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# The anarchism to come

Tomás Ibáñez

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March 20th, 2017

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*Tomás Ibáñez is arguably one of the most important voices of spanish anarchism, and the resonance of his work extends beyond his country of origin. Infrequently translated into english, we have tried in earlier posts to modestly fill that gap. We share below a recent and perhaps polemical essay of his, an essay that was originally published in Libre Pensamiento nº 88, of the spanish CGT, and in electronic format at [alabarricadas](#), [acracia](#) and [el libertario](#).*

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ing, but also a utopia. This implies an interweaving between *the political and the existential*, between *the theoretical and the practical*, between *the ethical and the political*, that is, ultimately, *a fusion between the sphere of life and the sphere of the political*.

To continue to be “anarchism”, the “coming anarchism” cannot do without any of these elements.

**Tomás Ibáñez**

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individual freedom, while at the same time completely excluding the possibility that, from an anarchist perspective, it is possible to think *freedom without equality*, or *equality without freedom*. Neither freedom, nor equality, *severed from their other half*, fall within an approach that continues to be anarchist.

It is this compromise with *equaliberty* that places within the heart of the anarchist invariant its radical incompatibility with domination in all of its forms, as well as the affirmation that it is possible and, further, intensely desirable, *to live without domination*. And it is with this that the motto “*Neither to rule, nor to obey*” forms part of what cannot change in anarchism without it ceasing to be anarchism.

Likewise, anarchism is also denatured if it is deprived of the set formed by the union between *utopia and the desire for revolution*, that is, by the union between the imagination of a world always distinct from the existing one, and the desire to put to an end this last.

Another of the elements that is inscribed permanently in anarchism is an *ethical commitment*, especially to the ethical exigency of a consonance between theory and practice, as well as to the demand for an ethical alignment between means and ends. This signifies that it is not possible to attain objectives in accordance with anarchist values along paths which contradict them. Whereby, the actions developed and the forms of organisation adopted should reflect, already, in their very characteristics, the goals sought; they should *prefigure them*, and this prefiguring constitutes an authentic touchstone for verifying the validity of means. In other words, anarchism is only compatible with prefigurative politics, and it would cease to be anarchism if it abandoned this imperative.

Lastly, neither can one continue to speak properly of anarchism if this renounces *the fusion between life and politics*. We should not forget that anarchism is simultaneously, and in an indissociable way, a political formulation, but also a way of life, but also an ethics, but also a set of practices, but also a way of being and of behav-

Who can predict the anarchism to come? No one, obviously. However, there exists a *principled reason* that allows us to affirm with complete certainty that this coming anarchism, and which is already revealing its face, will *necessarily be different* from that which we inherited and which we are already familiar with. In effect, anarchism is not only a terrific demand for freedom, perhaps the most extreme that has ever been expressed, but also consists of a political thought *critical of domination*, joined with a political practice that struggles against it. It is, nevertheless, *in the heart* of struggles against domination, in any of its forms, where anarchism is forged and where it acquires a good part of its characteristics.

Well, as the apparatuses of domination continue to change in the course of *historical time*, it follows, so as not to become without effect, that *what is opposed to them*, what confronts them, including anarchism, *also changes in parallel*. What is curious is that as a consequence of this inevitable modification in antagonistic practices, the very theoretical framework of anarchist theory also changes. The reason is none other than the particular symbiosis that this establishes between *theory and practice*, between the “*idea*” and the “*action*”, and which implies necessarily that if action should change, that *the idea* cannot remain static, because *a part of what constitutes the idea*, that is, *a part of what it itself is*, is none other than *practice*, and this has changed.

Consequently, to the extent that the apparatuses of domination continue to change, it follows that the coming anarchism will be *necessarily different from that which presently exists*. More, we can affirm, no longer for reasons of principle, but *empirically*, that the coming anarchism will not only be different from what exists today, but that, furthermore, it will be *very different*. And the reason is that the social changes that announce themselves, and that are already beginning to happen, are of such *a magnitude* that its effects on anarchism can only be *enormously profound*, placing it before the need to *reinvent itself*.

The creative exercise of imagining the anarchism of the future is undeniably laudable, however, I very much doubt that letting one's imagination fly freely is the best path to try to approach the form that *this reinvention* could take. And this because if the coming form of anarchism is going to depend, in part, on the nature of the apparatuses of domination that will be put into place and that it will confront and the larger world to which they will belong, then what we need to get closer to the anarchism of tomorrow is to *interrogate this coming world* on the basis of the developments that are presently gaining shape in the heart of present day reality.

However, if we want to capture the characteristics of what is emerging, we should understand that the changes that the world has been undergoing now for some decades, far from representing a *minor, dispersed* and *unrelated* conjunction of modifications, announce and initiate an authentic *change of epoch* and a true *historical discontinuity*.

In effect, everything indicates that we have already set out on the path that leads, simultaneously, towards *a new capitalist era*, towards *a new technological era*, and towards *a new ideological era*. These three great events are tightly tied to each other, are bound in a synergistic relationship, and mutually reinforce each other and comprise *three facets of the same global phenomenon*.

Thus, without pretending to outline, even broadly, a diagnostic of the present, I believe that it is worthwhile to attend to this gestating change of epoch, because it is the *best way* to approach the context in which the anarchism of tomorrow will constitute itself and in which its characteristics will be forged.

## The mutation of capitalism

To begin with the first of these *great mutations*, let us see what is taking place with *capitalism*. And yet, let it remain very clear in advance, that the destruction of capitalism is an *unwavering* demand

In a recent book, it is correctly pointed out that if what fascinates and what attracts our attention are macro-concentrations (the occupation of squares, the anti-summit protests, etc.), it is nevertheless in other places where *the new subversive politics* is being invented: this is the work of dispersed individuals who nevertheless form virtual collectives: *the hackers*.

In analysing their practices, the author specifies that the value of their struggle resides in the fact that it attacks a fundamental principle of the current exercise of power: *the secrecy of State operations*, a strictly reserved hunting area and totally opaque to non-authorised eyes, which the State keeps exclusively to itself. The activists draw on a practice of *anonymity* and of *the elimination of traces* that does not respond to the demands of secrecy, but to a new conception of political action: the opposite of creating an “*us*” heroically and sacrificially confronting power in an unmasked and physical struggle. It is about, in effect, not *exposing oneself*, of reducing the cost of the struggle, but above all of not establishing a relationship, not even of conflict, with the enemy.

## The anarchist invariant

Next to its inevitable differences with classical anarchism, a second consideration that we can advance, also in full confidence, is that to continue to be anarchism instead of becoming something else, the new anarchism should preserve some of the constitutive elements of the instituted anarchism. It is these elements that I like to call “*the anarchist invariant*“, an invariant that unites the current and future anarchism, and that will continue to define, therefore, the anarchism to come.

In fact, this invariant is composed of a small handful of values among which figures prominently that of *equaliberty*, that is, *freedom and equality in common movement*, forming a *unique and inextricable concept* that unites, *indissolubly*, collective freedom and

defies the system, that contradicts its principles, that dissolves its arguments, and that permits the development of transforming community experiences. It is for this reason that, from the new libertarian space that is being woven in different parts of the world, experiences of self-management, of economies of solidarity, of networks of mutual aid, of alternative networks of food production and distribution, of exchange and distribution are developing. The success on this point is complete, for if capitalism is converting itself into a form of life, it is obvious that it is precisely on this terrain, that of forms of life, where part of the struggle to dismantle it must situate itself.

A broad subversive fabric is gaining shape that provides people with antagonistic alternatives to the system, and which, at the same time, helps to change *the subjectivity of those who participate* in them. This last aspect is terribly important for there exists a very clear awareness, in having been formatted by and for this society, that we have no other remedy than to *transform ourselves* if we want to escape its control. Which means that *desubjectification* is perceived as an essential task for subversive action itself.

Lastly, it is by no means infrequent that the alternative anarchist space *converges with broader movements*, such as those that mobilise against wars, or against summit meetings, and those that from time to time occupy squares rediscovering anarchist principles like horizontalism, direct action, or the suspicion before any exercise of power. In fact, one could consider that these broader movements, which *do not define themselves*, far from it, as anarchist, represent what at one moment I qualified as *outside the walls anarchism*, and they prefigure the *coming anarchism*.

Together with these youthful anarchist collectives, another subversive phenomenon that responds to the technological characteristics of the current moment and which enriches as much the revolutionary practices, as the corresponding imaginary, consists of the appearance of hackers, with the practices and form of political intervention that characterise them.

for a political tendency that defines itself by its *struggle against all forms of domination*, including, therefore, *the exploitation of labour*. And this implies that anarchism, both the current and that which is to come, cannot, however it is conceptualised, cease to struggle to *overcome capitalism*.

Well then, what is happening with capitalism is that, contrary to the learned auguries that repeatedly announce *its terminal crisis*, its grand collapse, capitalism continues to demonstrate, as it has amply demonstrated in the past, its enormous *capacity of regeneration*. A capacity perfectly evoked by the metaphor of the *hydra* of which various heads grow for each that is severed.

It is obvious that, as it is able to feed upon *the very thing which opposes it*, capitalism adapts itself and transforms itself with terrible efficacy, and it is carrying through today an authentic *renewal* that distances it considerably from its earlier forms.

Of course, *its internal dynamic continues to be the same*: the appropriation of surplus value, the maximisation of profit, and the commodification of everything that can be commodified. However, its mechanisms, its functioning, its characteristics, all of this is changing.

For example, the new form of capitalism reveals itself to be particularly apt at extracting profits from great flows or fluxes, be they financial flows or the flows of information, among others. Consequently, the production of value no longer depends exclusively on labour, and even though the exploitation of labour power continues to be scandalous, it has lost the greater part of its centrality.

The result is that it is all of the activities of everyday life that this new capitalism converts into a source of profit, seeking to *construct*, rather than simply *search for*, the most appropriate subjects to provide for its gains. It is for it a matter of *producing subjectivities* that perfectly conform to its logic, and which facilitate its functioning, both in the field of consumption as well as in that of work. It is about *constructing* the way to be, the way to feel, desire, think, the way of relating to oneself, the way of being a person, and, for

this, it must *penetrate and colonise our desires*, our imaginary, our motivations, our social relations and, ultimately, how we exist.

Thus, for example, in the domain of labour, capitalism seeks to take advantage of all of the facets of those who are contracted. It does not limit itself to using the technical know how or labour power of a person, rather it endeavours to mobilise the totality of person's resources, from their motivations, their desires, their anxieties, their cognitive means, including even their emotional relations.

And this is made possible thanks to the constitution, over the course of the last century, of a considerable volume of *expert knowledge about the human being*. This as much in the field of biology (the management of life) as in the field of psychology (the production of subjectivities), and in the collective field (the management of populations).

Not even *freedom* falls outside the margin of these operations. It is used today as an *instrument of subjugation* and, for example, hierarchical structures become more flexible so as to increase the submission of subjects or the output of workers. Because it turns out that to govern, to manage and to make large numbers work, if based on freedom, makes it that it is those who are governed and the workers themselves who contribute to improve the mechanisms through which they are governed and exploited.

On the other hand, in *the current globalisation*, the impressive *ubiquity* of capitalism means that *there is no longer anything exterior to it*, that there is no longer an "*outside*" of capitalism, neither spatially, nor socially. It has colonised the whole planet, and even its surroundings, penetrating all of the mechanisms of society, all of the facets of our daily life, and even our own subjectivity. With this, capitalism no longer merely represents a particular economic system, but has become *a form of life* that tends towards hegemony.

Finally, it follows that if its relations with political power have always been close, today it is *supplanting* political power itself. As the *Invisible Committee* rightly points out, political power has moved it-

ments against the system, and sometimes even initiate them. Undoubtedly, this *fragmentation* corresponds to some of the characteristics of the new context which we are entering and which is making possible a new organisation of *the spaces of dissidence*. The current reality which is becoming literally "shifting" and "liquid" demands, certainly, much more flexible, more fluid organisational models, oriented according to simple proposals of coordination to realise concrete and specific tasks.

Like the networks that rise up autonomously, that self-organise themselves, that make and unmake themselves according to the exigencies of the moment, and where temporary alliances are established between collectives, these probably constitute the organisational form, reticular and viral, that will prevail in the future, and whose fluidity is already proving its effectiveness in the present.

What seems to predominate in these youthful anarchist collectives is the desire to create spaces where relations are exempt from the coercion and the values that emanate from the reigning system. Without waiting for a hypothetical revolutionary change, it is for them a matter of living from now on as closely as possible to the values that this change should promote. This leads, among the very many other kinds of behaviour, to developing scrupulously non-sexist relations stripped of any patriarchal character, including in the language, or to establishing relations of solidarity that completely escape hierarchical logic and a commodity spirit.

It also contributes, and this is very important, to the weight that is given to those practices that exceed the order of mere discursivity. The importance of *doing* and, more precisely, of "*doing together*", is emphasised, putting the accent on the concrete effects of this doing and on the transformations that it promotes.

In these spaces, the concerts, the *fiestas*, the collective meals (vegan, of course), form part of the political activity, equal to the putting up of posters, neighbourhood actions, talks and debates, or demonstrations, at times quite forceful. In reality, it is a matter of making *the form of life* be in itself *an instrument of struggle* that

place it, so as to legitimate the new emerging epoch, because this story remains still incipient and confused.

In spite of this, among the elements of this story that begin to outline themselves, what should be noted is the general acceptance of *uncertainty* as a substitute principle to firmly grounded and grounding certainties, or the substitution of transcendent and absolute values for *pragmatic criteria* with a certain *relativistic* aroma, or the re-composition of the moral values inscribed in western culture with the aim of responding, among other things, to the eruption of an ever more probable post-human condition announced both by genetic engineering as by positive eugenics, and also by the intracorporeal implant of RFID chips and other information technology apparatuses.

## Current forms of anarchism

I believe that it becomes quite clear that the context in which the coming anarchism will find itself will be eminently different from the context in which it has operated until recently, which can only but *substantially modify it*.

Some of these changes are already beginning to gain form, such that, to glimpse, even if confusedly, the characteristics of the coming anarchism, it is very useful to observe the current anarchist movement, and especially *its most youthful component*. This component represents a part of contemporary anarchism that already manifests some differences with classical anarchism, and with that which I have sometimes called “neo-anarchism”.

What we can observe at the present is that, after a very long period of very scarce international presence by anarchism, what is emerging and is already proliferating in very appealing ways in all of the regions of the world, are various collectives concerned with a great diversity of themes; multiple, fragmented, fluctuating and at times ephemeral, but which participate in all of the move-

self from the *parliaments*, transformed into mere theatres for the acting out of comedies, to *the great infrastructures of the capitalist economy*. Today, power is inscribed in the latter, the latter which are, for example, the routes and networks of communication and transportation, the transport of persons, commodities, but also energy, or information, those which mould *materially* the established system of domination. It is not necessary for anyone to command anything, we find ourselves *materially* trapped in these infrastructures and our dependence on their proper functioning is total. Whereby, to change society and to really overcome capitalism, it is of little use to burn parliaments if the *technological macro-apparatuses* are not also *dismantled*.

It is thus in this new type of capitalism that the scenario is being constructed for the coming anarchism. And if the latter will not be able to struggle against capitalism as it did before, and if part of the characteristics of anarchism come from this struggle, then it is obvious that from the simple fact that it will continue to fight against the new modalities of capitalism, that it will change necessarily in a very significant way.

## The era of the internet

The second *great mutation* that is taking place consists, as we well know, of our complete entry into *the information era* and, consequently, contemporary capitalism cannot be understood without *the irruption of the information technology revolution*. Without this revolution, it would not have been possible to construct the new capitalist era; the exploitation of *the great fluxes* already mentioned would not attain their present magnitude, nor would they have their current form, and the actual phase of globalisation *would not even have been possible*. It not only represents the global extension of the capitalist market and its productive logic, but inaugurates as well a new economic order that is characterised by, among other things,

*the extraordinary intensification and dazzling speed of interconnections.*

Nevertheless, however important its role in the reconfiguration of capitalism, it is not only at the level of the economy where the *generalised computerisation of the world* has opened a new era; to the extent that it concerns a *technology productive of technologies*, information technology transforms, not one, but *multiple planes of the world*.

It is sufficient to consider, for example, the impulse that it has given to genetic engineering, with the post-human on the not so distant horizon, or how it has renovated the conduct of war, through the growing sophistication of weapons as well as of military strategy (drones, self-guided missiles, cybernetic attacks, without forgetting the transformation of espionage and, more globally, military intelligence).

If all of these changes made possible by information technology are of the greatest importance for the configuration of the world that awaits us, there is one that merits very special attention, that which pertains to a new type of *social control* that is establishing itself and that is fostering *the rise of a new kind of totalitarianism*.

Generalised surveillance, total transparency, complete traceability, unlimited accumulation of data, the constant cross checking of the same, systematic analyses of DNA, the right that the State claims for itself to scrutinise our private life or, lamentably, the voluntary and detailed *self-exposition* of our daily lives. As we well know, thanks to information technology, *all* of our actions, including our silences and our *non-actions*, those that we abstain from carrying out, leave traces that are carefully *archived for ever*, and exhaustively treated by state services as well as by private companies.

Accordingly, it is not only political factors that render our future so menacingly charged with totalitarian threats. In effect, the principal totalitarian danger resides not so much in the rise of the extreme right, but in *the multiple technological apparatuses tied to*

*information technology* that are scattered throughout the world and which are weaving a totalitarian spiders' web where little by little our lives are being entrapped.

In light of the transformations that it is rendering possible, I don't take it as in any way preposterous to affirm that *the colonisation of the world by information technology*, which includes but is not limited to the so-called *internet era*, will imprint, *necessarily*, new characteristics on an anarchism that will have to confront this environment and develop itself within it.

## A new ideological era

Not only does the social and technological world change, for there is change also in an ideological sphere that defined itself over the last centuries by a broad adhesion to the discourse constructed by the Enlightenment and by its adoption as the basis for the legitimacy of an epoch, *modernity*, in which we continue to be immersed, but from which we have begun to depart.

Today in effect it is accepted in an increasingly general manner that the grand narratives of the Enlightenment are no longer credible, and that the meta-narratives of emancipation, progress, triumphant reason, of the project to realise, of science as fully beneficial, of hope in an always better future, etc., confront far too many critical arguments to be able to continue to ground and legitimise the faith in the epoch in which we live.

Always and whenever we do not throw out the baby with the bathwater – because it is evident that the Enlightenment was far from being a homogeneous block, and because some of its principles represent fundamental accomplishments – it remains only to applaud *the critical dismantling of the grand narrative of the Enlightenment* and of the snares that it laid out for us. Nevertheless, it is much more difficult to evaluate the story that is called upon to re-