state/market concurrently, but also how the poststructuralist critique of power is politicised. Postanarchism has been key in the relating of these notions to the politics of anarchism. I wish to explore how we can utilise this for current anarchist praxis through a direct practical experimentation. This conception of power is a key plank in the formation of this practice and anchors it within ontologies of the subject. What I wish to explore is how this can be achieved without regress to essentialist forms of identity.

May and Newman have identified the synergy between poststructuralism and the critique of domination and centralisation in anarchist thought. They do, of course, acknowledge that the poststructuralist authors they discuss were not involved in a

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<sup>179</sup> Michel Foucault, "The subject and power." *Critical inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982), 785

political project and there is no positive affirmation of anarchism.<sup>180</sup> The genealogy of power offered by Foucault clearly demonstrates that the place of power has moved beyond the state and centralised institutions, and this shifts the object of ‘struggle’ away from these bodies.<sup>181</sup> The other key implication for our understanding of Foucault’s conceptualisation of power is the *productive* nature of power. Rather than being merely a repressive force on the subject, power constructs, or constitutes, the subject.

There are two ways, outlined by Foucault, in which power operates on, over and through the subject. In all of the discussions of power that Foucault engages in, the subject retains its place as the primary object for study. First, Foucault describes the process of subjection as a reality. It is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of power that is exercised on those punished – and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects: over madmen, children at home and school, the colonised; over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives.<sup>182</sup> Foucault, following Mably, makes use of the term “soul” to denote the subject’s role in this process, echoing his thought on the pastoral role of the Christian church. This is the operation of power we are most familiar with, the subjection of the individual (again, not liberalism’s rational individual) to power. This is the operation of biopower, functioning to denote the limits of the possibilities for our subjectivity, imprinted on our bodies and reproducing the laws and moral codes, as discussed above. Secondly, and more interesting for us here, Foucault also delineates a process of subjectification, or a positive finding of identity within the operation of power. As opposed to being subject to the will of the other in the process of subjection, here instead the subject is ‘tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge’.<sup>183</sup> This leads us to re-examine the ontological grounding of the subject from the perspective of ‘productive activities, resources of communication, and the play of power relations’.<sup>184</sup> Postanarchist thought has

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<sup>180</sup> See May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*

<sup>181</sup> Saul Newman, “The Place of Power in Political Discourse”, *International Political Science Review* 25.4 (2004): 140

<sup>182</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish Penguin*, 29

<sup>183</sup> Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, 781

<sup>184</sup> Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, 785

posited this as power creating the subject and ruling *through* them in a manner similar to that of 'fixed ideas' and 'spooks' in the epistemological critique offered by Stirner.<sup>185</sup> Here Foucault moves the subject away from the narrow liberal individual and looks at how the play of power relations create the subject and anarchism is attempting a similar maneuver: to construct a basis for the subject potentially free of foundations and essential nature.

Foucault's reconceptualization of power leaves us with a number of questions pertinent to any form of liberatory politics: *who is to be liberated and what are we to be liberated from?* He identifies that power does not reside in the *place* of the king and that the control of bodies, 'in a general sense', leads to a proliferation of subjection over those whose bodies are supervised. So power must be diffuse, and how this power manifests itself as systems of control – be it on bodies, minds or both in a rejection of the dualism – can be interpreted as productive. Foucault's analysis is based in Kantorowitz's reading of medieval juridical theology. Despite this setting, far removed from our own, his identification of how the 'overflowing' of power from the sovereign is reconfigured on the bodies of his subjects – through constant control – affects the creation of subjectivity and is still relevant for contemporary discussions. The image of 'those stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives' brings to mind the operation of production, particularly in those countries which supply the finished products to "developed" economies as outlined about by Deleuze. This raises the spectre of power as diffuse across the networks of late modern capitalism, as well as highlighting the potentially damaging role we may all play as 'prosumers'. This is an illustration of the second question: *what are we to be liberated from?* The implications of Foucault and Deleuze's inquiries seems clear: we would be misguided to continue to seek our emancipation from political institutions as they exist. Instead we must look for all of the loci of the operation of power. We cannot look to the state to control the market, we cannot rely on the law for justice, and we must examine our own role in these systems.

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<sup>185</sup> Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 64

## The Need for Postanarchism

Postanarchism's radical re-reading of anarchist texts highlights the importance to anarchist thought of critical capacity. In its latest iterations, postanarchism is not a separation from 'classical anarchism', it is an attempt to take seriously the latent impulses of the tradition. 'Highly controversial'<sup>186</sup> anarchist thinker Hakim Bey's 1987 essay 'Post Anarchism Anarchy', while informal in style, is nonetheless an important text for understanding the motivations for the creation of postanarchism. He highlights some of the key tensions which have been explored, in greater depth, by other postanarchist authors. Bey begins by asking us '...imagine yourself confronted by a sorcerer who stares you down balefully and demands, "What is your True Desire?" Do you hem and haw, stammer, take refuge in ideological platitudes? Do you possess both imagination and Will, can you both dream and dare – or are you the dupe of an impotent fantasy?'.<sup>187</sup> Bey's intervention in anarchist thought is one which appears to mirror many of the commitments and questions that postanarchism and this thesis hold. Bey tells us that he is taking ontology seriously and approaches this through a series of personal revolts and 'risky ideas' including the use of 'pornography and popular entertainment as vehicles for radical re-education' and the overthrow of the hegemony of 2/4 and 4/4-time signature in music. While the use of music, art and pornography may seem almost flippant, it highlights the break that Bey is trying to create. He identifies that contemporary activism (Bey was writing in the late 1980s), was not representing or attracting oppressed groups such as 'Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans or children'. His stated aim is to reinvigorate the tactics of the 'movement' to prioritise the 'poor and marginal' in order to fulfil anarchism's commitment to non-domination.

I have a number of issues with Bey's thought, beyond the criticisms of where his thought has led. His re-assertion of ontology as key to anarchist philosophy is, I believe, an important plank in the construction of a coherent meta-ethics. As we shall see when we explore the consonance of anarchist ethics in the final chapters, it is

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<sup>186</sup> Elizabeth Vasileva, "Immanence and Anarchist Ethics" (PhD Thesis, Loughborough University, 2018): 26

<sup>187</sup> Bey, Hakim. "Post-Anarchism Anarchy"

impossible to find an answer to the 'place' of ethics – even a negative one - unless we return to the ontological grounding of the subject. Bey also, to some extent, prefigures postanarchist thought inasmuch as postanarchist authors have offered a re-reading of anarchist theory in order to fulfil its ethical commitments, and Bey is attempting to re-read anarchist practice. He is correct to try to hold anarchist praxis to the standards and ethics which it is supposed to be based within; what use is a claim to represent the oppressed if you are not even in contact with these communities? This is a theme we shall see reappear when we look at social practice art later in the thesis. One of the tactics developed as part of the politically engaged artistic practice component of this research responds directly to this. I argue that by taking seriously questions of ontology in practice we must become embedded members of the communities and groups we work 'with and alongside' and how power is conceptualised here forms part of the reason for this commitment.

The use of the phrase 'ontological anarchy' has an obvious impact on the work of postanarchist authors, most notably Newman. Bey is the first "post-anarchist"<sup>188</sup> who wants us to look at ontology not as inherently representative, but as the (non-)place which grounds the anarchist subject. This is important as it redirects anarchist meta-ethics towards ethical-nihilism and away from thin relativism. It is not a coherent meta-ethics, or even an attempt at one, but the attempt to re-theorise ontological philosophy from within the social-anarchist tradition is one which lays the groundwork for postanarchism proper and this research. We may imagine here that the 'poor and marginal' described by Bey could be interpreted as the lumpenproletariat, or 'the flower of the proletariat' as described by Bakunin.

Bakunin responds to Marx and Engels dismissal of the 'Lumpenproletariat' in *The German Ideology (Die Deutsche Ideologie)* by elevating that 'group' to the privileged revolutionary subject. The Lumpenproletariat are the 'great *rabble of the people*'<sup>189</sup> (emphasis original) the social mass of unemployed, people with impairments and those without class consciousness often translated in *The Communist Manifesto* as

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<sup>188</sup> I am making the distinction here between the "post-anarchism" of Bey and the postanarchism of Newman, May, Koch, etc.

<sup>189</sup> Mikhail Bakunin, in Sam Dolgoff, *Bakunin On Anarchy*, (New York: Vintage, 1972): 294



the 'dangerous class, social scum'<sup>190</sup> – today we can think of media descriptions of 'vile products of welfare',<sup>191</sup> 'workshy residents',<sup>192</sup> and 'the un-educated who voted for Trump'.<sup>193</sup> This is a partial response from Marx and Engels to Stirner, whom they accuse of falsely elevating the 'ragamuffin' or 'lumpen'<sup>194</sup> as the revolutionary subject in that they are devoid of class consciousness. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon also elevates the lumpenproletariat to be the postcolonial revolutionary subject as, for him, they constitute 'one of the most spontaneously and radically revolutionary forces of a colonized people'.<sup>195</sup> Fanon is by no means an anarchist author; his work is based in the traditions of pan-African nationalism and humanist variants of Marxism. However, his is a project which is seeking to explore the power-relations and exploitation of the communities Bey is addressing. Fanon's description of the lumpenproletariat is one which must be of interest to postanarchist thought; one of a group left out of bourgeois morals and property rights, built spontaneously through affinity, and ungovernable:

The formation of a lumpenproletariat is a phenomenon which is governed by its own logic, and neither the overzealousness of the missionaries nor decrees from the central authorities can check its growth. However hard it is kicked or stoned it continues to gnaw at the roots of the tree like a pack of rats.<sup>196</sup>

Here Fanon is discussing the ungovernable nature of the lumpen, and this an expression of both a confirmation of Stirner's assertion that even class-consciousness can become a dangerous spook, or for our purposes a positive answer to the place of ethics, and evidence that it is outside of direct resistance to

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<sup>190</sup> Nicholas Thoburn, "Difference in Marx: the lumpenproletariat and the proletarian unnamable", *Economy and Society* 31.3 (2002): 438

<sup>191</sup> "Vile Product of Welfare", *Daily Mail*, April 1, 2013: 1

<sup>192</sup> "Spongers Can Sue to Claim Benefits", *Daily Express*, July 13, 2013: 1

<sup>193</sup> Howard Jacobson, *Comedy, Populism and Donald Trump*, (London: Brunel University, 2017) Conference

<sup>194</sup> Nicholas Thoburn "Difference in Marx: the lumpenproletariat and the proletarian unnamable", 440

<sup>195</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 1991), 128

<sup>196</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 129

the state where we can find our potentially most effective tactics. This is a restatement that the place of power is diffuse and, therefore, so must be our resistance. Bakunin and Fanon are not, of course, proposing that we conceptualise power in a manner similar to Foucault and Deleuze. There is a uniting logic from Stirner, through Bakunin to Fanon where the 'lumpen' are held up for what they are not, as opposed to what they are: they are outside, but paradoxically inside, the problematic place of power. The lumpen as disbarred from social status, according to the status quo, are also outside governance. But can this be so? It seems to us a strong statement that what is now characterised as an 'underclass' is not part of the systems of power outlined by Foucault. We must, then, look to politics which can account for how power manifests itself in these communities and through these subjectivities. There is a relationship here to the question of what freedom can mean in these contexts, something we will explore in the next chapter, but here we must examine the political implications of poststructuralist philosophy.

For Murray Bookchin, it is commitment to fighting domination in all its guises which convinces him that anarchism could be the only truly liberatory ideology.<sup>197</sup> Anarcho-capitalism and the philosophical anarchism of Wolff and Nozick could both be identified as forms of anarchistic thought which do not share this commitment. However, I am excluding them for the purpose of this study as neither a form of 'left' or 'social' anarchism. Arguments can still be made within libertarian-left thought that the critique of domination is not given primacy within the field, or represents merely the anarcho-republican variants. Nevertheless, I shall persevere with this as useful to us at this point in our study. This could have been recognised as an ethics of *equal-liberty*<sup>198</sup> or as a total rejection of representation in political organising by 'classical anarchists'.<sup>199</sup> The commitment to *equal-liberty* from Bakunin suggests that the questions of domination (Who is dominating? How? What does this mean?) will be useful to us in exploring the questions of power (Who holds the power? How?). Bakunin raises liberty to an equivalent axis with equality as 'freedom is only valid when shared by everyone... I can call myself and feel myself a free man only in the

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<sup>197</sup> Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology Movement: Utopia or Technocracy?*, lecture at Five College Forum, Massachusetts, 24<sup>th</sup> August, 1978

<sup>198</sup> Saul Newman, "Postanarchism: a politics of anti-politics", 315

<sup>199</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 48

presence of and in relation to other men'.<sup>200</sup> Anarchism, as distinct from liberalism, maintains that equality and liberty are commensurate, and it is from these totalising concepts that I am extrapolating the ethic of non-domination as identified by Bookchin. I am using this here in order to explore the theme of power. We shall continue to develop and critique this conception, but for the question of power and our first explorations of the wider discussions of anarchist epistemology, or meta-ethical place, this will be our starting point.

Newman differentiates his anarchist commitments from those of the 'classical anarchists' Bakunin, Proudhon and Kropotkin whom he accuses of being 'confined to the classical paradigm of sovereignty'.<sup>201</sup> This illustrates the key cleavage between 'classical anarchism' and the first iterations of postanarchism as outlined by Newman: the former has anarchism as its final goal, the latter takes it as its starting point. I interpret this as a clearer rejection of domination and not merely anti-authoritarianism. By *starting* with anarchy, postanarchism is attempting to live up to the challenge of post-modernism by extending the critique of domination everywhere, including *within* anarchism itself. Domination and power are not synonyms, although they are interrelated concepts. It is clear that for domination to take place then power must be present. The place of this power is something that postanarchism takes seriously and I believe is crucial to any exploration of anarchist meta-ethics. Even outside of radical political thought this deep connection between power and domination is/has been made clear.<sup>202</sup> We can think of domination as the *action* of power, more than its mere exercise. As Foucault posits the positive nature of power, in this sense the domination is constructed *from* power, domination is not the manifestation of that power.

Newman's conceptualisation of ontological anarchy is key for this distinction as it represents a rejection of dominance in all forms, not an anti-authoritarianism which

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<sup>200</sup> Bakunin, in Gregory Petrovich, ed. *Political Philosophy of Mikhail Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*, (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 266

<sup>201</sup> Saul Newman, "Postanarchism: a politics of anti-politics", 319

<sup>202</sup> See, Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) Vladimir Lenin, *What is to be Done: Burning Questions of Our Movement* (London: Wellread, 2018), and, Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures* (Cambridge: Hackett, 2004)

can look for power in too limited a number of locations. Newman himself highlights 'classical anarchism's' focus on the state as a depiction of this.<sup>203</sup> Postanarchism has utilised the poststructuralist conceptualisation of power and its actions to continue the commitment to the eradication of domination outside of the state form. We can see an illustration of this if we look at the challenges which face contemporary society socially, ecologically and economically. Poststructuralism should be understood as an attempt to understand and theorise the postmodern condition, not to create it, and this is something which we can clearly perceive if we explore the wider issues which, discursively at least, dominate current political consciousness.

### **What are the problems with current conceptions of power?**

In their work *Assembly* Hardt and Negri offer an indirect critique of Deleuze and Graeber's work on the insidious nature of technology. Arguing that the advancement of technologies into more aspects of human life will form a 'path to liberation',<sup>204</sup> they make the ontological claim that humans and technology exist together as 'machinic assemblages'. This is a development of the argument made in their commentary on the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011, where they identify the digital tendencies of 'the assembly' and its possibilities for *constituent* power. The assembly is Hardt and Negri's updated conception of the 'multitude form' which is 'characterised by frequent assemblies and participatory decision-making structures'.<sup>205</sup> The multitude form is itself a constituent form, part of a wider project of class struggle of 'singularities that act in common'.<sup>206</sup> The multitude is a model developed by Hardt and Negri to illustrate how their concept of 'the common', or the '...wealth of the earth and the social wealth that we share and whose use we manage together',<sup>207</sup> relates to the atomised, biopolitical world through what they consider to be the dominant hegemony of *immaterial labour*. It is interesting to note that the class identified as the

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<sup>203</sup> Saul Newman, "Postanarchism: a politics of anti-politics", 319

<sup>204</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Assembly* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 107

<sup>205</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. "The fight for 'real democracy' at the heart of Occupy Wall Street." *Foreign Affairs* 11 (2011): 2

<sup>206</sup> Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and democracy in the age of empire*. (London: Penguin, 2005), 104

<sup>207</sup> Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri, *Assembly*, xvi

potential revolutionary subject – although this is a post-left development of Marx’s class struggle – is ‘The Dangerous Class’ highlighting the potential links to the lumpen or “dangerous class” discussed above.

Hardt and Negri’s project of synthesising Marxism with theories of postmodernism (a similar project to the poststructuralists) has focused on the theorising of social formulations and the resonance of these in the political. This has necessarily included a theory of power. They develop Foucault’s ‘biopolitics’ to examine ‘biopower’ where ‘the current war regime not only threatens us with death but also rules over life, producing and reproducing all aspects of society’. Both terms denote the engagement with ‘social life in its entirety’, differentiated as biopower, in a constituted, or constitutional, form of power, or one which is a form of power representing legal and disciplinary notions of force, or is ‘above society... [and] imposes its order’ and biopolitics is a constituent form of power which is a productive (in the Foucauldian sense) form of power which will ‘make clear the social basis on which it is possible today to begin a project of the multitude’.<sup>208</sup>

The analysis of Hardt and Negri appears to have some strong connections with postanarchist thought: their development of theories of the social construction of the political, focus on constituent power, and the idea of the common. This leads to a move away from statism demonstrating the potential anarchistic formulation of their ideas. However, the Marxist paradigm within which Hardt and Negri are writing leads to some disconnections, particularly when dealing with their ontological claims. Newman uses a conversation between Negri and Deleuze to offer an insight into this schism:

You ask whether control or communication societies will lead to forms of resistance which might open the way for a communism understood as the ‘transversal organisation of free individuals.’ Maybe, I don’t know. But it would be nothing to do with minorities speaking out. Maybe speech and communication have been corrupted. They’re thoroughly permeated by money – and not by accident but by their very nature. We’ve got to hijack

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<sup>208</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 94-95

speech. Creating has always been something different from communicating. The key thing is to create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers so we can elude control.<sup>209</sup>

I use this quote in its entirety as it highlights a number of the issues here. Most importantly for our understanding of how power creates and develops political subjectivities is the rejection of Hardt and Negri's claim that technology and humanity are ontologically equivalent. Deleuze is demonstrating that the 'non-place' of power is the site of resistance for poststructuralism, and therefore for postanarchism. This is also the 'radical outside' which Stirner uses to construct his concept of the Unique. This passage also emphasises the manner in which the technological aspects of Hardt and Negri's multitude form in the assembly are rejected by postanarchist thought. The ontological basis for 'anarchy' is based in a *de facto* rejection of rational communication as a basis for political action or resistance. The forms of communication and technology which are found to be consummate with postanarchist thought rely instead on opacity and anonymity. Examples of this opacity and anonymity can be found in the 'no demands' nature of Occupy Wall Street, the faceless speeches of EZLN spokesperson subcomandante Marcos or, perhaps, the disruption by drone of flights to and from Gatwick airport in December 2018. This is a logic which I have utilised in the creation of the politically engaged artistic practice discussed later in the thesis. This focus on the opaque and anonymous places our focus, as political activists, outside of the traditional analysis of authority. For our practice this meant a refocusing on the ontological aspects, or the way in which the participants were positioned within the practice.

Hardt and Negri and postanarchist authors develop their conceptions of the subject through what we may refer to as 'the singularity', a radical political subjectivity which supersedes the narrow forms of liberal identity. The key difference again appears to be a question of ontology; for Hardt and Negri the singularity represents subjectivities which are created through a recognition of the commonality of individuals, a commonality emanating from within the social structure where the 'component parts of the people are indifferent in their unity; they become an identity

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<sup>209</sup> Deleuze and Negri in Newman, *Postanarchism*, 26

by negating or setting aside their differences'<sup>210</sup> whereas the postanarchist conceptualisation is based in an incommunicability, or the complete refusal of representation. It is in this approach we centred in our practice, making use of the aesthetic norms and standards to obscure the representation of the participants. How this operated will be discussed in some detail later in the thesis, but as an example of what I am referring to the 'object' of art was removed as the focus of the work. What is produced is not the method, the purpose, or the evidence of our practice – it is the practice itself. This is a manoeuvre that mirrors the postanarchist commitment to incommensurability and leads us to direct the attention of the work 'to reveal the power relations and hierarchies that operate within the group and with us as 'instigators'. For example, the participants were allowed to break the usual rules for the space they were in: they could refuse to engage or could take control of the session'.<sup>211</sup>

I acknowledge that these are key differences in the political philosophies involved, however I mention these degrees of separation in order to highlight the potential connections which can be useful to us in formulating a theory of power which holds with the commitment to understand and reduce all forms of domination. The clear influence of poststructuralist (or post-left) political philosophy is clear in Hardt and Negri's autonomist position, and the ontological anarchy of postanarchist thought, although without the nihilistic commitments of Stirner. Both are theorising the current developments of radical politics and the instrumental way in which power has been dealt with by Hardt and Negri is a key argument for building links across this so-called divide. Both theories of power offer a possible explanation and refutation of a key problem for radical politics: the "only show in town" thesis. Žižek develops Jameson's argument that the fundamental problem facing radical politics is that the narrative control of communication has led to a situation where it is impossible to imagine alternatives to capitalism.<sup>212</sup> This highlights to us the manufactured nature of disempowerment created through constitutional power's relationship with

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<sup>210</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 99

<sup>211</sup> See Bates and Sharkey, "Politically Engaged Artistic Practice",

<sup>212</sup> Frederic Jameson, "Future city." *New Left Review* 21 (2003): 65

technologies of control. This argument also suggests to us that capitalism is no longer viewed, even within certain Marxian circles, as the mechanism for creating revolutionary subjects. Hardt and Negri's focus instead, is on the insurrectionary potential of autonomous social formations and the common which links these social formations to political outcomes.

The central problem with how power is currently theorised in discourse is the creation of a sense of disempowerment through the subjection of neo-liberal capitalism. Moving beyond Žižek's argument, imperatives to "empower" working class or BAME communities form part of the *narrative of powerlessness* which is a clear political manoeuvre, further emphasising the futility of these communities – and many others besides – in entering into political resistance. Hardt and Negri's project very much dismisses this presupposition alluding to, the ways that resistance not only *can* be mobilised, but also, through social formations such as the assembly the multitude can resist the affect of empire.

The similarities between the multitude form of the assembly and Stirner's union of egoists is only one area where we can see the potential positive connections with anarchist thought. Hardt and Negri's proposal is that the assembly and decision making 'do not require centralized rule but instead can be accomplished by the multitude' which is characterised by an inversion of the political relationship of leadership.<sup>213</sup> This reversal in polarity from leadership to movement is a relationship which Stirner characterised in his comparison of society and a union:

You bring into a union your whole power, your competence, and *make yourself count*; in a society you are *employed*, with your working power; in the former you live egoistically, in the latter humanly...; to a society you owe what you have, and are in duty bound to it, are — possessed by "social duties"; a union you utilize, and give it up undutifully and unfaithfully when you see no way to use it further. If a society is more than you, then it is more to you than yourself; a union is only your instrument...<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Hardt and Negri. *Assembly*, xiv

<sup>214</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 277



The instrumentalisation of the movement, or union of egoists, commits to a similar ontological claim as Hardt and Negri are making in *Assembly*. Stirner is, obviously, not claiming that the role of technology is vital in the construction of the union of egoists; however, the folding in of instrument into subject, and vice-versa, is an ontological commitment similar to Stirner's dissolving the objective into the subjective. I am not trying to categorise Hardt and Negri as ontological anarchists – the categorisation of these theorists is a notoriously tricky proposition<sup>215</sup> - however this does emphasise a commonality in approaches to power which may be more efficacious methods of trying to understand contemporary movements' interaction with political power. Both Hardt and Negri and the postanarchist theory(ies) of power rely on the principle of autonomy, or an interpretation of Stirner's egoism in later iterations of postanarchism.

### **Postanarchist Problems of Power**

In order to construct a coherent theory of power it is necessary to examine the inconsistencies present in current theorising.

In attempting to 'correct' the contradictions in theories of power, early iterations of postanarchist thought lost the political focus of the postanarchist project – one which must build on the rejection of essentialism and foundationalism as its primary response to questions of power. Duane Rousselle notes that May and other postanarchist authors are stuck in the 'impasse of yesterday's postanarchism' and have fallen foul of place of power by foreclosing 'on the possibility of any escape from the epistemological'.<sup>216</sup> Rousselle accuses May, Newman and Koch of a – needed - reductionism in order to distinguish postanarchism as a 'new' theory. However, he posits that this move has led to an inappropriate conflation of ontology and representation.

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<sup>215</sup> David Bates, "Situating Hardt and Negri." In *Libertarian Socialism*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 275-293

<sup>216</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-Anarchism*, 10

It is this rejection of representational ontology which leads May to conflate postanarchist *politics* with postanarchist *ethics* (or meta-ethics to be precise). Normalisation, as it appears in poststructuralist critiques of epistemology, is described by May as the key problematic of poststructuralist politics. This could be problematic as it leads to his positive vision of a first order ethics, which must, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter, be based in a positive answer to either the ethical place or process. This is fashioned from the belief that the place of power is diffuse and rhizomatic, as a result we must use our epistemologically based truth-claims to construct a clear boundary for ethical conduct. Here we clearly see how the place of power, as discussed by Foucault and Lyotard, is used by May for an ethics of *abundance* which is subjectivist in its epistemological approach. The position of power solely within networks, and found in nodes in all areas of these, is the construction of an axiomatic belief system which establishes the basis for further, relational truth-claims. It is how power is conceived of within this system of belief which is a cause of confusion and an illustration of the problem itself: the attempt to avoid representational ontologies leads to the epistemological understanding of political subjectivities constituted from *inside* these discursive formations. Can we not build a conception of power which places it within diffuse networks, but found by looking at its borders, or perhaps more productively outside them? This is a similar issue for Andrew Koch in his article 'Poststructuralism and the Epistemological Basis of Anarchism'.

Modernist thought, similar to traditional Marxist conceptions, relies on the promotion of one form of subjectivity over another. For this conceptualisation, power is viewed as being a singular and universal object which operates *only* to repress. The repression involved is *over* essential human nature and is power expressed *over* the individual as subjection. Koch uses a critique of this representative, universal ontology to critique 'classical anarchism'. Koch's is an important intervention in postanarchist thought arriving 2 years after Hakim Bey's *Post-anarchist Anarchy* and 2 years before May's *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* and suffers from the 'first stage' of postanarchism's need to distance itself from 'classical anarchism'. In spite of this, its establishment of the rejection of representative ontologies precedes and prefigures May's work in tying the poststructuralist conception of power to anarchist thought and the (*de facto*) rejection of the state,

arguing on the basis of ‘non-ontological assertions regarding the individual within the poststructural epistemology’.<sup>217</sup> Moreover, Koch demonstrates how the poststructuralist critique of modernist epistemology, which prioritises concept over the ‘immediate and sensual’, is problematic. He identifies that this assumes a universalising of thought of viewing “things-in-themselves” where ‘the idea of political unity rests its foundation on this epistemological doctrine’.<sup>218</sup>

This is an issue which seems to be rising to prominence again in institutional politics, something we can certainly see within the academy as it is directed (by government directives) to positivism, false objectivity and the creation of false metrics.

‘Evidence based research’ and research which is methodologically wedded to the creation of ‘policy’ are possible evidence of the oppressive epistemology of modernist thought in its promotion of one form of subjectivity. This is further evidence of how knowledge’s interaction with, and creation of, power forms a key part of anarchist thought. This highlights the difficulty of addressing the operation of power through an analysis which ties itself solely to epistemological critique. This is something which Koch’s argument is necessarily knotted to as his work is based in his critique of essentialism, both ontologically and epistemologically, and representation arguing that ‘a new theory of anarchism cannot be based on the ontological assumptions contained within the classical anarchist literature’.<sup>219</sup> This does not, however, tell us that we cannot base our ‘new theory of anarchism’ (much as I reject the title) as a re-examination of those ontological assumptions.

Newman develops ontological anarchy as a key concept in his visions of postanarchism in response to Andrew Koch’s argument that ontology is inherently essentialist and representative. For Koch, justifications for anarchism which are ontologically based ‘share a common concern for the delineation of the human character in order to proceed in their critique of the contemporary order’.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Andrew M Koch "Poststructuralism and the epistemological basis of anarchism." *Philosophy of the social sciences* 23, no. 3 (1993): 327-351  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/004839319302300304>

<sup>218</sup> Andrew Koch, “Poststructuralism and the Epistemological Basis of Anarchism”,

<sup>219</sup> Andrew Koch, “Poststructuralism and the Epistemological Basis of Anarchism”,

<sup>220</sup> Andrew Koch, “Poststructuralism and the Epistemological Basis of Anarchism”,

Newman's postanarchism focuses on his development of the Unique from Stirner and Lacan's split subject to construct a 'paradoxical 'outside' to power and representation'.<sup>221</sup> Newman's work has built on this opaque and anti-representative understanding of the subject. His work takes the epistemological critiques of poststructuralism and previous postanarchist thought as its basis and extends to attempt to "rehabilitate" ontological philosophy in anarchism. However, as described in the previous chapter on Stirner, in not taking the genealogical context of Stirner's writing and not applying the most radical reading of Stirner's philosophical project,<sup>222</sup> Newman precludes the possibility of Stirner's thought in the postanarchist debate over the primacy of epistemological or ontological concerns.

Newman identifies an ethics of the radical outside. He takes his interpretation of the subject from Lacan and Derrida, which he juxtaposes with the subject creation of heteronomous and plural epistemai in Deleuze, Lyotard and, 'with certain exceptions, Foucault'.<sup>223</sup> The creation of this radical outside is key for Newman's conceptualisation of power. The place of power for Newman is characterised as a position which 'places more emphasis on the structure itself, but sees it as indeterminate, incomplete and unstable' and uses the example of Gödel's 'incompleteness theorem' to illustrate this.<sup>224</sup> He continues May's and other postanarchist rejection of structuralist-Marxist accounts of the unidirectional nature of power, and instead looks to understandings of power which enable a refusal and disruption of power.<sup>225</sup> The reductionism and epistemological cloaking of the postanarchist critique was a necessary manoeuvre in order to construct postanarchism as a separate body of theory from classical anarchism. However, this has led to a human-centred vision of politics which struggles to escape the trap between representational ontologies and repressive epistemologies, something

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<sup>221</sup> Rousselle, *After-Postanarchism*, 10

<sup>222</sup> Here I am referring specifically to the importance of the interpersonal relationships of the Young Hegelian's and Stirner's "completion" of the Hegelian project.

<sup>223</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 34

<sup>224</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 34

<sup>225</sup> See Newman, Saul. "What is an insurrection? Destituent power and ontological anarchy in Agamben and Stirner." *Political Studies* 65, no. 2 (2017): 284-299

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321716654498>

which will be further demonstrated when dealing with postanarchist meta-ethics. Newman's thought provides, as we shall see below, some useful contributions to the discourse on power in anarchism; however, his inability to travail the issues with representative ontologies has led to, by his own admission, 'the opaqueness of these formations (on power)', which, 'no doubt make them difficult to apply in any sort of direct way to contemporary social and political movements'<sup>226</sup> – a problem for any political project and one which this project aims to explore through practice.

While acknowledging the inconsistencies and concerns outlined above, the postanarchist project has identified the utility in adopting and translating the poststructuralist conceptualisation of power. May's use of Foucault and Deleuze to dismiss the 'failed' Marxist project of strategic theories of power has allowed for anarchism to come to terms with a rejection of essential human nature – indeed there has been much writing since the intervention of the postanarchists to reaffirm the non-essentialist readings of the classical anarchists.<sup>227</sup> This has allowed for a siting of the place of power in diverse networks which can operate productively. Despite its ontological limitations, Koch's epistemological justification for anarchism provides a clear application of Foucault's writing on the nature of power. This is a description of power as being exposed through systems of control (of discourse), and his use of Nietzsche and Stirner underlines how anarchist thought can mobilise these ideas in praxis. Newman's work on *ontological anarchy* shares the closest connection with the ontological issues identified by Bey through his development of the 'paradoxical non-place': 'its very place is that of a "nonplace" because it is shifting and variable, always being reinscribed and reinterpreted'.<sup>228</sup>

The identification of a non-place as the place of power may seem debilitating or at least an idea which may be difficult to mobilise around. However, the unseating of the location of power relates to both the epistemological and ontological justifications for anarchism. This has an impact on ethical conceptions – which in turn alters our

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<sup>226</sup> Newman, "What is an Insurrection?", 297

<sup>227</sup> See Benjamin Franks, "Postanarchism: A critical assessment." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12, no. 2 (2007): 127-145, and Jesse Cohn, "What is Postanarchism" *Post*?" *Postmodern culture* 13, no. 1 (2002)

<sup>228</sup> Newman, Saul. *From Bakunin to Lacan*, 81

approach to praxis. Koch explores Stirner's argument that there is an error in the systems of thought which have dominated Western philosophy: '...that they construct a "fixed" idea of the human being and then seek to construct man in the image of the idea. Thoughts and conceptions themselves, become the chains that seek to enslave us. We are prisoners of our own conceptions.'<sup>229</sup> Newman pursues the ontological implications for Stirner's ethical-nihilism and identifies Stirner's use of 'insurrection' as a key form of political action, distinct from revolutions of choosing new masters. Newman's understanding of ontological anarchy is premised around taking anarchism as its point of departure, not its end goal.<sup>230</sup> He views insurrection as a form of political practice as consummate with this ethic as, for him, insurrection does not seek power, nor oppose it but 'rather, *profanes* it, suspending its operation and fostering instead autonomous relations and forms of subjectivity'.<sup>231</sup> The commonality between these approaches is that they are attempting the political use of disruption of power 'without necessarily proposing any alternative'.<sup>232</sup>

This is key for our understanding of power as scholars, but more importantly as activists and political actors. We have been exploring why there is a need for a coherent vision of power from the oppressive rhetoric of "common sense" liberal politics to the new modes of political control identified by Deleuze, and Hardt and Negri. I began the chapter by asking what is a useful way to think about power? Now we must ask: **what is a useful way to think about power which takes into account the commitment to oppose domination in all its forms?** What forms of political praxis should be sought from Zuccotti park<sup>233</sup> to Hong Kong, which avoid representative ontologies, repressive epistemologies and totalising moral codes? The ethical nihilism of postanarchism provides an opportunity to develop practice based around a liberatory theory of power through its dismissal of positive essentialism, its critical unseating of a foundational understanding of the subject, and its move to 'discredit and/or interrupt all universalist **and** relativist'<sup>234</sup> ethical systems.

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<sup>229</sup> Andrew Koch, "Poststructuralism and the Epistemological Basis of Anarchism", 6

<sup>230</sup> See Newman, *Postanarchism*

<sup>231</sup> Newman, "What is an Insurrection?", 294

<sup>232</sup> Newman, "What is an Insurrection?", 290

<sup>233</sup> Location of Occupy Wall Street

<sup>234</sup> Rousselle, *After-Postanarchism*, 44

This should involve a project of direct action rather than focusing on turning our project back upon ourselves or 'cracking capitalism'. Graeber describes direct action as 'acting as if we were already free',<sup>235</sup> as opposed to the practices of reform which maintain the unitary place of power, which takes a programme of affirmative action as its *terminus a quo* which is akin to the principles of mutual aid as laid out by Kropotkin.<sup>236</sup> I contrast this with John Holloway's vision of resistance in *Crack Capitalism* where Holloway encourages us to 'stop making capitalism' and engage instead 'think for yourself and yourselves, use your imagination, follow your inclinations and do whatever you consider necessary or enjoyable...'.<sup>237</sup> Holloway's vision appears to sit very neatly with the productive and diverse understanding of power; however, the development of his dialectical argument reveals its focus to still be based in the foundational structuralism of Marxist-Leninism or, to some degree, classical anarchism: 'Humanity (in all its senses) jars increasingly with capitalism... We want to understand the force of our misfitting, we want to know how banging our head against the wall over and over again will bring the wall crumbling down.'<sup>238</sup>

'Banging our head against the wall' seems an apt method for Holloway's endeavour, in both its potentially damaging effect on the perpetuator of the 'banging' and the all-consuming nature of its object. Holloway's examples come from a place of obvious power and privilege and clearly demonstrate to us that he is not seeking a truly liberatory system. We might ask how effective is resisting 'the rule of the cheap commodity'<sup>239</sup> in the queue at a foodbank or in exploited communities in the global south. The rule of 'the wall' also reveals to us Holloway's structuralist foundations, capitalism still as the unitary target of resistance and therefore responsible for the exploitation within its bounds. I am simplifying Holloway's arguments for the purpose of brevity, however, the point I am trying to make is: Holloway's political practice cannot account for domination in all its forms, so is not fit for our purpose. The ethical nihilism which underpins postanarchist practice and theories of power provide us with a more fruitful line of enquiry. It is the poststructuralist critique of power that

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<sup>235</sup> David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2009), 527

<sup>236</sup> See Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution*, (Freedom Press: London, 1987)

<sup>237</sup> John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto, 2010), 256

<sup>238</sup> John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*, 9

<sup>239</sup> John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*, 66

has provided postanarchism with a useful theory of power. Anarchism takes the problematic of domination, but without the developments of Foucault (etc.) which have identified the multiplicitous and productive nature of power, it is difficult to argue that it is responding adequately to Bey's charge. Indeed, it is *within* anarchist organising that Bey makes his call for a 'post-anarchism anarchy'.

### **How Postanarchism Addresses the Problem of Power**

What has come to be called the poststructuralist critique of representation is, at the political level, precisely a refusal of the vanguard, of the idea that one group or party could effectively represent the interests of the whole.<sup>240</sup>

The influence of poststructuralist thought on postanarchist literature is, perhaps, clearest in Todd May's 1994 work *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*. May's work is an early intervention in the history of postanarchism, and it is this work that begins the revitalisation of poststructuralist problematizing of anarchist politics. May focuses on the connections between the 'micro-political' practices and rhizomatic and networked nature of power in the work of Foucault and Deleuze. The poststructuralist critique of the discourses of power has had a great influence on the work of all postanarchist thinkers, and it is from Foucault's conceptualisation of positive constituent power that May develops his 'tactical' approach to politics. This tactical approach rejects the strategic vision of Marxism and is a vision of anarchist prefiguration. This is premised on a rejection of essentialism and informed by the poststructuralist understanding of the subject. Unlike other postanarchist scholars (perhaps, most notably the influence of Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida on Saul Newman), May limits the poststructuralist influence to the works of Foucault, Deleuze and Lyotard. He does this as these are the only thinkers from this school of thought whose work May considers to be 'tactical'. Indeed, May even goes as far as to say that 'we shall reserve the term

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<sup>240</sup> May, *The political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 12



“post-structuralist” for the common perspective sketched by the work of Foucault, Deleuze and Lyotard’.<sup>241</sup>

The spectre of power appears throughout the book with May developing his approach through differing problematics. In ‘The Failure of Marxism’ May begins by demonstrating, what he sees, as Marxist theory’s move towards ‘the perspective embraced by anarchism’, something he claims has occurred as a result of ‘successive disappointments’.<sup>242</sup> Intentionally avoiding the writing of Marx himself, May draws a comparison with Laclau and Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. He highlights the similarity in their argument, that Marxist theory has developed in the twentieth century through a series of disappointments and antagonisms. May maintains that his critique is “complementary” not “coincident” and he outlines his historical review of Marxism through Lenin, Adorno and Castoriadis. May charts the inevitable failure of strategic thinking, arguing that it is due in no small part to a misconception of the operation of power. It is interesting that in setting up his argument on Marxism, May draws on Laclau and Mouffe for his framework and seeks synergies there. Laclau and Mouffe, and indeed the Post-Marxist theorists generally, have been accused of the reductionism and straw-man arguments mirrored in critiques of the early postanarchist thought of which May’s works forms a not insignificant part.<sup>243</sup> May surveys Lenin’s objections to evolutionary socialism in *What Is to Be Done*, positing that the Leninist approach to power, i.e. ‘there can be only one struggle, there can be only one theory, there can be only one leadership’<sup>244</sup> has coloured the failures of the Marxist project. He makes the claim that this understanding of power is in the heart of the disappointments of, not just Marxist-Leninism, but also Critical Theory, existentialist Marxism and structuralist Marxism.<sup>245</sup> May does find accord with the critiques of power of autonomist Marxists Hardt and Negri. He agrees that the dissolution of the power of capital cannot come “from above” and that this is evidence of the failure of strategy in radical political theory, and confirmation of his thought on tactical approaches to politics.

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<sup>241</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 12

<sup>242</sup> May, *The political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 18

<sup>243</sup> Norman Geras, “Post-Marxism?”, *New Left Review* 163 (1987): 40-82

<sup>244</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 20

<sup>245</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 31

In his survey of the 'classical anarchists' May identifies discourses of power and action. From this he develops his conceptualisation of tactical politics, in opposition to the strategic thinking of the Marxist tradition. May is basing his assessment of the 'classical anarchists' to the work of Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin. From Bakunin's rejection of centralised, vanguard party, authority, May picks up on the anarchist rejection of representation (re-presentation) which he develops through the thought of Kropotkin. This is part of May's attempt to demonstrate that anarchist thought has, in many ways, prefigured the idea that power is diffuse and operates within 'social spaces'.<sup>246</sup> This leads May to the thrust of his argument on the rhizomatic nature of networks of power: that 'the political character of social space can be seen, as is seen by anarchists and poststructuralists alike, in terms of intersections of power rather than emanations from a source'.<sup>247</sup> This directly conflicts with, for example, Carl Schmitt's understanding of political power. For Schmitt, the friend/enemy antagonism denotes the, frequently violent, struggle over power which affirms the political autonomy of the state.<sup>248</sup> May uses the ease with which feminist critiques of patriarchy have been included in anarchist thought to demonstrate how, for anarchists, the reverse of this is true – that of critique and struggle against capitalism and the state.

The anarchist critique of representation is used to establish that legitimacy-based models of the state create a split between political and administrative will, as characterised by Rousseau in *The Social Contract*. May argues that this leads to oppressive authority over political subjectivities. This is a useful investigation for us as May is identifying the way that radical political thought has evolved its critiques and uses of power consistent with the distinction made above between societies of discipline and societies of control. This, of course, is no coincidence as May is demonstrating the interactions between anarchist and poststructuralist approaches to power. May asserts, using Hegelian terminology, that for anarchists the only consonant approach to the negation of power is negation. This exposes the key

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<sup>246</sup> May, *The political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 52

<sup>247</sup> May, *The political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 52

<sup>248</sup> Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*

ontological schism within postanarchism as identified by Saul Newman, that between the 'ontological imaginary of abundance and the ontological abundance of lack'.<sup>249</sup> In other words, it is the duality between the approach of rhizomatic networks as identified by prominent postanarchist author, Richard Day as 'newest social movements' and the lack or radical outside as characterised by Stirner's ethical-nihilism. I will pick up on this split in ontology below, but for us now it is important to observe the early evidence of how the approach to power – be it oppressive or productive – leads to a contradiction within postanarchist writing: that if we accept the socially constructed nature of reality then our ethical subjectivities must be either constructed from within these discourses (abundance) or through the demarcation of the limit of the symbolic manifestations of them. In other words, postanarchism has responded positively to the meta-ethical questions of place and process. For now, we can view this as simply where our ethics come from (place) and how we arrive at ethical claims (process).

As I shall explore later in the chapter, Newman attempts to construct this 'outside' using the thought of Lacan and Stirner. However, his failure to satisfactorily extrapolate the ethical obligation and implications of this thinking leads us to the key problematic of postanarchist literature: a coherent theory of meta-ethics. The underpinning of postanarchist literature is based in the crisis in anarchist moral philosophy, after the essential subject and positive views of human nature, for which this discussion of power is essential as it relates to both the place and process of our meta-ethics.

May attempts to draw our attention to the deficit in anarchist moral philosophy after establishing the 'end of humanism'.<sup>250</sup> In the concluding chapter 'Question of Ethics' May asserts the primacy of ethics in anarchist politics and asserts that '...if there is no point to resisting exercises of power, then poststructuralism as a *political theory* loses its point'.<sup>251</sup> May is constructing a first-order ethical theory<sup>252</sup> which asserts,

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<sup>249</sup> Saul Newman, "Postanarchism and Radical Politics Today" in *Post-anarchism: A Reader* (London: Pluto, 2011), 46-68

<sup>250</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 67

<sup>251</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 123

<sup>252</sup> See John Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1990)

unlike Foucault, 'binding principles of conduct'.<sup>253</sup> This leads to the key question on the text: 'The question is not whether or not there is power, but which relationships of power are acceptable and which are unacceptable'.<sup>254</sup> Antirepresentationalism and the promotion of difference are identified as the core ethical principles of poststructuralism. The principle of antirepresentationalism is described by May: 'poststructuralism is committed that practices of representing other to themselves – either in who they are or in what they want – ought, as much as possible, to be avoided'.<sup>255</sup> May recognises that it is not the act of representation *itself*, but the normalisation of the representations which creates an unacceptable relationship of power. Stirner's concept of the *Unique (Eigentum)* displays a remarkable similarity to this proposition as he argues in *The Ego and Its Own* '...I do not count myself as anything special, but as unique. Doubtless I have similarity with others; yet that holds good only for comparison or reflection; in fact I am incomparable, unique'.<sup>256</sup>

To go back to our question: what is a useful way to think about power that takes into account the commitment to oppose domination in all its forms? May's writing has made a number of key contributions to the postanarchist answer to this. In taking "useful" seriously, we can see that May's use of Foucault's understanding of the productive nature of power gives us a way of **putting power to use**; moving beyond resistance to an absolute sovereign or unitary place of power. This brings us to the second major contribution, the employment of the heterogeneous and rhizomatic nature of power which demonstrates the problem with strategic politics: resistance against a unitary place of power. **The use of a diverse understanding of power enables us to analyse what is meant by 'domination in all its forms'**. Without an understanding of the diverse nature of the place of power we may be stuck in a battle with the wrong enemy or perpetuate forms of domination in our endeavour to eliminate it.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 123

<sup>254</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 123

<sup>255</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 130

<sup>256</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 124

<sup>257</sup> We can see an example of this in the rejection of non-class-based subjectivities in Marxist-Leninism: Motion 8 "Identity Politics are anti-Marxian and a Harmful Diversion from the Class Struggle" 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2018 <https://www.cpgb->

May's third significant contribution to the answering of this question is his own formulation of a similar problem: 'The question is not whether or not there is power, but which relationships of power are acceptable and which are unacceptable'. This succinctly addresses the issue: **we do not need to debate the existence of power; our energy as radical political theorists and activists should be spent identifying 'unacceptable' power relationships.** This does of course leave us with the questions: *who*, and *how* are we decide what is 'useful' and 'unacceptable'? This is the question which forms the basis for the later chapter on postanarchist meta-ethics, as this is a problem which can only be solved through second order abstraction. However, it also leads to the aforementioned 'ontological split' in postanarchism between the Foucauldian/Deleuzian paradigm of May and Day and the Lacanian/Derridean understanding of the radical outside demonstrated by Newman. To call this a split of ontology may be an overstatement, certainly as May's justifications for a postanarchist political programme are made primarily on epistemological grounds, but I would argue that dismissal of ontology by some postanarchist authors as inherently representational limits the possibilities of the postanarchist project and does not take seriously enough the opportunities for political thought presented by ethical nihilism.

Newman's contribution to the question of power in anarchist thought has built upon the epistemological foundations laid by May and Koch, but has also re-established the ontological justification for anarchism. Newman identifies the utility, for anarchism, in the application of Foucauldian theories of power in developing the response to what he terms 'post-sovereign power'.<sup>258</sup> For our question on non-domination in power relations, it is his development and inclusion of Stirner and Lacan into postanarchist thought that is the most fruitful line of enquiry. I shall briefly outline how Newman has "fleshed out" May and Koch's epistemological basis for anarchism and added an ontological critique which bring us back to the questions raised by Bey. The key concepts which Newman has integrated into the

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[ml.org/2018/12/07/news/identity-politics-are-anti-marxian-and-a-harmful-diversion-from-the-class-struggle/](https://ml.org/2018/12/07/news/identity-politics-are-anti-marxian-and-a-harmful-diversion-from-the-class-struggle/)

<sup>258</sup> Saul Newman, "Postanarchism a politics of anti-politics", 313-327

postanarchist debate on power are: insurrection; the radical (sometimes paradoxical) outside, and ontological anarchy.

Situating Newman within postanarchist debates on power provides further confirmation of the need for epistemological approaches to the question of power. Newman has demonstrated that Foucault's analysis of state power 'shares much with the anarchists'<sup>259</sup> in that it is a rejection of legitimacy and social contract theories of sovereignty and 'seeks to overturn the very discourse of sovereignty itself'.<sup>260</sup> Newman also identifies that Foucault's 'historico-political' analysis – an alternative to the 'philosophico-juridical' – and his formulation of bio-power contribute to the strengthening of the bonds between poststructuralist and anarchist thought. However, it is Newman's thought on ontology that distinguishes him from May, Koch and Day.

### **Ontological Anarchy**

Since absolutely nothing can be predicated with any real certainty as to the "true nature of things," all projects (as Nietzsche says) can only be "founded on nothing." And yet *there must be a project*—if only because we ourselves resist being categorized as "nothing." Out of nothing we will make something: the Uprising, the revolt against everything which proclaims: "The Nature of Things is such-&-such." We disagree, we are unnatural, we are less than nothing in the eyes of the Law—Divine Law, Natural Law, or Social Law—take your pick. Out of nothing we will imagine our *values*, and by this act of invention we shall live.<sup>261</sup>

Newman divides poststructuralist thought into different understandings of subjectivity. He posits that the key differential between the Foucauldian/Deleuzian approaches to subjectivity and those of Derrida/Lacan are that for the former 'the subject is *wholly* constituted' by the external structures (knowledge/power for

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<sup>259</sup> Saul Newman, "Postanarchism a politics of anti-politics", 320

<sup>260</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 47

<sup>261</sup> Hakim Bey, "Ontological anarchy in a nutshell." *Journal of Conscious Evolution* 2, no. 2 (2018): 1.

Foucault, language for Lacan) whereas for the latter ‘they only *partially* constitute the subject’.<sup>262</sup> This split forms the basis for his departure from a purely epistemological grounding for his thought and his move ‘from anarchism to anarchy’.<sup>263</sup> Newman seeks to remove action and power from its *telos*, or guiding principles. Here he is taking May and Koch’s rejection of ontology as inherently representative on its own terms. He links the metaphysical commitments of knowledge/power with the problems of representation and foundationalism. In its place he calls for an unseating of anarchism as an end in itself and asks us to see anarchism without its guiding principles: ‘Is it possible to think of anarchism no longer as a project in pursuit of, and determined by, certain ends – the social revolution that will bring about the stateless society – but rather as a form of autonomous action, a way of thinking *anarchistically* in the here and now, seeking to transform the situations and relationships that one finds oneself in’.<sup>264</sup> It is clear from this proclamation that Newman is addressing May’s question of which forms of power relationships are acceptable. It is also clear that he is approaching this from the opposite point of analysis: we should think of power ‘anarchistically’, not think of power as anarchists (anarchism as a final programme). This modification of approach serves to underline postanarchism’s commitments to politics without ‘essentialist foundations in human nature and without any predestined goal or revolution or a particular model of social relations’.<sup>265</sup> This allows for greater scope in challenging ‘determinacy and legitimacy’ in relationships of power. What Newman’s formulation gives us for our question is its ontological grounding, or to put in another way it addresses the ‘**way to think about**’ section of our question.

Newman articulates the question: ‘*how can we formulate a notion of resistance to domination that does not reaffirm the place of power by succumbing to essentialist temptations?*’<sup>266</sup> in which we can see the similarities to our question and that of May’s (regarding power relations). Newman identifies that, as opposed to Foucault’s positing of the subject constituted through difference and abundance, Lacan’s split

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<sup>262</sup> Newman *Unstable Universalities*, 87 (emphasis original)

<sup>263</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 9

<sup>264</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 12

<sup>265</sup> Newman, “What is Insurrection?”, 289

<sup>266</sup> Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan*, 137

subject is constituted through a lack or a non-place. This is key for a rejection of representation and essential human nature as it is this lack, or outside, which allows for the positive subjectification to occur. Newman rejects Foucault's account of a subject discursively constituted through knowledge/power: 'if the subject is at the same time a precondition for the exercise of power, then how does the subject come to be at the same time subjected by it?'<sup>267</sup>

In order to solve the self-defeating nature of this argument Newman proposes looking outside the structures of knowledge/power and moving towards the disruption of the meaning-production process itself. Lacan's subject is constituted through its relationship to language (signifiers) to which it is always secondary. This at first appears to be similar to Foucault's argument that subjectivity is an effect of discourse. However, Lacan's subject is permanently separated from its signification and it is this failure, or gap, which allows for a paradoxical certainty of uncertainty: 'The subject fails to recognise himself in the symbolic order and is thus alienated... The subject is incapable of fulfilling this symbolic identity and so there is an excess or radical surplus produced by this failed interpellation'.<sup>268</sup> To illustrate this Newman uses Gödel's 'incompleteness theorem' 'which states that any branch of mathematics there will always be certain propositions that cannot be verified using the axioms of that particular branch, which require going outside the system'.<sup>269</sup> So, for Newman, the outside of discursive structures are both a unknowable and unstable location, but paradoxically also that which comes to define the inner system itself. This imperfect relationship is what allows for subjectification to occur, as opposed to the subjection of an individual by discursive formations.

Newman reveals the difference between subjection and subjectification and its political implications. He uses the example of a woman who rejects the traditional roles within society, and through this rejection becomes aware of the domination and oppression which create these roles. She then, through political and social struggle against these formations, becomes a feminist subject.<sup>270</sup> This is, for Newman, the

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<sup>267</sup> Newman *Unstable Universalities*, 75

<sup>268</sup> Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan*, 138

<sup>269</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*: 34

<sup>270</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*: 88



essence of insurrection, or the disruption which allows for liberation. This bears close resemblance to the process of ownness as posited by Stirner and explored in the previous chapter. The process of becoming is predicated on nothingness, but still is produced through, and by, the system of something. In the example above, the rejection of traditional roles for women creates the political subject *through* identifying as a woman. This is a clear break from Deleuze and Foucault's understanding of political subjectivity brought about through *difference* or an abundance of discourses. This allows for an ontological position that avoids essential views of human nature and representation, one which is part of Foucault's productive understanding of power, but which steps outside of the discursive relationship in its creation.

This is a process which is based in Foucault's outline for the process of subjectification (see above), but one which Newman extends to include a reconceptualisation of universality. Newman's postanarchism is based in the ethical-nihilism of Stirner, but is looking to re-appropriate and profane the universalism of liberal-enlightenment thought. We can certainly see the genealogical debt which Newman owes to Foucault, re-approaching the enlightenment from within this paradigm and looking at the role of alienation in the construction of the subject. However, Newman rejects Foucault's vision of the subject for giving us a positive vision for the place of the subject, albeit one which is not fully conceptualised. Newman looks instead to Rancière and Badiou to construct a vision of subjectification which is able to balance the project of universality he is engaged in and maintain the outside, or Other, as its 'place'. This is key if this investigation is not to fall back into representative ontologies and essentialist truth-claims. For Newman 'the subject is one who becomes what one *is not*, not what one is... who radically detaches himself from his normal social identity'.<sup>271</sup>

I need not rehearse Newman's arguments here, but what is important is that his project is one of universality. This is not to say that he is falling back in to the liberal traps of individualism. Newman's project is one which is looking for political actions which can respond to the commitments of ontological anarchy and offer a form of

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<sup>271</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 88

positive political project. It is for this reason that I reject the need for a universality, even a shifting, opaque ‘unstable’ one. When one examines the ontological ground upon which this universality is built what is key in the negative, the profaning, or the refusal of any form of essence of foundation and this is the guiding principle which should underpin our understanding of the subject. When we explore meta-ethics proper in the final chapters we shall be evaluating the danger of positive answers in ethical place and process. I want to extend this back into our vision of the place of power and subject construction to demonstrate that Newman’s positive framing of this place is itself problematic. His use of Rancière’s political equality, built from a lack not an abundance, and Badiou’s rejection of determinism, take us some distance towards this refusal, but his insistence on the need for a form of universality undermines this. When he posits that ‘the process of becoming a subject... involves at the same time a process of *de-subjection*: a removal from one’s given role and position’,<sup>272</sup> he is closer to Stirner’s negative-dialectic – dissolving the role and position into the subject to identify a ‘rupture’ and in response realise position as subject, or unique. Newman recognises this himself where he describes Stirner’s understanding of power operating through the subject to construct them,<sup>273</sup> but Stirner’s position is always one of refusal: ‘all things are nothing to me’.

My rejection of universality is based in this refusal to offer a positive answer for the place of power, or *where* the subject is constructed. Newman’s universality is one which is characterised through a lack of stable definitions and essential nature: something I believe is key to postanarchist visions of power and the subject. However, we must return the double negative to these questions. It is not enough to build our arguments around a rejection of foundations and essentialism if we then return to floating or empty signifiers to build our politics. For example, the anarchist rejection of democracy is not one which is usually established through the rejection of democracy as means, but for its nature as empty signifier co-opted by dangerous and authoritarian regimes and states. In place of the empty ‘democracy’ we ask instead for *anarchy*. I also reject the need for a universality on the basis of the problems associated with it and ask again for anarchy – an anarchy of the subject.

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<sup>272</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 96

<sup>273</sup> Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan*, 64

We must reject the potential metaphysics here, even if they only occur discursively, of the liberal subject and an attempt to include. In the later chapters I shall provide a more thorough description of this, but in place of universality I am proposing peculiarity: not us, but you. In order to construct a politics around a postanarchist meta-ethics it will be necessary to shift our focus away from what can create a collective politics within the collective and focus instead on you.

This is key for understanding our relationship to power and the processes of subjection and subjectification which give us another key aspect in answering our question, **how we can analyse power relationships in order to eliminate domination**. This understanding of the subject and the operation of power, based in the ethical nihilism of Stirner, moves forward the answer to our question: **we have seen how the place of power is diffuse and networked therefore resistance to domination must occur in diffuse and networked sites**. Power's ontological role in grounding the constitution of the subject gives us a mechanism to assess and develop a critique of domination even within the structures which are constructed to oppose this. As an example, the fictional perfect postanarchist movement, organised as a union of egoists, could still be propagating dangerous discourses, perhaps on gender or sexuality, which produce subjection in some of its members. It takes seriously the anarchist commitment to equal weight given to both means and ends which is key for answering our question. This also serves as a rejection to the lionisation of political processes such as democracy. Democracy, even "perfect" direct democracy based in agonism, still has the potential to create unhealthy and unacceptable power relations.<sup>274</sup>

The vision of power in postanarchism retains one consistent feature and that is to retain a critical capacity, similar to the postanarchist promise. Postanarchism can be characterised as an attempt to hold anarchism to its own commitments and discourses and we should hold our analysis of power to be central to this. There are a number of concrete outcomes from this analysis: we must assess the ethical content of power's use and productivity; we must not reject ontology as inherently

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<sup>274</sup> See Markus Lundström, *The Anarchist Critique of Radical Democracy* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018)

representative, and the subject can become the site of resistance. Obviously my last claim is potentially problematic – it appears to be a positive answer to the question of place – however, if we return to Stirner’s vision of the subject, or the unique, this is a vision of the subject which rejects conceptualisation and is best represented by an emptiness, or radical lack.

This guides our logic when we are confronted with the reality of the other; this may be in any situation, but the specific circumstances I am discussing are the occasions when power imbalances are clear such as within a student-teacher relationship, as has been the case developing this research. We must be accountable for our actions’ impact on this ontological ground; we must be careful what we do with such delicate instruments. Radical political theory tends towards the inwards and reflective when discussing subject formation, a discourse of speaker and listener where you (yes, you!) are directed to assess how this impacts on your relationship with yourself. I wish to redirect this exploration here to look at how you interact with others. This is a question of how we deploy the power we have, or which relationships of power are acceptable, or not. In the words of Foucault: ‘the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state and from the state’s institutions but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualisation which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us’.<sup>275</sup> The question we should be asking as anarchist practitioners is: are we imposing these new forms of subjectivity?

Richard Day addresses the context for this process of subjectification and gives us a way to explore this imposition. Primarily exploring what he terms as ‘newest social movements’, Day is analysing the intersection of Marxist, anarchist and other radical movements exploring the ‘logic of affinity’.<sup>276</sup> He uses the Gramscian conceptualisation of hegemony to scaffold his affinity logic of social organising. Day’s characterisation of the Lenin-Gramsci assemblage of hegemony is of a movement

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<sup>275</sup> Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, 785

<sup>276</sup> Richard Day, *Gramsci Is Dead: Anarchist currents in the newest social movements*, (London: Pluto Press, 2005)

still locked in a battle of resistance with the unitary place of power, usually the state before turning back on itself. Day characterises this as part of the old social movements where ‘political revolutionaries seek effects that (1) will be felt over an entire social space, usually the nation state, and (2) will occur across a wide spectrum...’.<sup>277</sup> Day makes use of Hardt and Negri’s conceptualisation of constituent power to create a counter logic which is akin to direct-action. He argues that it is ‘strongly identified’ with alternatives to late modern capitalism ‘rather than appealing to state power or waiting for/bringing on the Revolution’.<sup>278</sup>

The distinction made by Hardt and Negri between constituent and constituted forms of power is, for Day, the basis of the division between the logics of affinity (constituent) and hegemony (constituted). Day’s writing is very much based in epistemological justifications of anarchist thought, however, his logic can be used to construct a politicised vision of Newman’s ontological anarchy as it’s premised on the rejection of the ‘hegemony of hegemony’ and takes the rejection of systems of domination as its starting point.<sup>279</sup> Day gives us a description for organising and activism along ontological anarchic lines. He proposes the creation of alternatives ‘to state and corporate forms of social organising’ oriented toward refusal and disengagement with these forms through intersubjective formations which have no teleological commitments. Day’s logic of affinity bridges the gap between May’s understanding of power and resistance through networked forms of power and Newman’s reclaiming of ontological justifications for anarchism. This gives us a clear way of addressing the politicisation of the answer to the question of power given to us by May, Koch and Newman. This also highlights to us what will become an important question when we begin to sketch out postanarchism as meta-ethics: what is meant by intersubjective here? We will return to Stirner’s negative-dialectic to approach this question as this will give us a way to characterise this without essentialising the other or being fixed within the ‘gaze’.

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<sup>277</sup> Richard Day, “From Hegemony to Affinity”: *Cultural Studies* 18.5 (2004): 722

<sup>278</sup> Richard Day, “From Hegemony to Affinity”: 735

<sup>279</sup> Richard Day, “From Hegemony to Affinity”

## Conclusion

We started the chapter with the question: what is a useful way to think about power, which we expanded to **what is a useful way to think about power which takes into account the commitment to oppose domination in all its forms?**

Postanarchism has developed a system of thought which provides a partial answer to our question which is key for contemporary radical politics. I have begun to sketch out my response to this partial answer based in my reading of Stirner and a commitment to praxis as method. From Stirner, the negative-dialectic forces us to reassess the manner in which postanarchism has, *qua* poststructuralism, asserted a form of positive answer to the place of power. The potentially dangerous implication here is that if we connect this with a Foucauldian understanding of the subject and subject formation then we may also return a positive answer to the place of ethics. Following from poststructuralist thought postanarchism has taken the discussions of power to also be that of the subject and used this to reject ontology as inherently representative. This can lead to a subjectivist ethics which itself either affirms the foundations upon which this is built, or fails to escape the essentialist trap it is attempting to escape. This identifies that we are seeking negative answers to these questions, but how are we to use these negative answers to build a positive politics which hold to the ethical commitments of anarchism?

We began our exploration of power evaluating the problems of power as outlined by Foucault and Deleuze. The manifestation of power in societies of discipline is identified by Foucault as operating within the logic of institutions of the state. Power here is taken to be diffuse and networked, operating within these sites as an assemblage of 'productive activities, resources or communication and the play of power relations'.<sup>280</sup> This categorises power as fundamentally linked to questions of the individual. Foucault demonstrates how this is itself a form of governance, one which rules over and through the subject which 'structures the possible field of action for others'.<sup>281</sup> Deleuze illustrates how this operation of power has extended within postmodern society to create societies of control. Here the processes which Foucault

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<sup>280</sup> Foucault, "The Subject and Power", 788

<sup>281</sup> Foucault, "The Subject and Power", 790

outlines operating within the barracks, school, prison, etc. now play out for us in real time wherever we are linked to us through technologies of simulation; technology changes the way in which 'productive activities, resources or communication and the play of power relations' operate and where. Like inside the panopticon, there is nowhere to hide. This is a totalising vision in which political resistance is removed from its bonds of solidarity and we return to a focus on ourselves. This creates what we have come to understand as the process of normalisation and the function of the 'gaze'. Poststructuralism has given anarchism reason to reassess its relationship to power and asks how we might form a politics which accounts for these philosophical tensions.

This is clear when we look at the way postanarchism has attempted to discuss the subject as site for these processes. May, Koch and Day all base their thought in a rejection of ontology as inherently representative and therefore problematic. They tie this to the problematic nature of positive, or essentialist depictions of the subject. We have seen how we must encounter the issue within the Enlightenment and 'classical anarchist' visions of essential human nature as we can never find a satisfactory answer to who gets to set the "rules of the game", who gets to decide what the objective conditions are? Newman uses this to focus on ontological anarchy as an answer to this tension, but it is his centring of subjectification which takes this most seriously. Newman makes use of Lacan's split subject to illustrate how we may begin to conceive of subject formation outside of the ethics of abundance which Foucault and Deleuze propose. This is an ethics of radical lack or of the outside. Newman asks us to look to the limits, the borders, or the knowable systems of the symbolic order to find a vision of the subject and its formation which escapes essence or pre-existent identity and relies on a rupture and disruption to systems of meaning.

Postanarchism's development has led us back towards questions of ontology and that will form the central focus for the rest of this research. We have seen how the category of the lumpenproletariat demonstrates to us this operation and given us a way to find a practice within this theoretical work. Power should not be able to affect the creation of these subjects as they are supposed to be fundamentally closed to these systems. However, in a direct reversal of the logic of Bakunin and Fanon we can identify the operation of power within these communities in much the same way

as we can when look at other categories of the subject. This is not to undermine or deprecate Fanon or Bakunin, but to highlight that to fulfil their promises we must look again at how we have politicised power. This is something, I argue, that anarchism in a privileged position to confront as it is committed to the development of ethical practice in response to these issues.

We have expanded our question to try to account for 'domination in all its forms' which for the purposes of the chapter we have identified as a rejection of foundationalist truth-claims and essential understanding of human nature. I am not proposing that this in any way is representative of all forms of domination, merely all of the forms relevant to my argument. An entire thesis could be devoted to an exploration of the possible forms of domination, but this is not my intention. These two positions account for the issues we encounter when surveying how postmodern political philosophy has conceptualised power and its operation in society. The rejection of the foundational basis of knowledge is analogous with Stirner's rejection of fixed ideas, but also points us towards the rejection of essentialism. For Stirner, we must reject the tyranny of fixed ideas, as these 'fix' us into subject positions, and then the state is able to rule *through* us. To be able to rule through us this involves the confirmation of a solid conception of the place of the subject's creation. So to reject one is to reject the other: place and process of subjectification/subjection both negative.

This is not a position that is fully expounded by early iterations of postanarchist thought. Koch and May's rejection of ontological philosophy limits their work to purely epistemological critiques. This has been a necessary step in the development of my argument, but one which I am seeking to expand to provide our negative answers. For me, the unavoidable link between a rejection of foundationalism and ontological visions of an essential human nature force us to re-examine the problems we will encounter by dismissing these questions. This is not to say that postanarchism has not provided significant insight in this area. Newman has developed an idea of ontological anarchy, or thinking anarchistically, taking anarchy as our starting point, not as our project. This will become more important to us when we look at how freedom is conceptualised and mobilised for a radical politics. Newman's rejection of May's ethics of abundance for an ethics of the radical outside places the question of



ontological ground back within these debates and his reading of Stirner has given him a way to bring together power operation on the subject and anarchist politics. Newman's focus here on the formation of the subject is important for us as it begins to disrupt and destabilise visions of the subject, but his recourse to a form of universalism still provides us with a partial, positive answer to where the subject is created.

From May we have taken that if power is to be found in networks, diffuse and rhizomatically, then we must respond tactically through prefigurative means. This, for May, must involve a form of micro-politics or a politics of the every day. If power is everywhere then we must resist everywhere, but we must also heed his warning that 'practices of representing other to themselves – either in who they are or in what they want – ought, as much as possible, to be avoided'.<sup>282</sup> In other words, be careful how we make use of the symbolic order (language) as it has a direct impact on the real world (you). This is related to May's other lesson of poststructuralism: we must find which power relationships are acceptable and which are not. In order to explore these principles, I have developed a form of politically engaged artistic practice which is formed around these ideas. This is the focus of much of the final section of the thesis, but what is interesting for us here is that practice has formed this argument as it is the only way to engage in a prefigurative micro-politics which aims to avoid representing the other to themselves, is active in evaluating the acceptability of power relations and works within the ontological process of subjectification. To explore these ideas within anarchist discourse with any level of coherence we must find a way to link our practice to them and this is my intention for this research.

We have drawn a temporary parallel between domination and foundationalism and essentialism. The epistemological critiques of early stage postanarchism have provided us with an understanding of power which is networked and productive. This has provided us with a basis for this enquiry, but one which is also based in a partial positive answer to the question of where this power operates – over and on the subject. Stirner gives us way of approaching how power operates *through* the subject by constructing us as political subjects through 'spooks' or fixed ideas. This

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<sup>282</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 130

leads us to question how we might begin to tackle the questions of ontology which have dominated this discussion. The next chapter will look at how freedom is to be conceptualised if we are to re-approach the ontological grounding of the subject. Indeed, we may well ask what is the ontological relationship between power and freedom. If as I have argued above, we have the power, what limits are there on this: what can freedom mean?

## Chapter 3: Freedom

### Introduction: Why is freedom important?

The two key themes which any thesis in left-liberatory thought must give some space to conceptualising are power and freedom. In the previous chapter we looked at how power has been dealt with in postanarchist literature and its implications for anarchist praxis, the relational nature of power and how this can oppose domination in all its forms. This could lead us to conclude that freedom can be read as a form of non-domination, as in the republican tradition. However, the ontological grounding of power and freedom are interrelated in a knot which postanarchism has attempted to untangle. As I have argued, power is represented and critiqued epistemologically by poststructuralist and postanarchist authors, but to be able to put our understanding of power to use, we must identify the problematic operation of power. Power operates at the level of the subject to create our possible identities and from this follows an obvious question: does power *determine* my freedom? This leads us back to Max Stirner and the relationship between the subject and object, or in this case, you and your relationship with your reality.

From Stirner we have learned that in order to overcome the epistemological impasse of fixed ideas we require an ontological solution. We must become self-owners in order to escape the 'possession' of the moral ultimates and spooks which seek to undermine our uniqueness. The implication here is that freedom can be understood as the ontological basis for power. This leaves us asking if domination can represent the entire inverse of freedom. This chapter will continue to develop the ontological politics which we began to explore in the previous chapter. We shall identify the core tensions in the discourses of freedom and apply my reading of Stirner. The rejection of domination by republican thinkers will be explored alongside questions of positive and negative liberty. We shall see how this is a false dualism and within the dichotomy is the basis for my ontological argument. We are building the conceptual basis for an exploration of postanarchism as meta-ethics and for this, freedom must be explored as the field of possibilities.

How we identify what constitutes this field, and how the possible is altered and understood, is key for a postanarchist position which holds a rejection of essentialism at its core. If we are to reject positive visions of essential characteristics of the subject, then we must understand what the philosophical and political implications are. The core argument of this chapter is that a consonant vision of postanarchist freedom can only account for our ontology, our politics and all else that is left falls into what we may understand as poetry. This is, of course, a bold and potentially contradictory statement: how are we to separate questions of ontology from political acts? My argument is that we do not need to, merely to understand the relationship between these two categories and find a critical relationship to foundationalist accounts of freedom such as those offered by neo-roman thinkers such as Quentin Skinner. Hardt and Negri argue that the ‘political must be understood as ontological’<sup>283</sup> and, much as I agree with some of their analysis, I wish to reverse this formulation. The argument I am building is reliant on this vision of politics, or our direct negotiation with the world – a form of micro-politics – developed *after* our ontological relationship with ourselves. This will require us to explore Stirner’s formations of the Unique and the Union of Egoists, both of which involve a negation of the philosophical, or metaphysical, form and language which serve to trap these discussions within the ‘fixed ideas’ of normative ethics.

A genealogical study of Isaiah Berlin’s freedom binary will give us a way of identifying conceptually what we are talking about when we are discussing freedom and the relationship between the ontological grounding of the subject and their politics.<sup>284</sup> This leads to the development of a series of practices which form the artistic praxis in the following chapters. Stirner’s ownness will be explored alongside

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<sup>283</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 354

<sup>284</sup> For a wider discussion of anarchism and pluralism see: Paul Hirst, *From Statism to Pluralism: Democracy, Civil Society and Global Politics* (London: UCL Press, 1997); Chantal Mouffe, C. (ed.), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (London: Verso, 1992); Casper Sylvest, “Beyond the State? Pluralism and Internationalism in Early Twentieth-Century Britain”, *International Relations*, 21 (2002), pp. 67–85. For more on liberalism and anarchism see: Susan Brown, *The Politics of Individualism: Liberalism, Liberal Feminism and Anarchism*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2003); Bruce Buchan, “Anarchism and Liberalism” in Nathan Jun (ed.), *Brill’s Companion to Anarchism and Philosophy*, (Boston: Brill) 2017.

the liberal and republican variants of freedom to identify what I describe as a politically achievable freedom. This is, by its very nature, a conceptualisation of freedom which is not a goal for us to aim towards, or something for which we require an engagement with mainstream political structures. Instead, what I am proposing is an ethico-political strategy based in the negative dialectic of Stirner and the ontological relationship to the self of ownness. Ownness is a form of radical self-ownership and consequently the vision of the subject from our study of power is key to avoid the re-inscription of essential human nature on the individual.

Anarchist thought has been preoccupied with the conceptualisation of freedom and liberty, perhaps more so than any other political ideology, from Bakunin and Proudhon's anarcho-republicanism to Bookchin's reaffirmation of social ethics. Questions around the limits of free speech, how "direct" a democracy needs to be for self-realisation, and the acceptability of violence in the face of fascism still dominate discussions in anarchist practice. It is imperative, then, to at least engage in a precursory overview of the discourses of freedom and how these interact with anarchist praxis. My contention here is that the postanarchist use of Foucault's understanding of relational power and Stirner's concept of ownness are key to how all liberatory politics aim to "liberate". As Foucault demonstrates,<sup>285</sup> there is a direct relationship between our conceptions of power and freedom. Power conditions our freedom and how we conceive of freedom conditions how we approach power. Moreover, the way we approach the question – indeed, the meta-questions – of freedom has a direct impact on our politics. For example, deterministic approaches, such as Marxist-Leninism, minimise our power as revolutionary subjects, relying on expertise and vanguardism to realise our 'freedom'. Relativist approaches also rely on a teleological view of freedom, albeit not a universal one, and have, as a consequence, been rejected by postmodern politics as oppressive and exclusionary.<sup>286</sup> I am, of course, oversimplifying for the sake of brevity, although I hope I have made clear the direct, often causal, linkage between freedom and politics.

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<sup>285</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 219

<sup>286</sup> Stevenson, *Freedom*, 18; Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom", 3

In the previous chapter I argued that the diffuse, rhizomatic nature of power provides us with political optimism and opportunity: we have the power. This chapter shall focus on the question: what should we do with it? Note that this does not include the sub-question, how do we do it? This is something which will be dealt with in the section on meta-ethics itself, although this disjuncture does highlight to us the importance that postanarchism can have in framing the ethical debates in liberatory politics. Within anarchist approaches to freedom, as with power, postanarchism offers us a way of coalescing around questions which help us form our decision-making processes – be they individual or collective – and provide for us a constant critique which should aid our struggle to fulfil our liberatory promises. Freedom must be given the centre ground of any discussion of liberatory politics – the clue is in the name – and, therefore alongside the previous discussion on what is a useful way to think about power, we also need a “useful” way to think about freedom. The use, not necessarily the utility, of these debates are what move them from the realm of dry, self-aggrandised Political Theory into our politics. Also key to this question, as highlighted in the chapter on Stirner, is the word ‘think’. My intention here is to be as broad as possible with this line of enquiry. I am attempting to encompass forms of thought, normative formations of social practices and ethical processes. My argument is that Stirner’s concept of ownness allied with ethical-nihilism and an understanding of regimes of power gives us a non-coercive, liberatory vision of ‘politically achievable freedom’.

### **Political freedom and personal liberty**

European political philosophy, from the Frankfurt School to plural-liberalism, has conceived of freedom in two ways which are relevant to our discussion: political freedom and personal liberty. This dualism, and our approach to it, is key to how postanarchist conceptions of freedom operate. By attempting to answer the questions related to this division we are once again ‘trapped in the language of our opponents’. What I wish to make clear with this section is the background against which postanarchism has approached freedom, through a rejection of these questions as, themselves, reliant on fixed ideas or rationality, moral spooks, or part of the power-knowledge nexus. More space will be devoted to exploring liberal and

republican arguments on freedom later in this chapter. This discussion serves to highlight the distinct approach which postanarchism takes. I intend to outline how postanarchism can be of use to all liberatory political theory and how this might be manifested in political praxis. This will go further than simply restating the case that postanarchist authors, primarily Newman, make for practices of freedom which maintain the epistemological critique of fixed ideas and the rejection of human essence.

Liberalism has engaged in a critique of the republican framing of freedom as simply non-domination, and asked what role personal liberty has in politics. From Hobbes'<sup>287</sup> declaration that the commonwealth is 'one person, of whose acts a great multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves every one author'<sup>288</sup> to Berlin's delineation of the extent of negative freedom as 'a function of what doors, and how many are open to him; upon what prospects they open; and how open they are'<sup>289</sup> these arguments coalesce around the question of how we are to be governed. This is one of the questions on which Berlin bases his distinction between negative and positive freedom. For Berlin, the underlying questions to these conceptions are: 'who governs me?'; and 'over what areas am I master?'.<sup>290</sup> This is closely linked to the neo-roman republicans, Pettit and Skinner's, assertion of the state and private property as both empirical and normative conditions. These questions will be explored below. However, it is clear from these statements why anarchists may take issue with the "freedom/s" proposed here. All of these assumptions are based in an analysis of freedom which starts from a position of unfreedom. These are debates which, for wholly separate reasons, all share a presumption of governance, all reflect ontological perspectives which share an ethical commitment to some form of individual freedom and some whose epistemological beliefs lead them to attempt to quantify freedom in a form of hedonic cul-de-sac. I am, of course, reflecting on these thoughts from a strictly anarchist, or

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<sup>287</sup> I am not arguing that Hobbes was himself a liberal. However, I consider his contribution to these debates as key in the creation and definition of liberalism's view of freedom, both personal and political – and, perhaps more importantly, the distinction between the two.

<sup>288</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 132

<sup>289</sup> Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, 41

<sup>290</sup> Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, 177

postanarchist, position which rejects coercion and authority in all its senses. I state here that I share the rejection of the state and of private property as inherently coercive and authoritarian and this shall form the commitments of my argument.

Freedom as non-domination is certainly appealing as a proposition for anarchist authors and there has been a recent turn to re-establish this as the basis for a left-critique of freedom.<sup>291</sup> Skinner and Pettit have gone some way to assert the neo-roman variant of republicanism in contemporary discourses of freedom and their contributions will be given greater analysis below. Key to my argument is the issues which anarcho-republicans have identified in their thought. The internal contradiction of the neo-roman argument is based in the normative assumptions of its authors, whose commitment to legalism as a *means* to achieve the *end* of freedom immediately strikes the anarchist reader as problematic. Pettit argues that ‘the laws create the authority that rulers enjoy, so the laws create the freedom that citizens share’, and that through correct constitutionalising rulers ‘will themselves be suitable constrained’.<sup>292</sup> The contradiction here, is the strategic application of legal means which lock in place the structures of governance and authority, something rejected (see below) by Kinna, Pritchard and other anarchist authors.

Pettit and other neo-roman republicans reject the Kantian Universal freedom – the manifestation and implications of this spook will be explored below – and restrict their argument to a freedom from arbitrary interference. Kinna and Pritchard have argued that the reliance on the law as a method for the creation of freedom is a fool’s errand. They are writing from within the republican tradition but are both respected anarchist scholars who have done much to move republican discourse and to reassert the latent republicanism in anarchist thought. It is for this reason that I am positing Pettit and Skinner as neo-romans through their shared commitment to the state. This taxonomy is not exhaustive and serves to distance this branch of traditional republican thought from its more radical variants. Kinna and Pritchard demonstrate the contradiction of a freedom underwritten through authority, as even

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<sup>291</sup> See Stuart White, “The Republican Critique of Capitalism”, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 14 (2011): 561-579

<sup>292</sup> Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 36



laws which fit Pettit's 'non-domination' definition are 'always mediated by background conditions of domination that are removed from public scrutiny'.<sup>293</sup> I am presenting this argument not to engage in a critique of neo-roman republicanism (something explored below and in depth by other authors) but to posit the anarchist critique of authority within these debates. The presuppositions of anarchist thought on freedom hold that political institutions must hold to ethical standards which are flexible and, far from what we might see as the traditional anarchist understanding of the opposition of power and freedom, do not seek authority which undermines the power of the constituents. Put more simply, our institutions must serve the needs and desires of their members and be able to develop in order to meet them, or be disbanded.

The political/personal divide is best expressed in Berlin's questions above. The nature of the questions is reflected in the anarcho-republican formations of Kinna and Pritchard, even as they critique the neo-roman variant. By taking republican commitments to non-domination as their point of departure these authors are still engaged in this discourse, although their conclusions would gain much support from anarchist activists. The authors arrive at post-sovereign constitutional formulations in order to give us a clear method of implementing a politics which appears consonant with anarchist ethics. These methods are based in anarchist praxis, chiefly the Occupy movement. However, by focusing on the questions of domination and arbitrary authority they remain within Berlin's paradigm. The approach taken does focus on negative liberty which directs their efforts at the question, 'over what area am I master?'

The answer, based in horizontal organising and prefigurative practice, seems to answer many of the ethical demands made by this thesis. However, returning to Stirner and his process of 'dissolving' we arrive at a different approach to Berlin's taxonomy. For Stirner, the answer to both inquiries, be it on matters of who is master or the extent to which we are to be governed, receive the same answer: 'Of what use is a freedom to you, indeed, if it brings you nothing?'.<sup>294</sup> Similarly, Newman highlights

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<sup>293</sup> Kinna and Pritchard, "Anarchism and non-Domination", 232

<sup>294</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 141

Foucault's conception of freedom which 'is more than just the absence or negation of constraint'<sup>295</sup> and introduces the notion that freedom is "practised" not bestowed. Newman's has given a detailed account of postanarchist freedom based in the thought of Stirner and Foucault. He has developed from this his postanarchist 'axiom of freedom'<sup>296</sup> based in both ownness and an experimental set of practices commensurate with Foucault's, alongside other poststructuralist authors', conception of 'situated freedom'.<sup>297</sup>

Newman builds on the work of May to introduce a postanarchism (here standing in for the signifier freedom) which seeks to bring together the personal freedom of ownness and the political liberty of situated freedom. This position shows the fallacy of the prepositions 'separating' freedom and exposes the ontological foundations of the extrication. Newman implores us to 'try to understand freedom not as an object to be grasped, a goal to be achieved, a political project to be fulfilled or a regime to be perfected – but rather as an ontological point of departure and an axiomatic condition for human action'.<sup>298</sup> What he is arguing for is the reuniting of personal and political liberty: it is impossible to 'begin with freedom' and to maintain the dualism. If you are ontologically free, or "pre-free", the answer to both of Berlin's questions starts and ends with you. If you are to govern yourself, then you are not to be governed at all. There is no extent of governance suggested in the autonomy found in postanarchism; there is a warning to avoid the fixed ideas and spooks which may interrupt this process and the notions of human essence which also promote oppressive practices.

This is the basis for Newman's axiom - itself an inversion of Rancière's 'axiom of equality' - where all domination confirms the possibility of freedom. The slave is only a slave due to the existence of the master; the tyrant's rule enforces the possibility for its absence; the existence of a dominant ideology or discourse suggests the existence of its opposite. In the previous chapter on the thought of Stirner I discussed Newman's inclusive disjunction where a politics of repression is only

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<sup>295</sup> See Newman, "Stirner and Foucault: Toward a Post-Kantian Freedom",

<sup>296</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 128

<sup>297</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 116

<sup>298</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 129

possible if there also exists an anti-politics or a politics of liberation. The links between these ideas are clear, and also mirror the way that Newman views the subject and brings us back to Stirner's negative objective-dialectic or '*Vergengenständlichungsdiagnostik*'. This removes any possibility for the dialectical 'realising' of freedom, or any form of dialectical reasoning; the only purpose of the dualism is recognised as the purpose of ownership. The methodology of freedom Stirner recommends to us is egoism. The method which is to be employed, insurrection, shares pre-freedom as its ontology, or rather starts with, as opposed to aims at, freedom. It is the distinction between *egoism*, and *egoism as methodology for achieving ownness*, which separates Stirner from other egoist thinkers. As shall be explored below, egoism and its effect on ideas of freedom are a large concern of Berlin's greatest influence, Alexander Herzen and the Russian Socialists. However, what we can discern here is the importance of ontological philosophy for negotiating a way of thinking about freedom which is *useful*.

This offers us no answers on how we might realise this freedom, something I will attempt to resolve in this chapter, but gives us some important premises to begin our discussion. The divide between personal and political freedom is itself oppressive and represents the structural domination present in networks of power. Freedom itself can be a fixed idea which is able to possess us and, therefore, must be critically assessed as such, not merely lauded as the ultimate political goal or something which can be easily described, or even measured,<sup>299</sup> in policy documents. Power and freedom are inter-related conceptions which philosophy, especially anarchist philosophy, must treat as such.

## **Republicanism**

Kinna and Pritchard identify the commitment to non-domination as key for anarchism and, therefore, for how we conceive of freedom. I believe if we explore the links between republican thought and anarchist praxis, we can separate non-domination and freedom. As I have outlined in the chapter on power, non-domination is a key plank in anarchist ethics commensurate with anti-authoritarianism. This may be a

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<sup>299</sup> See Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 355

more useful way for us to conceive of non-domination; not as standing in for the abstraction 'freedom', but in a clear and recognisable fashion. Before we can attempt this separation, it is important to trace how these ideas become interlinked within republican thought.

Republican thought, and its corollary neo-romanism, have based their visions of freedom on the principle of non-domination and this is a tradition which has increased in prominence. From the 'crisis of liberalism' ground has been taken by neo-roman thought within conceptions of political freedom. As we have seen, this is the creation of personal freedom through political freedom. In a similar construction to liberalism and Berlin's vision of neo-roman, republican thinkers have sought to justify the existence of the state and other forms of governance through the 'demands of freedom'. Pettit tell us that 'thinking about politics in terms of the demands of freedom as non-domination gives us a very full and persuasive picture of what it is reasonable to expect of a decent state and a decent civil society'.<sup>300</sup> We can already begin to see how, if we consider our discussion of Douglass, ontological freedom may operate within this framework and, perhaps more interestingly, offer resistance to it. We can "ignore" the 'decent state' and realise our freedom in opposition to this; we can operationalise 'practices of freedom' within its confines and offer *unreasonable* expectations. However, more interestingly for us, we can see how we may achieve a form of freedom which keeps the desirability of non-domination but does not rely on it to construct its conceptualisation of freedom.

The neo-roman thinker Quentin Skinner argues that in order to maintain freedom 'you must ensure you live under a political system in which there is no element of discretionary power, and hence no possibility that your civil rights will be dependent on the goodwill of a ruler'.<sup>301</sup> This appears to be a clearer political aim than to 'enhance freedom' as it outlines to us the nature of non-domination. It places emphasis on the political *system* as an arbiter of political *life*. This also serves to reinforce the view that rights-based political discourse is necessarily premised upon

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<sup>300</sup> Pettit, *Republicanism*, 4

<sup>301</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 74

dependence and the need to be granted these rights. We could reformulate Skinner's words to fit within an anarchist paradigm: you must ensure you live under a political system in which there is no element of discretionary power and hence no possibility that *you* will be dependent on a ruler. An example of the operation of this which has been praised within anarchist activism can be found in northern Syria.

If we look to the Rojava revolution and the Democratic Confederalism which has formed the political system there, this principle of non-domination actioned through a lack of dependence can be traced. I am not arguing that the Rojava revolution is Anarchist – although there is a not insignificant presence of proclaimed anarchist international brigades and volunteers – but it can be in no doubt that the events in West Kurdistan represent the most interesting international developments in liberatory politics since the EZLN began their insurrection in 1994. There is much to be said, and more to be analysed and evaluated, in Rojava from an anarchist perspective. However, what is of interest to us here is the relationship which Skinner identifies between political systems and discretionary power. The solution to this conundrum within the context of the Syrian civil war has exposed the structural violence of the state system. In order to prevent discretionary power and to avoid dependence the solution has been to have the “guns” answer to the bottom. What is meant by guns here is literally the weapons of war – we cannot separate these events from their context - but in our own context it could easily be read as the coercive powers of the state (i.e. policing and judiciary). What is meant by the bottom is the neighbourhood council system, a system which places emphasis on the representation of local communities through their composition. By directing the coercive forces of governance to follow from the subjects they operate over (with), the political system here is able to demonstrate what non-domination may look like. We can divorce this from abstractions as this relates directly to the political practices in the localities. Freedom here is not ‘measured’ through this interaction but forms the axiomatic logic of the political system. The ‘freedom’ of the subjects is a dependent factor for the operation of non-domination. What is demonstrated here is that non-domination is the product, not the constituent components, of freedom. Here, as outlined above, personal freedom is producing and conditioning political freedom and not vice-versa. This is the lesson for us. Without the ontological grounding of freedom, the possibility of non-domination is foreclosed, and this can

lead us to examine the 'output' of a system as evidence of freedom. What the Rojava example teaches us is that when we are exploring the relevancy of political practices to anarchist thought we must be aware that by praising the ends alone we can bolster the oppressive practices and fixed ideas as presented by neo-roman authors.

Returning to Kinna and Pritchard's 'correctives' it is possible to see how their conflation of anarchist and republican freedom can lead us to foster problematic norms and systems. Kinna and Pritchard argue that the freedom outlined by Skinner can be built upon in order to overcome coercion. For them, 'the critical purchase of freedom as non-domination then extends from the rigorousness of the tests it sets to assess the freedom-enhancing properties of political institutions'.<sup>302</sup> However, the republican basis for their understanding of freedom traps them within the logic of political freedom as a means to the ends of personal freedom. They argue that the freedom which Pettit outlines is only dependent on the state due to the 'special' status given to private property and that without this they can circumvent the coercive presuppositions, namely the state and private property, of neo-roman republicanism.<sup>303</sup> However, I believe the epistemological position of republican authors is the foundation for authoritarian and coercive practices. Pettit begins his *Theory of Freedom* with a direct refutation of the relational understanding of freedom and epistemological critiques of poststructuralism: 'It would be utopian to think that what happens in politics is a function of the normative ideas that circulate in and around the political world'.<sup>304</sup> I believe that this is a position which cannot be justified within the paradigm of liberatory politics as outlined here. Moreover, this philosophical approach is mirrored in Kinna and Pritchard's outline of horizontal constitutionalising as good anarchist practice. I, along with Newman, have no issue with the structures they propose – indeed they form the basis for some of the work in artistic practice that forms a key plank of this thesis' proposals – but we should have reservations about the ideological underpinning of these. The issue we have is not with the proposed structures, but with the axiomatic logic of their construction. By suggesting a telos, or even multiple *tele*, of political practice we are still creating

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<sup>302</sup> Kinna and Pritchard, "Anarchism as non-domination", 222

<sup>303</sup> Kinna and Pritchard, "Anarchism as non-domination", 229

<sup>304</sup> Pettit, *Republicanism*, 1

rules or 'spooks', ideas which Stirner indicates *will* be used to repress the individual. If we are to work within a purely philosophical conception of freedom then we must, necessarily, posit freedom as a universal. This is the misstep Kinna and Pritchard make, despite their best efforts to work within prefigurative, anti-authoritarian practices. By taking a vision of freedom which has its ideological assumptions in republican thought, they create a vision of freedom 'dependent on normative conditions and ultimately on an idealised community'.<sup>305</sup>

### **Isaiah Berlin and Russian Egoism**

We have seen that liberalism and neo-roman republicanism both rely on conceits of power which themselves preclude freedom: namely a commitment to the state and private property, and to an ontological commitment to unfreedom, or 'voluntary inservitude'. Plural-liberalism attempts to assert a vision of freedom which is similar in terminology to, although operationally very different from, the discourses of freedom proposed by postanarchism. The realisation of individual liberty through self-realisation and practices which allow for the co-existence of different sensibilities sounds like a promising start, or even consonant with the self-ownership of ownness. However, I believe that we need to separate the pluralism from the liberalism in order to find what might be useful to us here.

Following Foucault, Todd May relies on the distinction between tactics and strategy in order to make a differentiation between means and ends within political praxis. Using this dualism, we might find a way of conceiving pluralism and liberalism as means and ends, not as complimentary ideological commitments. This ties the liberal project, with its colonial logic, deification of reason and 'rational individual' to the moral values of pluralism. May builds on Foucault's employment of military language to graft ideas of strategy and tactics on to the means/ends distinction. May is using an opposition with Marxism in order to give primacy to what he describes as tactical, micro-political practices. He opposes this with Marxist theory as strategic or being based in a logic of "the ends justifying the means".<sup>306</sup> May here is talking about the

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<sup>305</sup> Newman, "Ownness Created a New Freedom", 168

<sup>306</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 21

genealogical logic of Marxism and not the writings of Marx himself; this genealogical logic connects with Laclau and Mouffe's account of Marxism – something which has a significant impact on Newman. This is countered with a view of anarchism as inherently tactical or prefigurative. In other words, by focusing on ends, Marxism is a strategic sociological logic which contrasts with anarchism and which dissolves the distinction between the two – our ends *must* be commensurate with our means.

Here liberalism could be categorised as strategic. It is an ideology which is premised on the *realisation* of freedom – freedom as ends. Berlin, and other plural-liberals,<sup>307</sup> posit value-pluralism as means. I am not engaging in a debate on the coherence of these views; that has been done at length elsewhere. I am asserting that if we separate the means from the ends of Berlin's vision of freedom, we may be able to find notions which can be useful for anarchist praxis. I wish to examine how the latent content of pluralism may be connected to poststructuralist understandings of networks of power and how this relates to anarchist visions of freedom. Further to this, there are examples of horizontally organised societies which overtly state their commitment to a form of pluralism which are supported by anarchist scholarship.<sup>308</sup>

My conceptualisation of Berlin's argument is building on the analysis of George Crowder. It is focused on the links between the liberalism Crowder finds in Berlin's value-pluralism and how this manifests itself in Berlin's reading of Herzen. Crowder sees within Berlin's thought on value-pluralism 'an affinity with some sort of liberalism' based in the commitment to a form of moral universalism.<sup>309</sup> My argument centres on how this liberalism can be found in Berlin's reading of Herzen and their shared rejection of Russian socialism. Berlin develops his vision of liberalism partially in response to his reading of Alexander Herzen and the Russian socialists. In Herzen's thought, and his discussions with his contemporaries, we can see a connection between the discussions which dominated the discourse of the Young

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<sup>307</sup> See George Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002); William Arthur Galston, *Liberal Pluralism: The Implications of Value Pluralism for Political Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

<sup>308</sup> See *Charter of the Social Contract in Rojava*

<sup>309</sup> George Crowder, "Value Pluralism, Diversity and Liberalism", *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, June 2015, 18.3: 549



Hegelians and Russian Socialism. As a contemporary and correspondent of Bakunin, the links to the genesis of anarchist thought on freedom is obvious. Herzen, and Russian Socialism more broadly, place greater emphasis on the role of egoism in progressive politics.<sup>310</sup> Herzen's fear of the oppression of communism manifests itself in Berlin's rejection of radical forms of pluralism and Berlin constructs his theory of liberty based in the conservative elements of Herzen's thought.<sup>311</sup>

Berlin's liberal account of freedom is based in a negative freedom premised on 'opportunity'. As opposed to Stirner, for Berlin freedom is 'the opportunity for action, rather than action itself'.<sup>312</sup> This is not to say that Berlin doesn't speak on behalf of positive liberty, indeed he admits that this 'opens fewer paths, but with better reasons',<sup>313</sup> and this highlights to us an area which is closer to Stirner's call for us to make freedom our own.<sup>314</sup> From these two positions it is clear that the disjuncture and similarities in expression of liberty share their underpinning in a commitment to individual freedom, at expense of all other freedoms or 'spooks'. Egoism is, perhaps, the ultimate expression of this – certainly within the paradigm of Hegelian thought – and posits a rejection of determinism which goes too far for Berlin (who doesn't take a position on this). Personal liberty is necessarily based in a subjective philosophy; it is vital to establish what the individual being discussed is before how freedom can be secured for that individual. For Stirner, this individual is the unique, the opaque and un-nameable non-concept which he creates to stand in for the self in his (non) philosophy. It is clear from Berlin that his theory of individual freedom is tied to the liberal individual. We can trace the commitment on Berlin's part to his reading of Herzen and the debates within the Russian socialists of the nineteenth century. It is no secret that Berlin's Russian heritage played a role in the formation of his thinking on politics, and he pays particular attention to Herzen as 'a political (and consequently moral) thinker of first importance' whom he credits with founding the

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<sup>310</sup> See Andzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: A History of Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth Century Russian Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975)

<sup>311</sup> I am referring here to Berlin's state bias and promotion of the state as a way of maintaining freedom.

<sup>312</sup> Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, 35

<sup>313</sup> Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, 49

<sup>314</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*

revolutionary movement in Russian.<sup>315</sup> I intend to interrogate the relationship between the thought of Berlin and Herzen and draw a comparison with the individualism of Stirner. This will focus on how both Herzen and Berlin account for a base form of egoism in their visions of a politically free society, but do not fully account for the conditioning of individuals through the knowledge-power nexus or fixed ideas; nor do they fully realise their pursuit of non-teleological thinking.

Russian socialist thought has placed greater emphasis on the role of egoism in revolutionary thought. Emerging from the 'European disappointment' following the revolutions of 1848 and decade of repression which ensued, the revolutionary movement in Russia viewed European political philosophy from, as they regarded, the outside. This is not to say that European political philosophy did not have a significant influence on these debates - Bakunin himself operated within Hegelian thought during his early work - but that the conflict between slavophile conservatives and Russian socialists placed a special importance and exceptionalism in this discourse.<sup>316</sup> While Herzen cannot be said to be an anarchist, there can be no doubt that he supported anarchists and liberatory politics.<sup>317</sup> Berlin's reading of Herzen is an inherently conservative one; a reading based in the fear that the sacrifice of the individual to the collective cause is itself oppressive. Herzen's politics, which ultimately are based in the utopian<sup>318</sup> conception of the village commune, coalesce around the peasantry of Russia. We can draw an analogy here with the discussions of the lumpenproletariat in the previous chapter and Bey's call for anarchism to work to include more exploited and marginalised voices. For Herzen, the 'spook' of communism is held above the people it is intended for, as anarchist practice has excluded communities it seeks to represent, and it is the excluded which forms the basis for these political positions. It is interesting to look at the ways that Herzen's socialism manifested itself and how his relationship to Bakunin illustrates his rejection of "causes" held over the individual. This is reminiscent of Stirner's call to

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<sup>315</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* eds. Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (London: Penguin, 2013), 83

<sup>316</sup> Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, 591

<sup>317</sup> Aleksandr Herzen, *End and Beginnings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 478

<sup>318</sup> I am not using this pejoratively, but in Bookchin's sense.

refuse grand narratives and moral ultimates, but this is not to say that Herzen is a Stirnean.

Berlin's reading of Herzen leads him to posit a liberalism in which personal freedom is protected and reinforced through political freedom. This is reliant on political structures which 'guarantee' non-interference and the promotion of choice. As demonstrated above, the liberal state is itself an oppressive and hierarchical instrument which runs counter to anarchist visions of freedom. Herzen's argument is that by allowing the liberator to take the place of the master we are merely recoding these oppressions. Herzen's target is the communist movement, which he sees as the potential destroyer of peasant villages and agricultural communes. However, we could equally apply this to the tyranny of choice which is packaged to us as freedom under neoliberalism. This is a point which postanarchist thought is in agreement with. The contemporary choosing of new masters is not freedom but a coercion which operates through 'encouraging certain forms of identification, passivity, conforming behaviours, patterns of consumption and communication'.<sup>319</sup> The core argument here is that if liberation doesn't work for the 'bottom', be it the peasant village in nineteenth century Russia or exploited former industrial communities of modern Britain, this is not freedom; this is just the constitution of new arrangements. Berlin's taxonomy emerges from this distinction; we can see that the concerns of Herzen – that of the crushing of existing liberatory social formations – become Berlin's quest to protect the liberal individual. This leads him to the questions above and the splitting of forms of freedom, but if we reject the *a priori* existence of the state, or hierarchical forms of governance, as inherently unfree, then it is clear we must look elsewhere for a form of freedom which is able to avoid imposing new forms of authority.

Liberation must be premised on the rejection of new masters and practices of domination. This is not something which can be achieved through the election of new masters and the rearrangement of existing conditions. This is demonstrated if we return to the non-concept of the unique. I have argued that the unique is a way of conceiving the subject which escapes the universalising narratives of the liberal individual. A signifier without signification or content, an opaque shifting singularity

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<sup>319</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 92

which cannot be easily categorised and allows for the experimentation which Foucault posits as necessary for practices of freedom to occur. Postanarchist authors have espoused the unique, or similar obscure conceptions, to escape the meta-narratives of human essence or spirit. Stirner posits the unique in direct response to the liberal individual and this contest highlights to us the issues which direct Stirner and other anarchists to reject liberalism's vision of the universal rational subject. Where liberalism looks to the 'human', the universal and reason, we instead are shown that these are the same epistemological tools which have been employed by the church to repress populations and now find themselves mirrored in our political institutions. Liberal political institutions are premised on this version of personal liberty guaranteed through political freedom which operates from the top down. The counter to the unique – here we could think of almost any fixed category of subjectivity such as conceptions of 'the human' (as in human rights) - implies a metaphysics of the subject. We must be the characteristics which compose 'human' in order to be considered so. This relies on the epistemological commitments of the enlightenment of a foundational, observable world with the 'correct' fulfilling of freedom. This necessarily creates out-groups or Others, something which has been rejected by postmodern politics.

Herzen was not a political liberal but shared the commitment to a universality of the subject and a strong theory of history. Where Stirner's unique is a proposition designed to dissolve the fetishisation of reason and abstraction, Herzen believed that 'raising itself to the level of universalist of reason was a necessary prerequisite of individuality'.<sup>320</sup> Herzen's commitments to find liberatory forms of political practice is commendable and there is much in his thought which is of use to anarchist discourse. His arguments with Bakunin highlight this potential source of useful and often overlooked discussion. Herzen engages directly with Bakunin on anarcho-communism. In 'My Past and Thoughts' he argues that the struggle for social fulfilment should not have sacrifice as its methodology and echoes Emma Goldman when he argues that the well-being of society 'will never be attained if everyone makes sacrifices and nobody enjoys himself'.<sup>321</sup> Herzen's argument mirrors the

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<sup>320</sup> Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, 387

<sup>321</sup> Herzen, "My Past and Thoughts" in Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, 82

dichotomy constructed in the 'first wave' of postanarchism with the 'classical anarchists' of whom Bakunin is a primary member.<sup>322</sup> I am not trying to establish Herzen as a 'forgotten anarchist' or even suggesting a new reading of Herzen (although there is much possibility here), but in applying Herzen's critiques of communism we can also discern the unfreedom at the heart of liberalism and therefore the problems which Berlin's account of freedom have for liberatory politics. If Bakunin's revolutionism must be rejected for its coercive discourses and strategic logic, then liberalism also shares this 'terrible power over human lives'.<sup>323</sup>

Postanarchist authors have made this a key plank in their argument. In place of the logic of revolution, they suggest insurrectionary politics. As I have proposed in the chapter on power, we no longer have a unitary place of power to resist, no building we can occupy or hill to defend. The implications of this are that we must look to resist everywhere but this is an untenable position; as noted above, a life of permanent struggle can hardly be categorised as free. The solution to this impasse suggested by postanarchism is insurrection. Stirner tells us that if revolution begins with our dissatisfaction with existing conditions, then insurrection begins with dissatisfaction with ourselves.<sup>324</sup> In practice this means holding ourselves above moral sacrifices in a manner consonant with Herzen as it 'starts from the affirmation of the self, and the political consequences flow from this'.<sup>325</sup> Herzen himself makes a similar argument: 'If only people wanted to save themselves instead of saving the world, to liberate themselves instead of liberating humanity, how much they would do for the salvation of the world and the liberation of humanity'.<sup>326</sup> This sceptical-individualism could feature in Stirner's writing, although there are many areas of separation between the two thinkers' visions of liberation. This serves to highlight the mirage of liberty which is created through aiming at, not beginning with, freedom. What is missing from Herzen, and consequently Berlin, is the ontological pre-

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<sup>322</sup> See Newman, *Postanarchism: A Politics of Anti-politics*

<sup>323</sup> Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, 193

<sup>324</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 279

<sup>325</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 54

<sup>326</sup> Aleksandr Herzen, *From the Other Shore and The Russian People and Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1979), 128

freedom implied in ownness. We can see the operation of these narratives in the 'freedom' offered to us under neoliberalism.

Neoliberal-capitalist society places a strong emphasis on the discourses of freedom and extends the 'laissez-faire' logic of economic liberalism into civil society. If we follow the arguments that the state and private property are inherently coercive then the fallacy of this brand of freedom needs no further explanation. However, this is a very pessimistic approach to political practice and the question of freedom. If we examine the operation of 'freedom' under neoliberalism and resistance to it. I contend that we will can find examples of egoistic resistance and the pre-freedom associated with ownness and this can help scaffold our optimism. Freedom under neoliberalism is viewed as compliance with market logic: choice; competition; non-state interference, and entrepreneurship. Foucault identifies three tendencies of typical markets for which neoliberalism introduces 'regulatory actions' and 'organising actions'.<sup>327</sup> These are the conditions for which, under the logic of the market, it is acceptable for the state to interfere with freedom – or, to put it another way, to regulate. The example of this logic Foucault gives us is the approach of neoliberalism to unemployment: 'Whatever the rate of unemployment, in a situation of unemployment you absolutely must not intervene directly or in the first place on the unemployment, as if full employment should be a political idea and an economic principle to be saved at any cost. What is to be saved, first of all and above all, is the stability of prices'.<sup>328</sup> Recognised first and foremost as the objective of neoliberal-capital here is the stability of prices and this demonstrates to us how under the mirage of freedom which neoliberalism promises, interference (the removal of freedom in a liberal sense) is acceptable, even desirable, in order to maintain the price mechanism. This is by no means a new phenomenon: so called laissez-faire liberal-capitalism, from British mercantilism to the creation of the constitution of the US, is premised on this logic.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 138

<sup>328</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 139

<sup>329</sup> Sheldon Richman, "What is Laissez Faire?", in *Markets Not Capitalism* eds. Gary Chartier and Charles W. Johnson (London: Autonomedia, 2011), 127

Sustainability and empowerment are two concepts instrumentalised by neoliberal ideology that relate to these discussions, and to which I have needed to critically respond as part of this research. The artistic practice in which I have engaged to explore these themes takes a long-term (or sustainable) commitment to the communities it operates in as part of the ontological commitments I am outlining here. This practice has also been based in exploited communities which often find themselves targeted for 'empowerment'. This has led me to two questions relevant to our discussion: what is meant by empowerment, and what is being 'sustained'? In the previous chapter we established that power is already to be found in these communities, operating through the individual relationships and the play of power relations. The will to work within these communities must not be bound up with the narrative that the people and groups which compose them are "powerless" and need us to "save" them in some way. This is clearly the operating of a colonialist logic; it is deeply hierarchical and serves to create a negative, objective discourse fixing the individuals within its gaze. This is, as May puts it, an example of an unacceptable relationship of power and one which can have problematic results as an outcome of its "sustainability".

As part of an ontological approach to politics we must take seriously our role in the creation of others as political subjects: there must be a strong intersubjective component. As a guiding methodology for practice this means becoming embedded members of the communities we wish to work with. There will be an evaluation of the efficacy and need for this method later in the thesis, but for now what is important is the critical approach to liberal notions of sustainability. The practice I have developed attempts to avoid the potentially problematic nature of this through getting to know participants, letting them get to know us, and making them co-creators in any practice. The danger here is a very real one, that by trying to "empower" communities without an understanding of which relationships of power may be acceptable and which may not, we can fix in place the hierarchies, domination and oppression already found within these communities. If then we aim not to magnify these problems, we must deal critically with any notion of sustainability. These two concepts are deeply interrelated in much the same way that we may understand power and freedom.

The subjective nature of artistic practice, and its inherent possibility for experimentation and affect, offer us a way to create a practice which rejects the narratives of empowerment and market logic. This is not to say that artistic practice forms a *de facto* liberatory practice, simply that it offers us a route to this possibility. What is important for this debate is the nature of some forms of artistic practice. Bishop notes that what is termed socially engaged artistic practice, or community art, has been co-opted by neoliberal capitalism in order to fulfil its welfare provision.<sup>330</sup> Here we can see the operation of the ‘organising actions’ of neoliberalism, actions of the paradoxical government-funded free market operator. We can think of the artists “helicoptered in” to exploited communities in order to expand a narrow editorial control of what is acceptable practice and discourse, funded (directly or indirectly) by government in order that the state can withdraw from a community – or a function within it, e.g. childcare - and maintain the appearance of market logic and price.<sup>331</sup> What this tells us is that freedom, in any liberatory sense, is not at the heart of this discussion.

The logic of the market is given primacy and the state will be grown and its influence drawn further over individual freedom – even in artistic expression – in order to achieve this. This directly associates marketization with freedom despite the obvious contradictions. It is this conditioning, Foucault tells us, which produces the neoliberal form of subjectivity, *homo economicus*.<sup>332</sup> Power relations here serve to associate the individual with a source of value and legitimacy which is bestowed through the market. We can see how this is expressed in the operation of the art market, where price is directly taken to be the *de jure* form of legitimation for an artist or artwork. This leaves us answering only to the norms created by, and in the maintenance of, the market. This creates *homo economicus* as predetermined; a form of telos returns through the operation of capital (in this case the individual) and serves to call for the individual to sacrifice themselves for this logic in a way which Herzen and Berlin would find very uncomfortable.

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<sup>330</sup> Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso Books, 2012), 13

<sup>331</sup> See Bates and Sharkey, “Politically Engaged Artistic Practice: Strategy and Tactics”

<sup>332</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* ed. Michel Senellart (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 226



## Ownness and Newman

If it were possible to tear egoism from the human breast,  
This would be tantamount to taking away man's vital element,  
his fertile ferment, the core of his personality.<sup>333</sup>

Herzen rejects teleological thought and promotes egoism as 'that concentration and separation to which all living beings tend, as to their final goal'.<sup>334</sup> What is 'missing' from Herzen, and leads Berlin to his false taxonomy, is a theory of ownness. Coupled to Herzen's rejection of Slavic communalism is his rejection of the irrationality of Stirner: instead, he asserts a rational, universal self. This demonstrates to us the ontological implications of Herzen's thought; he is still committed to the realisation of human spirit (*Geist*) despite his rejection of Hegelian panlogicism, which places rationality as the axiomatic logic for the realisation of freedom. In other words, in a similar logic to the post-Kantians, Herzen asks us to hold universal history and logic above the individual in order for that individual to avoid 'frittering himself away'.<sup>335</sup> This appears to run counter to Herzen's commitment to individualism and rationality. However, this reflects his interpretation of how liberation involves 'thought defeating fact', a feat of 'logic over tradition' for whom Peter the Great forms Herzen's key example. As opposed to Stirner, indeed aimed directly at his logic, Herzen is promoting a rejection of determinism based in the necessity of historical development. Here necessity does not stand in for rationality. He is not arguing that there is a telos guiding this development, merely that nature 'rejoices in what has been attained, and reaches out beyond it; she has no desire to wrong what exists; let it live as long as it can, while the new is still growing. That is why it is so difficult to fit the work of nature into a straight line ; nature hates regimentation, she casts herself in all directions and never marches forward in'.<sup>336</sup> Stirner's thought rejects even this 'necessity'. This theory of history may be an acceptable way for Herzen to contemplate his support for the village

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<sup>333</sup> Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts Vol II*, 96

<sup>334</sup> Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts Vol II*, 96

<sup>335</sup> Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts Vol II*, 63

<sup>336</sup> Herzen, *From the Other Shore*, 33

commune, but abstracted further than this it becomes the fixed idea which stands in for metaphysics or, at the very least, can be used as a narrative of oppression. If historical development can be 'justified' at all, it can be used to cover previous injustice and future exploitation.

As a way of escaping these fixed ideas Newman posits Stirner's vision of ownness. Newman's intervention is to demonstrate the application of ownness and how the relationship of ontology to questions of freedom is effected by the logics of neoliberalism. Freedom, for Stirner, is another fixed idea, or moral ultimate, which holds dominion over the individual. This is a process which occurs primarily through the domination of the individual by the state, contradictorily, in the name of freedom. Political liberty here is revealed to us as an abstraction which removes 'you' from the laws and institutions which govern us. Far from political liberty guaranteeing personal freedom, 'It does not mean *my* liberty, but the liberty of a power that rules and subjugates me; it means that one of my *despots*, like State, religion, conscience, is free'.<sup>337</sup> Newman's postanarchist account of ownness moves from Stirner's critique of liberal humanism to demonstrate its utility in regard to Foucault's sacrificial neoliberal subject. It is the ontological freedom which ownness promises, is even premised upon, which 'seeks to make freedom real by placing it back within the grasp of real individuals who are free to create their own singular path'.<sup>338</sup> The basis for Newman's argument is that this is something which can be achieved, something we can do now, without having to wait for the right politician to be elected or village commune to be created. Newman takes up Foucault's critique of postmodern society and argues that it is this approach to ontology which is needed to resist these discourses. My argument is that this can also be used to demonstrate the inconsistencies in Herzen's politics and that the proposed axiomatic logic of pre-freedom or 'ontological freedom', as proposed by Newman, is a more productive way of approaching Herzen's presuppositions (namely the crushing of the individual in the name of liberation).

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<sup>337</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 142

<sup>338</sup> Newman, "Ownness Created a New Freedom", 160

To find our way to a politically achievable freedom - coherent with a philosophical freedom – we must develop a philosophy of freedom which fulfils the stated commitments of a liberatory politics. In order to construct a meta-ethics of anarchist thought I am proposing this change of logic. Here I am suggesting that ownness as an ‘end in itself’ demonstrates its utility by answering Herzen’s critique of Stirner’s irrationalist approach to egoism and Berlin’s pluralism. Newman moves Stirner’s critique from its nineteenth century moorings and establishes, through Foucault, that within the totalising systems of norms, systems of power have freedom as their ontological basis.<sup>339</sup>

Newman inverts the typical reading of Foucault, that power is the secret of freedom, to argue that ‘*freedom is the secret of power*’.<sup>340</sup> This move leads us to concentrate on the freedom we have, not the freedom to be achieved or realised. Newman finds a manifestation of freedom as the ontological basis for power in Foucault’s ‘care of the self’.<sup>341</sup> He is establishing that the pre-freedom of ownness is also found in the resistance to the subjecting processes of power. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, power operates to ‘create’ our subjectivities through and over us. This takes a number of forms from the language we use to the application of the law. Foucault posits that through the aestheticisation of our lives we can engage in a resistance to the operation of this power. Newman advances that these strategies of resistance can, in fact, lead to ‘a new kind of tyranny, a tyranny made all the more pervasive and effective because it is one that the subject imposes upon himself’.<sup>342</sup> Taking his lead from Lacan’s conception of the split subject (as radically split between speaking and being) Newman identifies the process of subjectification as the necessary resistance to this tyranny. The split which exists between speaking/thinking and being allows for the identification of the subject as distinct from the individual, the subject being the space where power operates and the individual identifies with. From this we can see how the individual is able to recognise the operation of power over their subjectivity and create an image of themselves in which the individual ‘transcends his ordinary, everyday existence to take up a position of a full political

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<sup>339</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 107

<sup>340</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 108 (emphasis in original)

<sup>341</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 76

<sup>342</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 77

subject'.<sup>343</sup> Here we may think back to Douglass' description of the night of the fight with his slave master.

As I argued in the chapter on Stirner, Douglass gives us an excellent first-hand account of the development of his ownness. This would also appear to be a description of the process of subjectification as outlined by Newman. The process which Douglass' story illustrates is that of the political logic which follows from ontological freedom: in place of the decision to fight the master to gain freedom, I am free, therefore I will fight the master. This is a solid basis for liberatory politics commensurate with the prefiguration and ethic of direct action found in anarchist praxis. From Douglass resting in the woods going through the process of subjectification we can move our imaginations to the US military contractor who decides to publish images of war crimes, or the Kurdish woman who takes up arms to protect her community. These are actions which display the pre-freedom of ownness and address the ontological issues of Herzen. In place of the individual realising themselves through the rejection of tradition and moral ultimates, the subject realises themselves in seeing how power operates through them and the basis in freedom which this presupposes: in order for my freedom to be taken from me, I must be free to begin with. If we invert liberalism's, and to some extent socialism's, promise to create individual freedom through political freedom we are in a better position to realise Herzen's promises. Here I propose that ownness, achieved through egoism<sup>344</sup> or individual freedom to create a form of liberatory political practice, is consistent with Berlin's proposed pluralism and Herzen's vision of socialism through the village commune. Establishing the ontological basis for freedom is the first step I believe we must take to find a useful way to think about power or to create a politically achievable freedom. It is also important to interrogate how forms of domination interact with this and how we might put this philosophy in to action. It is not enough for us to rely on theory to declare we can simply 'put up' with the oppressions and hierarchies which rule our lives. We must offer a road map, something to do.

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<sup>343</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 88

<sup>344</sup> Egoism as described in the chapter on Stirner, an egoism which finds its basis in ethical-nihilism.

Newman has done much to advance the cause of postanarchist politics and has outlined how this may be philosophically conceived. What is missing from Newman's account is the taxonomy of postanarchism, or the programme of postanarchist politics. Newman is careful to avoid giving his reader too much detail on how we should go about political practice, and for good reason. We must be vigilant not to reintroduce coercive practices and ideas, not to deify spooks or to imply a "correct" politics. Newman is very clear that this is his intention, and he does outline the latent postanarchist content of political practices, including the occupy movement, and references Stirner's 'union of egoists' as a potential source for anarchist praxis, which he posits as examples of an indifference to power and an ontological anarchy. However, despite this good work, we are still left in doubt over the nature of the practices we should engage in. Here Newman is praising the experimental nature of the democratic procedures involved in the Occupy movement while elsewhere he identifies the contradictions inherent in this. The example used appears more to give us a way of making the distinction between radical forms of direct-democracy and postanarchist politics than to give us an understanding of how to operationalise this. What I am calling for is a 'program' which is commensurate to Hakim Bey's original call for a postanarchism.

Bey outlines nine areas where anarchism needs to fulfil its promises – some of which sound strange and contradictory to twenty first century ears – from anarchist cartography to greater representation of people of colour. There are many issues with Bey's thought. For example, he appears caught in a contradiction, one necessary for his position; he first calls for us to 'cleanse the temple of vain idols' then finds unqualified praise for "'Higher states of consciousness'".<sup>345</sup> Using Stirner's critique of our 'possession' by ideas it is possible to see how the phrase 'higher states of consciousness' implies, at the very least, a 'necessity' in Herzen's sense, or at worst a form of teleological thought which runs counter to his stated intentions. The vision which Bey outlines is not commensurate with postanarchist thought as developed by Newman. However, the critique he levels and the form he proposes as an alternative is still relevant for our discussion. Bey's intervention in anarchist

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<sup>345</sup> Bey, "Post-Anarchism Anarchy", 3

thought came at a time when anarchism was considered to be in crisis and liberatory politics was ignoring marginalised groups such as people of colour and the queer community. While there has been much progress since Bey wrote, there are still those who proclaim anarchism to be in crisis<sup>346</sup> and our movements are often accused of lacking representation from marginalised voices – despite efforts to the contrary.

Newman addresses Bey's call for an 'anarchist present', attempting to demonstrate, through his postanarchist philosophy, that anarchistic practice is, in fact, flourishing. Newman does not try to appropriate political practices for postanarchism. He is identifying an organising logic in radical politics which are forms 'of politics and ethics based on an indifference to power'.<sup>347</sup> It would be a misstep for Newman to "claim" individual movements for postanarchism. However, it would be beneficial for him to give us more detail on how postanarchism is represented in these practices and, perhaps more importantly, how it is not. I shall attempt to sketch out how we may apply a taxonomy of postanarchism, or ontological anarchism, to political practice, not to create normative political theories, but in order to provide a "toolkit" of approaches to political practice. I shall engage in this endeavour at greater length in our exploration of artistic practice, but here I believe it is of *use* to outline how we might conceive of a politically achievable freedom. I believe we can outline current critiques of organising and philosophy and construct a way of approaching the question(s) of our politics that is consonant with our understanding of relative freedom, the operation of power on the subject and ownness.

Let us begin by returning to Bey's question, "what is your true desire?". The implication of this question is that your 'true desire' is a knowable object. This is an equivalent manoeuvre to Lacan's explanation of the *objet petit a*, or the object of desire. This is not to say that the *objet petit a* is simply *the thing* which we desire, but it is the excess of meaning which is found in the signification of the other. It is both of, and paradoxically outside, the subject. It provides for us an intersubjective process of subject creation which Rousselle describes as:

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<sup>346</sup> See Anarchist Studies Network Conference 2020, *Anarchism in Crisis*.

<sup>347</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 137

...[I]ntimately external, humanly non- human, and relative, always, to the symbolic order. The thing swallows up the subject and yet also constitutes the subject as such. But the *objet petit a* only swallows some semblance of reality, precisely in order to reconstitute the subject among the chain of signification.<sup>348</sup>

What is useful here is that the project Lacan is engaged in is similar to that of Foucault and Stirner, that of making our actions, thoughts and politics more unique, more “you”. I highlight this here as it raises an important point for our discussion. Ontological anarchism, or ownness, does not imply that we can simply ‘put up’ with our oppression. It is not simply a way of obfuscating the logics and operations of neoliberal markets. What an axiomatic logic of freedom provides for us is something concrete to mobilise around: it gives us something to do - even at times, such as during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown which form the immediate context for my writing, when there is nothing (no-thing) to do. Taking freedom as our point of departure (*point de capiton* for Lacan) leaves us with the inference that freedom – at least in its ontological, pre-freedom sense – is something we already have. Here we can draw a comparison back to our conclusion that ‘we have the power’ from the previous chapter.

If we accept that we are already ‘free’ then this goes some way toward answering our questions of personal liberty. What is left to discuss is how this ontological approach to freedom manifests itself in our negotiation of political freedom. How is political freedom negotiated in a manner which is able to create (non-idealised) communities, movements, societies etc. which are able to fulfil political freedom of their constituents? Following the logics of egoism and ownness it becomes clear that the key principle for all organising must be the creation of political institutions which are premised on serving the needs and desires of their members. We may think here of Stirner’s ‘union of egoists’. This is the form of organisation which Stirner advocates and, indeed, uses to rebut any notions of society. The issue Stirner takes

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<sup>348</sup> Duane Rousselle, *Lacanian Realism: Political and Clinical Psychoanalysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 33

with society is the 'fixed' nature of societies in which we must become its 'subjects'. The union, for Stirner, is a departure from this, as it is a social formation which does not detract from the principle of ownness. It may, Stirner tells us, impede on our political liberty, but leaves intact our ability to see ourselves as free and act upon this. 'But *ownness* I will not have taken from me. And ownness is precisely what every society has designs on, precisely what is to succumb to its power'.<sup>349</sup> What allows for this condition is the flexibility of the union, something which must always remain 'my own creation, my creature, not sacred, not a spiritual power above my spirit, as little as any association of whatever sort'.<sup>350</sup>

This highlights to us the contested and contradictory nature of our political environment. An example I wish to explore to illustrate this is the resistance to the imposition of restrictions of freedoms by the state in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The UK and the US alongside most states, followed the advice of the World Health Organisation and implemented a series of measures to curtail the interaction of individuals. These range from the closure of most workplaces and a ban on public gathering which has been enforced by the police. A section of conservative voices and their followers have reacted against this imposition. This exemplifies interaction of personal and political freedom in our negotiations of individuals' wants and needs which may, or may not, dovetail with our own. The actions of these individuals could be described as egoist or individualist. However, I do not believe that this represents the philosophy of ownness and it runs counter to our understanding of egoism. Ownness and egoism are often portrayed as base and selfish, and ignore our need to organise collectively in order to realise our needs and desires. The Russian socialist and contemporary of Herzen, Vissarion Belinsky, argued that Stirner failed to distinguish between 'primitive animal egoism' and egoism 'imbued by moral principle'.<sup>351</sup> Stirner, of course, would reject the need for any form of morality. However, it is the accusation of the base and animalistic nature of egoism which is representative of the characterisation of egoism. Often egoism is equated with an empty selfishness, something which is based in the Christian

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<sup>349</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 271

<sup>350</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 273

<sup>351</sup> Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, 389



morality of the West. The animalistic nature of egoism leaves it open to accusations that it is, simply, incapable of creating the organisation required for liberatory politics.<sup>352</sup> My argument is that far from being too basic and simple to fulfil these desires it is a more reliable way of navigating the political.

Republican and liberal conceptualisations of freedom find their expression, and demonstrate their limitations, in the conservative anti-lockdown actions. Here we see clearly the dualism between the conservative (republican/Republican) will to avoid interference and domination and liberalism's retort of impositions on freedom – in this case freedom of movement - to maximise opportunity. A politics of ownness, alongside a philosophy of egoism, gives us a way to understand the choice to limit our own movement – as communities, or unions of egoists, not by the state – as a practice of freedom, as Foucault would understand it. If we look to anarchist activism we can find examples which demonstrate how this can operate politically. The amoralist collective Crimethinc published advice on the anarchist response to the pandemic placing emphasis on the principles of mutual aid and the creation of a 'security culture'. A security culture is an established anarchist tactic aimed at minimising risk through autonomous decision-making. Security cultures are developed for a number of reasons, but it is common in anarchist praxis for these to be established as a way of avoiding state co-option. 'Culture' is used here to avoid any notion of constitutionalising or protocol, with the aim of changing our ontological relationship to risk. The guide instructs its reader that '[t]he important thing is to agree about the level of risk you are collectively ready to tolerate, adhere to a set security protocols, and communicate clearly when a new risk arises'.<sup>353</sup>

What is being discussed here is the creation of 'unions' which operate along the axiomatic logic of freedom – note the legal restrictions of the state are not even discussed here – to create political conditions. The decision-making process does not rely on idealised community, reason, or abstractions. What is called for is people

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<sup>352</sup> See Murray Bookchin, "Social or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm" 1995, accessed April 17, 2019 (achieved at) <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-social-anarchism-or-lifestyle-anarchism-an-unbridgeable-chasm>

<sup>353</sup> "What is Security Culture", Crimethinc, last modified January 11, 2004, <https://crimethinc.com/2004/11/01/what-is-security-culture>

to make decisions for themselves based in their own interest. This is not within a moral vacuum as we are led to believe. In order to achieve ontological freedom or engage in practices of freedom we must first follow the instruction to 'know thyself!'. I will explore how we can conceive of this below. However, what is important here is that knowledge of the self (of the unique may be a better way of expressing this, avoiding the loaded neoliberal consumerist visions of the 'self') includes knowledge of how we interact with others, or to put it another way, the implications our actions have for our relationships to power. Ownness, or ontological anarchy, limits our discussion of personal freedom to the pre-existing freedom, which forms the basis for the rest of our logic. The implication of this assertion is that, within the abstract discussions of freedom, everything beyond this limit is what we may define as politics. How this is to be negotiated is based on the unique, the "you", the conditions or risks you face and the possibilities specific to that situation. For anarchist praxis in the face of a pandemic this means the individual using their self-knowledge and self-ownership to negotiate how to manage the risk and life of a community. This may mean that some members expose themselves to higher levels of risk in order to aid more venerable members of the community, but not necessarily. The implication of my argument, of course, is that the conservative protesters should be free to organise and defy the ban on gatherings – although this is not the recommendation of this thesis. However, I must also include the ability to defend against any increase of risk this may perpetrate.

A way of exploring this relationship is to be found in Foucault's discussion of 'technologies of the self'. Foucault identifies, within the "truth games" of knowledge, production and exchange, 'technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality'.<sup>354</sup> Foucault identifies a taxonomy of technologies of the self within his hermeneutics: self-knowledge, and care for the self. Foucault argues that self-knowledge is the only form which has been treated as morally acceptable in

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<sup>354</sup> Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self* eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1988), 18

medieval and modern cultures, as care for the self is viewed 'as an immorality, as a means of escape from all possible rules' (something Stirner would, surely, be in favour of).<sup>355</sup>

Foucault identifies within Greco-Roman culture that self-knowledge appears as a consequence of self-care. I am treating this as analogous to political freedom created and conditioned by individual freedom. The "knowledge" in self-knowledge here refers to the Greek *gnosis* as opposed to *episteme*. *Gnosis* is a form of knowledge based in sensibility and sensuous perception – here we may think of the ways we "know" our friends, their modes of being more than their individual preferences. Care for the self is envisioned as a practice of freedom or 'an exercise of self upon self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being'.<sup>356</sup> Here we can read care for the self as a form of egoism, egoism which is practiced in order to 'attain a certain mode of being', which I argue can be translated as ownness or ontological anarchy. Foucault gives us a way of approaching the operation of these processes in a way which is based in the sociological distinctions of the truth games which constitute the power-knowledge nexus. In other words, Foucault demonstrates to us that there is a long tradition of these practices, which involve using egoism as the means to realise our "own" freedom. This is what allows for the possibility of the liberatory forms of politics discussed or, to return to my claim from the opening of the chapter, where we can see freedom as the ontological grounding of power.

## Conclusion

We have taken political freedom and personal liberty to be the way in which political philosophy has tended to categorise freedom and problematised the dichotomy between the two. Key to the delineation of both, and the subsequent anarchist characterisation of freedom, are the questions of governance presented by Berlin. The key argument made here is that freedom appears to be linked to power relations in a way which points us back towards the ontological politics of Stirner and egoism.

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<sup>355</sup> Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*, 22

<sup>356</sup> Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom", 2

The question, 'who governs me?' is premised around the ontological assumption of governance from the other. It begins in a position of unfreedom, it is equivalent to Skinner and Pettit's acceptance of the state as both empirical and normative. We have identified through this line of enquiry that this "starting point" is key to how we are *able* to evaluate questions of freedom and leads us towards practice as a way of exploring this. Newman asserts that freedom must be the starting point where we begin answering this question, not its goal. This is a direct challenge to the binary of personal and political freedom as it directly rejects the assertion of governance in each case. Here, we cannot work "towards" freedom and the divide between the two categories of freedom is an illustration of how power relations can become codified within the discourses and structures present in a society. For the purposes of this chapter this forms the presuppositions of the argument: the conceptualisation, more than the concept itself, of freedom must be critically explored and we must be careful not to reify it or "fix" it above ourselves.

Republican thought, in both its neo-roman and anarchist variants, takes a commitment to non-domination as the fundamental logic of freedom. Following on from our discussions of power this makes it a very attractive proposition for any form of anti-authoritarian politics. By beginning with non-domination, we are able to extricate the political negotiation which must take place for us to be considered free. For the neo-romans Pettit and Skinner this involves the affirmation of the state as the site of protection, administered and delineated through rights. It is this which identifies the political system as arbiter of political life and, for these thinkers, the basis for our civil rights. We have identified that this is a formulation which has an *a priori* acceptance of governance outside of the self and leaves us no place to create and practice freedom. We can remove the commitment to civil rights and replace this with the concept of "you" in order to find a way to satisfy a rejection of the state form and dominating practices. Far from the need for a political system to guarantee you your rights, this highlights that the rights which are bestowed upon us are themselves a representation of our un-freedom: we must begin in a place of non-freedom in order to have rights conferred to us. We have reformulated this to reject forms of rights-granting governance as themselves acts of domination, and therefore, for us to meet the commitment to non-domination we must also reject the principle of governance itself. As an example of this, we have seen how the

autonomous administration in Northern Syria has redirected the coercive forces of the state to answer directly to horizontally-organised, municipal councils. This is a prefigurative attempt to directly address the assumptions of state and governance within republican thought and to put in to practice non-domination as political logic. What this highlights to us is not a form of idealised political practice, but that when we hold freedom – or non-domination – as an end alone this can become a fixed idea or spook held above the constituents of a community and become a form of oppression in its own right.

Moving beyond freedom as ends, plural-liberalism – characterised in the thought of Isaiah Berlin – has been identified as freedom as means. Building on May's characterisation of tactical and strategic political practice we have separated the methods of pluralism from the goals of liberalism. In Berlin's liberalism it is the individual which is given primacy in these debates. This is the thin, liberal individual based in a vision of the subject as a rational actor within a given field. Berlin's position takes a reading of Alexander Herzen's thought which is premised upon the fear that the sacrifice of the individual to any collective cause is itself a form of oppression. This appears to be consonant with the rejection of political system as arbiter of personal freedom outlined above, but itself promotes an authoritarian truth-claim. The guarantee of individual freedom is based in the political structures of the liberal state and must be posited as an end. It is the fixed, rigid characterisation of the liberal individual which creates this impasse. As opposed to Stirner's vision of the unique, the liberal individual is always predetermined and universalised; it is itself the object of the discourse. Through this process of objectification, it is held above those whom it is supposed to represent and reaffirms an essentialism which codifies how freedom is to operate. If we are all to be subsumed under the heading "human" then it is this expression which must represent the realisation of, and therefore the definition of, freedom. Herzen's assertion that the individual must not be subsumed by a greater cause – something we may interpret as a fixed idea - is based in his rejection of communism but could easily be directed at the all-encompassing liberal individual. This leads Herzen - and consequently Berlin - to a position of pluralism. For Herzen, this is to be found in the village commune, for Berlin in the liberal state.

Herzen has been key to our move from pluralism to a rejection of the conceptions of freedom presented by liberalism. Herzen's commitment to a universal individual and the rationality of history (not reason itself) mirrors the ontological assumptions of liberal discourse on freedom, but his project is one which shares with ownership egoism as its method, not pluralism. There is an inherent meta-ethics within Herzen's thought and one which I believe runs counter to Berlin's interpretation. Herzen shares the authoritarian truth-claims and foundationalism of liberal-humanism but appears to reject the ontological grounding of the essential subject. He gives us a negative answer to the question of the place of ethics, something we will explore in greater detail in the final chapter. For now, what is important is that Herzen's sceptical-individualism rejects the positive vision of a universal individual and places questions of political subjectivity at the centre of discussions of freedom. This is not to say that Herzen's vision of the subject is one free of meta-narratives, as it is closely bound with his positive answer to the question of ethical process. This, for Herzen, is interlinked with his theory of history which is still a rejection of deterministic thought. This is tightly bound to Herzen's defence of the village commune and an idealised social form, something which itself can, and has, been used to justify previous injustice and future oppression.

To escape the positive visions of freedom we have examined how the postanarchist deployment of Stirner rejects even the concept of freedom as itself a fixed idea held above us. This seems at first similar to the individualism of Herzen, but it is the non-concept of the unique which both anchors this discussion in questions of ontology and rejects the historical dialecticism. The vision of the subject first enunciated by Stirner as the unique, and developed by postanarchist thought through Lacan and Foucault, is one which is ontologically grounded in freedom. This form of pre-freedom returns us to the questions of subjectification we explored in our chapter on power. This is a fundamental disjuncture with the debates of liberalism and republicanism, taking the subject out of the knowable realm and establishing it paradoxically outside, or at least on the borders, of the play of power relations. It is the affect of power relations which is key to how postanarchism has conceived of subject formation, and the key finding for us has been that for power to operate on the subject in a process of either subjection or subjectification then there must be an underlying assumption of freedom: for my freedom to be taken from me, I must begin

free. Newman has outlined how Stirner's theory of ownness should form the basis for political action; we should act *anarchistically*, ignoring the unitary place of power. We can read this as acting egoistically from a position of ownness. This is a radical form of self-ownership and one which proposes a form of individual freedom to create a form of liberatory political practice.

This negative vision of freedom (not a negative form of freedom) provides us with a way to envision freedom outside of the paradigm of governance and authoritarian truth-claims, but still leaves us asking what this form of practice may look like, what does it do? This identifies freedom as having at least two component parts for our practice; ontology and politics. Politics here is defined as our direct negotiation with how we live in our reality but is necessarily conditioned by our ontological approach. I have explored this approach above, and this will form the basis for the proposed form of practice in the next chapters. Ownness is a way of conceiving freedom which is consonant with an ethical-nihilist ethics and is an answer to how we might create forms of practice which are not based in foundationalism and essentialism. In the next chapter I will explore how this might be put into practice and what its potential limitations are. In the discussions of how this may condition our response to pandemic induced lockdowns, we can begin to see the implications of this. In ignoring/profaneing the state as unitary place of power through the creation of autonomous 'security cultures' we can see that this is something which must be addressed through praxis. It is the micro-political formations, or the other side of our equation of freedom, which will be the focus of this.

All of the discussions presented so far have focused on establishing a vision of anarchist ontology which is not inherently tied to essential visions of the subject. This is first evident in our reading of Stirner and the development of the negative-dialectic. In the discourses of power we have found again that it is questions of the political subject which must be addressed. I am proposing that we must develop forms of political practice which respond to this through a commitment to ownness. This must be a politics which is subject focused, but not subjectivist. The ethical-nihilism of Stirner is interpreted here as a negative answer to both the place and process of ethics, but this alone does not give us something we can practice. These discussions have two main aims: firstly, to establish the interconnectedness of freedom and

power and, secondly, to develop the ontological ground to approach a politics of ownness. Postanarchism and poststructuralism both explore the manner in which these abstractions are actualised within political practice. Postanarchism has established that freedom is more than a relational abstraction through which power (or anything else for that matter) can be 'measured'. Newman has returned to Stirner and the concept of ownness to move the discussion to respond to republican and liberal accounts of freedom and this has highlighted the need for our politics to be bound in the axiomatic logic of freedom. This is, indeed, a contradiction: how can we use axiomatic logic to profane and destroy first principles, or moral ultimates? The answer we have arrived at is through ownness, or ontological pre-freedom. Next, I wish to bring together these two points of departure: the ontological pre-freedom of ownness and the politics which this suggests.



## Chapter 4: Estética: Art, Ethics and Me

### Introduction

I've been inspired by anything that is an attempt to implement utopian ideas.<sup>357</sup>

So far we have established the need to readdress the questions posed by postanarchism and to find the use of postanarchist thought for liberatory politics. In breaking down the subject/object dualism we have found that we can reassert a vision of the subject as a shifting, opaque 'non-concept', one which we can use as the premise for a liberatory 'form of living' – the Unique. Stirner's development of an ontological approach to freedom is based in the 'dissolving' of the objective into the 'ownership' of the individual can form the basis for methods of political practice which avoid positing a universalised and oppressive understanding of subjectivity, while rejecting the equally totalising notions of neoliberal identity politics. Postanarchism has identified the poststructuralist epistemological critiques of postmodernity as analogous to those levelled by Stirner at 'fixed ideas' and 'spooks'. I have tried to answer the questions of power and freedom which have dominated anarchist thought and practice by making use of the ontological politics of Stirner. Now I will tie these arguments to forms of practice. This will involve the development of forms of praxis which are based in the arguments I have developed and functions to explore the consonance of these ideas, and provide a detailed overview of their operation.

We have explored how power is configured in rhizomatic networks which diffuse power and, therefore, mediate our response. Power's operation on the subject has also been identified as key to our political and ethical formulations. Freedom has been established as the ontological basis for power and, therefore, as the axiomatic logic of our resistance to oppressive forms of power. In querying what is a useful way to think about freedom, we have established that if we are to take the ethical-nihilist position – dismissing the 'uselessness' of abstraction – what is signified by freedom breaks down to three key elements: ontological freedom, our politics and poetry. Or

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<sup>357</sup> Tania Bruguera, "5 Questions for Contemporary Practice with Tania Bruguera", interview with Thom Donovan, New York, April 14, 2011

to put it another way, we can establish self-ownership as the basis for our actions, mediate the conditions of our life through our (often micro-) political practices and everything else left within the signifier is poetics – possibly important, but still bringing us nothing, to use Stirner’s formation. In this chapter I shall expand on the model of politically engaged artistic practice and use this discussion to critically explore the above. How does the politics of postanarchism *actually* manifest itself, what are its successes – and, perhaps most importantly – what are its failures? If we, as political theorists, are to be useful, to find our utility to praxis, then we must engage in an open discussion of our how our theory operates practically and be prepared to discuss what happens when things go wrong. We will learn from each other only when we are prepared to discuss how our ideas have developed in response to flops, disasters and disappointment alongside the successes. It is also equally important to give our readers a clear conception of our argument based in some form of practice, not merely allude to the actions of a group we have had no contact with and do not credit in our bibliographies.

I am presenting this model of politically engaged artistic practice not as some postanarchist methodology *par excellence* or as the “correct” way of practicing our politics. However, this model has been developed from the research which has formed the basis of the thesis so far and the questions which it poses will form the footing for what is to follow. I hope to offer a critique and explanation of this work which will be of use, enable greater understanding of my argument thus far, and begin to form part of our toolkit for forms of life which are consonant with liberatory goals. Internationally recognised artist Tania Bruguera’s work has had a considerable influence on the development of this practice and her thought and work will be explored alongside the model developed. Developing this practice has allowed me to explore the practical implications for my theorising and has aided in the development of the meta-ethical questions which postanarchism is trying to ask.

If we accept postanarchism as an attempt at a meta-ethics of anarchist practice, then what is key to this process is the series of questions (perhaps meta-questions) we must ask in order to come to a formulation of meta-ethics which can balance the commitments of current anarchist praxis with postanarchist thought. This will be explored in greater detail in the following chapters, for now what is important is the

series of questions which is posited by the previous chapters and this model of artistic practice. For example, how can we ‘take in to account’ ontology when addressing questions of freedom? How can a ‘politics of anti-politics’<sup>358</sup> form the basis for our organising? What happens to the dualisms of anarchism if we take ethical-nihilism as our basis for our ethical reasoning? My reading of Stirner has been based in this process of ethical logic and it is for this reason that I have chosen to emphasise these areas when discussing him. Using this work to construct a form of artistic practice has allowed me to ‘play’ with these ideas and attempt to formulate them in a way which doesn’t require postgraduate study to action. What has been left to me from this process has been the meta-ethical paradox (note, not a contradiction) at the heart of anarchist praxis. What has become apparent during this development is that when we examine the paradox closely, it actually makes sense. The position which I will develop throughout the rest of the thesis is that egoism is *necessary* for socialism. This immediately removes anarcho-capitalist variants of anarchist thought from this study; egoism here is distinct from the thin individualism of anarcho-capitalism and it is the dialectical relationship – a negative dialectic – between the two which is core to this argument.

Here I shall discuss the key themes of the thesis so far, with particular reference to those which influenced the development of the artistic practice below. We shall also see the inherently political nature of artistic practice – all artistic practice – and the thin, often contested, border between ethics and aesthetics. Experimentation is a key plank in prefigurative practice and it is through aesthetics where the experimental nature of our practice becomes clear. Rancière has posited that the postmodern relationship to art or the ‘aesthetic regime’ posits a direct relationship between art and life. For Rancière, ‘there exists a specific sensory experience – the aesthetic – that holds the promise of both a new world of Art and a new life for individuals and the community’.<sup>359</sup> I intend to explore these ideas in greater depth below, however, it is clear that the ‘new life’ for the individual and community is an exciting promise to anarchist praxis. More than this, at a time of increasing individual, community, and

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<sup>358</sup> Newman, “Postanarchism: a Politics of Anti-politics”

<sup>359</sup> Jacques Rancière, “The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes”, *New Left Review* 14 (March/April 2002), 17

ecological exploitation, new forms of life - experiments with customs, systems and institutions – should pique the interest of us all.

## Ownness

The attempt to measure or to categorise ontology through post-positivist data collection is a fool's errand at best, and a "management tool" - part of neoliberalism's obsession with manageable metrics - at worst. In *Empire* Hardt and Negri bring together the importance of ontology and measurability, or, more accurately, immeasurability. For Hardt and Negri, politics is inherently ontological as it is 'given immediately; it is a field of pure immanence', a claim they make based in the postmodern shift from measure to immeasurability.<sup>360</sup> The argument I have developed here is that ontology is a foundation for the political, but not constitutively. I am not engaging in a debate with Hardt and Negri's thought - that has been dealt with by other authors - but the genealogy of measure which they present and its shift from the dominant paradigm in Western political philosophy gives us an overview of how measure and ontology have parted ways. They identify that the 'powers of the multitude' - for us, perhaps, the power of our collective swords in a union of egoists - have the inherent ability to 'put pressure on the borders of the possible, and thus touch on the real'.<sup>361</sup> Or to put in another way, the ability for a group of singularities to engage in experiment and creation in order to affect change in what is possible. For Hardt and Negri, labour retains its privileged position, something which I am not supporting here. However, in identifying '*the new place in the non-place*' as their interpretation of 'beyond measure' we can begin to see the synergies in their thought with postanarchist authors – an argument made in greater detail elsewhere.<sup>362</sup> This is a formation similar to the postanarchist identification of the subject and the 'place' of power; indeed both owe their lineage to Foucault and Lacan.

The operation of power in politically engaged artistic practice is designed around this separation of measure and ontology. The vision of subjectification, upon which the

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<sup>360</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 354

<sup>361</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 357

<sup>362</sup> David Bates, "Situating Hardt and Negri" in *Libertarian Socialism* eds. Alex Prichard, Ruth Kinna, Saku Pinta and David Berry (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 275-293

model is premised, operates within and on the 'non-place' of the subject. This is the basis for the embedded and long-term practice which forms a central tenet of politically engaged artistic practice.<sup>363</sup> The model proposes this in order to avoid the pitfalls of "helicoptering in" practitioners from outside of communities they are working with. Claire Bishop notes that this has been a particular feature of community art and socially engaged artistic since the Blair government funded these projects as a means to undermine welfare provision.<sup>364</sup> Away from these concerns the model has been developed around the organising principle of ownness: act as if you are already free. The jump from soundbite to practice involved developing long-term relationships with both the participants and the institutions involved. Institutions which operate in and around the art world – I include education here – can often be blocks to liberatory politics and, certainly, to radical forms of resistance. This does not mean that they should be avoided. Sholette and Thompson's work has demonstrated the utility in operating with and alongside such institutions, providing we do not allow the ethico-political strategy to become subsumed.<sup>365</sup> The theory underpinning this practice is based in the ontological freedom outlined in the previous chapter, for which I used the example of Frederick Douglass' description of the night before his fight with his slave master. I do not believe that the creation of this pivotal moment can be manufactured. However, what can be achieved is the conditions for this to occur or, at the very least, an attempt can be made to prevent the structures and practices which prevent or diminish this. This tactic has been developed specifically to rebut any notion of "empowering" the participants. As we shall see when we look at the intersection of power relations and this practice, the power is already to be found in the individuals and communities where we work.

The longstanding commitment to work with a community is designed to operate in a manner which provides support and develops interpersonal relationships which are based in trust. In order to diminish the effect of the natural hierarchy between

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<sup>363</sup> For a more detailed discussion of politically engaged artistic practice and how it differs from other forms of artistic practice see: Bates and Sharkey, "Politically Engaged Artistic Practice: Strategies and Tactics"

<sup>364</sup> Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 13

<sup>365</sup> See Thompson, *Living as Form*; and Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010)

teacher and student, it has become apparent that a culture of trust must be developed and this cannot be accomplished without a demonstration of commitment and an amount of 'buy in' from all participants. The commitments of socially engaged artistic practice have formed a key plank in the evolution of this model. Socially engaged artistic practice has been commissioned to 'fill the gap' left by austerity politics and the neoliberal 'hollowing out' of welfare and community support. One of the groups which has had a great influence on the creation of this model, Valleys Kids, has been successfully engaged in this endeavour for over twenty years in the valleys of South Wales and their activity, as with many other social practice groups, has increased along with the withdrawal of the state. This model moves away from these forms of practice in order to negate the neoliberal meta-discourse of the market and measurability. The operation of the, supposedly exceptional, art world functions to blunt the critical capacity of the artistic practice: grant funding provides the 'legitimacy' to act in these areas and the mechanisms utilised to control these funds purposely directs the efforts of the practice to support, not critique, the state-market. This is not to dismiss the work of social practice artists: indeed, they have inspired and developed the model discussed here. One of the key lessons from social practice art has been the need to become embedded in the communities we work with in order to gain 'legitimacy' from *them*, not funding bodies.

The model here requires that we develop the licence to act in these communities and with them. As outlined, there are a number of reasons for this, but what is of interest here is the way in which this method promotes the values of ontological freedom. In order to illustrate freedom as an axiomatic logic we developed a series of workshops which were driven by the participants. This involved the initial description of the project and an overview of the theories which underpin this. Time was allowed to discuss and critique this and we by no means saw the immediate creation of consensus. Different members of our group facilitated meeting in order to prevent one of us dominating these discussions. We began these workshops in September of 2018 and developed these ideas collaborate for a period of seven months before finalising our activities for the programme at Tate Modern.

Participants were encouraged to develop these thoughts outside of these workshops and to discuss their responses away from the potential power imbalance of teacher-

student. This was achieved through the creation of space for them to meet independently and in spaces supervised by people not involved in the practice. The long-term nature of the project has allowed for the development of institutional awareness and the need to promote the agency of the participants. The participants for this manifestation of the model were young people (16-18) who all attend school in the UK. Ownness is one of the areas that it has been most difficult to explicitly develop a practice in response to, and this is why we have begun here. When assessing the data from the participants I would argue we can see the ontological operation of the practice and the development of this axiomatic logic of freedom through what Robin Nelson describes as 'embodied knowledge'.<sup>366</sup>

Part of this model has involved the development of a pedagogy which is coherent with its political commitments. Nelson identifies the epistemological logic of arts practice and the forms of knowledge which flow from this. Distinct from 'tacit knowledge', embodied knowledge is a form of knowing which is unique to forms of practice: Nelson gives us the example of one's ability to ride a bike.<sup>367</sup> He places this within an epistemological taxonomy which runs from explicit knowledge, derived empirically and scientifically valorised, to the implicit knowledge of the body. This directly rejects the Cartesian dualism of mind and body and relates to the innately subjective ground of practice:

The explicit is typically associated with 'objective' (value-free) knowledge of objects seen clearly from a distance. It is 'know-that' in character since it can be represented mathematically in numbers or diagrammatically, or articulated as rules or laws in writing in the passive voice. The tacit might, by way of negative definition, include modes of knowing (such as embodied cognition) which cannot be readily formulated by the means.<sup>368</sup>

This model of knowledge production and exchange, with its basis in artistic practice and rejection of measure and empiricism, offers a pedagogy which fits with a

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<sup>366</sup> Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 40

<sup>367</sup> Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 40

<sup>368</sup> Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 38

commitment to ontological freedom. This is based in the possibility to ‘seek means of at least an intersubjective sharing through reflecting on mutual engagements in a practice’,<sup>369</sup> or, to put it another way, the implicit forms of knowledge embodied in artistic practice can be traced through forms of intersubjective exploration. It is for this reason that evaluation of the project took the form of participant-directed interviews. The questions were developed with participants as part of the work and afterwards participants interviewed each other and filmed the results. What this has demonstrated is the ontological action of the practice and its refutation of the need to ‘empower’ these communities. This shall be demonstrated when we explore some of the interview data later in the chapter. In this case the practice involved the creation of a political ‘movement’ – something left, intentionally, undefined. Examples of artistic practice which focused on experiment, play and joy were used to demonstrate some potential methods. These included Mark Thomas *Serious Organised Criminal*; The Yes Men and Bruguera’s *Tatlin’s Whisper*.

The group took the decision to create a ‘user-generated’ pop-up protest where members of the public could suggest and debate topics for the participants to ‘protest’ on. These ranged from the refusal of the sugar tax to the abandoning of property. Each topic was discussed and worked up in to chants, placards and song. This provided for the physical embodiment of the ‘politics’ of the practice in line with the pedagogy suggested by Nelson. Nelson’s work is developing a practice as research methodology for academics and postgraduates and I am careful to avoid suggesting that we concretise these forms of knowledge through reflexivity.<sup>370</sup> Here, Nelson’s pedagogical developments have been used in order to address our fundamental relationship with ourselves. The act of creating and performing the protest, and the movement which surrounded it, is a form of tacit or embodied knowledge, we are unable to quantify or measure it, and this has been developed by the participants through discussion and critique.

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<sup>369</sup> Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 57

<sup>370</sup> Indeed, ‘reflexivity’ operates along the objective logic which this thesis fundamentally rejects.



The interview material which the participants produced suggests that this endeavour may have been successful. Before I present some of that data it is important to stress a number of concerns. Firstly, I am not presenting this as a social experiment or positivist social science. I am making no truth-claims here. I am setting out the theoretical underpinning of the model, explaining what was done and why, then some interview material from the participants. I have not designed this research to 'prove' the relationship between these forms of artistic practice and anarchism or to understand what is 'truly' going on: Todd May has demonstrated the folly of understanding this.<sup>371</sup> Secondly, the participants in this practice are from an exploited community which is the target for many of the temporary community art projects which are discussed above. The impact of this has been that the participants are, despite their age and inexperience of the workplace, able to confidently use the keywords and phrases which funding bodies and academic researchers are seeking. The repetitive use of this language through engagement in evaluative processes has provided this vocabulary, and this is one of the reasons for the chosen evaluation methods: allowing the participants to create their own interview structure, and to use a medium they are familiar with - video recordings of each other - to create a relaxed environment where they were able to discuss the events more freely. That said, I still hold the belief that the interviews were conducted in good faith and represent, broadly, the views of the individuals and the group as a whole.

When we discuss ontology, we are entering a subjective space. If we are to try and assess ownness or pre-freedom, then thought and practice must both be considered. To return to Newman's understanding of ontological anarchy, he sets out the *form* of this principle: as opposed to a revolution and the pursuit of a set series of 'ends' we should think of 'a form of autonomous action, a way of acting and thinking *anarchistically* in the here and now, seeking to transform the immediate situation and relationships that one finds oneself in'.<sup>372</sup> The responses of the participants indicate that they have changed how they approach the relationships they find themselves in. One of the participants told us that they had 'learnt that [they] can speak to a wide

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<sup>371</sup> Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 97

<sup>372</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 12

range of people' and this is based on their confidence in themselves. What is interesting here is that the participant expresses this not as a newly acquired confidence or a developed skill, but as something pre-existing which they discovered about themselves ('I didn't think I had that confidence').<sup>373</sup> Another participant reflected that: 'I have more of an impact than I thought I did'<sup>374</sup> (we shall look at how power relations interact with these forms of radical self-ownership later). What we can infer from the interview data is that the forms of practice involved operates at the level of the individual and within this there is an emerging sense of the way these have interacted with alienation.

My claim - at this point a thin one - is that this potential success places emphasis on the agency of the individuals to illustrate the freedom we already have. Newman warns us that forms of liberatory praxis create idealised relations which are unable to bend to the needs and desires of its constituents and become abstracted 'into relations between *objects*'.<sup>375</sup> This model of practice has been developed to critique and eliminate the objective, the fixed ideas which Stirner warns us may possess us. Here we see how the rejection of the subject/object dualism can manifest itself: a denial of objects *as well as* objectivity. We might think of our criticism of anarcho-republican constitutionalising; it is the 'idealising' tendency which bears responsibility for the oppressive abstraction. The step in our practice which addresses this directly emerges from our discussion of pedagogy: the need to *embody* the practice, not merely discuss the theory. In this case this involved the creation of these formations and the 'testing' of their boundaries by members of the public. I believe that if we had lectured our participants and reduced the practice to group discussions, rather than the creation and maintenance of the oscillating institutions and the political action they required, the participants would not have been required to develop these capacities.

I believe that this practice has inherent value and its basis in ownness, promoted through embodied learning, is a direct reflection of the research presented here.

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<sup>373</sup> Peer to Peer interview.

<sup>374</sup> Peer to Peer interview.

<sup>375</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 88

There is no ‘switch’ we can change to fundamentally alter the subject’s relationship with themselves. However, the egoist methods which Stirner implores us to follow are a simple proclamation: ‘That one is to listen to God, conscience, duties, laws, and so forth, is nonsense with which people have stuffed your head and heart and made you crazy’.<sup>376</sup> Stirner’s argument here is not that we should convince individuals to follow the path of ownness, but that we already are. Indeed, for Stirner, creativity is a key example of this, which he argues has ‘already been looked upon as the creator of new productions that have a place in the history of the world’.<sup>377</sup> It is this narrative that is set directly at odds with neoliberal marketisation and pernicious “empowerment” strategies. This leads us to critique ideals of giving power to communities in the same manner in which Stirner treats freedom: ‘What good is your freedom if it brings you nothing?’. This cannot be taught, merely facilitated. The model is created with this as its operating logic. The practice here offers a vision of a form of success that comes from building trust through long-term projects and this, at least according to the interview data, offers ‘something’ (some-thing) to its participants. Bruguera mirrors this commitment to long-term projects as the basis for “success” in her work. This success is also based in a shift in ontology described above, or subjectivity for Bruguera: ‘success is when people are really sure they can only be one thing and because of the experience they can be something else’.<sup>378</sup>

This is not to say that problems did not present themselves, or that areas for further theorising did not become apparent. The first and most obvious issue with any form of long-term practice is its sustainability.<sup>379</sup> The extended nature of the model must be built in to any manifestation of the practice at the planning stage. I argue that it is better to not pursue these forms of project if this cannot be sustained. The competitive, marketised system has extended itself to both the artistic and academic worlds, and this has created a culture of individual survival in response to manufactured precarity. We can see this in the grant funding process which asks practitioners to explain how they will be creative before they have been given the

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<sup>376</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 147

<sup>377</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*,

<sup>378</sup> Bruguera, *Personal Interview*

<sup>379</sup> I am not referring to the loaded, neoliberal understanding of this, mere the ability to sustain.

time and resources to be creative and then to 'compete' against other practitioners. In practice, this means guessing the content of competing proposals and criticising them, which requires time and money which could have been spent on the creative process the funding bodies claim to serve. The logic of this process creates short-term opportunists of us all. This can lead to us taking opportunities which cannot fulfil a long-term commitment and this short-termism can lead to our projects manufacturing harm in these communities.

### **Power: The 'indignity of speaking for others'<sup>380</sup>**

In the previous chapter we explored how freedom can be considered as the ontological basis for power and how our triple concepts of ownness, politics and poetry can reveal the operation of this. This leads us to, perhaps, the most prominent theoretical contribution to our model: power. Our discussion of power has codified two logics, or operations, of power. Firstly, there is the networked, rhizomatic nature of power. Here, the identification of the 'place' of power forms the basis for the site of our resistance. This also plays a role in the development of *how* we resist: we move from the unitary place of power – the castle to storm – and develop an understanding of power which promotes a disruption in the operation of power, not its appropriation. There are clear parallels with our dismissal of "empowerment" narratives. "Empowerment" suggests that power is something quantifiable, something which can be captured and exchanged. As I have made clear above, this is something that this thesis vehemently rejects, and the model developed here is based in my assertion that we already have the power, much as we are already "free". Secondly, the productive nature of power, and the political subjectification process that Newman outlines, has influenced the emphasis placed on play and fun as methods of resistance. The ontological grounding of the model necessitates this focus on the process of subject formation or becoming. This is inescapably a political process and in order to demonstrate how this has influenced the creation of this practice we shall explore how postanarchism has envisioned this process, a process which seeks to

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<sup>380</sup> Michel Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 209

re-establish the Cartesian subject and the promises of the enlightenment, but which arrives at very different political solutions to liberalism.

Newman proposes a 'politics of profanity' in order to avoid falling into the trap of transgression: by transgressing we are simply reaffirming the power-structures which we are transgressing.<sup>381</sup> We can think here of how mainstream politicians seem to revel in being hated,<sup>382</sup> but are unsettled when they are ignored or deemed unnecessary. Stirner makes clear the theological foundations of liberal humanism which transpose the divine from God to 'man':

As a universal principle, in the "human society" which the humane liberal promises, nothing "special" which one or another has is to find recognition, nothing which bears the character of "private" is to have value. In this way the circle of liberalism, which has its good principle in man and human liberty, its bad in the egoist and everything private, its God in the former, its devil in the latter, rounds itself off completely; and, if the special or private person lost his value in the State (no personal prerogative), if in the "laborers' or ragamuffins' society" special (private) property is no longer recognized, so in "human society" everything special or private will be left out of account.<sup>383</sup>

Here Stirner is accusing liberal humanism of merely transgressing, in the manner described above, the transgression of the religious. The place of power – our imaginary palace – has been stormed, but the occupation has merely strengthened its battlements. In order to avoid this, Newman suggests 'profanity' as political method as it 'seeks to undermine the category of the sacred – not by putting something new in its place but by reclaiming and using the 'objects' normally caught within this category in new and unprecedented ways'.<sup>384</sup> This begins to hint at the inherently experimental or *playful* nature of this maneuver. Newman is identifying logics of praxis which are insurrectionary – based in the ontological anarchy, or

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<sup>381</sup> Newman, "What is an Insurrection?"

<sup>382</sup> I am thinking here of examples such as Margret Thatcher, Michael Gove and Iain Duncan Smith.

<sup>383</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 115

<sup>384</sup> Newman, "What is an Insurrection?", 293

ownness, above. From the above, we have developed a theoretical understanding of power outside of its unitary position at the top of a chain and, therefore, we must develop new and heterogeneous methods for our interaction with it.

In our discussion of power, May demonstrates the utility of understanding power as networked and intersecting. This is an exploration of a form of intersectional ethics, not a politics of intersections and identities. Giving us the example of feminisms' inclusion in anarchist praxis, May identifies a genealogy of networks of power in anarchist thought and poststructuralist philosophy which can accommodate different ideologies under one umbrella. The 'tactic' suggested by this analysis is a 'micro-politics'. May describes how this relates directly to our understanding of networked power-relations: 'If we and our practices consist of little lines or partial objects, which the genealogical method unravels theoretically, then political intervention must be along those lines and the intersections they form'.<sup>385</sup> Micro-politics shares anarchism's rejection of representation and is, on a political level, a rejection of colonialist logic. By operating along the 'lines' and intersections of power there is an epistemological rejection of universality, or human essence, coherent with our ethical-nihilist position. What May establishes is the basis for a total rejection of any notion of 'empowerment'. Power is already to be found in communities – although not equally distributed (if, indeed, this is itself desirable) – and, even if this were not the case, we would have no instrument or mechanism to transport this power to these communities. This is ignoring the obvious power imbalance and colonial logic of this assumption – who, after all, are “we” to be the vehicles of power?

We see this form of colonial logic in operation within curation and the legitimization of art. Our project encountered a number of incidents which underscored the hierarchical relationships that dominate the art world and these will be explored below. Curation and 'expertise' are examples of the operation of power's 'lines of flight' which become apparent when interacting with this world. Outside of the discussions of cultural capital, marketisation and aesthetics, curation acts as a 'gatekeeper' to legitimization in the art world. "Amateur" artists' status changes when they are deemed worthy of inclusion in a gallery space. Large art institutions

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<sup>385</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 96

exemplify the networks of power relations intersecting through nodes: the presentation of the work, the other art in the space, and the different audience all contribute to alter the status of art. Here we can see the operation of power-relations through what Rancière describes as the 'aesthetic regime'. The basic operation of his thesis focuses on the aesthetisation of forms of life and the intrinsically political nature of artistic production. Rancière's aesthetic philosophy is a project which seeks to unseat the spooks and fixed ideas of art theory and art production. The logic of the aesthetic regime operates along the lines of flights described by May, and creates the legitimation of art forms: '...for art to exist as such it is not enough to have practices of poetry, painting, sculpture, music, theatre, dance etc. These practices have, as a matter of fact, been around for millenaries and fulfilled a multiplicity of functions – social, civic, religious and so on – without being thought of as a division of a specific sphere called Art'.<sup>386</sup> This 'specific sphere called Art' is deeply hierarchical and creates its own aesthetic politics or 'meta-politics'.<sup>387</sup>

It is within this paradigm that politically engaged artistic practice is situated, working to 'profane' the hierarchies, exclusions and problematic exercise of power. Much as Rancière argues that 'there is a meta-politics of aesthetics which frames the possibilities of art',<sup>388</sup> I argue that we can see the inverse of this operation and its confirmation: there is a meta-aesthetics (in that it forms a 'policing' or normative function) of political practice which frames its possibilities or illustrates its border. To put it more simply, there are a number of 'aesthetic discourses' which police, in Rancière's sense, what is possible through the creation and control of norms. In Rancière's thesis, Art has become a differentiated, exceptional form of life. The aesthetic regime of Art serves to distance itself from the artistic age of representation. Politically, we might argue, we are still very much within the 'age of representation'. In order to adopt politics as a form of life commensurate with Rancière's vision of art, we much address the same question: what is the relationship between life and politics? This is not to say that Rancière is separating the aesthetic and the political. He indicates clearly that the two are intrinsically

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<sup>386</sup> Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution" *Maska* 32, no. 185-186 (2017): 24

<sup>387</sup> Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes", 20

<sup>388</sup> Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes", 20

linked, that aesthetic art 'promises a political accomplishment', and this is partially explains why the aesthetic forms a foundation in the development of my political argument. In the access to the subjective realm, away from reason and scientific truth-claims, on a plane in which autonomy and heteronomy are dissolved, we are offered the opportunity to see the dissolving of the object into the subject in real time. It gives the possibility to create new forms of life and new practices. Once these experiments have taken place, although we may forget them, we cannot 'un-see' them.

The first plank of this model's accounting of power is based in the logic of affinity and solidarity. In our discussion of power, we have seen how Day has identified 'non-hegemonic' forms of political action.<sup>389</sup> Day's work gives us a way of seeing how practice may occur in response to May's understanding of networked power. By seeking non-hegemonic practice, for Day, we are turning away from the unitary place of power and seeking to construct alternatives within a particularity. This matters for us here as by rejecting the notion of a unitary place of power we are also rejecting totalising, universal subjectivities – *giests* which possess us and form the boundaries of our possibilities. What Day recognises in the 'newest social movements' is the operation of affinity logic which, he argues, is a form of *constituent power*. Day argues for a form of direct action which is based in the intersubjective, ephemeral communities which form in political movements, therefore our methods and institutions should be temporary and flexible. In our model this logic of affinity works to emphasise the commitment to solidarity which is key to engagement in any form of co-creation. Co-creation is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it undermines (although not totally) notions of authorship. The legitimacy of practice is often based in its practitioners, not its actions or theories, and this can lead to the creation of hierarchies. For example, an artwork which has an established professional artist as its author, or co-author, will be immediately granted a greater legitimacy than a student or amateur production. This can express itself in a number of ways: the work's cost or price; the significance given to its content; its potential reach, and, therefore its efficacy. Co-production can begin to undermine, or profane, this progress of legitimation and the problematic hierarchies it creates.

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<sup>389</sup> Day, "From Hegemony to Affinity"



In order to actualise this commitment, the constitutional model developed by Kinna, Swann and Pritchard, discussed above, has been used to scaffold the practice. The practice element took the form of creating a political movement, as previously outlined. The horizontal decision-making process which Kinna *et al.* describe was introduced to the participants as a potentially interesting way for them to progress as a group. This was used as the basis for the group's decisions about how to proceed and for the 'pop-up protest' element of the installation. The participants were given space in Tate Modern, London, as part of Tate's social outreach programme, Tate Exchange (TeX). The group decided to great carnival-style, joyous protests which would move across a space filled with members of the public, Tate staff, and others engaged in art practice. This gave the participants opportunity to avoid being 'curated' and allowed for a degree of autonomy. Play and fun were emphasised as methods of resistance as this gives us a temporary engagement with ontological anarchy as the axiomatic logic for our practice, or starting as free. Play has been identified within artistic practice as a way in which we can, albeit temporarily, remove the rules and conventions which normally form the borders of our reality, or of what is possible. By dismantling these - be it through a new form of decision-making, encountering downward pressure from an institution (which is suddenly taking them seriously for the first time), or having to become mentors and facilitators - this playing acted to demonstrate the rhizomatic, interlinked and shifting nature of power.

The role of curator demonstrates what May describes as unacceptable forms of power relations.<sup>390</sup> Within poststructuralist thought, power moves from the intolerable domination of our lives as we recognise the possibility of overcoming that oppression. Anarchism has, to some extent, moved to expropriate the politics of power away from hierarchy and domination to create a politics which assumes that power already resides with the constituents. Anarchism is distinct from liberalism in this sense. This creates a need for a deeper analysis, especially within decision-making and conflict resolution. As opposed to dealing with an individual conflict or making a decision efficiently, anarchism commits to explore the underlying causes of conflict and find a way to make decisions which accounts for the pre-existent

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<sup>390</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 123

interplay of power. It is from the poststructuralists that we can find a method – albeit an abstracted and philosophical one – which acts on these suppositions. As Foucault notes:

...power relations are not something bad in themselves, from which one must free one's self. I don't believe there can be a society without relations of power, if you understand them as means by which individuals try to conduct, to determine the behaviour of others. The problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one's self the rules of law the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the *ethos*, the techniques of management, the practices of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination.<sup>391</sup>

The model of politically engaged artistic practice being developed here takes this as its basis for politico-ethical reasoning. It is the meta-aesthetics which Foucault describes which delineate the limits of our political possibilities, so in order to expand or to profane these borders we have created a space to play with these definitions. As an example, the pop-up protest was a loud celebration of its theme: megaphones, musical instruments and crowds chanting formed the basis of the performance element. The spectacle of the carnival was not the 'art' being created, nor was it the most interesting aspect for us. The process of creating and playing is the aim, or purpose, of this practice. It is the interactions, the decisions taken, the problems encountered, the ephemeral experiences and the creative process itself which is foregrounded here. These events took place in Tate Modern, high in the Blavatnik Tower, away from the 'legitimate' art and curated gallery spaces. TeX itself is caught in this paradox of art/non-art. It occupies a prominent but removed location, and provides an audience and form of social interaction which is usually absent from the other gallery spaces, but exists in a contested 'non-art' area of the larger institution. The group's initial plan had been to take the protest down through these exclusive, concrete spaces and past the public – most of whom would not have been aware of the existence of TeX – out in to the main entrance through the impressively

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<sup>391</sup> Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom", 18

proportioned Turbine Hall. The institution deemed this too dangerous to accomplish without 'disturbing' the other spaces.

During the first of the protests a member of the curatorial team dashed up the stairs to complain of the "bleed" of the work. These are not failures or problems, but the very reason for the practice: here we see the relations of power and their interactions laid bare within a situation which is safe and positive for its participants. A political process was already being undertaken in the form of the consensus meetings and these actions merely became new objects to be discussed and accounted for. No amount of political theory articles or philosophy Youtubers can replace the experience of overcoming these conflicts and negotiating solutions which do not exacerbate the power imbalances that lead to domination and oppression (something ably demonstrated by a curator arriving in a space, sweating and out of breath to tell a group of, largely, under eighteen-year-olds that their practice is impinging on the 'legitimate' art below, affecting its market function).

It is play, or experimentation, which allows for the breakdown and re-negotiation of the rules, norms and conventions which usually dominate (in both senses) these spaces. My thesis is that play here serves to give us access to oneness or ontological anarchy as the axiomatic logic of our praxis. Through the act of play we can experiment with confidence in the way we practice, and it is the new possibilities which this presents that can allow us to react "organically" to the situations we find ourselves in. Play here forms the environment, or form, as well as the content of the practice. To create this 'form', a large area was demarked with artificial grass and flowers, and colourfully decorated. The intention was to recreate a 'square' as a reference to the 'movement of the squares', the series of movements beginning with the 2011 Arab Spring and the Egyptian occupation of Tahir Square. These movements are given prominence by Newman when he is outlining the organising logic of postanarchism. To those who have sat through three-hour consensus discussions may be incredulous when I advance agonism and consensus as the practice of fun and play. However, situating this practice in the space created joy: a Dionysian celebration of politics that is key to this movement. I am not the first to suggest that the space a piece of art is situated in – whether for creation, participation or observation - plays a key role in how we interact with it. The creation

of this space bestowed a degree of ownership on the participants and helped to develop the environment in a way which is based in their thoughts, needs and desires.

Newman posits that ownness can be situated within actions of solidarity and affinity. His argument is based in Stirner's assertion that there are only egoists, and egoists who are not aware that they are egoists.<sup>392</sup> We do not engage in acts of affinity and forms of solidarity out of a sense of duty or self-sacrifice: ownness implies that we act out of our 'selfishness'. Newman links this directly to anarchist forms of solidarity, such as Kropotkin's 'mutual aid', arguing that:

[P]ostanarchist insurrection is not a Cause for which one sacrifices oneself – the last thing radical politics needs today are any more sad, pious militants, whose apparent selflessness often masks the most vicious sensibilities. Rather, as a politics of ownness, the insurrection is a movement of joy, conviviality and the happiness experienced in being together with others'.<sup>393</sup>

Newman's statement echoes the thought of egoist-anarchist Emma Goldman, who also asks us to profane what is sacred and to retain the ontological freedom of anarchy, as opposed to the 'straight-jacket of individuality' of liberalism.<sup>394</sup> Goldman, famous for her commitment to dance and acts of joy, draws on Stirner to reject the totalising notions and 'legitimacy' of governance which she believes is the antithesis of any form of freedom. Goldman also shares Stirner's rejection of a purely negative freedom as 'with such freedom you may starve to death'.<sup>395</sup> Goldman and Newman are arguing on behalf of a radical form of autonomy which profanes or replaces the logic of individualism within neoliberalism: the autonomy of the individual, which includes the possibility of social action or community creation. I argue that it is how we understand and interact with networks of power which conditions our ability to pursue this radical autonomy. This, of course, is an intentionally circular argument:

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<sup>392</sup> Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 37

<sup>393</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 63

<sup>394</sup> Emma Goldman, "The Individual, Society and the State" in *Red Emma Speaks* ed. Alix Kates Shulman (New York: Humanity Books, 1998), 112

<sup>395</sup> Goldman, "The Individual, Society and the State", 121

freedom forms the ontological basis for power, and in order to evaluate relations of power we need to promote a form of ontological anarchy, or ownness, and the 'end' or goal for this evaluation is also ownness. The relationship between ontological freedom and power is not a simple dualism which can be easily defined and categorised. This is one of the many reasons why anarchist thought is caught in a paradox in its analysis of democracy.<sup>396</sup>

This paradox forms the basis of the relationship between our theory and the practice outlined. There are a number of issues with the anarcho-republican model employed – some of which have already been discussed – which may preclude us from engaging in these forms, such as the potential for promoting an idealised form of community. However, the basis in agonism, which rejects antagonism, and in an ephemeral and joyous process, fits with how radical democracy is prefigured.<sup>397</sup> This gives us a way of exploring the conflicts and negotiations necessary for the realisation of any form of freedom, beyond the “freedom from”. This involved the analysis of power relations and gave the group autonomy to decide which forms of power were useful, and which were unhelpful, in this endeavour. This was not a seamless and perfect process. All consensus processes are time-consuming and this was no different here. Each meeting took place in a time-limited and pressured environment which partially undermined the efficacy of the process. We ran short of time throughout, and this led to the modification of the process to reduce the time for discussion. At times this reinforced power imbalances and hierarchies. It is easy to fall back on the systems of authority which we are familiar with in order to avoid a problem and this was, occasionally, the case here. However, the achievements of this process were significant. Power has been demonstrated as operating through the participants and all of the symbols, systems and individuals that they interact with. A new sense of self-ownership was created which led to unpredicted results, new exchanges and possibilities. In the words of one of the participants: ‘We can express our voices even though we can’t vote, we can do it through other ways. I’ve

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<sup>396</sup> Markus Lundström, “Toward Anarchy: A Historical Sketch of the Anarchism-Democracy Divide” *Theory in Action* 13, no. 1 (2020): 80-114

<sup>397</sup> See: Chantal Mouffe, *Agnostics: Thinking of the World Politically* (London: Verso, 2013); and Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2014)

learnt that just because I am a younger person doesn't mean I am not able to have an effect'.<sup>398</sup>

## Subjects and Objects

So far some of my theoretical assertions have been described through practice. The logic of freedom and ontological anarchy, and the networked, rhizomatic nature of power, have been explored through artistic practice. We have seen how the operation of these lines of flight intersect with aesthetic philosophy and how we might form an anarchistic practice, even if we strip away the potentially unhelpful signifier *anarchism*. The model of politically engaged artistic practice is developed through the theories presented and forms the physical manifestation of this research. The one key area of the research which has not yet been examined through this lens involves the updated reading of Stirner's *Vergengenständlichungsdiagnostik*, or more specifically the political implications of Stirner's 'dissolving' of the object into the subject. The negative-dialectic that Stirner employs is a parody of Hegelian logic, one designed to expose and dismiss the teleological forms of thought which Stirner terms '*geists*'. This negative-dialectical process is both an ontological and epistemological one. It directly concerns the construction of our reality; our actions are ontologically guided by a selfish egoism and this leads us to dismiss the 'sacred' epistemology of the enlightenment. This selfish egoism is, as Goldman observes, not analogous with the ruthless individualism of neoliberal-capitalism. It works counter to the logic of neoliberalism in that it rejects reason as the basis for guiding actions. Indeed, it accuses this process of falling back in to a form of theological thought – reason, standing in for 'human' (as in human-rights), which in turn is an abstracted variant of you or 'the Unique'.

This has been discussed in depth in the chapter on Stirner's thought. Here it is the action of dissolving which has formed part of my theorising within the model of politically engaged artistic practice. This focuses on the border between autonomy and heteronomy of artistic production. The supposed autonomy of artistic production becomes diffused when we move our focus away from questions of authorship and

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<sup>398</sup> Peer-to-Peer Interview.

the understanding of object as art. Bruguera describes how she wants an art which 'is the thing', not an art which merely 'points to the thing'.<sup>399</sup> Bruguera is not engaging in Lacanian psychoanalysis or referencing the concept of *das ding* (the thing), however, as we shall see when discussing meta-ethics, tracing the outline of *das ding* gives us access to a form of post-symbolic real which we are unable to represent (re-present) with the symbols themselves. An object can be assessed in a number of ways, physically and philosophically; this does not allow us access to the real or the "true" properties of the object. By tracing the outline of 'the thing in itself' we are exploring the ways in which the object interacts with our subjectivity: in other words, the bits of the object which pertain to, relate to, and can be understood by the subject. When we move the focus of our artistic production away from the final product created and look instead at the process as art, we are able to engage in this method. The art moves from the painting, sculpture or installation to the work which occurs in workshops, seminar rooms and studios. Art here cannot be commodified, cannot become alienated and objectified.

What becomes apparent when studying the operation of this model is the tension between the heteronomy of the art and the autonomy of the artist. For Rancière this tension forms a knot which is based in the 'and' within the proposition: 'aesthetic experience will bear the edifice of the art of the beautiful *and* of the art of the living'.<sup>400</sup> Rancière is developing an argument based in Schiller's understanding of the 'play drive', which is relevant to our discussion above on play and joy, and expresses the connection between the autonomy of art and new forms of life. It is not, however, the autonomy of an artwork *itself* which Rancière is discussing; it is the 'autonomy of experience',<sup>401</sup> the shared experience of the creation of the art, the promises which exist outside signification and the experience of looking at/interacting with the artwork that bring together the autonomy of art and the "promise of politics". This ties art to life, or to things which are not art (separate here from our category of non-art); and where art is characterised as autonomy and not art (life) is categorised as heteronomy. Moving the focus of the art, or aestheticisation, from the object of its

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<sup>399</sup> Bruguera, interview

<sup>400</sup> Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes", 18

<sup>401</sup> Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes", 19

production to the process of producing, blurs this line and gives us the possibility of approaching the work prefiguratively. The process of dissolving the object into the subject should be interpreted as the same move as the anarchist commitment to prefiguration, or the dissolving of the ends/means dualism. Our means *must* be commensurate with our ends, a non-authoritarian society cannot be created through authoritarian means etc.; our object must fall under the will of the subject and, conversely, the ends must equate with our means. This is why democracy, even in its direct and consensus forms, remains problematic: it is only the means. In our model this manoeuvre is recreated in the process-driven nature of the art. Although *things* were produced, the art itself was found in the creative process and its realisation. This utilised the ‘play drive’ to bring together the heteronomy of politics with the autonomy of art. However, as argued above, it is the autonomy of the artist which exceeds the heteronomy of the art in this model. There is no object left to be ‘aestheticized’, so the forms of life which are being created, or played with, in a creative process driven by the ‘promise of politics’ are dependent upon the autonomy of the artist (or artists). Or to put it back into the terms of this thesis: egoism operates to create socialism – socialism is foreclosed without it.

Ownness is a form of radical self-ownership. It exceeds the boundaries of Kantian autonomy in that it is the negative-dialectic which brings the outside object into the ‘ownership’ of the subject. We might think here of how power operates on the subject to create the ‘self’ as outlined by Newman. Here the self is separate to the subject; the self comes to recognise itself through the operation of power on the subject via the process of subjectification.<sup>402</sup> This is distinct from the process of subjection where ‘power constructs an identity and imposes it on the individual’.<sup>403</sup> Newman draws a direct comparison with Rancière’s description of politics as the desire for a form of subjectivity to be recognised as the universal subject. Some forms of subjectivity are barred from this claim in a ‘policing’ logic, and it is the disjuncture between the call and the response which creates the possibility of subjectification. Politics for Rancière then, ‘begins when the equality of everyone and anyone is inscribed in the liberty of the people. This liberty of the people is an empty property,

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<sup>402</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 88

<sup>403</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 88



an improper property through which those who are nothing purport that their group is identical to the whole of the community'.<sup>404</sup> In opposition to Rancière's description, ownness seeks to operate this process in reverse: the 'empty property' of the people is found empty and occupied by the singularity who sees the opportunity to 'take' what it desires as its property. Property here, as discussed in the chapter on Stirner, is not the private property of liberalism. For Stirner, we are able to instinctively understand what is our property (*eigentum*); we do not seek permission from the state to blow our nose or ask for this to be 'given' to us in the form of rights.<sup>405</sup> Things become our property 'from the moment when nothing is more to me than myself; for from this moment State, Church, people, society, etc., cease, because they have to thank for their existence only the disrespect that I have for myself, and with the vanishing of this undervaluation they themselves are extinguished: they exist only when they exist *above me*, exist only as *powers* and *power-holders*'.<sup>406</sup>

In our model, this idea found form in our literal removal of the object from the creative process and in the inclusion of insurrectionary logic. The development of the work is based in the participants and it is their explorations of themselves, through this process of play and production, which fixes the logic of the process through the individuals. A number of workshops were used to begin this process, beginning with the discussion of how this relates to our power. This is a form of the 'subjectivity politics' outlined in the chapter concerning freedom; a group of singularities with a porous border (the group's composition varied from meeting to meeting and members of the public joined at the final stage), brought together and working within the logic of affinity/solidarity. The decision-making process, the development of a theme into a celebration, and the discussions and negotiations this involved, are where we see the new forms of existence, the reflection of power and the possibility for what is to become our property. This practice is designed to create the conditions for this to occur; for the participants to take ownership of themselves, to see how this interacts with networks of power and to negotiate their 'freedom'. What was told to the group was that our world (our reality?) exists only in our relationship with it; that

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<sup>404</sup> Rancière in Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 91

<sup>405</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 252

<sup>406</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 252

far from giving us dominion over it, this must involve an understanding of the importance this accords to you. From this we can begin to build an understanding of how we fit in with the nodes and lines of power relations and discover the power we already have. This opens the possibility for freedom and ownness.

There is no method yet developed within the social sciences which could 'measure' the process and impact of what I am describing. Creating this immeasurability was an intentional move, but also limits the claims that I can make around this research. Like all social phenomena worth our attention the data is noisy, the logics complicated and the results messy. 'Objects' returned to become the focus of the work during times of conflict or stress. The learned behaviours and norms of a lifetime cannot be undone purely through a project of this brevity and nature. What I have attempted to outline here is the process through which we can create a series of practices which are formed in postanarchist philosophy. The form of this practice is based in the negative-dialectic of Stirner and the operation of power as interpreted by Newman.

There is no set goal to be achieved. The model is developed around the commitment to make it possible that the world can become the participants' property. What this means in our practice is that we reject thin neoliberal categorisations of the participants themselves. This is consonant with May's first political rule of poststructuralism: that as far as is possible we ought not to describe each other.<sup>407</sup> The reason for this basic ethical commitment brings together this process of subjectification with the dissolving of the objective world into the possession of the political subject. May's ethical principle is drawn from the idea that the descriptions we use for each other form the lines of flight in the operation of power; they create the 'image' we see of ourselves reflected on the mirror of our subjectivity. Stirner impels us to look at this mirror and realise our relationship to the image we see. The view is our own and only our own. All we can see can be seen by us alone, and far from finding our limitations in the reflection, we are to find our autonomy in this. In other words, we must avoid telling the participants what is expected of them – to be good citizens, to adhere to an idealised form of interaction etc.; we limit the focus of

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<sup>407</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 130

the 'art' to the process to avoid the projection of this autonomy on to the object and to re-centre the practice outside of the norms and hierarchies of everyday life. The participants were encouraged to profane the process, the object and the relations which they created. This was achieved through the initial removal of barriers and hierarchies associated with the environments (schools, Universities, art institutions) and through allowing discussion and play. This did not create perfect language games or a new-found freedom which radically transformed the participants. In practice, it generated a series of 'off-topic' conversations, the graffitiing of work being produced, and autonomy over time and inclusion. After hours of being able to control the terms and boundaries of their own behaviour, the participants demonstrated that they were able to trust the autonomy they were given. This is an important and often-overlooked area of models for political and artistic practice: we cannot be in control of the creation of trust. This can be a long and frustrating process, which can at times seem counterproductive, but it is this time and acceptance which is the absolute basis for the promotion of the theories I have outlined. There are a number of exciting and brilliantly creative illustrations of the work produced as part of this practice. However, what must not be lost is this commitment to non-dominatory forms of interaction and the promotion of ownness. **This is what postanarchism promises: an attempt to create practices which strive to unseat oppression wherever it is found – especially in ourselves.**

### **Conclusion: Ethics and Aesthetics**

This chapter has posited a model of politically engaged artistic practice as a way of exploring the promises of postanarchism. The "postanarchist turn" opens up a number of possibilities for anarchist thought. Firstly, the epistemological critiques of poststructuralism offer the opportunity to reassess how we relate to existing anarchist praxis. Secondly, the ontological reordering of liberation attempts to take the work of theory and explore what freedom may actually look like. Finally, it is a form of critique in itself which, based in the ethical-nihilism of Stirner, asks us to question our ethics. Anarchism, taken as a series of analogous ethical commitments, must examine the logics, norms and systems which interact with and create these ethical formations. This leads us to the fundamental question of postanarchism: what are the ethics of anarchism? The chapter has demonstrated what a practice which is

based in postanarchist thought may look like. I have attempted to draw an outline of these practices and provide, in simple terms, some 'flesh on the bones' of the theories and philosophies outlined in the previous chapters. The practice discussed has been developed from the ideas which I have presented in the first half of the thesis. None of these examples answer our ethical question, which will be the focus of the next section.

I have used my reading of postanarchist thought to scaffold the model of politically engaged artistic practice. This is by no means exhaustive: there are other concepts and philosophies which have been developed in this area but which I have not represented. The aim of this chapter has been to show how these ideas may be developed practically so others may develop or "put them to use". Ownness, or ontological anarchy, forms the basis for the embedded nature of the practice. The operation of power, and its networked nature, created the need to grow a form of practice which tries to expose these, while using them to the advantage of the participants and to allow for experimentation with political negotiation. Finally, the breakdown of the subject/object dualism forces us to look at our work prefiguratively and ties us to a rejection of colonial logic. What is not answered here is: what is the ethical basis on which we can make these decisions?

The aim of the thesis so far has been to explore postanarchist conceptions which influence our politics. Politically engaged artistic practice has been used to demonstrate the ways in which we might translate these theories into political action and to show where these cannot fulfil their aims. I have taken a commitment to non-domination, anti-authoritarianism and the resistance of oppression as the ethical basis for anarchist or left libertarian thought, and anti-essentialism and anti-foundationalism as the grounding of postanarchist meta-ethics. What this practice has demonstrated is the need to explain and examine how these positions are practiced. The next chapter will look at how the development of this practice has illustrated the meta-ethical questions and tensions which exist within this thought. Postanarchism's promise to question, to probe, and to critique both inside and outside of anarchism creates a charge to re-examine our ethical bonds and borders, and to find coalitions with other forms of liberatory thought and practice.

## Chapter 5: From Aesthetics to Ethics (or Practice to Theory)

### Introduction

The proposed model of Politically Engaged Artistic Practice is developed from the ontological and epistemological critiques of postanarchism. This development has shown the series of ethical commitments in these critiques which find their expression in the practices outlined. The border between aesthetics and ethics is a thin and contested one. Throughout this thesis I have expressed Anarchism as a loose set of ethical commitments, often first order, such as the rejection of power or violence. Rancière demonstrates the operation of the ethical discourse within the art world and the politicisation of this. The rest of this thesis will explore the synergies and disconnections between these ethical universes and seek to demonstrate that postanarchism as a meta-ethical position is equipped to answer the ethical charge of anarchist thought.

Firstly, we shall look at how the practice discussed in the previous chapter has been influenced by the work of Tania Bruguera. Bruguera is not an anarchist, but her practice dovetails with the ethical-political tactics of anarchist thought. Discussions with Bruguera, and her work, have formed a key plank in the creation of this practice. I shall then look at the conceptual relationship between ethics and aesthetics through the thought of Rancière and the practice of Bruguera and seek to answer the questions this raises. Within which category of ethics is this practice situated, and what are the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of this praxis? This process will outline a first-order ethics, illustrating the need for a meta-ethics that can meet the manifest promises of the practice. This is mirrored in postanarchism's development and relationship to other forms of anarchist thought. Rousseau's study of the meta-ethics of anarchism will be used to evaluate the basis for a meta-ethics in anarchism and demonstrate the problems of place and process which form the basic ethical taxonomy of our practice. I shall then explore the ethical systems which have become paradigmatic in anarchist philosophy and how these relate to the philosophy of ethics more broadly. I will focus on the development of anarchist ethics, and practical virtue-ethics by Franks, whose work is one of the few interventions in this area that seek to critically examine the recent developments in

anarchist ethics, and who engages with postanarchist thought. After locating postanarchism within these ethical categories I will demonstrate how my reading of Stirner, based in the negative-dialectic and parody, provides us with a consonant answer to the problem of place in what Rousselle refers to as ‘base-subjectivist’ ethics. It will be necessary to return to how Swann, Franks and other anarchist authors have categorised postanarchist thought in order to demonstrate the postanarchist appeal to the broader, latent commitments of anarchism.

**‘There are no objective values’<sup>408</sup>**

Mackie begins his key work in the categorisation of ethical systems with an outline of his moral scepticism and the distinction between first and second order positions.

The basis for his position as moral sceptic is the bold statement above.

Postanarchist and poststructuralist thought would find much agreement with this statement. The negation of the objective is the very operation of Stirner’s negative-dialectic. Indeed, one may opine that Stirner would deny the existence of ‘values’ in any form beyond the spooks and fixed ideas that form the foundational basis for oppressive epistemologies. I have also found this commitment in the practice of Bruguera, whose practice has inspired the ideas that underpin this thesis in action.

The starting point for this thesis was the development of the postanarchist conceptualisations of power and freedom presented alongside, and through, my reading of Stirner. I then looked at the development of an artistic practice in order to realise and “test” the theory building and, finally, the investigation of the postanarchist philosophy of meta-ethics which I will present in the final chapter. The intervention of Bruguera in this process came at the point of finding practices which are consonant with the ethical principles presented so far. These are not a coherent second order position, but a series of approaches which are based in the meta-ethical rejection of place and process which compose an ethical-nihilist, or postanarchist, ethic. This thesis is not a formal examination of social movements, or analysis of artistic practice on its own terms. What I am hoping to achieve is the development of postanarchist theory through the use of practice. Having the opportunity to work with Bruguera has given me the chance to present a case for the

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<sup>408</sup> Mackie, *Ethics*, 15.

concepts I have proposed as useful ways of understanding both power and freedom set within practice.

This chapter will set out how Bruguera's practice has influenced my theory. I will use A discussion of the tenuous border between art and politics to frame the way that Bruguera's practice is accomplished through an ethical discourse. If we are to posit ethics as the latent discourse of anarchist thought, then the ethical tactics which Bruguera has developed clearly have something to say about anarchist praxis. She is not an anarchist, but it is reasonable to argue that her work aims to operate "anarchistically". Bruguera is committed to the removal of hierarchy in her work and operates within an acknowledged form of power-relations. She bases her practice in a form of prefiguration and the "resistance" in her work aims to create alternative "forms of life". There is much in the development of the aestheticisation of life, as Foucault proposes, that can be found in the operation of Bruguera's practice; I shall demonstrate how the ontological action promoted works within the postanarchist understanding of the subject.

Bruguera's work is based in a form of practical ethics which is roughly commensurate with Franks' 'practical anarchism'.<sup>409</sup> Franks' practical anarchism is built on around a form of virtue ethics based in praxis where values are regarded as 'being inherent to a social practice'.<sup>410</sup> It is the ethical practices themselves which govern the creation of 'goods', for Franks. Bruguera partially shares this commitment. As I shall demonstrate later, this is still what we may refer to as a first-order ethics, despite the clear distinction Bruguera makes between morals and ethics:

I first of all make a distinction between morals and ethics. And I almost feel as if what is moral is what has already been decided by everybody, that works, or is this, kind of invisible contract of conduct that everybody has. Ethics, for me is more about experimentation where you are enacting the ethics, not following a rule, but you are enacting ethics 'moments'. Through that

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<sup>409</sup> See, Franks, *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy*.

<sup>410</sup> Franks, *Anarchisms, Postanarchisms and Ethics*, 112

experience you can come to an understanding where you can say, “yeah, this is good” or “this is not good” for us, something that works. That is why I don’t see it as something set in stone, but as something more like a process of negotiation.<sup>411</sup>

Already we are able to see how Bruguera’s practice contains a manifest ethical commitment. This is one of the reasons I am positing the artist’s perspective as useful: the explicit ethics of the practice and the experimental space which is created to examine these ethical ties. This echoes the anarchist commitment to prefigurative practice and provides a space for academic enquiry into how these ethical experiments manifest themselves. Bruguera acknowledges the close ties between the aesthetic and the ethical. She mentions that in her first language, Spanish, aesthetics becomes *estética* (*est ética*) or “is ethics”. Her practice is based in ethical strategy and its political implications.

All art is inescapably both political and ethical. As this thesis argues, there is a meta-ethics at work in all forms of creation: the ontological and epistemological assumptions which underpin all practice. This is not to say that all artworks are *overtly*, or manifestly, political. However, as Rancière has established, the aesthetic always requires and reinforces a meta-politics. Chantal Mouffe makes the distinction between the foundational nature of the politics of art – artwork which is latently political, or does not expressly acknowledge its politics – and ‘critical art’ which is created ‘politically’.<sup>412</sup> We can think of any number of galleries and exhibitions which make a claim of political neutrality, the same manoeuvre discussed earlier of taking the “centre” or “apolitical” position as a discourse which seeks to undermine the didactic and, therefore, “extreme” politics which step outside of the permitted boundaries.

For Mouffe, aesthetic strategies are not necessarily the practices that can resist the ‘current mode of capitalist production’. Instead, the ‘search for authenticity, the ideal

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<sup>411</sup> Bruguera, Interview.

<sup>412</sup> Chantal Mouffe, Rosalyn Deutsche, Branden W. Joseph and Thomas Keenan, “Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension”, *Grey Room*, Winter, 2001, No. 2: 98-125



of self-management [and] the anti-hierarchical exigency' are the practices and activities which are characteristic of modern forms of production.<sup>413</sup> That work has become an apparently autonomous activity is demonstrated by the shift in working practices experienced during the corona virus pandemic of 2020. In place of resisting through these strategies, Bruguera is asking for an art which aims to reorder the 'imaginary environment' through its access to the symbolic. Dismissing any notion of *telos* she argues that 'every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices'.<sup>414</sup> Embedded within anarchist thought, I am not proposing to abandon anti-hierarchical praxis in order to resist working conditions. I believe Mouffe's argument shows the way in which postanarchist politics can relate to the tension of autonomy and heteronomy in artistic production, what I have referred to as the meta-aesthetics of politics in the previous chapter. Within the strategies which Mouffe rejects as serving the post-Fordist modes of neoliberal capitalism we can resurrect a micro-political tactic. Within postanarchist thought the 'search for authenticity' relates to our alienation, not from any form of authentic individuality, but from our subjective selves – or simply put, from "I" or "you". (See discussion on alienation in Stirner chapter). From this the thin 'self-management' can be dismissed and re-established as the radical form of self-ownership 'ownness'.

When discussing the political nature of her work Bruguera proposes the creation of 'political moments' drawn directly from her ethical approach to aesthetics. There is a commitment to anti-hierarchical practices which Mouffe critiques. However, the model I have taken here is the ontological appeals of Bruguera's methods. As discussed in the chapters on Stirner and freedom, the ontological critiques of postanarchism I have developed are a key plank in the creation of postanarchism as meta-ethics. Newman is clear in his argument on ontological anarchy that the basis for a 'politics of anti-politics' is the operation of insurrectionary logic. This logic operates ontologically creating the space to find power over the self. Newman is not alluding to a thin conception of self-mastery, but 'a micro-political transformation of the self in its relation to power, such that we are able to extricate ourselves from

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<sup>413</sup> Chantal Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces", *Art & Research* 1, no. 2 (2007): 1

<sup>414</sup> Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces", 3

systems of power and our dependency on them, even our desire for them'.<sup>415</sup> For Day, this is the 'politics of the act'; for May, this manifests itself as the political rejection of representation, as without a naturally existent human essence 'there is no bar to creating oneself'.<sup>416</sup> These micro-political strategies express themselves in the manner in which Bruguera considers her work political:

I would love for my work to create political situations. Not to be political in the sense that it refers to a political image, a political moment, or political leader, or be political in that it talks about an issue. Hopefully, it creates situations in which people have to position themselves politically. It doesn't always happen (laughter). When you generate an option and you bring that to people then they have to decide how they want to be involved. As an artist I don't have the last say, I'm only there to react – as a 'reactor'.<sup>417</sup>

This is a clear rejection of representation described by May and creates the basis for the micro-political formations which Newman refers to. It forms the foundation for the creation for ontological anarchy or oneness. It is this process of a 'micro-political transformation of the self' that has been adopted within the model of politically engaged artistic practice, and it is what distances our practice from that of social practice artists. This is not to say that socially engaged art does not engage in this creation of political 'moments', but that, as Bishop notes 'unease, discomfort or frustration – along with fear, contradiction, exhilaration and absurdity can be crucial to a work's artistic impact' and can be absent from work with an overt focus on first order ethics.<sup>418</sup> This can reduce its efficacy and reintroduce the representation which May demonstrates is the basis for both the erection of 'a barrier between them and who (or what) they can create themselves to be' and the re-inscription of 'oppressive social relationships'.<sup>419</sup> What we can see in Bruguera's description of her practice is the creation of an overtly ethical approach to politics, but an ethical-political strategy which does not eschew 'unease, discomfort or frustration'. For example, Bruguera's

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<sup>415</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 54

<sup>416</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 131

<sup>417</sup> Bruguera, Interview

<sup>418</sup> Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 26

<sup>419</sup> May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 131

Turbine Hall commission for the Tate Modern was titled *10,148,451*. This figure rose to match ‘the number of people who migrated from one country to another last year added to the number of migrant deaths recorded so far this year – to indicate the sheer scale of mass migration and the risks involved’.<sup>420</sup>

Bruguera is creating the micro-political situations as the basis for the operation of the aesthetics of her work. She describes herself as ‘responder’, not author or creator, the implication being that she is trying to side-step the issues of natural hierarchy present in these situations. This is an attempt to account for the epistemological rejection of essentialism within a practice of ontological freedom. In our model, this finds its expression in the focus on the creation of these situations and moves our focus from the political ‘object’ to work at the level of the political subject. This move intentionally utilises the epistemological critique from May as the ontological foundation for the practice. In our praxis this became manifested in the freedom given to participants to shape and create the work and its themes as we worked, as Bruguera states, as ‘responders’. This, of course, is not a politically neutral stance. I am not making claims that we were able to remove our power from the space or the other elements which conditioned the responses of the practitioners. Rather, I argue that Bruguera’s approach allows us to ‘site’ our work within these political situations. In other words, through creating conditions which must be confronted by the participants, the ‘politics’ involved in Bruguera’s work is based in a micro-politics endorsed by Newman and May, and is consonant with the postanarchist rejection of objective values.

### **The Split in Ontology**

I am conflating May’s critique of enlightenment epistemologies – borrowed from the poststructuralists – with the ontological politics of Newman. My central argument is that **the construction of a coherent meta-ethics is based in these two positions and that through artistic practice we can see how they are brought together.**

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<sup>420</sup> Tate Modern, Hyundai Commission Tania Bruguera *10,148,451*, London: Tate, October-February 2019, (<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/hyundai-commission-tania-bruguera>)

The ontological status of art has always existed within the symbolic register, *re-presenting* to the audience. However, in art where the participants – their contributions, creativity, and even their bodies – form the art, the art itself creates the split in ontology. As Bishop notes ‘...participatory art has always had a double ontological status: it is both an event in the world, and also at a remove from it. As such it has the capacity to communicate on two levels – to participants and to spectators – the paradoxes that are repressed in everyday discourse, and to elicit perverse, disturbing, and pleasurable experiences that enlarge our relations anew.’<sup>421</sup>

In Bruguera’s approach to artistic production I believe we can see evidence of this privileged position and split. This is roughly analogous to Lacan’s split subject, itself based around the inversion of the Cartesian dualism. This split subject, radically split between speaking and being (hence the matheme \$ being used in Lacan’s schema) extends Descartes’s *cogito*, ‘I think therefore I am’, to explore the relationship between non-thought and non-being. This is done to disrupt our understanding of fundamental human essence, or to unseat the spooks and fixed ideas of essentialism.

Bruguera’s work is focused on, and developed with, the communities with which she works. She holds a long-standing to commitment to them, and her projects are based around the sustainability (not in the neoliberal sense) of this commitment. Her project *Immigrant Movement International* ran for over five years in Queens, New York. This project, which describes the medium utilised as the ‘appropriation of Political Strategies’,<sup>422</sup> began with Bruguera living with members of the immigrant community before establishing a community centre and headquarters. The project brought together artists, members of the community and social service organisations to examine the relationship between the ‘implementation of art’ – or what we may see as the operation of Rancière’s aesthetic regime – and society. This work had an explicit focus on the mediation of our subjectivity through language and symbols.

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<sup>421</sup> Claire Bishop, *Living as Form* Nato Thompson ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 45

<sup>422</sup> “Immigrant Movement International” Taniabruquera.com, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/486-0-Immigrant+Movement+International.htm>

This work retained the split ontological status as outlined by Bishop, a work which is focused around, and for, its participants, but which maintains its sense of scepticism, and relationship with audience. This is a re-focusing on the 'place' of meta-ethics, both in the sense that it is part of the artworks ontological function and, more literally, the physical space of occupation within this community. It is the ontological status of the practice that gives space to the exploration and critique of representative epistemologies. This reflection of postanarchist politics is key to its use in the creation of our model. More than this, it is the binding to the ontological – perhaps, even, its privileged ontological status – which leads artistic practice to become a basis for my exploration of postanarchist meta-ethics. Here, the epistemological critiques of May and Koch can be scaffolded on to this privileged position, allowing us to explore the coherence of these ideas and begin to look at how we might express a consonant meta-ethics.

There are obvious parallels with anarchist praxis and Bruguera's *Immigrant Movement International*. The commitment to a community – indeed, the commitment to become a part of that community – and focus on the agency of that community is something we can find in forms of anarchist organising from Occupy to the mutual aid networks created in the wake of the Corona virus pandemic of 2020. Bruguera does not refer directly to forms of anarchist practice and I am not applying the anarchist label to her work or thought. This is a colonialist logic which must be fiercely rejected. However, there are parallels with anarchist practice and postanarchist theory which give Bruguera's work an importance in the creation of our artistic model. Bruguera describes the long-term commitment alongside the freedom of the participants as 'doing it for real', and here we can return to Bishop's discussion of the social and artistic discourses. What Bruguera is attempting is the negation of the tension in these discourses. Bishop comments on this false dichotomy: 'Art's relationship to the social is either underpinned by morality or it is underpinned by freedom'.<sup>423</sup> From this line of criticism of social practice art which, I argue, Bruguera's practice navigates and actively seeks to experiment with:

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<sup>423</sup> Bishop in Thompson, *Living as Form*, 38

...you have a specific amount of control over what you do, if you want to do it for real – proactively. At the same time, it is very tiring because you are constantly negotiating. When you have a really good group ... you don't have to negotiate anything you just have to moderate the conversation which allows you to get in to things very quickly. They are very well prepared, which is interesting because you think this group is so diverse, so it should be more difficult to agree on stuff and to figure out one goal for the whole group, but it has been easier. Maybe it's precisely because everybody is out of their comfort zone. When you work with the Cuban community or the immigrant community there is a lot of residual behaviour, residual attitudes or expectations that they acquire before whatever issue you are working with. That can be something very different.<sup>424</sup>

The description offered places the practice at the centre of the tension between the two opposing discourses. Bishop's manifesto asks for the maintenance of this tension in order to 'unseat all of the polarities on which this discourse is founded (individual/collective, author/spectator, active/passive, real life/art) but not with the goal of *collapsing* them.'<sup>425</sup> Presumably, for Bishop, this 'unseating without collapsing' involves a form of Hegelian negation, a negation which always contains an element of recognition. Bruguera's practice highlights the fallacy of the negation by shifting the epistemological action, or meta-ethical process, from the recognition of the 'polarities' of each discourse, to their dissolving. The process-based nature of her work, something discussed greater detail below, is a direct challenge to the ontological relationship here. For Bishop, the role of the spectacle is clear. As with Rancière, the artistic object is the necessary ontological 'quilting point'<sup>426</sup> providing the relationship – its boundaries, and our ability to trace it – from the subjects (participant and spectator) to the object, in this case the art practice. Here, place and process are brought together in what could be recognised as the negative-dialectic of Stirner. Tension is indeed maintained between the social and artistic discourses, but what we find at the core of this relationship is not an object but a series of ethical

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<sup>424</sup> Bruguera, Interview

<sup>425</sup> Bishop in Thompson, *Living as Form*, 40

<sup>426</sup> See Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*

ties. Bruguera's practice is not intentionally targeting this dissolving, but the focus on how the object is brought *within* the subject offers us an interesting way to apply the negative-dialectic as method.

What is highlighted here is the way that epistemological spooks and fixed ideas, expressed as 'residual attitudes or expectations', become the target for the unseating of the subjectivities of Bruguera's participants. The ontological ground may have a double function when looked at from the point of view of an art critic, or performance analysis. However, what is clear from Bruguera's explanation of her process is that the ontological grounding of her work is based in what we have seen in the axiomatic logic of freedom or ownness. The ontological grounding of the practice is operating only for and with the subject. This could be seen as a form of thin subjectivism. However, the techniques which Bruguera employs as part of this practice point to the possibility of resurrecting the subject as the place of ethics without falling into the *teleological* trap of subjectivist politics. I am not positing Bruguera as a latent ethical-nihilist - I have taken enough liberties with her politics - but I argue that the *form* of practice rejects any idea of essential identity or foundation for the subject.

In the next chapter I shall posit this as operating within the base-subjectivist position. Rousselle summates this position in which 'the belief in a truth-bound subject is retained but only as a critique of *telos*. The *telos* of truth, liberation and the dialectic of history, and so on, is disrupted by an epistemological process that gears itself towards the darkness of the unconscious'.<sup>427</sup> Rousselle rejects the base-subjectivist position as a consonant meta-ethics due to this retention of the subject as the place of ethical discourse. For Rousselle, this is a purely epistemological critique and we can see his belief that this 'code' retains the subject as place 'but the process through which these ethics are believed to be filtered is reverted toward a constitutively open discourse whereby the subject's self-knowledge is no longer concealed by the imaginary identifications with foreign causes or essences'.<sup>428</sup> Bruguera's description above certainly confirms the epistemological critique

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<sup>427</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-Anarchism*, 76-77

<sup>428</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-Anarchism*, 77-78

identified by Rousselle, acknowledging that people needed to be out of their 'comfort zones' and have their presuppositions challenged through this mix of autonomous and heteronomous practice. My argument, one which I shall develop at greater length in the following chapter, is that we can see evidence not only of the dissolving of the 'foreign causes and essences' into a simple rejection of negation, but into the subject itself through the negative-dialectic of Stirner. This is not an intention of the practice, and I am merely using Bruguera's practice as an illustration of why this is interesting to postanarchist scholars. I will map the theoretical ground for this later: at this stage, the important thing to note is that Bruguera's practice radically unseats the participant's conception of themselves in order to achieve the rejection of foreign causes and essences. Indeed, the participants' relationship with these mediating 'realities' is directly targeted by Bruguera.

If it's a group that's too homogenous you want conflict because you want to break that feeling of "I know what it is... I know what I'm doing" this, sort of, comfort zone, you want to break it. And in the breaking you can pick up other pieces which can bring you another whole. Wholeness in the conversation.<sup>429</sup>

It is interesting to note that, in some situations, the 'breaking' of the whole is the method that she employs. Perhaps this is a way to approach Bishop's request for 'unease, discomfort or frustration – along with fear, contradiction, exhilaration and absurdity', rather than the shock tactics of the YBAs (Young British Artists – a movement primarily in the visual arts originating in the 1990s and characterised through the work of Tracy Emin, Damien Hurst, Sarah Lucas, Angus Fairhurst and Michael Landy). It is certainly more coherent with a removal of the ontological importance of spectacle. Bruguera's practice emphasises what she describes as 'implementation' over production. This, briefly, is the rejection of the object as ultimate 'goal' of a project, something she says can lead to misunderstanding of 'success'. These discussions point towards a similar manoeuvre to Stirner's negative-dialectic, or give us a way to think about its operation. Bruguera describes how the immigrant communities she has worked with often face 'a unifying feeling of

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<sup>429</sup> Bruguera, Interview



hopelessness<sup>430</sup> and that this is what she is attempting to 'break'. The basis in what I assert is a form of ownness, takes freedom as its locus in order to address questions of power. Returning to Newman's vision of ownness this is a practice which 'seeks to make freedom real by placing it back within the grasp of real individuals who are free to create their own singular path',<sup>431</sup> through its mediating role in our reality.

Bruguera acknowledges this intention. She tells us that while this feeling of hopelessness is 'very real' it 'also predisposes you towards reality and takes away from the feeling that "I can do this or that"'.<sup>432</sup> Newman's argument is ontological and the (anti-)politics this creates is also something we could categorise as 'implementation over production'. This can be expressed as a form of prefiguration, which itself operates in the same way as the negative-dialectic. Prefiguration in the anarchist (maybe postanarchist) sense can be read as the dissolving of the ends/means distinction. We can see the function of this if we return to the anarchist critique of democracy, the "means" of democracy are empty without the "ends" of our values. A democratic village or commune which chooses absolute leaders through consensus, or the allowance of female genital mutilation is not one which can be described as in any way anarchist as it lacking in anarchist *values*. The converse of this argument is that we cannot strip the ends from our means. In the above examples, both based in existing communities, the means of democracy *must* contain within them the values of the ends, in that they contain the potential for this oppression and domination.

This is roughly analogous with the manner in which Stirner deploys the distinction between subject and object. He tells us we should bring the objects we encounter into our possession, but that this is a process of realising that these objects already *are*, as they must be for us to be able to recognise and interact with them. The links between these concepts can be seen in the way they are brought together in Bruguera's practice. By focusing on radical self-ownership in order to address the

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<sup>430</sup> Bruguera, Interview

<sup>431</sup> Newman, "Ownness Created a New Freedom", 160

<sup>432</sup> Bruguera, Interview

epistemological problems of spooks, or essences, Bruguera appears to be engaging in the approach outlined by Newman. This is also a removal of the means/ends distinction, key to prefigurative politics, or in her own words: 'it's a process that opens up through process'.<sup>433</sup>

### **Production as Prefiguration as Negative-Dialectic**

Bruguera's focus on process over production, or subject over object, is a praxis which mirrors the politics of prefiguration and gives us the possibility of examining the operation of this politics through the postanarchist, or discursive approach upon which this thesis is based. She describes to us how this operates within specific artistic spaces and projects, but these projects and spaces are using politics and ethics as their *medium* not as their final object. She explicitly acknowledges the ethical responsibility and we might, in fact, wonder if this is politics using aesthetics as its medium. For political theorists, this distinction is unimportant. I will not pursue the arguments around the didactic nature of participatory art, but will assert the two are dissolved into one another. By utilising art practice and arts spaces, we have access to a world which is supposed to represent a rejection of measure, aside from the operation of the art market. Bruguera's work is not, in itself, "sellable". This is an intentional move and one which has led to the renegotiation of commissions. Commissions from large art institutions and museums usually rely on the uptake in 'sales' and the increased market value they bestow. This is interesting but something which cannot translate to practice without an object is not the focus of this thesis. Perhaps, this is where we can see the rejection of the objective most clearly. Bruguera has been prepared to ignore financial gain and 'success' in order to realise the manifest ethics in her work.

Bruguera is explicit in the use of prefiguration. It is worth returning to the definition of prefigurative politics offered by Raekstad and Gradin. They define this form of political practice as 'the *deliberate* experimental implementation of *desired* future social relations and practices in the here and now'.<sup>434</sup> What we need to understand

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<sup>433</sup> Bruguera, Interview

<sup>434</sup> Raekstad and Gradin, *Prefigurative Politics*, 36 (emphasis in original)

for our exploration of Bruguera's thought and practice are: the practice ideas must be experimental; the experiments must be deliberate; there must be a vision for the future social relations; these social relations *must* be 'desirable'. (Here we may assume that the subject of this desire is the practitioner, and that this must be actionable without the need for future developments to occur.) Raekstad and Gradin place an emphasis on the deliberate nature of these acts, noting that what separates prefigurative from other political practice is this intentional nature: if all things proceed from other previous things, prefiguration differs by trying to achieve a desired outcome. ('Those who begin to develop new social relations rarely expect or plan for them to become the social organisation of the future'.<sup>435</sup>) So, putting this together within our exploration of artistic practice, the practitioner *and* participants must have a vision of a desired outcome, which is here taken to be a desirable set of social relations. This must be achieved through experiment, not simply novelty, and the form of the practice must be the form of those social relations. On these concepts Bruguera gives us the example of a group of artists she works with in her native Cuba:

It is assuming that something will come after, not an end, but a new beginning. Let's use the case of the people protesting in Cuba. When I confronted the government they [the group of artists] looked at me as if I was crazy. Four years later, after all the work we have done these people are ready to confront the government, but that's not the end. If they change the law, that's not the end. The end is the transformation of the people meaning that it can always become something else. Behavioural prefiguration, it's this idea that, not like in politics or in activism where you have a goal and you achieve it and it's done. It's about one step towards the liberation of the people, the feeling of freedom. You can't have somebody who doesn't know what freedom is as they wouldn't know what to do.<sup>436</sup>

This appears to match our criteria and extend through its ontological commitment. Bruguera, interestingly, removes this form of action from 'politics or ... activism'

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<sup>435</sup> Raekstad and Gradin, *Prefigurative Politics*, 36

<sup>436</sup> Bruguera, Interview

which is based in a goal, but places the target for the action with the participants. This refocuses the practice on the new social relations or forms of organisation. Here both Bruguera and the group of artists she is working with share this vision of renewed social relations or becoming ‘something else’. This is clearly experimental practice; at least, we can infer this from the reaction of her peers, with these social relations. Here, Bruguera is referring to the Havana iteration of her work *Tatlin’s Whisper*. In this intervention Bruguera created a platform – both literally and figuratively – for participants to speak freely and without censorship, something denied to the public in Cuba. The Guggenheim describes this work as seeking to ‘activate viewers’ participation by recontextualizing powerful images from significant events’.<sup>437</sup> Behind the language of the museum (looking to actualise or activate), the work is a knowing parody of the image of Fidel Castro’s first speech after the revolution of 1959. The freedom of Castro is aesthetically represented in the practice of speech. It is interesting to note that Bruguera was arrested for this work (a perlocutionary act, in Butler’s terms). This clearly represents what she describes as ‘the transformation of the people’ and we can relate this act directly to our definition of prefigurative politics. The use of parody is similar to Stirner’s formations and use of humour. For instance, think of how Stirner parodies Hegel’s thought on human essence or *geist*, or how he creates a fictional wife for his antagonist Kuno Fischer. Both mirror this use of irony ‘making strange’ the familiar.

Bruguera even advances a new category of prefigurative practice, ‘behavioural prefiguration’, as part of her work. Her explanation of this form of practice is tied directly to our definition and to the basis in ontological anarchy, or ownness. Bruguera’s role as artist gives her the license to create the conditions necessary for the transformation of social relations. My claim, that the axiomatic logic of the practice is freedom, is evidenced by her commitment to the ‘transformation of the people’. As addressed below, it is important to note that her work also maintains a rejection of neoliberal and colonial discourses which seek to “empower” these communities or build in “resilience” or “sustainability”. In place of these discourses, it is the attempt to create the ‘feeling of freedom’, separate from any claim to actual

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<sup>437</sup> Tania Bruguera, Guggenheim Online Collection, *Tatlin’s Whisper #6*, New York: Guggenheim, 2009, (<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/33083>)

freedom or the conditions for it. This is an important distinction, as it highlights both the ontological position of the practice and the dissolving of the ends/means of the work.

The transgressive act of speaking freely in public in Cuba is the means, but through this practice the ends are realised within the performance itself. We can look again to the anarchist rejection of democracy.<sup>438</sup> The broad critique of democracy, in both its representative and direct forms, is that it is merely a means, and ignores values and ends. As left-libertarians we could not support a process which leads to the re-imposition of hierarchy and domination, even if the means of deciding this is liberatory and non-hierarchical; the values must be present throughout. This is what we see in Bruguera's practice. She is experimenting in creating platforms for this feeling to occur within the prefigurative ethics to which she is committed. There is a clear ethical commitment within this form of practice, one which takes the subject as its ethical 'place'. The autonomy of artistic practice is placed against the heteronomy of co-production, and this may be a difficult 'place' for anarchists on which to base their ethical principles. It is interesting to note that Bruguera has explored how this operates and if we can be 'forced' to be free. Other examples can be brought to mind here, such as the camps for the families of former ISIS fighters in North East Syria, or the freedom of 'choice' in modern consumerism. How do we create universalities which do not contradict our values from these particularities or subjectivities?<sup>439</sup>

...some people are not ready to be free and sometimes people reject freedom because it's not what they know, they are not prepared for it, they don't know what to do with it, they are scared. So yeah, forced is a good word. But, is it an effective tool? That's another question, I don't know. Look what happened in the USSR, people were forced to be 'free', and they still had a corruption mentality, a blackmail mentality, a black market mentality, a fake news mentality, a lying mentality. So, I almost feel like you can force freedom, but I

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<sup>438</sup> See, for example Crimethinc or Markus Lundström, *The Anarchist Critique of Radical Democracy*

<sup>439</sup> "Roj Camp management on transfers from Al-Hol", Rojava Information Centre, last modified September 20, 2020 <https://rojvainformationcenter.com/2020/09/our-aim-is-that-these-women-open-their-minds-roj-camp-management-on-transfers-from-al-hol/>

think the more interesting path is to be a little bit more patient and to educate people on how it feels to be free and what you can do with that freedom. The other thing that is kind of sad is... people who are free who don't use their freedom. They just enjoy it; this is a privilege. I always say that the privilege means you have to work towards something.<sup>440</sup>

There are two interesting conclusions to draw from the above: firstly, the re-assertion in Bruguera's work to create the 'feeling of freedom' and secondly, the identification of the ethical responsibility of freedom. In the first case, this feeling of freedom is placed in direct opposition to Žižekian notions of forcing freedom on subjects. We can think here of Stirner's distinction between egoists and people who are unaware they are egoists. For Stirner, egoism is the method, or means, to achieve ownness; Bruguera also requires a self-aware process to realise the desired ends of her practice. The process is epistemological in nature, aimed at unseating the spirits and fixed ideas which have "possessed" the participants. This is a direct replication of egoism into ownness. We can see in Bruguera's critique of the 'forced freedom' of the USSR, Stirner's critique of the distortions of religious thought:

But the habit of the religious way of thinking has biased our mind so grievously that we are — terrified at ourselves in our nakedness and naturalness; it has degraded us so that we deem ourselves depraved by nature, born devils. Of course it comes into your head at once that your calling requires you to do the "good," the moral, the right. Now, if you ask yourselves what is to be done, how can the right voice sound forth from you, the voice which points the way of the good, the right, the true, etc.?<sup>441</sup>

Stirner implores us to reject the abstracted and morally-loaded 'freedom' just as Bruguera is trying to unseat the abstractions and feelings of hopelessness in the immigrant community in Queens, or the artists of Havana. Bruguera uses the term 'freedom' in its abstracted form which seems, at first, to contradict my comparison with Stirner's project. However, I argue that Bruguera's practice does reflect this

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<sup>440</sup> Bruguera, Interview

<sup>441</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 147

attempt at ownness, the radical form of pre-freedom discussed in earlier chapters. This freedom is not based in its religious, political or moral worth, merely its *use* to its subject. Her practice stands against the liberal and republican conceptualisations of freedom discussed above. The participants in her practice are not “free in theory” to engage in artistic practice, as we may characterise the liberal, negative freedom. Nor is it the mere guarantee of freedom from arbitrary interference promised to us by republicanism. Indeed, it would seem within Bruguera’s practice this is something she cannot guarantee; she has been arrested numerous times for her practice. The vision of freedom we find in Bruguera’s practice is not the goal of the practice, but its starting point. The ability to interact, to create and to participate are established at the beginning of a project. We see this in her becoming embedded in the communities she works with and making use of her power to enable this to occur.

It is for this reason that she also tells us that the privilege of freedom comes at the cost of having ‘to work towards something’. Stirner would, surely, reject the language used. However, the sentiment that this freedom does not exist only for you in isolation – a form of moral vacuum we may associate with some forms of thought experiment, ‘trolleyology’ in particular – but relates directly to the objective world and therefore is a part of the construction of our reality. The responsibility which Bruguera discusses above is a form of personal responsibility. This is not to dismiss the impact we have in conditioning the reality of others, but the affirmation of our responsibility to ourselves. Stirner implores us to ‘just recognize yourselves again, just recognize what you really are, and let go your hypocritical endeavours, your foolish mania to be something else than you are’.<sup>442</sup> We can find a link here with Bruguera’s personal journey as ‘artist’. For her, ‘understanding freedom and having choices... has been a long process’, something which she puts down to the politically and emotionally abusive place she comes from.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 149

<sup>443</sup> Bruguera, Interview

## Returning to Rancière

Returning to Rancière's 'aesthetic regime of art' we find another way in which the artist's perspective is useful. Key to Rancière's argument is the *and* which appends the "forms of life" promoted as art under the operation of the aesthetic regime. For Rancière, the "autonomy of art' *and* the 'promise of politics are not counter-posed. The autonomy of art is the autonomy of *experience*'.<sup>444</sup> It is the artwork which forms part of this ontological relationship with autonomy through the ways it is *not* an artwork. We can see this clearly in Bruguera's practice. The rejection of the object, or goal; her use of micro-politics as her medium, and the compulsion to remove the role of the spectator all step outside of the confines of a work of art, but remain essential elements in the practice.

Bruguera's Turbine Hall commission provides us with an apposite example of this operation. Here the entire floor of the hall (a huge, empty former power station) was covered in a pressure and heat sensitive paint. An unknown, but large, number of participants are required to work together to reveal the image beneath. The large empty space of the hall is dark and filled only with the noise of visitors to the gallery and an eerie, sinister, low-frequency sound. Little explanation is initially given to visitors, who must either actively seek the information from a small notice at one side of the hall, or register with the gallery's Wi-Fi. The participants will "fail" in discovering the image beneath the surface if they are unable to convince other members of the public to work with them. The image which is revealed is a portrait of Yousef, a Syrian refugee who fled the fighting in the Syrian civil war to settle in London. A claustrophobic room in the corner of the space emits an organic compound that is released into the air to induce tears in the participants, in what Bruguera describes as 'forced empathy'.<sup>445</sup> If members of the public remain as spectators the work will "fail", the portrait will remain undiscovered and the room becomes little more than the most ominous playgroup in South London. This is Bruguera's attempt at removing the ontological action of the artwork as spectacle. It

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<sup>444</sup> Rancière, "The Aesthetic Regime and its Outcomes", *New Left Review*, 2002: 136 (Emphasis added)

<sup>445</sup> Hyundai Commission, Tania Bruguera: 10,148,451



may not be entirely successful but it certainly demonstrates the different readings of the formula Rancière proposes: 'autonomy can be stressed over life, or life over autonomy'.<sup>446</sup> In this work we can see how these lines intersect and produce the 'meta-politics' discussed in the previous chapter. What is created is a clear expression of the participation of the art in 'the sensorium of autonomy', or what we may see as the operation of Stirner's negative dialectic. The 'non-art' present within this artwork, literally, forms part of the sensuous experience, but we only experience it through an engagement from *inside* the art. This is where we can see the operation of the negative dialectic in a clear and observable fashion.

It is for this reason that the artist's perspective is useful to this thesis: the *and* Rancière discusses between the autonomy of art and life which operates within the aesthetic regime provides the foundations for this manoeuvre. **The (anti-)politics I am proposing is a set of practices which are based in this ontological commitment: ownness taken as the beginning, not egoism.** Newman's formation of postanarchism begins with the ontological anarchy, a form of ownness developed alongside discussions of poststructuralist ethics. It is a 'strategy of freeing oneself from the forms of identity that have been imposed upon us by contemporary forms of governmentality, and constituting alternative modes of subjectivity'.<sup>447</sup> We have seen how this differs, fundamentally, with liberal and republican visions of positive and negative freedom based in the conceptualisation of the subject. In discussing what may constitute 'success' in her work, Bruguera argues that success is when people are initially sure they can only be one thing and because of the experience, they discover they can be something else.<sup>448</sup> This locates the place of ethics in her practice at the level of the subject, or more precisely, within the empty subject, or unique, of Stirner. His subject, as we have seen, is without essence or foundations, a vision of a subject without a true or authentic self. We must, however, be aware of the potential for this process of the profaning of our subjection to become a foundationalist ethic. As Stirner warns us:

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<sup>446</sup> Rancière, "The Aesthetic Regime and its Outcomes", 136

<sup>447</sup> Newman, "Ownness Created a New Freedom", 173

<sup>448</sup> Bruguera, Interview

If the presuppositions that have hitherto been current are to melt away in a full dissolution, they must not be dissolved into a higher presupposition again — i.e. a thought, or thinking itself, criticism. For that dissolution is to be for *my* good; otherwise it would belong only in the series of the innumerable dissolutions which, in favour of others (e.g. this very Man, God, the State, pure morality, etc.), declared old truths to be untruths and did away with long-fostered presuppositions.<sup>449</sup>

What speaks to this warning in Bruguera's practice is the rejection of idealised forms of activity or organisation. Within a small snapshot of her work we have seen: a self-directed immigrant community which is forged around the physical space provided; a project directly invested in the removal of fear through the realisation of the power which is pre-existent in the community; the creation of an ephemeral community built around the disestablishment of intersubjective relations; the parody of power and authority, and the creation of what is, essentially, an executive position on the board of a large art institution for people local to the gallery. There is a commitment to prefigurative experimentation, a long-term, embedded practice, and a knowing critique of power relations which seek to undermine any 'higher presuppositions' (here we might read 'objective values'). I shall examine how we may 'measure' success below, but the intention here is closely linked with the ethics and creation of political situations which reject objective values and measures. Looking back to the discussion of the political situations Bruguera creates as her practice, we see the limited scope of the negative-dialectic:

I on my part start from a presupposition in presupposing *myself*, but my presupposition does not struggle for its perfection like "Man struggling for his perfection," but only serves me to enjoy it and consume it. I consume my presupposition, and nothing else, and exist only in consuming it.<sup>450</sup>

Through her practice, Bruguera is seeking this 'consumption'. The use of limited political and ethical decisions which are 'forced' on the participants is combined with

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<sup>449</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and its Own*, 135 (Emphasis Original)

<sup>450</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and its Own*, 135 (Emphasis Original)

the lack of fixed goals, or presumptions of the subjectivity of her participants, which we may translate as the ontological freedom Stirner proposes. There is no inherent metaphysics or *telos* in the practices outlined, or the discussion of the work by Bruguera. This is instantly appealing for postanarchist theorists. Newman has developed this concept at length<sup>451</sup> and Rousselle has argued on its limitations, but this was the first time I had the opportunity to interrogate the how this may operate in practice. I do not have audience data, participant interviews or art criticism to fall back on; this may be the focus of future research. However, the emphasis here is to see how we might approach ownness in practice, not its efficacy. Bruguera creates this opening through her creation of the chance for her participants to decide on their 'own singular path, or paths, of freedom'.<sup>452</sup> The argument is that this may be impossible to judge the success of in 'empirical' terms. The model I have proposed in the previous chapter has been subject to thorough evaluation at the institutional level to assess the 'impact' of the practice on the participants, but this work has proved only the inevitable difficulty of trying to measure anything we might usefully describe as freedom. Bruguera herself rejects these neoliberal discourses:

I think sometimes people only measure success by what they can see, or experience directly and I try to find success in things that are invisible so it's very difficult for anybody to see the whole thing. You can only see one part.<sup>453</sup>

Here we see the incongruity between the ontologies of measure and representation which the institution operates through, and the epistemological position of the practice. Anyone who has ever been involved with Academic researchers will be aware of the imperative to stick precisely to the narrow confines of 'what they can see' and may even argue on behalf of the 'rigour' of only evaluating the one visible part. Bruguera gives us a clear rejection of this and the fact that we are only able to

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<sup>451</sup> See Newman, "Ownness Created a New Freedom"; *Postanarchism; From Bakunin to Lacan*

<sup>452</sup> Newman, "Ownness Created a New Freedom", 173

<sup>453</sup> Bruguera, Interview

'see one part' demonstrates the interaction of the ontological rejection of the objective to the epistemological refusal of measure.<sup>454</sup>

What I have posited here is the theoretical contribution which Bruguera's practice has made in developing the model of politically engaged artistic practice and the theories and philosophies I have discussed so far. There is potentially more to be exploited in the interview data. Analysis of the discussion of power and how this correlates with the poststructuralist, if not postanarchist, conceptualisations may be fruitful. I have limited the discussion to the ontological implications of the theory presented for two reasons. Firstly, this is the area of the thesis which has developed a novel approach to how we may interpret ontological anarchy or ownness. Secondly, and related to this point, when we start to examine meta-ethics in more detail in the following chapter, we will find that the 'gap' in postanarchist meta-ethics has been the 'place' of ethics. Bruguera's practice is not necessarily a coherent ethical universe and we see in her work how the focus on plurality and *diference* can reinforce some problematic and potentially essentialist issues into our ethical reasoning. However, there is evidence of how this ethical cul-de-sac may be traversed through the latent commitment to freedom as the locus for the practice.

What this chapter has established is why the artist's perspective is useful; that is, useful in the broad sense that it operates within the 'and' of Rancière, navigating the inherently subjective space between autonomy and heteronomy, and in the narrow sense that it is of use to my argument. Bruguera has had a significant impact on the creation of the artistic practice which underpins this exploration in postanarchist practice through her output and dialogues with me.<sup>455</sup> She has provided data for us to analyse alongside the grounding of the practice I have engaged in to establish the principles of meta-ethics which we shall explore in the next chapter. Prefiguration, ownness and the importance of ethics have all been asserted through the work and thought of Bruguera and mirror the commitments of the anarchistic politics I wish to develop. This is not the only manner in which practice could have been used to

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<sup>454</sup> Bruguera has directly told the author, alongside other academics, that she will not work within these paradigms.

<sup>455</sup> See Bates and Sharkey, "Politically Engaged Artistic Practice"

create this work. I could have spent time working within other forms of political organising or mutual aid networks, but this would have foreclosed the possibility of exploring the tight bond between ethics and aesthetics and the lessons we have drawn from this.

## Chapter 6: Meta-Ethics

### Introduction: An attempt to find anarchy in a chaotically unjust world

The previous chapters have illustrated the need to extend the ontological basis of postanarchism in order to move beyond the purely epistemological critiques levied by early forms of postanarchism. The central reason for this, as shall be explored in this chapter, is that this forms a necessary plank in forming a coherent theory of meta-ethics: something I am positing postanarchism as an attempt at. This chapter will first look back at how the themes of power and freedom have been developed as ways of understanding postanarchist meta-ethics and introduce a politics of peculiarity, or the politics of my reading of Stirner's thought. Building on the writing of Newman, my argument is that beyond creating a new freedom, ownness creates a new politics. From the reading of Stirner I have presented, the ethical and political implications of the negative-dialectic will be examined, and this forms the basis for a reimagining of postanarchist meta-ethics (from the relationship to the social to the fundamental ontological rejection). This chapter will examine Rousseau's claim that postanarchism is attempting to theorise the latent ethical content of anarchism. Rousseau's taxonomy of meta-ethics will be evaluated alongside the core concepts presented so far and the examples of practice which have illustrated the 'usefulness' of this. The ethical-nihilist position I have developed here will be used to expose the lack at the heart of Critchley's 'unanswerable demand'. Franks' work, including his most recent intervention, will be used as a way to critique postanarchism and to demonstrate the need for the politics of peculiarity based in Stirner's negative-dialectic. Franks' work is valuable and comes at a time when anarchism feels itself at a crossroads.<sup>456</sup> However, Franks does not give us a coherent meta-ethics within the taxonomy we are following here. His ideas, while attractive and useful, themselves expose an incongruity within anarchist ethical formation: ethics of practice which often ignore the intersubjective constituent. I will use Stirner's negative-dialectic to establish my conceptualisation of meta-ethics. This will argue that postanarchist thought does not need to look outside, to thinkers such as Bataille or Benjamin, and

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<sup>456</sup> See "Anarchy in Crisis," Anarchist Studies Conference, held online September, 2020

that we can further develop our reading of postanarchist thought to overcome the issues identified.

Far from being a conflicting hyper-individualism or narrow postanarchist epistemological critique, Stirner gives us the conceptual tools to place the intersubjective constituent back within a consonant nihilist meta-ethics. The social is not absent from Stirner, he does not deny the existence of the world and environment we interact with, just its deification. Stirner gives us the creative nothing to answer both the questions of place and process within anarchist meta ethics. This section will bring together both the epistemological critiques of postanarchist discourse with the implications of my reading of Stirner for anarchist ontologies. The politics of peculiarity I am proposing is not a refutation or continuation of anarchist ethics, this itself would ascribe a level of moral hierarchy, but serves to outline what may happen when postanarchist theory meets practice. Postanarchism has given us useful conceptualisations of both freedom and power, or tools to both understand and interact with the world we come into contact with. The negative-dialectic provides a way to bring together these strands in a meta-ethics which *may* account for the latent content of anarchist discourse outside of any “necessary” ethical, or empirical, content.

The position I wish to enunciate is one which takes as its basis the negative-dialectic of Stirner and asks how this might be useful to anarchist praxis. Thus is a politics which is, by its very nature, always in a state of flux but is not one of *Différence*, in the Deleuzian sense. Poststructuralist thought has experienced something of an ‘ethical turn’ in its later guises. Foucault describes Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* as an ethical text and the ethical content of his thought and its proximity to anarchist ethics has been explored by Newman and May.<sup>457</sup> Newman illustrates the manifest nature of this work in the writing of Lyotard and Derrida where ‘our contemporary world would appear to be characterised by a plurality of different and conflicting beliefs, attitudes and perspectives from which it is impossible to derive

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<sup>457</sup> See Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, and May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*.

any kind of universal moral standpoint'.<sup>458</sup> If for Lyotard, and to some extent Newman, plurality is the goal of ethical content within a groundless and foundationless world then there appears, as the basis of this reasoning, a tension which highlights the potential use of Stirner's negative dialectic.

The existing world (objective) stripped of its universality is a thick reading of the subjective. The negative-dialectic gives us a way of explaining this and accounting for it in our ethical reasoning, without making any *necessary* claims of universality. Indeed, I would reject Newman's request for some form of universal ethics or politics which is able to 'think beyond the parameters of the present'.<sup>459</sup> I take no issue with Newman's use of the anti-globalisation movement or a critical reading of enlightenment universalism to temper the ethical arguments within postmodern thought. However, much as I have no *prima facie* problems with Kinna *et al.*'s anarcho-republican organising, we must reject any form of idealised politics in order to avoid these notions of universal, or objective, moral values. We may be able to learn a great many things from the struggles and successes of the anti-globalisation movement, but we must not hold it up as an "ideal" form of politics. Indeed, we may see this as the operation of the colonial logic which operates to "read in" anarchism to indigenous movements in countries far from the author. The question we are left with is what, then, would a politics look like which rejects conceptualisation: a philosophical non-concept similar to Stirner's unique.

This is a continuation of the postanarchist rejection of the essentialised universal subject as identified by Rousselle and Franks.<sup>460</sup> Where Newman seeks to identify what is useful in enlightenment notions of universality, here we seek to find what is useful in this form of exploration. It is the act of finding use which we're concerned with here. Broadly speaking, what I am outlining is what 'dissolving' the objective into the subject might look like when applied to postanarchist politics. This is why I am asking for a politics of peculiarity, not egoism or postanarchism. This is based in the ontological position developed throughout: act as if *you* are already free.

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<sup>458</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 99

<sup>459</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 8

<sup>460</sup> See Franks, 'Postanarchism and Meta-ethics'; Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 137



## Politics of Peculiarity

I use the term peculiarity for a number of reasons. Firstly, the term is designed to reflect a politics based in Stirner's response to liberal theorising on freedom: ownness. This is distinct from egoism, but clearly related to it. In *The Ego and Its Own*, Stirner outlines egoism as a method for achieving ownness, or a radical form of pre-freedom or self-ownership - one which rejects the self-owning liberal individual and forms of Kantian autonomy. Stirner describes the subject who is:

...*originally free*, because he recognizes nothing but himself; he does not need to free himself first, because at the start he rejects everything outside himself, because he prizes nothing more than himself, rates nothing higher, because, in short, he starts from himself and "comes to himself." Constrained by childish respect, he is nevertheless already working at "freeing" himself from this constraint. Ownness works in the little egoist, and procures him the desired — freedom.<sup>461</sup>

In isolation this short section could be outlining the thin individualism of neoliberalism, compelling the reader to prize only themselves or the empty nihilist rejection of everything. This is not what Stirner is asking for. The negative-dialectic gives us a fresh understanding of this prizing of the self, rejecting that which is outside of – or, perhaps, above, it. This does not mean we can simply ignore the world we encounter, but that we must dissolve the world into ourselves. This sounds like a strange and unclear notion, but we must remember that Stirner is attempting to unseat the roots of the words he is using (and we are left with a number of, often unsatisfactory, translations). How do we dissolve the world? The first issue we must tackle is what is to be dissolved. Then, we must ask what this process would look like. And finally we must determine what this is to be dissolved into.

In order to address the taxonomy of Rousselle, which we use to analyse anarchist ethics, we must look again to the problems of ethical place and process. What is the

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<sup>461</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 149

process of dissolving and where is the place we are dissolving this into? In order to begin to make sense of this we must begin with the place, or destination, where this dissolving is to occur: you. This is the unique as political site. This gives us a location, but more importantly, designates the scope of the inquiry. We are concerned with what impacts on you in the broadest sense. I am impacted by the choice of car I purchase, but I am also impacted by the CO2 emissions; the impact on congestion; changes to prices; how others respond to my choice; how others respond to my taste; how this choice projects my taste; how this interacts with power and privilege; the exploitation involved in production, distribution and selling, and my micro-politics throughout purchase and driving. This list does not begin to capture the range of actions and logics which impact on me from one, apparently, simple interaction. However, it does begin to demonstrate how we might understand this process. It is asking you to consider *all things* which impact you, or put another way, the things which are not outside of yourself. They give us the unique as the *place* for this to occur. It is a reading of Stirner's egoism which allows for social formation of the subject, although doesn't require it. This is beginning to hint at my meta-ethical position, the question of place in ethics answered negatively through Stirner's unique and the negative-dialectic. These ideas will be explored at length below, but what is important here is that the 'place' we are discussing is the non-place of the subject, or the creative nothing positing itself.

I am attempting here to outline the implications that this reading of Stirner has for postanarchism. This will necessitate an emphasis on the ontologies of postanarchist thought and will, as a result, eschew the epistemological critiques explored earlier in the thesis. This is not to dismiss these - indeed these are the important foundation for this line of enquiry - but this section will look to find a consonant way of exploring the ontological aspects of the negative-dialectic in order to satisfy the problem of place in ethical discourse.

The choice of 'peculiarity' is closer to Stirner's *Eigenheit*, itself a derivation of "own" in the original German.<sup>462</sup> *Eigen* or "own" becomes peculiarity in most German to English translations and I believe this is a better representation of Stirner's thought.

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<sup>462</sup> I would like to thank Dr Soeren Keil for his assistance with translation.

Indeed, the translator's note in the 1907 edition for this chapter states that '[i]n most passages "self-ownership," or else "personality," would translate the word, but there are some where the thought is so *eigen, i e.*, so peculiar or so thoroughly the author's own, that no English word I can think of would express it'.<sup>463</sup> It is interesting to note the use of peculiar here. We can assume this is no accident: it is directly linked to the clause 'thoroughly the author's own', perhaps the clearest expression of ownness in this edition. The term peculiarity has found use by scholars to express unique features of 'identity-building processes',<sup>464</sup> or the elements which constitute the subject and are unique to it. Examples of this often seek to look for 'peculiarities' of larger groups such as nations or professions. However, I believe it expresses the unique nature of the individual. In order to satisfy the condition of being 'thoroughly the author's own', these peculiarities must belong to the subject and be part of what we recognise as them. Peculiarity is derived from the Latin *peculium* (property) or *peculiaris* (private property) and shares its modern interpretation with something outside of normalcy, or strange. I choose peculiarity for these reasons: it's direct link to a unique property; its etymological basis in the concepts of property, or ownership; its signification of strangeness, and this being a link to queerness. I shall continue to outline how a politics of peculiarity may operate, but etymologically I feel this satisfies Stirner's intention in the text in a way which is coherent with the ethico-political strategy I am proposing here.

We have seen how postanarchist authors have used the epistemological critiques of poststructuralism to construct a meta-ethics in a form of subjectivism. This is perhaps best characterised in the work of Andrew Koch and Todd May. Both authors attempt to foreclose the possibility of representative ontologies through the rejection of power conceptualised as either simply a "power over" or a negative action on the subject (subjection). As I have outlined, these are useful interpretations leading us to conceptualise power in way consonant with prefigurative practice. In the previous section we have seen how this relationship between poststructuralist theories of power and anarchist practice utilises the rejection of strategic political logic, and can

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<sup>463</sup> Steven Byington in Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* (New York: Tucker, 1907)

<sup>464</sup> Diana Mishkova ed., *We, the People: Politics of National Peculiarity in Sotheastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009), 2

be found in what Bruguera refers to as 'behavioural prefiguration'. Franks notes that the use of practice to experiment in prefigurative politics unifies 'the epistemic, ethical, organisational and tactical within an interpretive framework'.<sup>465</sup> Franks' work is concerned with the values generated during practice and we shall return in greater detail to these ideas. For now, what is of interest to us is that he has identified the manner in which practice brings together elements of our politics in a form which can maintain its critical function. These forms of practice avoid any necessary *telos* or foundationalism, and allow us to deploy our power while simultaneously giving us a way of assessing 'which relationships of power are acceptable and which are not'.<sup>466</sup>

This is not to say that these forms of practice alone provide us with the normative or ethical values needed to evaluate the relationships of power present in political action, but they allow for these norms and values to be changed and transcended.<sup>467</sup> This highlights that prefigurative practice is a form of ethical reasoning in itself, but one which is concerned with 'the epistemic, ethical, organisational and tactical' and not the ontological. We risk this cul-de-sac whenever we use power as the ontological grounding of politics. For Badiou, this leads inevitably to the state,<sup>468</sup> but my argument here is that to assume that power is the ontological basis for politics itself forecloses on the possibility for us to critically assess ontological formations and can, in fact, act to rarefaction and idealisation of forms of politics. Franks highlights for us the reason for this when he excludes ontology from his typology of prefigurative practice. As I have argued throughout this thesis, freedom, or ownness, is useful way postanarchists have approached the sticky question of anarchist ontology. These understandings of power are inherently linked to the epistemological critiques of poststructuralist authors and, we can say with some certainty, these authors were not concerned with anarchist praxis. It is 'of use' to us in that it provides us with a form of practice and an understanding that it is us (perhaps you) that holds the power and reminds us we must be careful how we deploy this.

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<sup>465</sup> Franks, *Anarchisms, Postanarchisms and Ethics*, 78

<sup>466</sup> May, *The political philosophy of poststructuralist anarchism*, 123

<sup>467</sup> Franks, *Anarchisms, Postanarchisms and Ethics*, 78

<sup>468</sup> Badiou, "Beyond Formalisation an Interview", 125

Freedom forms the ontological basis for the meta-ethics I am trying to establish here. As demonstrated throughout, this is a nuanced and complicated concept in itself and one which may not justify its signifier (freedom). What I mean by this is, as Newman recognises, the freedom '*we always already have*', not a goal to be achieved.<sup>469</sup> Postanarchism has recognised that our approach to the question of freedom is one of the place of ethics and links the political with the ethical. This is distinct from, but conditioned by, the epistemological dismissal of any form of 'universal freedom' as a fixed idea. It is only when we consider freedom as the *a priori* condition for our politics - or what Newman describes as ontological anarchy - that the concept becomes of use to us. This is freedom as a practice; something akin to Foucault's care for the self. It is not essentialist conceptions of the subject or foundationalist truth-claims which motivate this meta-ethics, but the implications of the reading of Stirner and the negative-dialectic. Rousselle notes that 'meta-ethics occurs quite fundamentally at the intersection of epistemological and ontological philosophy'<sup>470</sup> and the early stages of postanarchism have concentrated efforts towards the epistemological questions of ethics. It is my belief that the question of postanarchist ontology, along with conceptions of freedom and the practice of unions of egoists, must now take primacy in our discussions.

I am, as previously stated, not dismissing the epistemological philosophy of postanarchist and poststructuralist authors, but in order for postanarchism to realise the potential latent ethical content of anarchism we must look at ontological philosophy. I also do not believe that postanarchism requires 'adulteration' or 'outside' influence in order to answer this question. Newman makes use of Walter Benjamin, and Rousselle the work of George Bataille in order to address the accusations of subjectivism and thin relativism. I shall explore these arguments in greater depth below, but I wish to affirm Stirner's ownness as the basis for our ontological dismissal. This is not a dismissal in the sense that we are denying the ontological, but in order to establish the coherence of ethical-nihilist position we must find a negative answer which is still able to give us a grounding for our discussion – if not our meta-ethics themselves. This is, as previously stated, ownness as end in

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<sup>469</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 107

<sup>470</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 22

itself, or as both means and ends. Newman makes the distinction between egoism as a means to 'achieve' ownness, but in order for us to fulfil freedom as ontology – or as starting point – then these means *must* be dissolved into the ends. This provides us with both problem and solution: it removes what appears to be a simple process to achieve a result and instead proposes that the two must be 'achieved' simultaneously. This is the prefigurative manoeuvre we find in the work of Bruguera and the model of politically engaged artistic practice which informs this assertion.

Newman has outlined how we can move from 'anarchism to anarchy', a logic of ontological anarchy which is 'thus an experience of freedom and, indeed, intense ethical reflection'<sup>471</sup> where action can be stripped from its *telos* or metaphysical first-principle. Newman is proposing this in order to escape the epistemological 'authority of science and the moral authority of society' or the 'fixed ideas' which appear in the thought of the 'old masters of anarchism' (Bakunin, Proudhon and Kropotkin here).<sup>472</sup> Key for his definition of ontological anarchy is the idea that this unseats traditional understandings of anarchist 'struggle', in the sense that we have a series of both revolutionary aims and ideals which should be embodied in anarchist praxis. In place of this he suggests that we should have 'no Project of projects that determines all the others'.<sup>473</sup>

There are a number of points of interest from this short section on ontological anarchy (something Newman has covered in a number of texts). Firstly, he acknowledges that this ontology is part of, and constituted by, a form of ethical reflection. What exactly this may be and how it may operate while maintaining an ethical-nihilistic rejection of objective values is the basis for this section of the thesis and we shall cover this shortly. Second, that ontological anarchy finds its form in the immediate, the sensuous, or in action. From this we may assume that, as this must be explored and evaluated through practice, we may, provisionally, describe this as a practice itself. Thirdly, Newman identifies what Rousselle describes as the latent ethical content of anarchism, or that the 'old masters' of anarchism may fall foul of

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<sup>471</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 10

<sup>472</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 11

<sup>473</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 11

epistemological authoritarianism; through a deconstructive reading of their work we can argue for an anarchism which extends its anti-authoritarianism to questions of moral authority and scientific truth-claims. Newman takes ownness as his basis in this argument. However, he makes use of Schürmann in order to construct his view of acting 'anarchistically in the here and now';<sup>474</sup> a politics which is based in a removal of *telos*. My issue here is twofold: first, there is no practice described or engaged in to reach these conclusions. Second, while it demonstrates the rigour and breadth of his reading, the use of Schürmann seems superfluous. I am aware that as a researcher taking their first steps in this field that I stand on Newman's shoulders and my reading of Stirner (and the ideas developed here) would be impossible without Newman's intervention. However, Stirner's philosophy of ownness can be used to make a convincing case: one which can potentially provide us with a negative answer to the ethical question of place.

My proposal is that the postanarchist reading of anarchist ontology can be extended by the radical implications of Stirner's negative-dialectic. This is something which, I believe, may suffer from the same miss-reading which Stirner himself suffers from.<sup>475</sup> Following Stirner, I am left with the language of my 'opponent' and I believe this makes it imperative to explain these conceptions in depth. I am arguing that any theory of the social *necessarily* requires the extreme individualism of the negative-dialectic. It is, as I have stated, the removal of the objective. This is a deconstructive practice of breaking, or profaning, knowledge in order to create knowledge, or finding form for the creative nothing at the core of the postanarchist subject. In order for the intersubjective to become part of our ethical reasoning we must first examine what and how the other subject can interact with the self. Many writers in ethics and anarchism base part of their argument on the conception of the self as 'always already formed by its relationships and the values embedded within them' or on the 'demand' placed on us by the other.<sup>476</sup> I shall explore the 'other side' of the nature

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<sup>474</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, 12

<sup>475</sup> See Dr Bones, "The "Stirner Wasn't a Capitalist You Fucking Idiot" Cheat Sheet", last modified November 18, 2016, (achieved at) <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/dr-bones-the-stirner-wasn-t-a-capitalist-you-fucking-idiot-cheat-sheet>

<sup>476</sup> Franks, *Anarchisms, Postanarchisms and Ethics*, 60. Also See, Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment* (London: Verso, 2013)

of intersubjective ethics later; here it is the self which is being interacted with which forms the basis of my argument. We are trapped within our own experience and radically barred from enunciating the Real of the environmental world, left with only symbols to express ourselves. We might both agree that the page you are looking at is the same colour, but we can never know the sensuous experience of the other. Similarly, if there is no objective world, or truth, then how can we argue for a politics which is in any way feminist if we do not identify as a woman? How do we account for the efficacy of cancer treatments? What bridges this gap is the negative-dialectic. The oppression of others certainly does have an impact on me (note I am not speaking for you) and in order to dissolve the objective world and make the world my 'property' will require me to understand this impact and take account for it in my politics. This is an ontology which is directly connected to Bakunin's statement that 'I am truly free only when all human beings, men and women, are equally free. The freedom of other men, far from negating or limiting my freedom, is, on the contrary, its necessary premise and confirmation I am only as free as everyone else'.<sup>477</sup> If I am to take possession of the world then I must act prefiguratively: it becomes essential for me act in a manner which will allow for me to take possession of it.

To return to the example Stirner gives us, I do not ask permission to scratch my nose. Neither do I ask my partner if I can be in her company, my friends if I can call them, or my colleagues if I am to carry out part of my job. I have taken possession of these elements of my life. I have not achieved this through force: I don't believe this would be possible in these cases, certainly not sustainable. I do not wish to dominate these situations, but to *own* them in a way *peculiar* to me. Here relationships are indeed 'always already formed' and the values which dominate these relationships are embedded within them. However, this is action devoid of duty – I do not engage with them in order to serve some higher purpose, or *Geist*, I participate only for myself. The negative-dialectic implies that when any act of kindness or 'altruism' is met with a cynical "you're only doing it to make yourself feel good", we can ask where the problem lies with this. In order to execute the negative-dialectic then ownness, or anarchy in Newman's sense, must form the axiomatic logic. I must begin with my freedom - from ideas, from symbols, from duty – to be able to

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<sup>477</sup> Bakunin, *Bakunin on Anarchy* trans. Dolgoff (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 32



evaluate how I am to interact with others. Again, this is not to find some authentic self or truth, merely the taking of responsibility which is discussed in the literature of anarchist organisations.<sup>478</sup> This is not to say that any of these structures and practices are a *necessary* part of constituting the subject. The social can indeed have an *a priori* role in the development of the self, but only in the circumstances where these conditions exist. I do not wish to spend time on the folly of thought experiments, but we may concede that it is possible for a person to exist totally outside of society or what I will describe as the “raised by wolves example”. The argument here is that we only have available to us what exists *for us* for the formation of us as subjects. This seems an obvious and overly simple declaration: however, the rejection of a necessary, or universal, subjectification refocuses our attention through the subject. You *may* be socially constructed, but then again you might not. The implication of this is that we may see a use in the intersubjective nature of our ethical thought, but we take ourselves as the site, if not the ‘place’ of this.

This is a politics which is developed from a nihilist rejection of questions of *both* place and process in ethics. I am taking here what is identified as the latent ethical content to construct its politics. As a brief aside, I understand that my use of the term ‘politics’ may cause consternation with some readers. Other anarchist authors, Newman amongst them, prefer to use the term anti-politics, reflecting the anarchist rejection of government. I am not proposing that anarchists become involved in mainstream politics, or Politics. My argument is for a politics based in micro-political action and a direct negotiation over our involvement with the world we inhabit. This is the rough definition of politics which informs our view of freedom; freedom being taken as ontology, how we negotiate our relationship with the world and poetry, as detailed in the earlier chapter on freedom. If freedom is to be the *a priori* of our actions, or its ontological grounding, then politics must cease to be understood in the narrow mainstream sense. To begin as radical self-owners is to imply that our politics begins and ends with how we interact with the environment we find ourselves in. This is developed from a meta-ethics which is grounded in a rejection of positive

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<sup>478</sup> See anarchist collective Crimethinc - <https://crimethinc.com>, or anarchist ‘digital community centre’ IGD (It’s Going Down) - <https://itsgoingdown.org/>

answers to where or how our ethical reasoning is established. I am following from Rousselle's questioning of postanarchist meta-ethics and the emphasis he places on the question of ontology: '...by dismissing all ontologies as suspiciously representative and as incessantly harbouring a dangerous form of essentialism, post-anarchists have over-looked the privilege that they have placed on the human subject, language and discourse'.<sup>479</sup>

### **After Rousselle's Post-post-anarchism**

Rousselle is one of the few authors to take meta-ethics as their point of departure when investigating the content of anarchist praxis. Rousselle situates anarchist discourse around the latent interpretations of postanarchism, or the re-reading of anarchism through the prism of radical philosophy. For Rousselle, this is led by Lacanian psychoanalysis. Rousselle is a practicing psychoanalyst and I will make no attempt to expound on his application of Lacan to anarchist thought. However, I must acknowledge the influence that his work in this area has had on the development of this thesis. By taking ethical content to be the basis for his inquiry he is able to reach a number of conclusions which I shall take as a foundation for this final section. As a result, I shall offer a brief summary of the key arguments and demonstrate the ways in which this has influenced my thought and the tensions which I will explore. Firstly, the taxonomy which Rousselle uses, and I have alluded to throughout, gives me a postanarchist way to approach questions of postanarchism. Taking postanarchism itself as an attempted meta-ethics places the rejection of essentialist ontologies and foundationalism at the core of anarchism. This is achieved through what Rousselle describes as addressing the latent content of anarchism. It places meta-ethical enquiry as a way for us to look at how the epistemological rejection of essentialism by postanarchist authors affects our view of ontology by creating a divide between the two in order to find a level of coherence. Indeed, Rousselle states that this allows us to 'easily separate' the two 'in order to formulate an over-arching meta-ethical position'.<sup>480</sup> This is the intention of this thesis, to explore both the epistemological and ontological critiques which postanarchism has provided in order to develop a

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<sup>479</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 12

<sup>480</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 13

meta-ethics which is practice-based, contains a critical component, and avoids authoritarian truth-claims and the idealisation of the subject. This separation leads to the taxonomy of place and process which we shall use to construct the meta-ethics of peculiarity. The epistemological is taken as representing the ethical process and the ontological and its place.

The question of place is identified by Rousselle as dealing with ‘issues concerning the nature and origin of ethical acts (ie, the ‘what?’ and ‘where?’ questions that have prompted the development of ethical substantialisms)’.<sup>481</sup> In response to these questions three categories of ontological ethics are identified around questions of ethical agency: universalism, relativism and nihilism. Universalism is taken as a representation of essentialist ontologies represented by the natural-humanism of Bakunin and Kropotkin. Universalism argues that it is from this essence that our ethical principles arrive, based in a *telos* which we can take as commensurate with Hegel’s *Geist*.

Relativism takes the subject as its ethical place, although a subject which is socially constructed and finds its manifestation in the plural-liberalism of thinkers such as Berlin. This is based in what Mackie has described as, ‘the well-known variation in moral codes from one society to another and from one period to another, and also the countless differences in moral beliefs between different groups and classes within a complex community’.<sup>482</sup> The view of the subject is bound up with the epistemological authoritarianism rejected by postanarchist theory, taking the place of ethics to be the subject, but with an ontology which is locked into representation and determinism. We can think here of the strategic revolutionary philosophy of classical Marxism bound with the ‘ontological privilege granted to the working class’ which Laclau and Mouffe identify as carrying a ‘predominantly external and manipulative character’.<sup>483</sup> This gives us what we may consider a ‘positive’ answer to the place of ethics. ‘Positive’ here stands in for a level of determinism where our social construction gives us a discernible, clear set of second-order ethical questions. For

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<sup>481</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 40

<sup>482</sup> Mackie, *Ethics*, 36

<sup>483</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2014), 46

example, our status as members of the working-class, or being British, can be taken as the ontology of the subject creating them and the boundaries of their subjectivities. Power here is operating negatively to construct the subject which allows for ethical-relativism to posit this as a positive answer to how we evaluate our ethics.

It is the third area identified by Rousselle which is of most interest to me here: ethical nihilism. Nihilism is identified as the only response to the question of ethical place with a double negative answer, in that it maintains 'that there may be no objective guidelines for action, only manifest reductions of a base reality'.<sup>484</sup> Here, ethical nihilism emerges as distinct from amoralism or simple moral-scepticism. Moral-scepticism relates too broadly to the rejection of objective values, a view which can encompass thinkers from Rawls to Nietzsche,<sup>485</sup> and does not give us the negative answer we are seeking. It is, fairly obviously, the 'base reality' which fixes our attention here; the picture of the negative-dialectic I am sketching out is version of this base reality. What Rousselle identifies as a manifest postanarchist response in ethical nihilism, is the rejection of the ethical basis for 'all that exists' in order to develop a critical relationship with 'one-sided foundations and systems' and that this rejection also retains the autonomy of truth-claims on the subject.<sup>486</sup> He does acknowledge that the basis for the truth-claim made on the subject exists within the paradox of a truth-claim, or a distinction between its latent and manifest content. It is a postanarchist response to attempt radical re-reading of existing philosophy in order to identify what may be of use in its latent content. This is, to some extent, the reason for the existence of postanarchism, separate from a thin poststructuralist anarchism or poststructuralism plus anarchism. Rousselle does acknowledge this as a purpose of postanarchism. However, for me, what moves this from other categories of philosophy in to postanarchist thought is its politicisation. The motivation of postanarchist authors to find new arguments in old texts, as I have in the work of Stirner, *must* be based in the desire for a better critical engagement with political practice. This is a simple (perhaps overly simple) point, but one which I

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<sup>484</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 47

<sup>485</sup> Mackie, *Ethics*, 105

<sup>486</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 44-45

believe still needs to be made: **Postanarchism is a body of political theory which finds in its evaluation new ways of doing and thinking about themes and topics which have dominated anarchist discourse.**

### **The Taxonomy of Meta-ethics**

Anarchism, as the ethics of the real, rejects the dreams of imaginary others and in so doing rejects all positive conceptions of ethics. Post-anarchism is the manifestation of a negation that traditional anarchism set in motion long before. It is the meta-ethics of traditional anarchism. Post-anarchism is the realization of this meta-ethical rejection of ethical discourses in traditional anarchist philosophy.<sup>487</sup>

Working within a Lacanian paradigm, Rousselle identifies that the latent reading of anarchist ethics, as identified by postanarchism, allows us to classify a taxonomy of ethics which, potentially, provides us with a way to address the questions of coherence in anarchist ethics. Rousselle's argument is based on the view that postanarchism is a response to essentialism. Essentialism is taken to be the dominant meta-ethical position in both classical anarchism and the dominant truth-claims of modern scientific debate. Postanarchism emerges as a response to the variants of essentialism and the potential contradictions and oppressions which transpire from it within anarchist thought. This places postanarchist thought as an attempted meta-ethics with a clear position and purpose, clearly something which postanarchist authors would reject. Rousselle's contribution is to acknowledge the strictly ethical formula of this line of thought. This moves beyond a purely epistemological critique of representation and essential human nature and decentres our focus. By taking postanarchism as an anti-thesis to essentialist claims, Rousselle makes a coherent meta-ethics the central concern of postanarchism. This is not itself necessarily manifest in the postanarchist accounts of anarchist thought, however, we can identify a meta-ethics which allies itself to the latent ethical impulse in anarchist theory: what Nathan Jun has described as 'the claim that all forms of coercive

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<sup>487</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 113

authority are condemnable'.<sup>488</sup> Postanarchist meta-ethics is the attempt to extend this principle to systems of knowledge and anarchist *thought* itself. This thesis is an attempt to further this exploration through praxis.

Place and process are the two 'pathways' of meta-ethical discourse which are derived from our relationship to ontological and epistemological philosophy. Place, as we have seen, is the ontological relationship with the ethical subject: the 'place' where ethics are founded. Process is the means, or series of practices, which produces ethical enquiry. Positivist, enlightenment commitments to science as truth-producing is the key example for us here, demonstrating a positive response in that there is a knowable and universal *essential* relationship with reality. Ethical universalism shares this belief and positive answers to the questions of both the place and process of our ethics. Relativist responses reject the truth-bound subject as the place of ethics, but share the positive response to the question of process. We can think here of MacIntyre's 'Claims' which he describes as 'a set of positive affirmations about the moral and social history of the cultural and social order which we inhabit and that these affirmations in turn were bound to express some particular moral and social stance of a positive kind'.<sup>489</sup>

The content of these affirmations and the anarchist application of virtue-theory as ethics will be explored below. For now, we are interested in how MacIntyre illustrates the means by which relativism displaces the place of ethics in 'a paradoxical conception of that feature'.<sup>490</sup> He does this in a way commensurate with the goal of unseating a form of ontological essentialism, but still leaves us with the question of process, or whether this is a form of *teleological* thought. Franks has argued that virtue ethics allows for the discovery of multiple *tele* which may be commensurate with a latent reading of anarchism. Franks' work in this area will form the basis for a later discussion. However, what is clear from this argument is that ethical-relativism is not seeking this negative or paradoxical answer. Of the three forms of ethical

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<sup>488</sup> Nathan Jun, "Anarchist Philosophy: Past Problems and Prospects" in *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy*, 51

<sup>489</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Claims of *After Virtue*" in *The MacIntyre Reader* ed. Kelvin Knight (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 69

<sup>490</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 74

reasoning Rousselle presents us with, it is only ethical-nihilism which is seeking to answer both enquiries with a purely negative response. It is this that is identified by Rousselle as the meta-ethics of latent anarchism, an ethical fulfilment of anarchist (anti-) politics. In a direct reversal of this formula he suggests that postanarchism is the politics which is formed in this rejection, or 'it is the politics meta-ethics was seeking'.<sup>491</sup>

This forms the basis for the meta-ethics I am presenting here, alongside the critique of other forms of anarchist ethics. This is not to dismiss these as something to be discarded, indeed just as I have no specific objection to the organising principles of the anarcho-republicans, I also have no *prima facie* reason to object some of the reasoning presented by authors such as Bookchin and Franks. However, this taxonomy gives us the opportunity to fulfil the latent ethical promise of postanarchism: a rejection of ontological essentialism *and* epistemological foundationalism *without* any form of *telos*, or positive conception. This is why the non-concept of the unique and the negative-dialectic of Stirner are of such importance. It is my argument that the latter of these can provide ethical-nihilism, in what Rousselle describes as the 'base-subjectivist' variant, the ability to provide this unstable and paradoxical relationship with the ethical field.

The four ethical codes which compose the enquiry are: subjectivism; base-subjectivism; materialism, and base-materialism. Here, subjectivism is represented by traditional anarchist thought, base-subjectivism by ethical-nihilism, materialism by traditional Marxism and base-materialism in a latent reading of Georges Bataille. The subjectivists retain both truth-bound subject as place of ethics and the process or *telos*. This is a position manifest in the work of Peter Kropotkin whose commitment to *telos* and subject-based morality offer this double positive response: 'The idea of good and evil exists within humanity itself. Man, whatever degree of intellectual development he may have attained, however his ideas may be obscured by prejudices and personal interest in general, considers as good that which is useful to

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<sup>491</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 117

the society wherein he lives, and as evil that which is hurtful to it'.<sup>492</sup> The subject retains their privileged position as the source and arbiter of ethical codes; codes based in what is 'of use' to its context. Rousselle, alongside many anarchist authors, has argued that Kropotkin and the other 'old masters' of classical anarchism can be read as exhibiting an anti-essentialism (albeit a through a latent reading), or at least can be read as retaining an essential subject in order to reject *teleological* thought. I am not engaging in a debate about the reading of the classical anarchists, or the construction of the oxymoronic 'anarchist canon'. Kropotkin's manifest content is enough here to demonstrate the operation of the subjectivist ethical code.

The materialist code rejects the subject as the place of ethics, but retains the commitment to *telos*, where ethics are based in their relation to the intended end. The thought of Lenin can be used to illustrate this conception related to a strategic conception of revolutionary action. May posits this as 'a strategic political intervention: that is, an intervention with a single goal, where deviation from that goal is either regression or betrayal'.<sup>493</sup> May points to the 'fundamental' nature of economic relationships in Marx' thought which leaves the vanguard to be the creator and creature of knowledge. The place as truth-bound subject is rejected as determined by social existence and the logic of the social as determination forms the basis for taking one struggle as *the* struggle (i.e. the exploitation of the working class).<sup>494</sup> Rousselle makes the distinction between these forms of ethical reasoning and their 'base' variants. This is the ethical codes of subjectivism and materialism, but with a rejection of essentialism, or, at least, its problematising. Base-subjectivism is characterised through the work of ethical-nihilists such as Stirner, Novatore and postanarchist authors. For Rousselle, the 'creative nothing' at the core of this vision of the subject remains a positive response to the question of place, albeit one which is only to provide a critique of *telos*.<sup>495</sup> Base-materialism rejects both the place and process of ethical thought offering a nihilism born of disappointment at strategic

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<sup>492</sup> Petr Kropotkin, "Anarchist Morality" in *Fugitive Writings* ed. George Woodcock (New York: Black Rose, 1993), 137

<sup>493</sup> May, *The political philosophy of poststructuralist anarchism*, 20

<sup>494</sup> I acknowledge that a view of our subjectivities as *conditioned* not determined by social existence may be a fairer reflection of Marx' views. However, the strategic logic of Marxist-Leninism outlined by May provides us with a picture of the issues of materialist ethics.

<sup>495</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 76-77



thought. The distinction made between the base-subjectivist and base-materialist codes is within this ontological position: 'Unlike the ethical subject in base subjectivist meta-ethics, the subject as a metaphysical category is a symptom rather than a solution to the question of political space'.<sup>496</sup>

It is this double negative which Rousselle is seeking in order to provide a consonant answer to postanarchist meta-ethics. His choice of a latent reading of Bataille's work is based in the rejection of the ontology of the subject. This, for Rousselle, is the only satisfactory manner to avoid positing *truth* as the basis for ethical reasoning which avoids advancing the ego as a knowable, and therefore essentialised, locus. For Rousselle, Stirner's thought remains an 'ontology of the subject' which offers a positive response to the place of ethics.<sup>497</sup> Stirner's nihilism is reduced to a narrow egoism which retains 'the corporeal subject as the locus of ethical activity' based in a vision of the ego as 'being'.<sup>498</sup> Descartes' cogito is used in order to identify an ontology which avoids the trap of representative ontologies through a focus on 'non-being'. Rousselle is following the counter axis to Descartes 'thinking and being'. If, for Descartes, thinking and being are in a linear relationship then the opposite of this – either I am not thinking, or I am not – forms the basis of a meta-ethical rejection of universalism and ontologies of the subject. This takes Descartes as illustrative of ethical-universalism and the use of essential visions of the subject to (de)construct its meta-ethical position and looks to mirror this to find a nothing (no-thing) at the core of ethical enquiry. This is not a simple denial of the antecedent 'I think therefore I am', but a representation of Lacan's conceptualization of non-being. Rousselle is deploying this in contradistinction to the universalism of being in ontological essentialism and the epistemological foundationalism of knowing.<sup>499</sup> The use of Descartes' cogito is illustrative of the 'ethics of the real' which rejects the truth-bound subject's positive affirmation of either knowing (thinking) or being. Here, thinking and being are representative of the subjectivist code of meta-ethics where knowing and being 'function to conceal (or repress)' the radical split between the subjects

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<sup>496</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 87

<sup>497</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 242

<sup>498</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 240

<sup>499</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 70

knowledge of themselves and the primordial absence at the core of subjectivity.<sup>500</sup> Lacan describes this non-being as ‘how / comes on the scene as a subject who is conjugated with the double aporia of a veritable subsistence that is abolished by his knowledge, and by a discourse in which it is death that sustains existence’.<sup>501</sup>

This is the basis for our vision of meta-ethics: an ontology and epistemology which is based in a rejection of process *and* a non-being as its place. This is distinct from the vision of the creative nothing of Novatore upon which Rousselle bases his rejection of base-subjectivism. Novatore’s poetic intervention is one which approaches these conversations aesthetically – something I believe is worth pursuing. However, his is not an attempt at a consonant meta-ethics, (anti-) philosophy, or politics, and it is of no less value for this. It is clear, though, that the place of ethics does contain a positive response:

Our nihilism is not Christian nihilism.

We do not deny life.

No! We are the great iconoclasts of the lie.

And all that is declared “sacred” is a lie.

We are the enemies of the “sacred”.

And to you a law is “sacred”; a society “sacred”; a moral “sacred”; an idea “sacred”!

But we — the masters and lovers of pitiless strength and strong-willed beauty, of the ravishing idea — we, the iconoclasts of all that is consecrated — we laugh satanically, with a fine broad and mocking laughter.

We laugh!...

And laughing, we keep the bow of our pagan will to enjoy always strained toward the full integrity of life.

And we write our truths with laughter.

And we write our passions with blood.

And we laugh!...

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<sup>500</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 76-77

<sup>501</sup> Lacan in Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 78

We laugh the fine healthy and red laughter of hatred.

We laugh the fine blue and fresh laughter of love.

We laugh!

But laughing, we remember, with supreme gravity, to be the legitimate offspring and the worthy heirs of a great libertarian aristocracy that transmitted to us satanic outbursts of mad heroism in the blood, and waves of poetry, of solos, of songs in the flesh!<sup>502</sup>

I quote this section at length and as verse, as it is in the original, in order to try to retain as much of its aesthetic quality, as possible when quoting out of context. The ‘creative nothing’ at the core of ethical reasoning here rejects the epistemological truth-claims of process, however, the individual is retained as ‘master’. Truth is being written (literally) here and the basis for this is the subject’s relationship to itself. The ability for the subject to become master, to decide upon the content of truth and to enjoy (perhaps *jouissance*) are all based in an ontology of the subject.

This contrasts with the non-concept of the unique from Stirner. It is at this point that the language Stirner uses becomes important: the ‘non-concept’, ‘unique’, and ‘union of egoists’. Stirner insists that if we attempt to analyse his unique philosophically we will fail miserably, and it is for this reason that, I argue it is a satisfactory fulfilment of Rousseau’s quest for a non-being at the core of ethical place. Stirner is clear that the non-concept of the unique is not an attempt to escape scrutiny, but his attempt to explain what cannot be explained. What Rousseau outlines may be best interpreted as an ‘ethic of the real’ commensurate with that of Richard Day and Lacan. Stirner’s unique is not Stirner’s *subject*. Although I have indulged in this practice, Stirner makes use of the term unique in order to avoid using the language of the individual (subject, I, being, etc.) precisely in order to avoid becoming another ontology of the subject:

Anyone who considers it a principle, thinks that he can treat it philosophically or theoretically and inevitably takes useless potshots against it. Being,

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<sup>502</sup> Renzo Novatore, “Toward a Creative Nothing” in *The Collected Writings of Novatore* trans. Wolfi Landsteicher (San Francisco: Ardent Press 2012), 47

thought, the I, are only *undetermined* concepts, which receive their determinateness only through other concepts, i.e., through conceptual development. The unique, on the other hand, is a concept *that lacks determination* and cannot be made determinate by other concepts or receive a “nearer content”; it is not the “principle of a series of concepts,” but a word or concept that, as word or concept, is not capable of any development.<sup>503</sup>

Stirner here is expressing what, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, can be interpreted as the Real. Something which is the basis for signification, but cannot itself be signified or expressed. The unique is itself the ‘social death’ which Rousselle seeks; not creating itself in a positive, conceptual manner. Rousselle is looking for an ethics which responds to the Real ‘which interrupts the smooth functioning of the subject’s ideological universe’<sup>504</sup> and it is the response which we offer which forms this ethic of the real, or politics of the Act. The unique is the non-concept which Stirner is attempting to use to offer us an alternative interruption. This is certainly what we may posit as the post-symbolic Real, or that which returns in knowledge after we have developed language (language here standing in for the realm of symbols, and knowledge as its corollary). In other words, if we understand the ethical context of the real to be an interruption to our ‘ideological universe’ this is a disturbance in our ontological relationship with the world. Stirner directly addresses this relationship – although he is, obviously, not addressing Lacanian theory – when he states that ‘the idea cannot be so realized as to remain idea, but is realized only when it dies as idea; and it is the same with the real’.<sup>505</sup>

Stirner is dismissing epistemological truth-claims of Christianity, but he uses the ontological disruption of the unique to achieve this. This gives us a vision of how the unique is itself a manifestation of the negative-dialectic: the dissolving of the objective world – the world of symbols – into the nothingness of the empty subject ‘you’. ‘You’ is conceptually stripped of its potential determination, only referring to the interlocutor: it is the question answering itself.

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<sup>503</sup> Stirner, *Stirner’s Critics*, 56

<sup>504</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 79

<sup>505</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 320

This is how Stirner deploys the unique, in a bid to fundamentally alter the relationship with reality *through* a change in our relationship with ourselves. He makes the provocation: ‘they say of God that he is perfect and has no calling to strive after perfection. That too holds good of me alone’<sup>506</sup> to profane (literally) this relationship. To escape from the terms of Lacanian theory the ‘you’ is held up as the only answer to the question of place in ethics. This is distinct from the ‘me’ which is usually associated with egoist ethics. ‘You’ forms an empty and undeterminable response; one which cannot have a stable answer and cannot be answered wholly. The real cannot be represented – the kernel of inexpressible reality which forms you – and this fundamentally breaks with any notion of ethics based in an ontology of the subject. It may be an ethics of a subject, but one which cannot be determined, discerned or discovered. This leads us both to and from our ethical-nihilist response. It begins from a non-place and ends in nothing. This is not to lead to inaction or ethical vacuums. This is the rejection of idealisation, of positive ethical reasoning and subjectivity. The sovereign subject Rousselle identifies as the negative ethical place in Bataille is, ‘not to make a conscious ethical choice, it is to recognise the sovereignty of being that already exists and to give oneself away to it from within the imaginary of everyday consciousness’.<sup>507</sup> If we read Stirner through the prism of the negative-dialectic then his thought reflects to us this recognition and negation, as he finishes *The Ego and Its Own*: ‘If I concern myself for myself, the unique one, then my concern rests on its transitory, mortal creator, who consumes himself, and I may say: All things are nothing to me.’<sup>508</sup> A closer translation of the original German<sup>509</sup> reads: ‘If I set my affair on myself, then I have set my affair on nothing’.

This ontological freedom as *a priori* basis for action can be found in the politically engaged artistic practice discussed in previous chapters. In creating a form of practice which is based in an intersubjective formation of this process it was the conditions of this possibility which became the focus. Trying to create an environment where a participant’s relationship with their ideological universe is

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<sup>506</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 324

<sup>507</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 240

<sup>508</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 324

<sup>509</sup> *Stell’ Ich auf Mich meine Sache. Ich hab’ Mein’ Sach’ auf Nichts gestellt.*

disturbed we began to question our deployment of power and the epistemological, or process-based, assumptions of the work. In these discussions the place and process can be handled separately; indeed, this seems necessary in order to handle these concepts “analytically”. In practice the relationship here which forms our meta-ethics becomes impossible to ignore: one cannot be considered without the other. The manifestation of our understanding of ontological freedom led us to a practice which is embedded in its context and holds an acknowledged, long-term commitment. In order to achieve the level of trust required to create this relationship we need to - echoing May - address the acceptability of our power relationships, and avoid positing our knowledge as in some way the basis for the practice (this is what is called the ‘University discourse’ in Lacanese.)<sup>510</sup>

We wished to challenge our participants’ understanding of their political and social realities and to disrupt how they view their relationship to reality. However, when working with a group of young people from a wide variety of backgrounds, our understanding of the position of power we held discouraged us from being too aggressive with this. This will not always be the case. Working with other groups will require different approaches to create these conditions. When creating practice with groups of university senior managers a degree of aggression and challenge may be necessary to create this disruption, or it may not. The focus is maintaining both the ontological and epistemological functions *simultaneously*. Where this differs from other forms of postanarchist and egoist ethics is the basis in you. Creating this practice forms the basis for this claim. We were attempting to use this ontological prefreedom as the basis for our practice and in trying to activate this we were unable to escape its intersubjective nature. It was from this challenge that these ideas formed in to the argument I am presenting here. What I am trying to illustrate is that when we move from philosophical discourse to practice there is an element of the mundane, the everyday in our execution. The disruption of the ideological universe, or social death as Rousselle describes it, becomes a way to approach a group of

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<sup>510</sup> The University discourse places knowledge as the Master signifier, making it the object of desire, or *objet petit a*. Here, knowledge is used as a prize, but not for its content. We can think of the “more of a comment than a question” contributions in academic panels or the use of metrics in email signatures – devoid of context and meaning – as examples of the operation of this.

people, allowing inappropriate (not offensive) joking in a conversation, or the removal of all expectation. In this instance, this was allowing a group of teenagers to set their own boundaries in a space where this has never happened to them before. This could just as easily be about the removal of authority from a group of figures who are used to control, or pre-emptively showing solidarity with a person from a marginalised group.

Over the coming pages I shall continue to sketch out what I believe is a coherent answer to the meta-ethical conundrum presented to us by Rousselle. This meta-ethical philosophy responds to these claims and tensions which I agree dominate anarchist thought and, in the words of May, 'moves anarchism more toward a purely ethical stand than toward a political one'.<sup>511</sup> However, the practice which I have engaged in as part of the process of creating this research gives it a politics. It is for this reason I am uncomfortable with some of the language and expression used by Rousselle. Our model of politically engaged artistic practice has been influenced by workshops which involved discussing sexual assault with a room full of teenage women, or exploitation with a group of community artists and early career researchers. There is a political commitment to our practice which responds to these situations, as outlined above. In delineating an anarchist meta-ethics which fulfils the latent ethical promises of anarchism, Rousselle invokes imagery of 'sacrifice', 'violence' and 'martyrdom'. Speaking only for myself, these are ideas I would not be keen to discuss with, for example, the family of Anna Campbell.<sup>512</sup>

The great sacrifice *for an anarchist* is thus to give oneself away to tolerable systems and foundations and to be stoned to death by her family, other anarchists, and so on, for doing so. It means that there are sacrifices that one has to make violently...<sup>513</sup>

This is not to say we should allow our politics to be anodyne or devoid of the ability to challenge or destroy. It is merely a restatement of May's charge to identify which

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<sup>511</sup> May, *The political philosophy of poststructuralist anarchism*, 64

<sup>512</sup> Anna Campbell, British anarchist activist who was killed while working as part of the Women's Protection Unit (YPI) in Rojava.

<sup>513</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 249

power relations are problematic and which are not. During anarchist actions in which I have participated, the individual acts broadly fall in to two categories. Those which have a long planning phase and those which are more limited in scope. These are two categories which are primarily responding to their circumstances. In the latter, these situations usually arise from the need to make an immediate, impromptu decision such as being charged by fascists, or an unexpected opportunity. In these situations, it is common for decisions to be undertaken on a "I'll follow the next person with an idea with one or two other supporters" basis. This does not include situations which can be anticipated: what to do in encountering the general threat of violence or/and the police. In the former, these circumstances are those which allow for, or require, discussion of problems which can be anticipated. We can think here of the constitutionalising of Occupy,<sup>514</sup> or the pre-action discussion of what to do if things become violent. Meta-ethics takes the place of the prepared discursive decision-making processes. This is where, as anarchists, we are able to theorise and to engage in agonism. In our politics we are faced with a direct negotiation with the world which may require decisions more akin to approaching a conversation with a stranger, through a series of micro-political gestures.

My argument here is that through a reading of Stirner which is based in the negative-dialectic we are able to satisfy the need for a negative answer to the question of ethical place. I am attaching this meta-ethical position to a politics of peculiarity to find a level of (in)coherence through practice. Rousselle overlooks the implications of Stirner's argument and as opposed to reading 'Kropotkin avec Stirner', I'm proposing reading Stirner *sans* Stirner.

What I am saying here is that postanarchism *is* a coherent theory of meta-ethics without the need for surrealist interventions from Bataille. We can place the negative-dialectic in place of the base-materialism of nihilist communism in order to avoid representative ontologies. Rousselle's work utilises a latent reading of Bataille in

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<sup>514</sup> See Ruth Kinna, Alex Prichard, and Thomas Swann. "Occupy and the Constitution of Anarchy" *Global Constitutionalism* 8, no. 2 (2019): 357-390 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S204538171900008X>; David Bates, Matthew Ogilvie, and Emma Pole, "Occupy: in Theory and Practice" *Critical Discourse Studies* 13, no. 3 (2016): 341-355 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2016.1141697>



order to offer a coherent meta-ethics of traditional anarchism; a 'point of departure' from, both, postanarchism and traditional anarchism which is 'an anti-essentialist *and* anti-foundationalist philosophy'.<sup>515</sup> The (post)anarchist subject is one which brings their own ethics in to being through a series of practices akin to Foucault's technologies of the self, but 'leaves them uncoded' or unrepresented. This is the ultimate form of anti-representation, that which rejects attempts to signify this rejection.

Stirner himself explains to us why this place of non-articulation, or non-being, is from where he writes: 'Stirner himself described his book as a sometimes "awkward" expression of what he wanted. It is the painstaking work of the best years of his life; and yet he called it sometimes "awkward". He had to struggle so much with a language that was corrupted by philosophers, abused by believers in the state, in religion, in whatever else, and which had made ready a boundless confusion of ideas'.<sup>516</sup> Stirner's work must be 'read between the lines',<sup>517</sup> or in its latent form, and the negative-dialectic is the best way I have found of expressing this. It is consonant with a rejection of place through its non-articulation. This answers Rousseau's charge for a postanarchist meta-ethics which is a manifestation of nihilist-anarchist thought.

I shall now briefly respond to the work of other authors working in this field in order to demonstrate the use and coherence of my position. Franks is one of the few thinkers to have dealt with both the tensions in anarchist ethical discourse and to offer a vision of meta-ethics which itself responds to the anti-essentialism of postanarchism. We shall explore how Franks' proposed practical-anarchism, based in virtue ethics, is a vision which may fit with the first-order ethics of anarchist practice, but does not provide us with a satisfactory answer to the problems of ethical place and process. Despite this rejection, Franks' work offers us a form of anarchist practice which is of use and can be articulated in ethical terms, and I shall demonstrate how this expresses itself in some of the praxis which underpins my argument. Humour will be

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<sup>515</sup> Rousseau, *After Post-anarchism*, 263

<sup>516</sup> Stirner, "The Philosophical Reactionaries", 135

<sup>517</sup> Stirner, "The Philosophical Reactionaries", 147

used to demonstrate something lacking from anarchist meta-ethics: the intersubjective. The thought of the authors discussed on these pages at first appears to be concerned with the intersubjective through a manifest commitment to forms of praxis which fundamentally involve the other. However, I argue that the ‘you’ never appears in these formations. The *you*, as opposed to the *I*, is an ethical-place which must be beyond determination and anchors our thought outside of traditional ethical discourse. Theories of humour may show us that the audience is missing from the joke.

### **Humour and the Intersubjective**

I have given significant attention to the thought of Max Stirner and Duanne Rousselle, and the artistic practice of Tania Bruguera. The work of these three practitioners has been central to build my case for a politics of peculiarity. Rousselle provides the framework for my argument giving us a taxonomy of ethics and identifying the meta-ethical content of postanarchism. I have developed a radical re-reading of Stirner which satisfies these suppositions and provides a consonant approach to meta-ethics and one which is ontologically grounded without being ontologically *founded*. Bruguera has provided the opportunity to develop a form of praxis which gives us access to this without falling back on ontologies of measure or epistemological foundationalism. The “postanarchist canon”, such as it is, has provided lines of enquiry which are useful to us in questioning conceptions of power and freedom and lead us back to the relationship in meta-ethics of epistemology and ontology. Franks has rejected postanarchism as a narrow form of subjectivism<sup>518</sup> and proposes a theory of anarchist ethics which is ‘a specific account of virtue theory that avoids the essentialism associated with Aristotle or a fixed *telos*’.<sup>519</sup> For Franks, as for Rousselle, it is the question of ethical place which forms the basis of his critique of postanarchist ethical reasoning. I have already addressed at some length the (in)coherent approach I am proposing to this question above. What we can take from Franks’ work is his critique of postanarchism and his theory of anarchist meta-ethics.

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<sup>518</sup> See Franks, *Anarchisms, Postanarchisms and Ethics*; “Postanarchism: Acritical Reassessment”; “Anarchism and Metaethics”, and *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy*.

<sup>519</sup> Franks, *Anarchisms, Postanarchisms and Ethics*, 58

I shall outline how, while critiquing postanarchism, Franks “does the work” of postanarchism through his analytical examination “from the outside”. I am trying to avoid the use of positive claims, instead proposing a series of negations and finding how these may find form in political practice. Franks is also seeking to find ethical procedure through practice, or more specifically *for* practice. I find his account of ethics grounded in practice-based virtue approaches useful and find evidence to support much of what he says in the practice which has been developed here. However, although his argument is based in practices which occur intersubjectively, I believe that – together with thinkers such as Simon Critchley and Slavoj Žižek – discussions of intersubjectivity occur often without considering *you*. Humour theory will be used to demonstrate this and how the politics of peculiarity differs.

While I find utility in Franks’ argument, it falls into the same trap of reification as the practice of the anarcho-republicans discussed previously: it loses the critical function which postanarchism insists is key to fulfil the ethical promises of anarchism. Our “work” is never finished, we can never find the ideal, or the sublime, manner of political practice and, if we are to commit to a lifetime of “struggle”, then this struggle should be to do better. If we are anti-racist, we must start and finish by looking to ourselves and never think that we have a complete, or *the*, answer. It is from this complacency that we can see occurrences, within our activist communities, of precisely the problems they are aiming to eradicate, from domestic abuse to exploitation and xenophobia.

Franks’ critiques of postanarchism are wide-ranging and evolve along with the ‘waves’ of postanarchist thought. His criticisms begin with the argument that postanarchism isn’t, and shouldn’t be, a transcendence of traditional anarchism and that class analysis is a lacking category in postanarchist theory.<sup>520</sup> Postanarchism has moved away from this initial phase and its associated claims of disassociation with traditional anarchism. Franks’ work has shifted in tenor to advance his theory of anarchist virtue ethics against the subjectivism which he sees in accounts of the individual ego, based on the writing of Stirner. Franks is writing in the analytical tradition and builds his methodology from the conceptual work of Michael

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<sup>520</sup> Franks, “Postanarchism: Acritical Reassessment” 140

Freeden.<sup>521</sup> This leads him to site the place of anarchist ethics within a social view of the subject, and he pays particular attention to how anarchist conceptions of freedom are intrinsically linked. This provides him with the conceptual basis to argue on behalf of the category 'social anarchisms'. He rejects of postanarchism on the grounds that it appears to rely on the subject, arguing that this leads to a number of 'fatal flaws': '1) that it is fundamentally solipsistic, denying dialogue and discourse and the possibility of moral evaluation; 2) it recreates social hierarchies in the form rejected by the core principles of anarchism, and 3) that Stirner's own meta-ethical account is epistemologically unsound as it ignores its own social construction'.<sup>522</sup> From this he develops a vision of anarchist ethics built upon the neo-Aristotelean virtue ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre, which is based in, '(m)ultiple, changing, interlocking but irreducible *tele*'.<sup>523</sup>

The anarcho-virtue theory which is presented to us is one which is built around contextual ethical processes, but not one which is reliant on a *true* process. This avoids the cul-de-sac of relativism and is in accord with the epistemological critiques of postanarchism. Franks argues that virtue-ethics are inherently prefigurative and avoid elevating the individual ego to a *telos* of the ethical subject. These ethical practices themselves create the values which govern them through the creation of internal goods. These practices develop into 'traditions', in MacIntyre's sense, 'which can adapt and transform over time and geography', where different 'objectives' can exist concurrently or in competition allowing for adaptation based on the desires or abilities of the participants.<sup>524</sup> The creation of ethical process based in practice which rejects epistemological foundationalism is certainly appealing for anarchist praxis. It gives us a critical function which allows for the change and critique of institutions and practices while promoting values which are socially created, but not socially contingent. We can think here of the creation and maintenance of communities in politically engaged artistic practice. The 'virtues' of mutual support, interdependence, a reflective use of power and trust can all be found in politically engaged artistic

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<sup>521</sup> Franks, *Anarchisms, Postanarchisms and Ethics*, 23

<sup>522</sup> Franks, "Postanarchism and Meta-Ethics", 145

<sup>523</sup> Franks, *Anarchisms, Postanarchisms and Ethics*, 187

<sup>524</sup> Franks, *Anarchisms, Postanarchisms and Ethics*, 95

practice. Thus it gave us a way to approach the problematic deployment of power by curatorial elites and how our participants were 'placed' within the art world.<sup>525</sup>

One of the examples which Franks uses in order to illustrate this argument is the practices present within Scottish football. He argues that different groups, with different abilities, are able to influence and adapt these virtues and traditions and, therefore, the ability to resist the creation of elites: 'In Scottish football, for example, hard tackling and direct play are considered core attributes, while in Catalonia ball control is privileged over aggressive play'.<sup>526</sup> This is the thread we must pull at in order to expose the tensions present within this argument and the case for the ontologically grounded meta-ethics presented here. This statement assumes that Scottish football is of limited ability due to its relatively small size and geographical location and despite these 'limitations' the Scottish are able to assert a series of local and advantageous changes to the practices and limitations of football. This implies to us that preference for 'hard tackling and direct play' forms part of the practice of playing the sport and, perhaps, part of the practice of entertaining. It is this preference for this style of playing the game which the Scottish teams are alleged to have *intentionally* developed to fulfil these desires.

Firstly, it is incorrect to assert that Scottish football prizes physicality - or what might be referred to as *pragmatism*, in the 'English sense'<sup>527</sup> - out of a commitment to either its aesthetics or its efficacy. In fact, if we look at the evolution of association football then it is Scotland, or the 'Scottish professors', who are responsible for the formation and dissemination of ball control and what is called passing play.<sup>528</sup> Catalan, and Spanish football more broadly, has traditionally been associated with physicality and it is only through the influence of Johann Cruyff - and only on one of Catalonia's clubs (Barcelona) - that this commitment to ball control and 'total football' can be seen. Also, this is not representative of other Catalan clubs, or indeed those

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<sup>525</sup> See Bates and Sharkey, "Politically Engaged Artistic Practice"

<sup>526</sup> Franks, *Anarchisms, Postanarchisms and Ethics*, 77

<sup>527</sup> Jonathan Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid: A History of Football Tactics* (London: Orion Books, 2008), 129

<sup>528</sup> Chris Taylor, "Uruguay: The First World Power", in *The Cambridge Companion to Football* eds. Rob Steen, Jed Novick and Huw Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 34

of Scotland. However, this does seem a reasonable analogy in response to massive structural power imbalances. Scotland or Scottish teams may be characterised as playing physically or prioritising strength when playing internationally. As the oppressed group, the Scottish teams who present as hard tackling, direct teams, are forced into this manoeuvre in order to survive: teams forced to adopt a more defensive approach in order to minimise the efficacy of the opposition. The objective here may be part of an amorphous, heterogeneous group of *tele*, but they are no less problematic and oppressive.

Another reading of Scottish teams' ability to adapt here does not offer us a positive vision for our politics and problematises the relationship between the epistemological ethical processes and the impact of these in the constitution (subjection/subjectification) of the individual. My argument is that the Scottish teams' ability to change the overall practice of playing football has been in response to the power imbalances present and not as a result of any desire or aesthetic choice. Similarly, political and ethical discourse has been affected by marginalised voices, but again from a position of oppression. Scottish football may have developed differently if it was resourced in the same way as more lucrative leagues around Europe, but I am arguing that this distinction be removed. This is not as simple as the poor chess player being able to influence the practice of playing chess in a manner similar to that of a world-class professional – it is borne of a structurally unfair playing field. Anarchists must aim to fundamentally alter the structures which constitute the site for our practices in order to remove this possibility. If the cash flows and footfalls of the football clubs involved were not the key distinctions between them, but their ability as equals and choices based on the needs and desires of their members, this would be a prefigurative basis which appear close to Stirner's union of egoists.

Franks makes (successful) use of humour throughout his book and I wish to explore the theme of joking in order to find the use of, and limits to, anarchist virtue ethics. Humour here is taken to be a broader category within which we can discuss joking, jokes, comic theory and performance. This is not an exhaustive list of what composes Humour Studies, but is what is of use to our argument. A number of authors whom we have looked at make humour the focus of, at least part of, their

work: Rousselle and Franks both make use of joking in their texts; Stirner holds the belief that humour, or more specifically parody, holds a special critical function due to the comic license it is given; Critchley has written at length on humour which forms the basis for part of his ethical formulations,<sup>529</sup> and Lacan modulates his view of the superego through a theory of humour.<sup>530</sup> I wish to briefly explore stand-up comedy as a practice and comic theory as a way of evaluating meta-ethics.

Looking at comic practice there is a discourse of ‘punching up/down’ which is roughly analogous with the ethical process discussed above.<sup>531</sup> This is a process of using a networked and rhizomatic understanding of power, in a manner similar to that of the postanarchist conceptions of power, to make first-order ethical decisions about the nature of joking. Comedian and broadcaster Stuart Goldsmith describes this as the *telos* of comedy:

Surely the reason behind it is that comedy is about, sort of ... has to be punching upwards... you can't punch down. And the nature, I would say, as a liberal left-wing person, is that you can speak truth to power, there's no point speaking truth to people less powerful than yourself.<sup>532</sup>

I am not engaging in a debate about the *purpose* of joking or stand-up comedy, but this illustrates to us the way in which some comedy practitioners view power-relations and the meta-ethical process which informs their first-order ethics. Broadly, what is being discussed here is the basis for judging the moral content of joking: am I punching up or down? We can draw a direct comparison with May's task to assess the potentially problematic deployment of power. This appears to be a form of virtue ethics and one which is informed by the epistemological commitments of postanarchism.

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<sup>529</sup> Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 85

<sup>530</sup> Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 303

<sup>531</sup> Quirk, *Why Stand Up Matters*,

<sup>532</sup> Goldsmith in Quirk, *The Politics of British Stand-up Comedy*, 19

We can see the operation of virtue-ethics in the development of this ethical process and its operation; a view of the subject, or at least the place of ethics, is a necessary component of the process. I must take some view on the potential power, and power imbalance, within the relationship of joker-joke-subject, in order to assess the claim of punching up. However, this becomes a problematic if we attempt to reverse the trajectory by using the ethical process to inform our view of its place. By allowing our view of the subject to be coloured by a *telos*, even if it is one among many *telé*, there is the possibility of the reinscription of forms of essentialism. Again, this is not a necessary function of this process, but a *possible* one, and this demonstrates to us how a purely epistemological departure can cause problems by idealising visions of the subject. What is missing for this to be a meta-ethics commensurate with the critical function we are ascribing to postanarchism is a negative answer to the question of place, or the ontological grounding of our ethical reasoning. We may reasonably assume that a black, self-identifying, male comedian is punching up when they are joking about a white, male comedian and that they are punching down when the joke takes aim at a black, trans male. (There are a number of assumptions here within the evaluation of power relations, such as the class position or sexuality of these hypothetical comedians, which I do not wish to engage with. I am using this example to exemplify the problems which can emerge, not the operation of the first-order ethics presented.) The problem we may encounter is that when these virtues which categorise the ‘good’ in practices of joking, can become what is accepted as the ‘good’ for categories of the comedian themselves.<sup>533</sup>

## You Must Be Joking

It is for this reason that I am happy to make use of practice-based virtue ethics in my practice, but believe that postanarchism’s intervention is a necessary one in order to avoid the issues presented above. I hope that I have not engaged in the practice of “straw manning” either Rousselle or Franks in these discussions. Both authors have

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<sup>533</sup> See, Gil Greengross, Paul J Silva, Emily C Nusbaum, ‘Sex differences in humor production ability: A meta-analysis’, *Journal of Research in Personality*, October 2019, DOI:[10.1016/j.jrp.2019.103886](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2019.103886); Flora Gill, ‘6 reasons why women aren’t funny’ *The Spectator*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2019; Moya Lothian-McLean, ‘Comedians Dismiss ‘F\*\*cking Ignorant’ Study that claims men are funnier than women’, *The Independent*, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2019.



made significant contributions to the development of anarchist ethical thought more broadly, and of this argument in particular. The taxonomy and deconstructive lens which Rousselle employs has allowed me to build on his argument to find a (in)coherent answer to the question of *where* we get our ethics from. Franks has provided a critique of postanarchist theorising which has led me back to anchoring these discussions in practice and provides the critical basis for the need for this thesis: postanarchism's need to explore the question of ontology. Both of these authors (indeed influenced by each other) make use of humour and joking throughout their work and it is this theme I wish to return to here. Franks and Rousselle, alongside other thinkers in the field such as Simon Critchley, use humour informing their arguments and it is a useful way for us to approach these topics. However, these authors approach questions of joking from a literary stand point. There is nothing wrong with this in and of itself, but jokes are almost always performed or, at the very least, are written for an audience. What is often missing from the textual analysis, is *you*.

You is a concept which I believe places a non-determinable and empty concept back into forms of base-subjectivist ethical reasoning. In the negative-dialectic we have developed a reading which further removes the possibility for epistemological foundationalism and ontological essentialism. However, in order to satisfy potential objections to this form of subjectivism as merely a restatement of an ontology of the subject, I believe we need to give more attention, although not a privileged status, to you. I am using 'you' here in the same fashion as Stirner deploys his unique as a non-concept: something which escapes signification and makes reference to the fundamental split in the relationship between thinking and being. This introduces potential boundaries for our ethical reasoning, or reduces it to a thin form of subjectivism where we may have changed the subject in question, but we are still placing our ethics within a truth-bound subject. The argument I have outlined I above goes some way, I hope, to answering questions of ontological essentialism, but in order to escape this possible signification, while retaining an element of Franks' practical commitments, we need to bring the audience back. The you is a non-concept which cannot be signified. For instance, I do not know who the reader of this text is. I can make educated guesses: this is a thesis which will be submitted for examination so it's fair to assume that the readership will include a supervisory team

and examiners. Outside of this small network and after the final drafting this text *could* find its way to anyone. This is as much as we can predict who will hear a joke, but we cannot guarantee it. We see this in the punching up/down discussion in comedy and the long-term embedded community work of politically engaged artistic practice.

The you is an extension and mirror of the unique in that Stirner tells us that ‘*you* are the content of the unique’.<sup>534</sup> Here I am trying to express that “*you is* the content of the unique”. This locates the place of ethical reasoning as between speaker and interlocutor as opposed to between author and reader. I believe that this is commensurate with Franks’ commitment to both prefigurative practice and practice based ethical reasoning. This is not *the* postanarchist subject, as there cannot be a postanarchist subject that we could discuss satisfactorily on these pages. This allows for a potential social view of the subject which is still an opaque, shifting singularity, but places it outside of signification while remaining within consideration. I am unable to predict who you are and even if I knew your identity I would still not have *gnosis* of you. The emptiness of you, as Stirner illustrates, cannot be filled by the assumptions I can make as these do not express who you are.

Simon Critchley also holds that our ethical reasoning is based in a process which is found in the relationship with the other. For Critchley, the ethical subject is formed through a demand > approval > demand cycle which creates a form of ethical-universalism created through heteronomous commitments, as opposed to the autonomy of the self.<sup>535</sup> Critchley is attempting with Kant what I am attempting with Stirner: the reversing of ethical reasoning. This is an epistemological move for Critchley born of disappointment anchored in Kant’s ‘Copernican turn’, leading us to attempt to find ‘justice’ in ‘a violently unjust world’.<sup>536</sup> For this argument, I am interested in the place or ontological place of ethics, or an attempt to find anarchy in a chaotically unjust world. Far from leading us back to moral ultimates and universal truths, this must lead us to consider the other as part of ourselves. The negative-

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<sup>534</sup> Stirner, *Stirner’s Critics*, 56

<sup>535</sup> Simon Critchley, *Infinitely demanding*, 8

<sup>536</sup> Simon Critchley, *Infinitely demanding*, 3

dialectic gives us the methodology required for this form of reasoning through its acknowledgement that despite your unknowability, I must make decisions based on only my experience of you/You. This is a form of reasoning which is based in the non-concept of the unique as its place and the rejection of epistemological truth-claims as the basis for its process. The consideration of you is ever present within any form of practice, be it as participant, audience, spectator, author, etc. and moves this from literary analysis to the evaluation of practice.

The comedian John-Luke Roberts displays this form of inherent ethical reasoning in discussion of his work. For Roberts, the relationship to power is what dictates both form and content.<sup>537</sup> Responding to questions on political comedy he argues that ‘...the way satire or topical comedy works is to attack the status quo. If you’re just supporting the status quo then it’s not funny and there’s nothing to do there, you’ve got to punch at the people in power. So that’s why that happens most of the time.’<sup>538</sup> Here, Roberts is assessing the power-relations inherent in comic performance and attempting a form of practice-based ethical reasoning. The discussion may appear to be of the writing, or literary, formation of the joke. However, what is pertinent is not only this, but *performance* of the joke. This is a key distinction for us as it demonstrates what happens when we make the manoeuvre from theory to praxis. For Roberts, it is the efficacy which is affected by this ethical reasoning; assessing what ‘works’. What ‘works’ refers to how an individual audience *has* reacted and cannot be abstracted to how a reader *may* react.

The process is one which both virtue theorists and postanarchists may find appealing, based in the internal ‘goods’ of the practice and endeavouring to assess the intersection of networks of power. It is clear that there is a concept within this reasoning which cannot be attributed to playing to a particular room, or audience, or trying to be universally appealing, something which could be mistaken for being the *telos* of joking. Roberts is using a conception of himself as performer (with all of the power and comic license that this gives), the subject of the joke, and you as audience, in order to assess the ethical content of the joke alongside, and as part of,

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<sup>537</sup> Quirk, *The Politics of British Stand-up Comedy*: 22

<sup>538</sup> John-Luke Roberts in Quirk, *The Politics of British Stand-up Comedy*: 22-23

its efficacy. Reflecting on how jokes may 'resonate' with their audience, comedian, Tom Allen demonstrates the ephemeral and temporary nature of joking is inherently tied to intersubjectivity, as, '[u]ltimately what keeps people doing it is that sense of "here we are together, finding common ground on something in life, on this evening, at this time, in this room. This is us, together"'.<sup>539</sup> Allen holds the belief that comedy is a way in which the relationship between joker and audience, or *I* and *You*, is given primacy. This is a demonstration of how the negative-dialectic applies within ethical-nihilist reasoning: we can 'extend' the non-concept of the unique to account for - or take property of, in Stirner's language - you. In other words, for a comedian to take possession of their audience, or teacher to take possession of their students, they must consider *them*. Not an abstracted form, but the actual people who constitute audiences or classrooms and, perhaps more importantly, the relationship between speaker and audience.

To be clear, I am not proposing a new place of anarchist ethical reasoning, but illustrating what the implications of the negative-dialectic are. This is both for critics such as Franks and for postanarchist scholars' meta-ethical analysis. I believe that an exploration through practice of the politics of peculiarity arrives at an interesting point of departure for our meta-ethics: **how can we create a positive practice from a purely negative ethics?** Joking offers us a way of exploring this issue as it stands outside of everyday interactions. Comedians are given status as outsiders or commentators on a community and, what Critchley refers to as, 'the ethical Thing that is at the heart of the aesthetic object'.<sup>540</sup> This is the moment of the Real at the heart of the symbolic signification, or where *You* and *I* are located. The 'aesthetic object' is to be dissolved into the subject and this will bring you radically into my consciousness. If we begin with a purely negative answer to the ethical question of place, then we must develop practical tactics for how we may deploy this in our politics.

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<sup>539</sup> Tony Allen in Quirk, *The Politics of British Stand-up Comedy*, 98

<sup>540</sup> Critchley, *Infinitely demanding*, 85. Critchley capitalises 'Thing' here in a reference to the Lacanian concept *Das Ding*. There is an interesting discussion to be had around Critchley's interpretation of Lacan and the implications this may have for his 'ethics of commitment', however, that is not the focus of this thesis.

How this manifests itself will change if the others involved in your practice are middle-aged, white male academics, or teenage girls. Where this moves on from a purely virtue-based approach is its attempt to foreground this critical function. The non-concept of ethical reasoning is retained and projected onto the other in order to stop us believing we have found the 'correct' answer. Postanarchism is an attempt to radically reread anarchist and poststructuralist thought in response to immediate conditions as other forms of anarchist thought attempt to fulfil the promises of anarchism. I began this discussion with reference to Bey's call for a new 'post-anarchism' in order to include the marginalised and exploited voices which anarchism claims to incorporate. Bey is not a thinker who remains relevant and is now largely discredited: this demonstrates that we must strive to maintain critical function within our philosophy, even if they are at our own cost as scholars or when involved in direct actions. It is not enough to face a situation where we are praised merely for our survival, such as in Scottish football: we must find a resolution which is ontologically grounded by ownness. I have over-simplified Franks' argument on football as practice, but this still forms a good representation of the missing *You*. Making use of common narratives around football may be sufficient to demonstrate a philosophical argument, but when we move into the practices of football we must consider more than this. If we are working alongside members of football clubs from the Highland League,<sup>541</sup> what constitutes the 'good' of a practice will be different than if we are working with top-level coaches of Catalan football clubs, but we cannot allow this to become idealised. The undermining incoherence of the negative-dialectic aids in the prevention of this. It allows for the insertion of a *You* to be used for our ethical processes without ontologies of the subject or essentialist representation.

This chapter has brought together the theorising of the conceptual chapters on power and freedom with the practice developed in the chapters on art and aesthetics using my interpretation of Stirner. The fundamental contribution of this chapter has been to demonstrate how, through the negative-dialectic, we can find the elusive negative answer to the question of where our ethics come from, and still craft a form of political practice which can be considered anarchist. The politics of peculiarity, as I

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<sup>541</sup> Lower level, or 'non-league', football in Scotland.

term it, is one which takes Stirner's call to take possession of our world seriously and looks to politicise the meta-ethics which underpin postanarchist enquiry. The taxonomy which Rousselle deploys in order to examine postanarchist ethics has been especially useful when examining the thought of Stirner alongside other anarchist ethical thinkers. It has given us a way of approaching meta-ethics while avoiding idealisation and retaining a critical component at all stages of our theorising, and which can be brought into our practice. This has led me to sketch out what a postanarchist politics would look like if we were to look again to ontological philosophy. For too long this has not been paid the attention it requires for postanarchism to fulfil its promises and to give us a positive vision; *something to do*. From ownness we are given an ontological position which can be deployed across all forms of radical subjectivity and in all forms of political practice: more than fighting to gain our freedom, we must fight because we are free. But to avoid the possible oppression lurking within this violent imagery I am proposing a concrete way of retaining the intersubjective: *You*. This is a partial response to the work of Newman, Rousselle, Franks and Critchley who have all made significant contributions to the development of postanarchist ethical thought – some from inside, some from their critique. It is a politics of praxis which I have, necessarily, needed to develop through practice and rejects the need for essentialised grounding of our subjectivities alongside a total refusal of foundationalist logic. Indeed, it could be argued that this is a form of extreme materialism which fundamentally rejects any need for arguments about structured reality. We do not need reality to have a structure to develop a politics from ourselves, from you. We just need you.

## Conclusion

At this point I think it is useful to explore the journey which the writing and researching of this thesis has taken me on. I am aware that practically no thesis is the same project at the final write up as it is in the planning: it would be a problem if we were unable to learn from our own ignorance and mistakes. I don't consider the journey I have been on to be particularly remarkable, or distinct from the experience of others, but I do think that it illustrates the findings, developments and central arguments I have presented. As Freud tells us, what is lost in content often returns in form.

In the early planning of this research, the outline was to explore theory through practice. I was hoping to develop original methods based in the subjective experiences of art, in order to "test" the usefulness of postanarchism in a world divided through late modern capitalism. Indeed, the original title for this thesis was 'Postanarchist Alternatives to Late Modern Capitalism'. This was to involve time spent embedded in activist communities to explore if postanarchist thought was contributing to their political practice and what lessons we could learn from this, and to explore what contributions I could make. It became clear that this was untenable within the bounds of my resources: it started to feel more like a project which would span an entire academic career as opposed to a thesis. Did I have time to find and explore these communities? How could I identify strictly postanarchist politics without including the colonialist logics I rejected; simply pitching up and telling someone what they thought?

It became clear to me that what I needed to do was to shift the focus of the work to explore and develop the theoretical content of postanarchism. At this stage, the thesis was to be a purely theoretical contribution, investigating what postanarchism was trying to achieve and how I could contribute to it, or to find the gaps – in academic terms – and try to fill them. In the theorising which this precipitated it became apparent that what was missing - and the only method for advancing this theory - was practice. Postanarchist authors have spent much time and effort developing the theories I was exploring and some even became involved in anarchist practice. However, I could find very little which was applicable, that pointed to

something we could *do*. It was great to hear that there were postanarchist tendencies in the Arab Spring or the Occupy Movement, but I needed to know what these felt like, how they failed, how could we apply their lessons to our lives. The only methods which could help in this endeavour were practical. I had discovered the negative-dialectic at the heart of Stirner's thought, but how was this to be made useful? This anchored my research in a need to be "of use": developed within the concrete reality not just of political practices, but political practices which I had direct experience of.

This led me back to art practice as a potentially useful avenue to explore the ideas I was developing. As part of the research, I had the opportunity to be involved with artists, activists and academics who were creating and analysing forms of participatory art, and this seemed to be the perfect environment in which to gestate the theories I was building. It was the deeply subjective nature of artistic practice and participation which had originally suggested itself to me as a potentially useful source of data for this research. Now, looking for a way to explore the dissolving of the objective world into the possession of the subject, arts practice offered me a way to approach this question directly: the object could be removed in favour of the participants. At this stage, a number of gaps in the theorising presented themselves to me. First, how could an arts practice hope to develop as part of an ontological politics? Second, if we are to take anarchism as a set of insurrectionary ethical discourses, what are the links between ethics and aesthetics? Third, why is the artists' perspective useful? It was from these questions that the form of politically engaged artistic practice has been developed, collaboratively, alongside academics and artists responding to some of the research which I had already completed. The new theory I was producing required this new form of practice to be explored. This took me back to the original proposition of the research: to develop new methods through which to explore what happens when postanarchism meets political praxis, but based in the subjective realm of arts practice. It wasn't enough for this to occur in the third person. I couldn't make claims which were anchored in a base-subjectivist meta-ethics based on what "one" had experienced: *I* needed to be an embedded and active part of this practice.



From this experience it became necessary to look to how the communal experience and the intersubjective were incorporated in my reading of Stirner. The manoeuvre which presented itself was to move from the first-person into the second – the move from I to you. This allowed me to investigate how the empty conceptualisation of the subject, necessary for an ethical nihilist discourse, could become part of a, potentially, social anarchism. The result of this has been the politics of peculiarity: a politics which takes ownness, or radical pre-freedom, as its ontological grounding, maintains a double-negative response to the question of where and how we arrive at our ethics, and remains committed to the postanarchist positions of anti-essentialism and anti-foundationalism.

I have taken the term peculiarity to represent the form of political practice I am proposing because it is based in a more satisfying translation of Stirner's term *eigenheit*, commonly translated as ownness. I believe that this closely matches the manner in which Stirner is attempting to use language to unseat the knowledge associated with this language. If we are to take knowledge as the corollary of language, and not the reverse of this, then it is of great importance how Stirner makes use of words. This is not to say I am making a "truer" translation of the work – a fool's errand – but my hope is that this is closer to the *political* intention of the text. 'Peculiar' relates to the things which are related only to the concept being discussed, in this case you. What are the things which are peculiar to you? This is also an exercise in 'making strange'.<sup>542</sup> By alienating ourselves from the categories and concepts which are *said* to create and define us, I hope to unseat them and allow us to radically re-read our relationships to ourselves. This is the necessary rupture in the ideological universe which we must create in order to ground a politics of ontology.<sup>543</sup> Peculiar suggests this strangeness sits alongside my/your uniqueness, and it is this which I hope to capture in this term and this exposition.

This research has identified that the intersubjective must be the foundation of this political praxis. This is to allow for *you* to be brought in to the discourse. This, of course, relies on the *I* to be brought in to being: there can be no you without a me to

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<sup>542</sup> Brecht, "On Chinese Acting",

<sup>543</sup> Rousselle, *After Post-anarchism*, 79

experience you. This allows for a reading of Stirner's alleged individualism to be part of the social. This is not to say that the social world is a necessary part of the egoistic vision I am proposing - we could still be raised by wolves on an island in the middle of the sea - but that the world I encounter is a part of me as much as I am a part of it. Many of the authors I have encountered as part of this research impress the need for intersubjective formations in ethical formations, but they do this in a literary fashion. I wish for the basis of my politics to be closer to piece of live art, capturing the audience as participants and taking them with me, allowing them to be an active component. This is difficult to express on the page and this is why it has been important to create a form of practice alongside this thought. By tying you to this form of practice we are also tied to an empty signifier, not merely the floating formations of *I*. *I* is never predetermined, but is always attached to its author. *You*, however, could be anyone. *You* is impossible to determine as it must be a changing and ever-rotating cast of interlocutors, participants and antagonists.

This transition takes place within the bounds of the negative-dialectic. I make you part of my world by taking possession of you, dissolving you into my subjective world. To take this specific instance as an example, I am trying to take you – my reader – as part of my property. How am I to achieve this? You may be reading this many years after my death, I might never know you are my reader, or you might not believe me even if we were to know each other. All I have here are my words and my ideas. When practicing my politics this can be extended to my physical presence and the actions I undertake in a shared space, but coercive methods still remain deeply ineffective to make you mine. I must find a way to bridge this divide and retain a negative, nihilist ethics which doesn't presuppose you, but allows you to posit yourself, much as I am positing myself. The negative-dialectic is the bounds of this enquiry, it is that which tells us what is, and what is not, part of this politics. I am limited to what I can experience, know, or be a part of. I only have the un-structured experience of reality I find once reality is stripped of spooks and fixed ideas. So you are a part of my world, even as a hypothetical future reader of this work. It is for you I am writing these words and my motivation is a selfish desire to include you in my world.

As I have stated, this is based in the double negative answer to the place and process of our ethics. Literally, where our ethics come from and how we arrive at them. For this inquiry, the place of our ethics relates to our approach to ontology, and the process is our epistemology. This is a meta-ethics in which I am attempting to find a negative response to the place of our ethics, while retaining a subject at its heart. This is why *you* is so important for this study: empty and intrinsically intersubjective. This is to escape accusations of subjectivism based in the will of some “authentic” self or the realisation of some form of *telos*. The concept of the you, posited as an extension of Stirner’s unique, is my attempt at a politicisation of this ethical nihilism. It rejects any recurrence of the essential grounding of the subject, and I am extending this to refuse the foundations of knowledge. Returning to the links between language and knowledge, being here is linked to how we experience the symbols which mediate our reality – namely language – and so the knowledge which is linked through these symbolic representations must be inherently unstable. If this is the case, we can argue that the foundations upon which the ontological relationship between subject and reality is unstable. This instability suggests to us that we do not need positive responses to either the place or process of ethics; we can be sure of nothing (no-thing) and so are left only with positing ourselves. We must justify ourselves only to ourselves, without recourse to moral dialogues or scientific enquiry – quite simply we do not need them. This is not to fall in to the thin individualism of liberal thought. This is not quite “doing what you want”, but positing what you must. This positing doesn’t occur within an ethical vacuum, but an ethical nothingness. There is no ethical content, but there is still the content of all that you experience. You must consider all of your relationship to reality and everything that composes this as the basis for your enquiry. How does your choice of career impact on your relationship with your children, your commitments to a community, or your carbon emissions? You must take possession of this, make it yours.

This is a position arrived at through our meta-ethical investigation. We have seen how the artistic practice engaged in suggests a link between aesthetics and ethics, and one which has been productive for this research. Rancière points us towards the key linkage which establishes how aesthetics can be useful to our understanding of ontological politics. The autonomy of art and the autonomy of experience is brought

together through all that relates to, but is not part of, forms of art.<sup>544</sup> We are only able to experience the 'non-art' present within any artwork or artistic practice from an engagement which takes place within the art. When we visit the theatre we are aware of our levels of comfort, the other people we encounter in the space – be they staff or other members of the audience - and the price of the ticket, all through the experience of the art itself. Rancière is discussing the operation of the aesthetic regime of art; I am turning this on its head to explore the way our politics creates its own meta-aesthetics. What I mean by this is that our politics, taken here to be all of how we negotiate with the world we encounter, create the boundaries of what is possible. This is in the sense that our negotiation with the reality that we encounter must provide us with the basis for all subsequent interaction. Rancière is asking what is the relationship between art and life, and I am asking what is the relationship between politics and life. This must concern ontological formation and it has only been through the exploration of the links between aesthetics and ethics, or politics and art, where it has become possible to explore this.

This has forced the focus of my research to look at the ontological commitments of postanarchism. We have seen how postanarchist thought has explored and critiqued forms of foundationalist epistemological philosophy and, Newman and Rousselle aside, rejected ontology as inherently representative. My argument is that we must re-examine our ontology in order to fulfil postanarchist rejection of essential visions of the subject. Rousselle argues that postanarchism is an attempt at a meta-ethics for anarchist thought, and one which must return an ethical nihilist response. I have employed an arts practice to foster an ontological philosophy which is able to demonstrate this commitment. This has developed in to the conceptualisation of *you* discussed above, and is the development of an ontological politics of ownness. This has been necessary for me to be able to advance upon the epistemological critiques of earlier forms of postanarchism with the ownness of Stiner, or the ontological anarchy of Newman. It was practice which was vital in the elaboration of this. I had to practice this theorising in order to realise its ambition. If we are to start as free, with the radical pre-freedom of ownness, and be bound within the terms of what we can posit ourselves, then I must engage in practice to have a way of exploring this.

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<sup>544</sup> Rancière, "The Aesthetic Regime and its Outcomes", 136

Stirner strips back our suppositions and leaves us only with ourselves. So, in order to develop a meta-ethics which is consonant with this approach, it became essential to put this in to practice, to explore it by doing. It is this approach that I have taken to be key to the process of exploring ontology without essentialising the subject which grounds it.

The practice which has been employed to explore this has been co-produced and co-authored. It has been created partially with the intention of developing these theories alongside artists, academics and its participants, all of whom all brought their own reasons for taking part and allowed me access to their thoughts and experience. We have called this politically engaged artistic practice. This name refers to its critical relationship with socially engaged artistic practice, the form of arts practice which is the inspiration and foundation upon which it is built.<sup>545</sup> This is an original methodology which demonstrates its commitment to ontological freedom through the long-term and embedded nature of the practice. We needed to become partial members of the communities in which we practiced in order to build the trust which is necessary to interact with the ideological universe of the participants. This is also part of a separation of ontology and measure, as it seeks to operate within a vision of subjectification which functions within the 'non-place' of the subject upon which the concept of the you is constructed. This is to move away from the practices by which some forms of community and participatory art have been used to further the neoliberal agenda of governmental funding bodies which often "helicopter in" practitioners to communities. Our model is aware that it may be replacing the welfare provision which has been stripped form these communities. Indeed, we are to some extent seeking this replacement. Postanarchist politics, built within ontological approaches to anarchy, is looking to "ignore" the state; to hollow it out with our own production. In order to avoid the pitfalls into which some previous forms of community practice have fallen, politically engaged artistic practice is constructed through a commitment to the logic of affinity, or unquestioning solidarity.

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<sup>545</sup> For a more thorough discussion of what these forms of practice are and how they differ see Bates and Sharkey, "Politically Engaged Artistic Practice"

The practice has proved to be an excellent way to explore the themes which this thesis has exposed as key to a postanarchist politics. We encountered issues with curation and institutional hierarchy which - far from causing problems for the practice - allowed us to expose the operation of networks of power, to demonstrate the power which was already held by its participants, and the freedom we need to practice with in order to address this. The practice was expressly designed to deal with and to explore these tensions in a manner that was safer and more productive than the competitive, neoliberal model of arts production which we are seeking to destroy. This is a model which is built to operate prefiguratively in that we are intentionally seeking to experiment with future social relations.<sup>546</sup> This is achieved by facilitating a group to take control, or to make their own decisions and create their own social realities. When we were unexpectedly presented with limits and problems, the participants responded by finding solutions. They were able to play with these issues in a manner that they were previously unable to imagine. This is about creating the conditions where people are able to *do* things themselves and to create better alternatives to the coercive and competitive systems and pedagogies which dominate this form of learning and practice. The negative-dialectic also played a key role. We were able to remove the “objects” of our art as the goal of the work and to focus on the ‘production’ of the work and the participation itself. This itself is inherently prefigurative in that the goal of the art is the bringing together of the objects created with the process of creating them, and the communities created as part of this production. Pictures were painted, music was produced and dance was created, but this was not where the arts practice was focused. This is the embodiment of the operation of the negative-dialectic: removing the objective to bring it within the subjective world.

The theory of freedom I have developed for this research is key for the direction which this practice has taken. This formation of freedom breaks down in to three fundamental elements: ontological freedom, politics and poetry. That is to say that for the abstraction freedom to have some use, or to bring us something, we must begin with ownness and develop this *politically*. The example I have used to illustrate the operation of ownness is that of Frederick Douglass’ fight with the slave breaker.

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<sup>546</sup> Raekstad and Gradin, *Prefigurative Politics*, 36

Here, Douglass does not fight to gain his freedom, but realises he must fight because he is already free.<sup>547</sup> We begin from a position of freedom; we do not aim at its realisation. From here we are to negotiate with the world we encounter; to engage in politics. All that remains within the signifier freedom is poetry. This is not to deny the importance of poetics - the artistic impulse of my research demonstrates how this can be useful to us - but it is not something *to do* and does not bring us something material to own. This form of ontological politics centres our role in the creation of others as political subjects. By taking seriously our responsibility in the discursive formation of those subjects we engage with, it demonstrates both the power we hold and the freedom that we must have in order to exercise this power. Artistic production, linked to the construction of subjectivities, tied to the ethical realm and intrinsically political, suggests itself as a way to explore this. Ownness is replacing other forms of “freedom” here. The dualism of personal liberty and political freedom must be resisted, as both share one common foundation: governance. To gain either form of freedom we must, to some extent, submit to the will of the other and the rights this can gain us serve only to illustrate *how* we are to be governed. If we are to become ungovernable, we must begin by realising the freedom we already hold.

For this to be true we must also be, in some fashion, powerful. That is to say, we must be involved in the actions of power itself. Poststructuralist philosophy has identified how power is rhizomatically networked and postanarchism has developed this in to a partial positive answer to the place of power. I have responded by rejecting this form of subjectivism and investigating how we might conceive of power in a manner that is useful. This is done through the confirmation that we are already free: we hold power because we are free/ we are free because we hold power. This paradox is important for this research as it rejects the argument that ontology must be representative while foregrounding a rejection of foundationalism and essentialism. There is no clear line of flight through which we can approach this formation and, consequently, there can be no foundation for the essential grounding of the subject. This is important if we are to take seriously power’s role in the creation of political subjects. Following Foucault, power operates to create us as subjects either through a process of creating negative boundaries for our

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<sup>547</sup> Douglass, *Autobiographies*, 278

subjectivities (subjection, or what I have described as a meta-aesthetics of politics), or allowing us to trace the outlines of the networks of power we operate in and posit ourselves in opposition to this (subjectification). The implication of this is that we must be careful of how we deploy our words as they have a real and constitutive effect on the world – they serve to create you.

This leads us back to where this thesis begins, with my reading of Max Stirner's thought. In Stirner we find a bringing together of the epistemological rejection of 'fixed ideas' and the ontological rejection of essential conceptions of the subject. Stirner's contribution is that which has allowed me to posit a consonant form of ethical nihilism, alongside myself. He attacks the Hegelian project through his use of humour and parody, and develops the negative-dialectic to achieve this. This necessitates the removal of the subject/object divide - itself an expression of philosophical prefiguration - to radically unseat the subject within subjectivism. Indeed, it could be argued that Stirner takes subjectivism into the realm of radical materialism. As Graeber argues:

A genuine materialism... would not simply privilege a 'material' sphere over an ideal one. It would begin by acknowledging that no such ideal sphere actually exists. This, in turn, would make it possible to stop focusing so obsessively on the production of material objects – discrete, selfidentical things that one can own – and start the more difficult work of trying to understand the (equally material) processes by which people create and shape one another.<sup>548</sup>

This is an expression of the operation of the negative-dialectic; dismissing the idealisations of Hegelianism, and moving the production of subjectivities – both ourselves and others, or *I* and *you* – within our own possession. It is also important to note that ownness is to be separated from egoism. The two are not synonyms, but egoism is to be seen as the method for achieving ownness: we are to do what is best for us calculated in terms of the whole of the world we encounter, and in this doing we are able to realise how we are in possession of ourselves. This is what has led

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<sup>548</sup> Graeber, "Turning Modes of Production Inside out", 71



me to assert ontology as key for a coherent form of postanarchist meta-ethics.  
Ultimately, this holds one *thing* as the focus for our meta-ethics and our politics: you.

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