Language, Ideology, and Anarchism

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As an emancipatory perspective, anarchism aspires to replace forms of domination with forms of freedom. Aspirations are wonderful things; they push us toward new achievements, and they hold us accountable when we act. The difficulties begin when our aspirations are not realized, when we try and fail. The difficulties become apparent when we at last acknowledge the staying power that forms of domination possess. One response might simply be to resolve to "fail better"—as Samuel Beckett suggested in *WorstwardHo.* The trial-and-error pursuits of activist practice seem to reflect just such an orientation to the emancipatory project. Another possible response would be to engage in the sort of thinking that emerges whenever our expectations do not come to pass—thinking that runs the gamut from pragmatic problem-solving to academic theorizing. Regardless, anarchists have taken up both the challenge to act and the challenge to theorize in various ways. A few anarchist theorists have sought to meet these challenges, at least in part, by exploring theories of language and ideology.

One among them has been John Zerzan, who devoted an essay to the topic. His primitivist anarchism attacks civilization and culture generally, asserts that "the origin of all symbolizing is alienation" (Zerzan 2006, 57). It regards language as an alien ideology, an externally imposed form of domination.

Alternatively, theorists drawing upon post-structuralist strains of thought have come to see language both as a significantly constraining and as a potentially liberating force. By further exploring issues related to language and ideology, then, this paper constitutes a set of preliminary notes toward articulating an anarchist approach to the theory of language. I certainly do not claim to have fulfilled any such aspiration. My aim here is the more limited one of doing some conceptual or philosophical work that might help further the discussion.

In many respects, language and political theory are coterminous. Plato and Aristotle certainly ruminated about language as they debated a theory of Forms or assessed competing claims to rule.

Hobbes, cautioning against the troubles engendered by any "abuse of words," took particular pains to set forth an explicitly defined vocabulary for moral and political thought. Rousseau also made a contribution—his hypothetical account of the state of nature gave language an important place in the prehistory of civilization. Without it, there would be no lasting communities or societies, and hence, none of the associated inequalities resulting from property and power. More recently, countless contributions to academic political theory have taken an explicitly linguistic turn. This heritage makes it all the more interesting that anarchist theory, with the exception of the postanarchists, has devoted relatively little attention to the topic.

In this context, the essay on "Language: Origin and Meaning" by John Zerzan (2006, 3143) might well be a useful starting point for reflection. Zerzan's primitivism is a good place for this study to begin because in many ways his ideas represent a limit case. Critical of every aspect of a symbolic culture that underlies civilization itself, he sees language, thought, and culture as forms of mediated experience that take us away from our natural essence (Guimaraes 2010, 340). Much as Rousseau did, Zerzan regards domination and repression as the logically and practically necessary outcomes of civilization. Because it represents an aboriginal separation from nature, from direct experience, the advent of language and other forms of symbolic culture marks nothing less than a fall from grace. It marks the point where we become estranged not only from nature and each other, but from life itself.

Beyond that initial estrangement, though, language constitutes another, more insidious phenomenon. As a means for transmitting ideology, language becomes the primary vehicle for the sort of subjugation or domination that anarchists characteristically oppose. Operating through the "closure of symbols," language and ideology work simultaneously to produce false consciousness, thought control, and unfreedom (Zerzan 2006, 32-34). In every society, language conceals and justifies, monopolizes and shapes everyday

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life. "As the paradigm of ideology, language stands behind all of the massive legitimation necessary to hold civilization together" (Zerzan 2006, 35).

Aware that this very critique of reification is itself reified in language, Zerzan does not see an immediate path out of the ideological straightjacket in which we find ourselves. Language and ideology are learned habits of thought, imposed from the outside. They constitute us as part of an unnatural world. The more we are socialized, the more embedded in that world we become; the more embedded, the more estranged. Philosophical insights into language offer no way out, either. To Zerzan, poststructuralist theories simply drain language of meaning. The only hope is to restore some form of authentic communication, which he finds in the sorts of unmediated experiences where language itself is unnecessary. There are but "two kinds of human experience: the immediate, non-separate reality, and separate, mediated experience" (Guimaraes 2010, 339), and Zerzan clearly prefers the former. In short, the ideal situation would be "a world of lovers, a world of the face-to-face, in which even names can be forgotten, a world which knows that enchantment is the opposite of ignorance. Only a politics that undoes language and time and is thus visionary to the point of voluptuousness has any meaning" (Zerzan 2006, 43).

The task, it seems, is to delineate a perspective on language that captures and reflects the aspirations of anarchists. Such an understanding involves an effort to advance a theory of language that is both attuned to abstract theory and reflective of common sense, that is both accurate and emancipatory. This is no easy task, to be sure, but Zerzan's essay provides us with a starting point insofar as it appears to make three critical claims: (1) language and ideology are unnatural, external impositions on the freedom of subjects; (2) language and ideology are hegemonic tools for the legitimation of domination; and (3) language and ideology are closed systems of thought. In what immediately follows, I will examine each of these

claims as potential building blocks for an anarchist understanding of language and ideology.

II

Zerzan's core assumption is that language, like ideology, is an external phenomenon, something imposed by an alien force. We encounter it as the always already existing medium of communication between people. We are given a language almost as a birthright, an inheritance from previous generations. As people develop into subjects, language appears not only as a vehicle for thought and expression, but also as the embodiment of the force of society— in Lacanian terms, the Symbolic Order. Our choice as a subject is to integrate and be content, or to rebel and remain an outsider.

Karl Marx's oft-quoted observation about history (that we make it, but not as we please) seems just as apt as a characterization of our encounter with language. Language stands outside the individual, appearing as an external and restrictive force. As Max Stirner (1995, 305, original emphasis) put it: "Language or 'the word' tyrannizes hardest over us, because it brings up against us a whole army of *fixed ideas*'" As we learn such things as the rules of a grammar or discourse, one's feral spirit is told either to conform or be crushed. Going one's own way, thinking one's own thoughts, expressing oneself in a unique manner—these are simply not possible in the context of a system of communication based upon experiences and truths that are not our own.

Because language is a given, because it seems to stand opposed to individual freedom, Zerzan believes that it can only have arisen from an external source. It can only have appeared as a dastardly means to unsavory ends. In this context, Zerzan (2006, 36-37) seems drawn to two possible ends for the advent of language—one, lying or deceiving in a world where intentions and emotions were oth-

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counter. As Wittgenstein (1958, §18) observes: "Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses." In wandering through that city—squatting here, creating a TAZ there; organizing here, performing direct action there—we are noticing different language-games, observing the range of practices that are possible, developing resources for both criticism and insurrection. In short, we are not merely traveling as nomads from one milieu to another, we are experiencing a life in which the "dogmatism and slogans that formerly proclaimed a new era, the signposts for utopia, are everywhere coming to an end. Everywhere, concepts have turned into reality, becoming unpredictable, shifting, unstable. There is clarity only in the land of appearances and words; where life begins, systems end" (Landauer 2010a, 90-91).

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York: New Press.

erwise transparently conveyed, and two, initiating people into the division of labor that serves as the foundation of civilization. Regardless of the end, language and other symbolic forms of communication appear as a limit upon what is natural and free.

One anarchist who took issue with that view was Rudolph Rocker. In one chapter of his 1937 work, *Nationalism and Culture,* Rocker (1978) argued against any notion that a given language represented the spirit of a particular people, that language had an essentially national character. In his view, though language was inextricably involved with social relations. "In speech, human thought expresses itself, but this is no purely personal affair, as is often assumed, but an inner process continually animated and influenced by the social environment. In man's thoughts are mirrored not only his natural environment, but all relations which he has with his fellows." Though Rocker believes that language carries culture, he did not believe that either language or culture represented something alien to humans in their natural state.

> "For language in its widest sense is not the exclusive property of man, but can be clearly recognized in all social species. That within these species a certain mutual understanding takes place is undeniable according to all observations. It is not language as such, but the special forms of human speech, the articulate language which permits of concepts and so enables man's thoughts to achieve higher results, which distinguish man in this respect from other species (Rocker 1978)."

In other words, speech (understood as vocabulary) clearly has to be taught; however, language (understood as thought and communication) is entirely natural.

In this sense, then, language cannot be understood as an external imposition. As he often observes, Noam Chomsky (2004, 85, 128,

429) believes that language is the outward result of a mental faculty that all humans naturally possess. This mental faculty represents a fundamentally biological capacity—"an essential component of the human mind" (Chomsky 2004, 578)—that allows us to interact with others, to create ever new forms of expression. The capacity to learn a language lies within us and enables us to generate an entire range of sentences that may never have been uttered before. "A person who knows a particular language has the capacity to speak and understand an indefinitely large number of sentences, and uses this ability freely in normal linguistic behavior: in communication, in expression of thought, and so on" (Chomsky 2004, 350). Far from an alien imposition on nature, then, language is a natural element of human life. As expected, Zerzan (2009) regards Chomsky's view of language as a "severely backward, nonradical perspective, not unrelated to his unwillingness to put much else into question, outside of a very narrow political focus." Where Zerzan takes the story of the Tower of Babel to be a metaphor for the loss of innocence and the onset of alienation, Chomsky regards the multiplicity of human languages to be an important indicator of the freedom and creativity found in human nature.

The question of how natural language is or should be was certainly an element in the debate over Esperanto during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Certainly, Esperanto is one the most artificial languages one can imagine—designed to be a *lingua franca* for people from a range of natural languages. Some anarchists and social reformers were convinced that its widespread use would not only encourage international understanding and cooperation, but would also "somehow make people more free" (Guimaraes 2010, 339). Other radical theorists found that Esperanto had little to recommend, however. Antonio Gramsci, who had academic training in linguistics, asserted "the historicity of languages in opposition to the illusory utopia of a language created artificially without any ground or cultural participation" (Rosiello 2010, 32). In a similar vein, Gustav Landauer (2010b, 277) observed how artificial cre-

matter one's preferred "ontological theodicy, politics is the activity of the forming of a common front, the horizontal aggregation of a collective will from diverse groups with disparate demands." Such a conception of politics can be seen within Laclau's logics of equivalence and difference. Such a conception of politics requires confronting a dilemma of congruence—replacing one ideological perspective with another can happen only if the new perspective is somehow congruent with the old. Agents of social and political change cannot persuade folks to embrace a new world view "unless people see the point of it—that is, unless they can acknowledge its links to former habits of thought and unless it somehow speaks to their condition" (Williams 1997, 141). The pressure for congruence, I believe, translates relatively seamlessly into common anarchist demands for prefiguration—for being the change we wish to bring.

In *Culture and Value,* Wittgenstein (1980, 20e) observes that sometimes one's philosophy appears to be simply "a matter of temperament, and there is something in this. A preference for certain similes could be called a matter of temperament and it underlies far more disagreements than you might think." Temperament may indeed account for the various strains of anarchist and radical thought explored above, as well as for my preference for a pragmatic, Wittgensteinian account of language. Still, such an account reminds us that language and ideology—as well as the forms of domination that they create and support—are all part of the life we currently experience. We cannot rest content with that reminder, though, because the aim of our theoretical and activist practices is to put us on a path toward liberation.

In this context, it is worth noting Christopher Robinson's (2006, par. 31) suggestion that "Wittgenstein's theorizing is not conservative; his descriptivism entails and even demands a life devoted to non-conformity; and the conventions he exposes at the base of all human languages is the source of political and critical freedom." The free, creative aspect of his theorizing emerges in the multiplicity of language-games and the diversity of forms of life that we en-

and captivating (Owen 2003, 87-88). When our perspective comes into question through genealogical description and critical reflection, or when things begin to appear in a new light, genuine transformation is possible. "Aspect dawning or change occurs when one realizes that a new kind of characterization of an object or situation may be given, and we see it in those terms" (Norval 2006, 235).

Wittgensteinian reflections about aspect dawning lead one to the view that identification is largely a retrospective, even retroactive, process. It emerges not merely through rational persuasion, but also through a subject's active participation in a practice: "The subject becomes a democratic subject, not simply because she is rationally convinced it is the better option, though that may be part of the story, but rather because she participates in democratic practices, which retroactively allow her to identify as democratic subject" (Norval 2006, 241). In other words, because of this redescription of herself—because of this aspect change—the subject sees herself and things in general quite differently now. Processes of redescription are central not only to identity formation but also to the battles over representation, the "semiotic street fights" (Thompson 2010, 31), that occur after nearly every major protest. With Black Bloc activists often pegged as terrorists, with anarchists generally coded in stereotypical ways, redescription is necessary if the prevailing frames are to be undermined: "By speaking about what the mask *enables* and not what it *means*; by not seeking to simply refute possible negative readings ..., the Black Bloc statement [posted on infoshop.org] effectively reformulates the relationship between activists and objects" (Thompson 2010, 57, original emphasis).

In contexts related to identity, ideology, and language, the prospects for change seem to be ever problematic. If revolution were easy, it would be an everyday occurrence; but it is not. Breaking free of old habits and conventional practices is not for everyone, nor can an abstract ethics of the demand be particularly motivating for most people. A more pragmatic orientation to the emancipatory project is required. Critchley (2007, 147-148) observes that, no

ations such as Esperanto could "never capture what is most important in a language: the fine shades, the nuances, the unspeakable. In the grown languages, a lot of what is said lives between the words as an unutterable element." Any insistence on the organic character of language certainly suggests that not all that is natural is bad—even if it supports civilization.

III

To treat language as natural, though, does not wholly undermine Zerzan's position on language and ideology. Like language, ideology can never truly be neutral. Holding an ideology embeds one in and further legitimizes a pre-existing community; holding an ideology, like speaking a language, frequently puts one on the side of the established order. As John Thompson (1984, 130-131, emphasis deleted) has observed, "to study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning (signification) serves to sustain relations of domination." Functional analyses of ideology thus have noted that, in addition to giving folks some cognitive purchase on the world, ideological positions put people into relationships with others. Beyond identifying a person with a particular community, ideologies also serve a hegemonic function—they ratify the choices that people make by ensuring their legitimacy or rightness.

Mention of hegemony naturally brings to mind the ideas of Gramsci. In his view, language and ideology helped constitute what he called 'common sense'—an ordinary understanding of how the world works. For most people, common sense functions as a kind of philosophy, and it provides people with the cognitive frameworks through which they grasp the meaning of social and political phenomena. Gramsci (1971, 377) acknowledges that, as a "historically necessary" element of any social structure, ideologies "have a validity which is 'psychological'; they 'organise' human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness

of their position, struggle, etc." Over time, this common sense becomes second nature to people's ways of thinking and acting.

Gramsci's discussions of hegemony examine language and ideology (or, more broadly, culture) as a means for advancing the political and economic interests of particular groups, parties, or social classes. In his view, "the State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules" (Gramsci 1971, 244). If the ruling ideas of an epoch are indeed the ideas of the ruling class, as Marx noted, then the ideas of classes seeking to rule must somehow be invoked in ways that replace the others. No revolutionary movement is possible without a revolutionary consciousness, as we know. As a result, because symbolic systems are never neutral, the crucial question in evaluating any particular manifestation of language, ideology, or culture is: *Who benefits?*

Gramsci observed that all parties (and, we could say, all ideologies) carry out a policing function—the function of safeguarding interests in the context of maintaining order. It need only be asked whether the function is performed for a reactionary or a progressive purpose. In Gramsci's (1971, 155) words: "Does the given party carry out its policing function in order to conserve an outward, extrinsic order which is a fetter on the vital forces of history; or does it carry it out in the sense of tending to raise the people to a new level of civilisation expressed programmatically in its political and legal order?" This positional question necessarily focuses our attention on the role played by language as a material force in the political contest between classes, between the state and its antagonists.

The focus of political action thus has to move from direct challenges to state power (wars of maneuver) to indirect efforts aimed at undermining hegemonic world views (wars of position). Because direct challenges to a hegemonic world view are likely to fail, one must proceed instead with a patient and difficult siege (Gramsci 1971, 239) that seeks to undermine the legitimacy of domination by

of a language" (Wittgenstein 1969, §63). Any sustained alteration in the language-games we play suggests a corresponding alteration in the practices we perform, in the forms of life we inhabit. In short, we have arrived in a highly pragmatic fashion at the "contingent determinacy" favored by May, without resort to any elaborate ontological architecture.

Though a Wittgensteinian account of language has much to recommend it, its utility for the anarchist project may still remain in doubt—particularly because Wittgenstein has been viewed as both a philosophical and political conservative (Robinson 2006). To show the fly the way out of the bottle, to show that Wittgenstein might have something meaningful to say to anarchists, let us return to the issue of how to construct an alternative, oppositional identity. For Simon Critchley (2007, 112, original emphasis), "the labour of politics is the construction of new political subjectivities, new political aggregations in specific localities, a new dissensual *habitus* rooted in common sense and the consent of those who dissent." Similarly, the labor of political theory becomes one of describing how it is possible for all that to happen. All too often, though, theorists ponder matters at such an abstract level that they ignore Wittgenstein's (1958, §66) telling admonition to *look,* rather than *think,* when we contemplate matters such as the concept of a game or the nature of language. If we take this admonition seriously, then we need to explore matters such as identity formation from a more grounded standpoint.

The central question is how might a change in any dominant grammar of identity be possible? How can we rearrange or articulate that grammar's elements in novel ways. When a grammar has become sedimented or naturalized, subjects come to take things for granted or to see them in the same way—a phenomenon that David Owen (2003) has called "aspectival captivity." Aspectival captivity develops when a given picture of the world becomes an implicit background or horizon ('natural forgetting'), when it is taken for a universal ('philosophical repression'), when it becomes entrancing

ture, at least initially; we first have to accept: "The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes *after* belief' (Wittgenstein 1969, §160, original emphasis). As certain habits of thought and action become established, they become constituted as common sense, as second nature. As Wittgenstein (1980, 64e, original emphasis) remarked of religion, "although it's *belief,* it's really a way of living, or a way of assessing life. It's passionately seizing hold of *this* interpretation." We always learn to interpret our lives through the prism of the language-games whose lessons we have absorbed. Even so, Wittgenstein embraces no foundational or essentialist assumptions about the subject positions available to us, no grand narrative on the order of either class struggle or hegemonic contest.

Finally, our account of language should acknowledge its contingent and open-ended character. For Wittgenstein (1969, §559), a language-game simply exists: "It is there—like our life." Nevertheless, it is not a permanently fixed feature. Not only does a language-game change with time (Wittgenstein 1969, §256), but it is clear that "language has no single essence" and is instead "a vast collection of different practices each with its own logic" (Grayling 1996, 79). Although we "make ourselves in the practices that make us" (de Acosta 2009, 31), those same practices emerge and dissipate in a seemingly perpetual evolution.

At one point in the *Philosophical Investigations,* Wittgenstein (1958, §309) asked himself, "What is your aim in philosophy?" His answer: "To shew the fly the way out of the fly- bottle." The emancipatory project in which anarchists are engaged has much the same orientation. It involves developing a political space for action, "the creation of an interstitial distance within the state, the continual questioning from below of any attempt to establish order from above" (Critchley 2007, 122-123). That creative activity depends upon using imagination: "If we imagine the facts otherwise than as they are, certain language-games lose some of their importance, while others become more important. And in this way there is an alteration—a gradual one—in the use of the vocabulary

calling common sense into question. Because language represents the source of identify and understanding in a system of political and economic stratification, because it offers the "concrete space for every possible hegemony" (Gensini 2010, 70-71), any effort to undermine orthodoxies begins in the very domain in which we are always already embedded. Superseding any hegemony will require criticizing popular views and transforming common sense. Such a reorientation is no doubt premised on a situation in which most people are educated and open enough to hearing arguments, and then acting, on the social and political questions of the day. Gramsci's purpose, according to Marcus Green and Peter Ives (2010, 296), "is to ascertain the content and meaning of common sense, to understand how the masses conceive life, the world and politics, with the point of radicalizing common sense and providing subaltern groups with the intellectual tools necessary to confront dominant hegemony, philosophy and power."

Language thus becomes the tool for switching valences from the reactionary to the progressive pole. Within any hegemonic configuration, then, the goal must be to transform language from a conservative (for anarchists, statist) force into a progressive (that is, anti-statist) one. Logically prior to creating a receptive public, though, is self-education—developing a critical perspective on one's own conception of reality or world view. Knowing oneself "as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory" (Gramsci 1971, 324) is where the revolution begins. Breaking free of established world views thus becomes the very essence of dissidence, the necessary precursor to political transformation.

Loosening the grip of language and ideology in this way might seem relatively easy, at first glance. All one need do is to take people with sufficient education and provide them with the facts of the matter. This rationalist approach to political awareness is what Chomsky (2006, 69) has advocated: "With a little industry and application, anyone who is willing to extricate himself from the system

of shared ideology and propaganda will readily see through the modes of distortion developed by substantial segments of the intelligentsia." All it takes is a sound mind, a bit of intellectual effort, and ideological liberation will soon be at hand. However, social scientific explorations of framing (Lakoff 2004; Nunberg 2007), our experiences with recent policy debates (e.g., health insurance reform in the United States), not to mention our long delayed emancipation—all these suggest that the easy answer is not a viable one. People often remain subject to, and at times reinforce, the very prejudices and stereotypes that they might otherwise decry. How, then, can hegemonic world views be undermined? What can be done to break free of our linguistic and ideological chains?

A Gramscian answer would work through the socio-political nature of the hegemonic situation. Even though a given hegemony seems well-established and deep-rooted, it remains problematic at its core. Despite its best efforts, "no matter how totalizing a system might be, it will never achieve its ambition of totality—it is impossible to create a system with no outside" (Day 2005, 175). Try as it might to subjectify individuals in sundry ways, it cannot ever fully succeed; a symbolic lack (some element that cannot be signified) will always remain. Most conventional political projects have attempted "to 'fill' or 'suture' this fundamental lack in society, to overcome its fundamental antagonism. But this is an impossibility: the Real of antagonism, which eludes representation, can never be overcome" (Newman 2001, 147). In the context of Ernesto Laclau's discourse theory, then, any hegemonic world view must ever be incomplete, must always remain contestable. "That is to say, while discourses endeavour to impose order and necessity on a field of meaning, the ultimate contingency of meaning precludes this possibility from being actualized" (Howarth 2000, 103). Through political and linguistic activity, subjectivities and antagonisms emerge; logics of equivalence and difference are thus configured and (in moments of dislocation) reconfigured in various ways, as given political situations warrant (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 1996).

Wittgenstein's approach urges us to think pragmatically. In doing so, we should return to our criteria for an adequate theory of language. First, it must accept that language is natural, that it represents some great existing fact. Wittgenstein's approach most definitely begins with just such a perspective. For him, language is an integral element of a community's practices; indeed, "the term „language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of a language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (Wittgenstein 1958, §23, original emphasis). Members of a given community do not have to deliberately impose rules from the outside; they do not have to force creativity and expressiveness out of an individual. What happens instead is that the rules inherent in our practices are taught in the context of various "language games" involving interactions between speakers. The language games help set the boundaries of appropriate use of words. In so doing, it establishes individuals as members of the community and gives them the capacity to act. A Wittgensteinian perspective, without any need for linguistic science or extra-historical ruminations, allows us to view language as a natural phenomenon.

Second, an adequate theory of language should acknowledge that language is not merely natural, but also hegemonic. Though language is "woven into all human activities and behavior, and accordingly our many different uses of it are given content and significance by our practical affairs, our work, our dealings with one another and with the world we inhabit" (Grayling 1996, 79); it should be seen as neither autonomous nor essentialist. In learning a language—that is, in participating in a form of life—we naturally come to accept certain things as valid and true. "The child learns to believe a host of things. I.e., it learns to act according to these beliefs. Bit by bit there forms a system of what is believed, and in that system some things stand unshakeably [sic] fast and some are more or less liable to shift. What stands fast does so, not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it" (Wittgenstein 1969, §144). Doubt never enters the pic-

asking the question 'What does it signify?' and ask instead 'What does it produce? What can it be used for?'" The latter questions are certainly in the spirit of anarchism's focus on concrete practice rather than abstract theory, on doing rather than being. They are very pragmatic questions about how we get on with things, about how we use language to carry on with the tasks of life—political, social, and otherwise. In other words, they are questions that point to an as yet unexplored source for an anarchist account of language that I believe meets the criteria set forth above. As noted, an adequate account must not only regard language as natural, hegemonic, and contingently open-ended; in addition, it must also have some satisfactory implications for anarchist practice.

For all the attractions of poststructuralist thought, I propose that an adequate account of language could be drawn from Ludwig Wittgenstein. His approach shares with anarchism a pragmatic orientation that emphasizes practice over theory—even in the course of theorizing. His focus is not on developing an abstract ontology of the subject, but rather on what language could *do* (and not do) for people: "Think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-drive, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails, and screws.—The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects" (Wittgenstein 1958, §11). In reading a good bit of poststructuralist writing, one often gets the sinking feeling that language has gone on holiday(Wittgenstein 1958, §38). Wittgenstein provides an important corrective because, for him, it is more useful to focus on describing our everyday practices. This position he shares with Alejandro de Acosta (2010, 119), who noted that anarchism's "commonplaces (direct action, mutual aid, solidarity, affinity groups, etc.) are not concepts but forms of social practice. As such, they continually, virally, infect every even remotely extra-parliamentary or grassroots form of political action. And, beyond politics, they compose a kind of interminable reserve of social intelligence."

A different approach draws on the Situationists, who relied upon such tactics as the *detournement* (subversive misappropriation of images and artifacts) and the creation of "situations" (occasions for unmediated play) to help people break out of their intellectual imprisonment by the "spectacle" (Sheehan 2003, 122-124; Knabb 2006). By creating enough disruption of our everyday consciousness, we will doubtless be shaken out of our ideological stupor. Thinking along these same lines, for example, Hakim Bey aims to disrupt the routines of everyday life, to disrupt the normal course of business, through such mechanisms as Poetic Terrorism, Art Sabotage, and most notably, the Temporary Autonomous Zone. Bey (2003, 33, original emphasis) thus seeks to "murder the IDEA—blow up the monument *inside us*" in order to shift the balance of power; he sees this *"sabotage of archetypes* as the only practical insurrectionary tactic for the present." Bey eventually denies having any overtly political intent or instructional purpose, however. By focusing on art, imagination, immediacy, and experience, his approach concludes with a Nietzschean emphasis on "pure expression" ("Peter Lamborn Wilson Interview, Part 2" 2009, section 7).

As Richard Day (2005, 8-9) has noted, anarchist theory and practice has thus moved from an approach based on the logic of hegemony (taking or influencing state power) to one based on the logic of affinity (working with others in ways that prefigure new social relations). Political theory and action are no longer understood to occur on the large scale associated with narratives that focus on a cataclysmic political and social event—"the Revolution." Instead, political activity occurs over a variety of localized domains and emphasizes a micropolitics that calls "for social, personal, and political experimentation, the expansion of situated freedom, the release of subjected discourses and genres, and the limitation and reorientation of the role of the intellectual" (May 1994, 112).

As noted above, Zerzan saw language and ideology as a linked system of hegemonic justification. From Gramsci forward, the question has always been how exactly one goes about undermin-

ing a given hegemonic world view. An early response was to suggest that one's opponents were in the grip of a false consciousness, that they were mired in the distortions of ideology. Such a restrictive or negative conception of ideology (Seliger 1976) falls, though, when it becomes evident that there is no privileged social class, that no one has a monopoly on either science or truth, that one's own world view is just another ideology among many. In such a context, the radical political task is "to disarticulate the ruling discursive structures that guarantee the reproduction of relations, that is, to undertake an educational work that rearticulates these discursive structures in the perspective of social transformation" (Maas 2010, 92). Here again, though, difficulties abound. We soon come to face the fact we willingly submit to our own subjection—whether conceived as giving in to the spooks of fixed ideas (Stirner), as falling prey to the machinations of desire (Deleuze), or as some other phenomenon. Undermining the legitimacy of a legitimizing ideology therefore is not easy, nor can the goal be achieved in any direct way. For many, the aim can be attained only through fostering clever breaks with the flow of mainstream ideas, patiently organizing ideological and political coalitions, or crafting new forms of social relations built on the principle of affinity.

IV

Zerzan's approach to language seems to foreclose such options for turning around hegemonic configurations, however. His prevailing view seems to be that, fundamentally, language and ideology operate as closed systems. Because they are closed systems, there is no point of working within them or trying to transform them. The only truly radical option for Zerzan is to go outside them—to (re)create a world beyond ideology, beyond language. In making this move, he retraces a familiar route that insists on "a radical conceptual division between two ontological orders—that of

communication; even if there were such a reason, the possibility of returning to a proto-human form seems remote at best.

Even though language is natural, it nevertheless confronts us as an external force because it is always already here. We are embedded within its rules and discourses as soon as our linguistic faculty begins to operate. In that context, it becomes easy to regard language and ideology as agents of social reproduction, as vehicles of and supports for domination, as "screens of power" (Luke 1989). The great problem for anarchist and other forms of radical political thought is to show how it is possible to resist and remove domination. Whether the spark of resistance stems from conceptual breaks fostered by autonomous practices and situationist *detournements*, or from the ontological fissures highlighted by poststructuralist theorists, anarchists and others have argued that the existing order need not be a permanent one. As we have been often reminded, another world *is* possible.

Reviewing the interactions among language, ideology, and anarchism traced above, I am reminded of Chomsky's (2004, 113) observation that "a Marxist-anarchist perspective is justified quite apart from anything that may happen in linguistics." Although he regards any connection between his linguistic (scientific) and anarchist (political) views as tenuous at best, Chomsky does notice that they both are imbued with a spirit of creativity and freedom. Rocker (1978), too, pointed to this creative aspect when he asserted that language "is a structure in constant change in which the intellectual and social culture of the various phases of our evolution is reflected. It is always in flux, protean in its inexhaustible power to assume new forms."

Still, the search for a satisfactory account of language that could support anarchist inquiry and practice has not yet concluded. The hesitations and concerns about the philosophical and political adequacy of poststructuralism expressed by May remain to be addressed. In his own postanarchist classic, May (1994, 94) quotes from *Anti-Oedipus*, in which Deleuze and Guattari urge us to "stop

jectification might provide a suitable self-understanding for anarchist theory and practice.

V

In his review of Saul Newman's *From Bakunin to Lacan,* though, Todd May (2002, par. 11) observed that he was "not convinced that by utilizing a deconstructive approach to language and politics there is room for the kind of collective action that seems necessary for political success." The indeterminacy intrinsic to such theories, he suggested, would be more likely to drive people apart than to bring them together. A better approach, in May's view, would be to "articulate a conception of language that sees meaning—and the political categories that arise from it—as determinate but contingent, rather than necessarily indeterminate." In discerning an anarchist theory of language, one has to take this concept of "contingent determinacy" very much to heart. Certainly, the analysis above suggests that we need an account of language that comprehends it as simultaneously *natural* (rather than external), *hegemonic* (rather than politically neutral), as well as *contingently open-ended* (rather than closed). The anarchist theorists treated above appear to provide us with ideas that meet these criteria.

Chomsky, for one, tells us that the language faculty is a natural one for human beings. It need not be interpreted as natural in the essentialist sense, but rather, it should be seen as natural in the biological sense—in other words, the ability to work with language is as natural to us as the ability to grasp with opposable thumbs. Language is a great existing social fact; it is one of the most natural things in the world. As Landauer (2010b, 277) observes: "Anarchists need to understand that the basis of both individual life and human co-existence is something that cannot be invented. It is something that has to grow." Human communication is necessary, but there is no reason to assume (as does Zerzan) that it has to be non-symbolic

'natural authority' and 'artificial authority'"—the Manichean route taken by the classical anarchists (Newman 2005, 36). Zerzan has, in other words, sought to locate nature as the radical outside of civilization, as an anti-language position from which to attack symbolic culture.

In a world where our worldviews and identities have all been constructed by language and ideology, can an emancipatory politics even be conceived on such a basis? In a world where domination characterizes the vast range of social relations, is such radical freedom ever really possible? If we are embedded within language and ideology, are we not also permanently mired in them? Can radical theorists and activists identify a language that operates contra language itself? Such questions are at the heart of recent thinking about language, ideology, and politics; they are the ones to which we now turn.

Of course, poststructuralists, post-Marxists, and postanarchists alike have tilled these fields for some time now. Remarkably, for all their work highlighting the power that linguistic, discursive, and ideological systems have over us, most such thinkers have not reached the sorts of conclusions advanced by Zerzan. Poststructuralist thinkers suggest instead that not only are such linguistic and discursive systems essentially contestable, they are contingent and open-ended—if not altogether entropic.

Any synoptic discussion of poststructuralist views of language naturally must be beyond the scope of this paper. Because capable scholars have explored the territory so well, it should suffice here merely to review some of their findings. Perhaps the best place to start is with Saul Newman (2001; 2005; 2010), whose work provides a thorough examination of poststructuralist thought from an anarchist perspective. Acknowledging that it undermines or deconstructs linguistic, political, and other structures, Newman provides us with an account of the two main positions in poststructuralist thought. "The first position, exemplified by thinkers like Foucault and Deleuze, suggests that rather than there being a single, cen-

tralized structure, there are instead multiple and heterogeneous discourses, power relations or 'assemblages of desire' that are constitutive of identity, and are immanent throughout the social field" (Newman 2005, 5).

Michel Foucault's work, it seems to me, primarily has outlined how power operates in a constructive manner to constitute different subject positions. Discursive and disciplinary mechanisms fashion the different sorts of identities that are possible within any given social configuration, and these identities both enable and constrain us.

> "Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth—that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault 2006, 168)."

Like Marx before him, Foucault's contributions also highlight the evolving nature of social and political institutions and discourses. To know that life could be otherwise, to abandon a fatalistic point of view, is doubtless an important step toward emancipation. If other identities are possible, and I can choose which ones to adopt, then we are surely pointed toward one possible exit from the cycle of subjectification and reproduction. The range of identities available to us is theoretically quite vast because the linguistic and ideological systems that we confront are not only filled with contradictions, they are never wholly systematic. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987, 161) suggest that a different social order, a different machine is always possible. "Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous

has already been done, as one could point to countless examples of writing for anarchist papers, zines, and other unconventional outlets. Still, might not a postanarchist who is prescriptive about what form of writing is sufficiently anarchist ironically fall victim to the very essentialism postanarchism critiques? Can one even identify a specifically anarchist style, as opposed to a liberal or Marxist one?

In sum, postanarchism generally offers a useful corrective to the essentialist ontology held by theorists like Zerzan. As noted above, Zerzan regards language as the decidedly closed system that undergirds civilization and its ills. Without any hope of reforming it, or any way to work within it—doing so would be akin to collaboration with the enemy—there is but one path to liberation, which is to abandon language altogether. Zerzan urges anarchists to strive for an authentic form of communication that is beyond words, that is outside symbolic culture. For poststructuralist theorists, and the postanarchists who have learned from them, such a pure radical outside is but an impossible dream. As Newman (2010, 13) observes, anarchist politics should not be based "on essentialist identities, processes of dialectical unfolding or on a certain organic conception of the social body; rather the possibilities of radical transformation should be seen as contingent moments of openness that break with the idea of a naturally determined order."

The antiessentialism that makes poststructuralist thought appealing carries within it this "theoretical impasse: if there is no uncontaminated point of departure from which power can be criticized or condemned, if there is no essential limit to the power one is resisting, then surely there can be no resistance against it" (Newman 2001, 5). Newman and others suggest that poststructuralism nevertheless contains the answer to the very problem it presents. An outside is possible, but it is not a permanent or radically exterior outside. Instead, "an outside can emerge, paradoxically, from the *inside*—that is, from within these very structures of language, discourse, and power" (Newman 2005, 159). In this way, poststructuralist ontologies that highlight the limits of signification and sub-

Another Lacanian, Slavoj Zizek, observes that any ideology can only be maintained by illusion or fantasy—the illusion that people make conscious decision; the fantasy that obscures ideology's role in structuring our outlooks. If any ideology functions through fantasy, then, just how is it possible for individual subjects to emerge from its grip? The answer that Zizek (1989, 84, original emphasis) offers is to traverse the fantasy; as "soon as they perceive that *the real goal is the consistency of the ideological attitude itself,* the effect is self-defeating." In other words, "because ideology expects to be taken cynically, the ultimate act of transgression is perhaps to follow it to the letter, to thoroughly identify with it" (Newman 2005, 67). From a psychoanalytic standpoint, traversing the fantasy of ideology might make therapeutic sense.

From the standpoint of political practice, though, the advice seems problematic. Consider this: In the face of an omnipresent state, how should an anarchist behave? Taking Zizek seriously would suggest that an anarchist, opposed to all forms of coercive authority, should embrace the state to the fullest—become its cheerleader, campaign and vote for candidates, get a degree in public administration, and pursue a bureaucratic career.

A number of French feminists also found inspiration in Lacanian theory, as they pondered what it meant for women to be in but not of the Symbolic Order. In their view, women—whose status is outside of language, who possess a *jouissance* beyond signification—would never be liberated unless a new language could be developed. For Helene Cixous (2000), this meant creating a feminine writing *(I'ecriture feminine)* in which women could write themselves *as* women, and thereby, break out of a masculine libidinal and cultural economy. For Cixous (2000, 261, original emphasis), writing thus represents *"the very possibility of change,* the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures." If women need to "write through their bodies" (Cixous 2000, 267), perhaps anarchists should begin to "write through their freedom." Perhaps this

place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times." Because multiple codes pervade systems of discourse, because there exist smooth spaces to contrast with the striated ones, people have more many options to explore than they realize.

Returning to Newman's typology, we find that the "second position, exemplified by thinkers like Derrida and Lacan, places more emphasis on the structure itself, but sees it as indeterminate and unstable" (Newman 2005, 5). Indeed, one of the chief contributions that Jacques Derrida makes is to identify language as a realm of undecidability, "an indefinite fluctuation between two possibilities" (Derrida 1991, 194). Even in the most carefully constructed text, there remain concepts and ideas that do not cohere, problems that are left unstated and unresolved. The contradictions and aporias that Derrida frequently finds in literary and philosophical texts suggest that no impregnably closed system of thought could ever be devised. Jacques Lacan similarly regards the external orders that constitute subjects as highly capable, but flawed. They effectively constitute the identity of any subject, but that identity must ever remain incomplete or inadequate. For example, once I identify as a _____, it is always in order to ask if being a is all there is to life. One is always left wanting more, so identification thus becomes the process of trying to fill the lack at the heart of the subject (Olivier 2004; Laclau and Zac 1994).

The political implications of poststructuralist thought no doubt are many, but the one that matters most is this: the subjects, structures, and discourses that constitute the political are all contingent, indeterminate, and open-ended (Newman 2005, 140, 154). At this point, poststructuralism reveals its affinities with anarchism; indeed, under the influence of poststructuralist critiques of identity and ontology, a postanarchism that is simultaneously antipolitical and political has emerged. As an anti-politics, postanarchism

shares with traditional anarchism "its rejection of the state and its suspicion of political representation, and it endorses its fundamental ethical critique of political power" (Newman 2010, 69). As a political theory and practice, postanarchism endorses any number of revolutionary projects (insofar as they are rooted in an ethics that shuns hierarchy and adopts a prefigurative stance) without having any guarantee that they either will be successful or will avoid replicating the domination they seek to replace.

An anarchism built on poststructuralist insights into language and discourse can take us in any number of directions. One direction would have us pay attention to the performative aspects of identity suggested by Foucault and deftly developed by Judith Butler (1999). In her view, gender—and by extension, ideological identity—is neither a substance nor a set of attributes; rather, "gender is always a doing." It is constituted by "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler 1999, 33, 44). In this context, processes of repetition and iterability, not singular acts of decision, provide the route to new constructions of one's identity (Butler 1999, 179-188). From this point of view, then, one is not born, but becomes an anarchist. Becoming an anarchist does not mean joining a party, taking a vow, or making a decision; rather, it likely involves succumbing to a seduction, giving oneself over to "the feeling of anarchy's lure" (de Acosta 2009, 27). Becoming an anarchist simply means doing the things that anarchists do (whatever that might be)—and doing them over and over again.

A second theoretical direction suggested by poststructuralism affirms not only that language is contingent and open-ended, but that the struggle against the State is similarly so. For example, in conceiving their political practice, postanarchists have settled for "a nomadic agent of change: one that can disappear, who is not bound by place, or past experiences" (Franks 2007, 138). As nomadic agents learned to flow in and out of vortices, as they be-

gan to explore the smooth spaces in any social configuration, they recreated the model of revolutionary struggle. Rather than direct, frontal assaults on the citadels of power—assaults designed to acquire power—they preferred indirect encounters focused on creating room for autonomy. In this context, then, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 353) certainly altered the metaphors of political struggle. Traditional images of revolution call to mind a game of chess: "Chess is indeed a war, but an institutionalized, regulated, coded war, with a front, a rear, battles." A better image, they suggest, is that of Go—a game marked by "war without battle lines, with neither confrontation nor retreat, without battles even: pure strategy, whereas chess is a semiology." The problem with this approach, of course, is that traditional organizing gives way to expressive acts—resulting in the tension between "social anarchism" and "lifestyle anarchism" featured in the famous polemic by Murray Bookchin (1995).

A final theoretical direction suggested by poststructuralism focuses on Lacanian psychoanalysis. Famous for having observed that the unconscious is structured like a language, Lacan reinterpreted Freud's theories of psychosexual development in order to account for its linguistic character. Resolving the Oedipal situation, then, becomes a matter of integrating into the Symbolic Order or not. Nevertheless, a Lacanian route to social and political liberation is not immediately obvious.

Ernesto Laclau (1996, 52), for example, points us toward the lack at the heart of any subject—a conception in which "antagonism and exclusion are constitutive of all identity." To put it another way, "identity is constituted around a fundamental lack at the heart of the subject, and that identity is constituted through the identification with external objects, thus temporarily filling the lack" (Thomassen 2004, 558). The lack, though, can never be successfully overcome. Just as soon as one identifies as an anarchist, for example, then the expansive content of what being an anarchist involves beckons; perpetual dissatisfaction and alienation ensue.