

AN-ANSWERS...

Catherine Malabou
Kingston University - London

I am very pleased and honored to know that on Salvo Vaccaro's initiative, the exchanges we had in February 2024 at the French Institute in Milan concerning the Italian translation of my book *Au Voleur! Anarchisme et philosophie* (translated into English as *Stop Thief! Anarchism and Philosophy*, Polity Press, 2024), are getting published in *Soft Power*. I would like to thank Salvo, Donatella di Cesare and Tomás Ibáñez for their careful reading and analysis of the book. Of course, all three have not failed to question the orientation of the book (resolutely philosophical) or the choice of authors (many could have been included, such as Plato, or Walter Benjamin). Ibáñez wonders whether the distinction between ungovernable and non-governable is really relevant. As for Vaccaro, he deplores the fact that I didn't treat Foucault any better. Indeed, my book insists on contemporary philosophers' denial of anarchism. Here are five examples: Reiner Schürmann, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Rancière and Giorgio Agamben. I try to show that, although they are all very close to anarchism, none of them has assumed the fact of being an anarchist, none of them has taken the step of political anarchism.

My approach, I admit, is necessarily partial and sometimes unfair - Foucauldian "anarchaeology", for example, is admittedly one of the most interesting and convincing forms of contemporary anarchism. I therefore acknowledge the relevance of the critical remarks made by my three readers. I do not intend to respond to them here, as I believe

it is necessary to let them resonate in their radicality and to respect the hermeneutical directions they open up. I would simply like to point out that none of the three really mentions the fact that my reflections on anarchism are truly contemporary, addressing issues such as anarcho-capitalism, libertarianism and cyber-capitalism today.

The recent leap accomplished by IA is so phenomenal that I do think that intelligence has entered the age of an irreversible metamorphosis, with dramatic political consequences. Simulation, the “for real”, is at stake in the age of what I will tentatively call the age of *anarchic replication*. An-archic having to be taken here literally, as without an “*arkhè*”, that is without a principle, without a commandment. It is not only an age where Artificial Intelligent simulation is limitless, but also an age in which the disappearance of the model/copy dualism allows for the emergence of an absolute horizontality. Such a horizontality is at once technological, ontological and, of course, political. For me, the key issue is whether we can envisage a possible transitioning from “anarchic replication” to “anarchist replication”. What if the new metamorphoses of intelligence were not only the age of cyber-capitalism or libertarianism but also that of anarchism and of non-governability?

As Ibañez recalls, my book starts with the statement that we are currently witnessing the global coexistence of a de facto anarchism, a factual anarchism, and a dawning anarchism. What is de facto anarchism? Nowadays, the state has already disintegrated, offering nothing more than a protective envelope for the various oligarchies that have divided up the world between themselves. Everywhere, the social world is condemned to a horizontality of desertion. In economically privileged “democratic” countries, the effects of the already longstanding collapse of the welfare state continue to circulate indefinitely. No state institution, no common parliamentary organization can respond to the challenges of poverty, migrations and ecological or health crises in any way other than through pitiful emergency measures.

As for the dawning anarchism, the actual collapse in the social meaning of verticality coincides with an emergent planetary consciousness signaled by the dramatic rise in collective initiatives and experiments in alternative political visions. In France, for example, in recent years, occupation strategies, the *Gilets jaunes* movement and, more recently, the protests against Macron have introduced to the political landscape the effective existence of organizations and modes of decision based on self-generated collective modes of organization.

These alternative phenomena coincide exactly with what must be coined as the anarchist turn in capitalism itself, which speaks the now hegemonic language of anarcho capitalism. We are currently living in a time of deep an-archic/an-archist ambiguity.

The development of IA is of course actively participating in this undecidability. Let us consider three examples.

Firstly, the world of the Blockchain, cryptocurrency transactions, and the circulation of non-national currencies, on which I made some research a few years ago. I was first fascinated by the promise this represented: cryptocurrencies leeching off state currencies and compete in the usual circulation of funds by commercial and central banks. Wasn't this announcing the end of a certain epoch of governmentality, centralization and hierarchy? It did not take long for me to understand that these new systems were in reality strengthening control, inequalities and oligarchic trends.

The second example is Taiwan, where anarchists are now holding governmental positions. Such is the case of Audrey Tang, Minister of Digital Affairs in Taiwan, the first transgender prime minister in history, and a genius cybernetician and free software creator who defines herself openly as a "conservative anarchist"¹. They have identified as "post-gender" and accept "whatever pronoun people want to describe [them] with online. I'm really whatever, so do whatever". The pleonasm of "conservative anarchist" should not be misconstrued. What Tang means is that they want to work on the conservation of the anarchist utopia experimented by Net programmers who, over the past twenty years, have been suggesting substituting virtual participative democracies for classical political decision making (Shirky, 2012).

Tang's strategy consists in using open-source coding tools to "radically redesign and rebuild an existing government process or service – and from this create new tools to show citizens how the state operates" (Reprogramming Power, 2018), in other words, to reveal government information to the wider public. Tang themselves have declared in other media:

Simply by changing the "o" to a zero in your browser bar, you enter a "parallel" government site that may be working better, where there are viable alternatives. Under the initiative, g0v, there are currently approximately 9,000 citizen-hackers participating in what we call "bifurcating" the government. In open source culture, "forking" means taking something that is already there, and taking it in a different direction. Citizens accept digital surveillance, but the State also accepts transparency, an openness of its data and its codes, and integrates the criticisms that will necessarily emerge. (Hébert, 2021)

¹ Tang states this on their profile on the platform Medium.com, where they regularly publish article manifestos.

We see the ambiguity: Is Audrey Tang a symptom of domination or emancipation? A reinforcement of the logic of government or its defeat? “Join institutions, all the better to subvert them”. Many critics will say that those are the words of the dominant. And I’ve heard from Taiwanese friends that Tang’s tech governance was very much alike those in the West.

Lastly, much shorter, Elon Musk, who recently declared: “If you must know, I am a utopian anarchist (...)” (2018).

Let’s try to go further in the analysis of those ambiguities, focusing on the sudden appearance of ChatGPT in our lives. Clearly, a new semantic system is emerging in the age of anarchic/anarchist replication, which substitutes the question/answer pair to that of the signifier/signified one on a horizontal plane. It functions as a mirror. Ask me about what *you* intend to mean, and I will answer. I will provide you with the meaning of what you mean. The “asking” structure is more important than what is asked. We don’t care that much about meanings and signifiers, the machine says, we play master and servant, ask me, I will serve and respond to you, while we both know that there is no master at work here, that our relationship is perfectly horizontal, as my answers are the pure reflections of your queries or demands. I can only tell you what you already know. It is in that sense that the question/answer system, as a new semantic structure, can be seen as a form of an-archic mode of organization, an-archic meaning once again without an *archè* in which the production of meaning is built out of the exchange of language with itself. Nevertheless, it seems that an anarchic replication of the lost symbolic relation tends to surreptitiously restore it at the moment when it shows it is lost, while an anarchist replication would be a process of acceptance of the loss.

Chomsky et al. (2023) recently addressed the issue by downplaying the role and importance of ChatGPT. The authors’ contempt is not that surprising when we realize it is a common standpoint among linguists, such as Daniel Everett, who recently declared: “So here is what ChatGPT has done: it has falsified in the starkest terms Chomsky’s claim that innate principles of language are necessary to learn a language. ChatGPT has shown that without any hard-wired principles of grammar or language this program, coupled with massive data (Large Language Models), can learn a language”. ChatGPT learns out of data, not of principles, out of a great diversity of cultural background, without giving priority to any of them.

Many texts similar to that of Chomsky have recently been published here and there, expressing technophobic and apparently reassuring visions of humans being still in control. It is obvious, they say, that ChatGPT cannot respond to everything. Therefore, we should not delegate our authority and responsibility and say, every time the machine

writes in our place: “it’s not me, it’s my ChatGPT”. Responsibility is what is at stake. Response, that is the question.

In the age of anarchic replication, we are witnessing constant attempts at filling the place of response and responsibility with new modes of control, and the promise that one day ChatGPT or more sophisticated systems will answer every question, thus restoring the lost symbolic relationship, reinstating the master. But no, IA won’t ever respond to everything, because absolute responselessness is irredeemable, and the very condition for the existence of intelligence.

Artificial responsless intelligence lets natural intelligence the task of inventing the responsibility for the non-response. This is what anarchism is precisely, order minus power, the task of inventing ways of life and modes of political organizations out of the absolute responslessness. Such are the new techno-political stakes of anarchism, which have become impossible to silence.

References

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