

CONSTRUCTING ANARCHISMS: A WORKSHOP
Organized by Shawn P. Wilbur
WEEK NINE READINGS

Constructing an Anarchism: Individualism

We're in a stage of the construction of this first anarchism where we have to focus on the ideological and practical implications of the theory of *collective force* and *unity-collectivities* we have been exploring. I had originally intended to address these questions in a different manner, focusing on the concepts of *mutualism* and *federation*, but the concerns remain much the same.

Part of the context for the emergence of Proudhon's anarchist ideas was a period in which new *isms* were emerging seemingly everywhere one might look. For those unaware of the proliferation of ideologies in that period, it's worth tracking down Arthur E. Bestor's 1848 essay on "The Evolution of the Socialist Vocabulary," just to get a sense of the real fervor for inventing ideologies — even if, in the end, you might be inclined to say with Proudhon that "all these isms aren't worth a pair of boots." This was the context in which Proudhon proposed a "system of mutuality" that would, he said, be "all-powerful" against the range of ideological extremes. Things turned out differently, but perhaps he had good reasons for his confidence at the time.

We have been wrestling with questions regarding individuals and collectives, ordinarily the ideological province of *individualism* and a range of potential opposites — *socialism*, *communism*, *collectivism*, etc. Part of the immediate background of Proudhon's work was the work of figures like Pierre Leroux, who is generally credited with having introduced the paired notions of *individualism* and *socialism* to French political thought in the early 1830s. His "Individualism and Socialism" is one of the first things we will look at in our historical survey, precisely because of his attempt to introduce those now familiar and frequently embraced isms as undesirable extremes that would have to be balanced. When we compare the conditions under which anarchist ideas emerged in the 1840s and those under which anarchism emerged roughly forty years later, one of the most obvious contrasts is the extent to which the tendencies that Proudhon seemed intent on denying separately, and balancing, had become the core concerns of competing anarchist ideologies.

I confess that I am fairly *old school* in my rejection of both simple individualism—in all of its more atomistic forms—and all of the forms of "social" thought that, when push comes to shove, don't seem to amount to much but some kind of anti-individualism. But I've also come to believe that there just aren't that many really atomistic theories of the individual—at least of any seriousness—and I think that the work so far in "Constructing Anarchisms" and "Rambles in the Fields of Anarchist Individualism" backs me up.

There are, I think, still very good reasons to be concerned about the means of identifying *individualities*, whether it is a question of human individuals or relatively distinct social bodies, and to think clearly about their individual physiology, as well as their means of relating to one another. Part of that process clearly responds to concerns and ways of thinking about the world that we tend to associate with the various "social" ideologies, but those ideologies seem rather short on the tools necessary for delimiting and distinguishing. Most of the dogged opposition to communism as a solution to specific social problems is arguably based in somewhat underdeveloped conceptions of social relations and there is an important lesson to be learned about how our identification and examination of individualities is never complete until we have examined their larger contexts. But most communist and socialist analyses are unfortunately

threadbare when it comes to tools for analyzing the *communes* or the *society* on which they focus, just as the presumably more radical forms of democracy seem to give us an even fuzzier picture of the *demos* involved.

My approach is explicitly synthetic—with synthesis here being a means of recovering an early anarchist perspective that would have denied any one-sided emphasis—but I often find that I have to draw my tools primarily from the individualist side of the familiar divide. As the selection from E. Armand and the pages of *l'en dehors* should demonstrate, there are also some real literary pleasures associated with exploring the individualist currents.

The ultimate goal, of course, is not in any way to deny the social, but to address *association* in consistently anarchistic terms. In the context of Proudhon's sociology and the unity-collectivities that we have been discussing, we know that it is not just “two men” or “two families, two cities, two provinces” that might “contract on the same footing.” Proudhon's treatment of the State as “a kind of citizen,” with interests of its own and some kind of standing in social negotiations, still encounters the other citizens “on the same footing.”

We're moving toward a theory of anarchic encounter, taking quite seriously Proudhon's assertion that, in the anarchic “social system,” “there are always only these two things, an equation and a collective power.” The first step in that process is to recognize the variety of individualities that might encounter one another, recognizing their variations in scale without building any hierarchies among them, and recognizing that only some of them will be what Proudhon called “free absolutes,” capable of conscious reflection.



We'll pick up that thread next weekend, in the first of a series of posts really breaking new ground for me, as I try to suggest how Proudhon's rudimentary “social system” might scale up from the simple interpersonal scale, while at the same time sketching some of the ways that non-governmental federation might meet the needs of anarchic societies.

The suggested readings for this week are quite short. Those with the time to take a look at Pierre Leroux's “Individualism and Socialism” should find it interesting. The section from Charles Fourier's *The Theory of the Four Movements*, describing the “pear-growers' series,” is another dip back into so-called “utopian socialist” theory, explaining part of the dynamics of *harmony*, the era and condition in which human interactions all revolve around the satisfaction of our various passions. It will provide some context for next week's discussion of *guarantism*, another notion that originated with Fourier.

The Theory of the Four Movements

Note A

I must anticipate one objection that will no doubt be addressed to me on the subject of that new domestic Order that I call the PROGRESSIVE SERIES. It will be said that the invention of such an order was a child's reckoning, and that its arrangements seem mere amusements. Little matter, provided we reach the goal, which is to produce industrial attraction, and lead one another by the lure of pleasure to agricultural work, which is today a torment for the well-born. Its duties, such as plowing, rightly inspire in us a distaste bordering on horror, and the educated man is reduced to suicide, when the plow is his only resort. That disgust will be completely surmounted by the powerful industrial attraction that will be produced by the progressive Series of which I am going to speak.

If the arrangements of that Order rest only on some child's reckonings, it is a remarkable blessing of Providence which has desired that the science most important to our happiness was the easiest to acquire. Consequently, in criticizing the theory of the progressives series for its extreme simplicity, we commit two absurdities: to criticize Providence for the ease that it has attached to the calculation of our Destinies, and to criticize the Civilized for the forgetfulness that causes them to miss the simplest and most useful of calculations. If it is a child's study, our savants are below the children for not having invented that which required such feeble illumination; and such is the fault common to the Civilized who, all puffed up with scientific pretensions, dash ten times beyond their aim, and become, by an excess of science, incapable of grasping the simple processes of Nature.

We have never seen more striking evidence of it than that of the stirrup, an invention so simple that any child could make it; however, it took 5000 years before the stirrup was invented. The cavaliers, in Antiquity, tired prodigiously, and were subject to serious maladies for lack of a stirrup, and along the routes posts were placed to aid in mounting horses. At this tale, everyone is dumbfounded by the thoughtlessness of the ancients, a thoughtlessness that lasted 50 centuries, though the smallest child could have prevented it. We will soon see that the human race has committed, on the subject of the "passional series", the same thoughtlessness, and that the least of our learned men would have been sufficient to discover that little calculation. Since it is finally grasped, every criticism of its simplicity will be, I repeat, a ridicule that the jokers will cast on themselves and on 25 scholarly centuries which have lacked it.

Let us come to the account I have promised; I will explain here only the material order of the series, without speaking in any way of their relations.

A "passional series" [considered as a group] is composed of persons unequal in all senses, in ages, fortunes, characters, insights, etc. The sectaries must be chose in a manner to form a contrast and a gradation of inequalities, from rich to poor, from learned to ignorant, [from young to old,] etc. The more the inequalities are graduated and contrasted, the more the series will lead to labor, produce profits, and offer social harmony.

[When a large mass of series is well-ordered, each of them] divide in various groups, whose order is the same as that of an army. To give the picture of it, I am going to suppose a mass of around 600 persons, half men and half women, all passionate about the same branch of industry, such as the cultivation of flowers or fruit. Take, for example, the series of the cultivation of pear trees: we will subdivide these 600 persons into groups which devote themselves to cultivating

one or two species of pear; thus we will see a group of sectaries of butter-pears, one of sectaries of the bergamot, one of sectaries of the russet, etc. And when everyone will be enrolled in groups of their favorite pear (one can be a member of several), we will find about thirty groups which will be distinguished by their banners and ornaments, and will form themselves in three, or five, or seven divisions, for example :

SERIES OF THE CULTIVATION OF PEARS,

Composed of 32 groups.

Divisions. Numeric PROGRESSION Types of culture.

- 1° Forward outpost. 2 groups. Quince and hard hybrids.
- 2° Ascending wing-tip 4 groups. Hard cooking pears.
- 3° Ascending wing. 6 groups. Crisp pears.
- 4° Center of Series. 8 groups. Soft pears.
- 5° Descending wing. 6 groups. Compact pears.
- 6° Descending wing-tip. 4 groups. Floury pears.
- 7° Rear outpost. 2 groups. Medlars and soft hybrids.

It does not matter if the series be composed of men or women, or children, or some mixture; the arrangement is always the same.

The series will take more or less that distribution, either of the number of groups, or the division of labor. The more it approaches that regularity in gradation and degradation, the better it will be harmonized and encourage labor. The canton which gains the most and gives the best product under equal conditions, is the one which has its series best graduated and contrasted.

If the series is formed regularly, like the one I just mentioned, we will see alliances between the corresponding divisions. Thus the ascending and descending wings will unite against the center of the series, and agree to make their productions prevail at the cost of those of the center; the two wingtips will be allies and unite with the center to combat the two wings. It will result from this mechanism that each of the groups will produce magnificent fruits over and over again.

The same rivalries and alliances are reproduced among the various groups of a division. If one wing is composed of six groups, three of men and three of women, there will be industrial rivalry between the men and the women, then rivalry within each sex between group 2, which is central, and the end groups, 1 and 3, which are united against it; then an of No. 2 groups, male and female, against the pretensions of groups 1 and 3, of both sexes; finally all the groups of the wing will rally against the pretensions of the groups of the wingtips and center, so that the series for the culture of pears will alone have more federal and rival intrigues than there are in the political cabinets of Europe.

Next come the intrigues of series against series and canton against canton, which will be organized in the same manner. We see that the series of pear-growers will be a strong rival of the series of apple-growers, but will ally with the series of cherry-growers, these two species of fruit trees offering no connection which could excite jealousy among heir respective cultivators.

The more we know how to excite the fire of the passions, struggles and alliances between the groups and series of a canton, the more we will see them ardently vie to labor and to raise to a high degree of perfection the branch industry about which they are passionate. From this results

the general perfection of every industry, for there are means to form series in every branch of industry. If it is a question of a hybrid [ambiguous] plant, like the quince, which is neither pear nor apple, we place its group between two series for which it serves as link; this group of quinces is the advanced post of the series of pears and rear post of the apple series. It is a group mixed from two types, a transition from one to another, and it is incorporated into the two series. We find in the passions some hybrid and bizarre tastes, as we find mixed productions which are not of any one species. The Societary Order draws on all these quirks and makes use of every imaginable passions, God having created nothing that is useless.

I have said that the series cannot always be classified as regularly as I have just indicated; but we approach as closely as we can this method, which is the natural order, and which is the most effective for exalting the passions, counterbalancing them and bringing about labor. Industry becomes a diversion as soon as the industrious are formed in progressive series. They labor then less because of the lure of profit than as an effect of emulation and of other vehicles inherent in the spirit of the series [and at the blossoming of the Cabalist or tenth passion.]

From here arises a result that is very surprising, like all those of the Societary Order: the less that we concern ourselves with profit, the more we gain. In fact, the Series most strongly stimulated by intrigues, the one which would make the most pecuniary sacrifices to satisfy its self-esteem, will be the one that will give the most perfection and value to the product, and which, as a consequence, will have gained the most by forgetting to concern itself with interest and only thinking of passion; but if it has few rivalries, intrigues and alliances, little self-esteem and excitement, it will work [coldly,] by interest more than by special passion, and its products and profits alike will be much inferior to those of a series with many intrigues. Therefore, its gains will be less, to the degree that it has been stimulated by the love of gain. [We must then plot a grouped series, organize intrigue, as regularly as we would a dramatic piece, and, in order to achieve this, the principal rule to follow is the gradation of inequalities.]

I have said, that in order to properly organize intrigues in the series and raise to the highest perfection the products of each of their groups, we must coordinate as much as possible the ascending and descending; I will give a second example to better etch that arrangement in the mind of the readers. I choose the parade series.

[Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur]

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WEEK TEN READINGS

Constructing an Anarchism: Guarantism

For Charles Fourier, *Guarantism* was one of the stages between *Civilization*, the undesirable present state of things, and *Harmony*, a state in which the harmonious expression of the passions would occur more or less naturally, thanks to lessons learned and tendencies developed along the way. Guarantism wasn't perfect, but it was good enough that he resisted describing it too fully, lest we be tempted by its relative splendors.

Proudhon borrowed the term from Fourier, making it a near-synonym of two more familiar terms, *mutualism* and *federalism*. As we turn to questions about anarchic social organization, I want to talk about relations that will certainly align with familiar understanding of those terms, but I want to start from the borrowed notion of guarantism, precisely because it is difficult for even those pretty well versed in the theory of the early 19th century to come at that term with too many preconceptions.

I also want to underline something that has been true right along, but will no doubt be increasingly so through the final weeks of this “quarter:” « my guarantism » is best understood as an appropriation of an appropriation. I am largely going to skip over the step of documenting and interpreting Proudhon's use of the term across his works, in part because he didn't use it a lot, but primarily because the most interesting part of that usage, for our purposes, is the connection of the three terms already noted. We need to talk in general, non-utopian terms about social organization and I really want to keep things fairly simple. We have a good idea now, I think, of the various ways that things can get complicated. But now seems like a good time to take advantage of one of the surprisingly simple model that Proudhon gave us of “the social system.”

We'll dig a bit into the details, but try to stick to one short and already familiar passage from *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*:

Two men meet, recognize their dignity, state the additional benefit that would result for both from the concert of their industries, and consequently guarantee equality, which means economy. There is the whole social system: an equation, and then a power of collectivity.

Two families, two cities, two provinces, contract on the same footing: there is always only these two things, an equation and power of collectivity. It would involve a contradiction, a violation of Justice, if there were anything else.

I've already suggested one clarification, recognizing that the individualities that might meet “on the same footing” need not necessarily be similar in terms of scale. If, for example, the State should be understood as “a kind of citizen,” engaging with the more easily recognizable citizens on the same footing, then we can assume a rather marvelous simplicity and strict horizontality in our model—however complicated the application may ultimately become. Each encounter always involves the same two elements: “an equation, and then a power of collectivity.”

Every time I encounter that formula—“une équation, et par suite une puissance de collectivité”—I want to translate it a little bit differently. There is quite a rabbit-hole that we could plunge ourselves into if we wanted that kind of fun, tracing Proudhon's revision of the

phrase and its echoes in other parts of the text. At one point, Proudhon is *this close* to refuting his own patriarchal tendencies... But what's important to us is that he eventually settled on not just a (small) collection of necessary elements, but on a kind of process as well. In 1858, the formula is simply a list:

Voilà tout le système social : une puissance de collectivité, une équation.

In 1860, it has been revised to show a kind of process: “an equation, and then a power of collectivity.”

Let's treat the steps in that process as active. We begin with an *ecounter*, as two individualities meet and (mutually) “recognize their dignity.” We wouldn't be stretching the sense of things much to say that they see themselves in one another. And let's acknowledge that, given the range of possible encounters we have acknowledged, that is not always going to be easy. *Equation*, according to the first definition in the *OED*, is “the action of equalling.” Let's underline the fact that the equation in question here may be a sort of task.

The task of equation accomplished, something new emerges: *une puissance de collectivité*. Let's distinguish *puissance* from the various other power-words, recognizing that what emerges directly from this active equation is a potency, a collective potential. And let's note that Proudhon was prone to presenting “la puissance de collectivité ou la liberté” (the collective potential or liberty) in their own sort of equation.

That may seem like quite a bit of close reading, but we're barely skimming the surface. We have our process of encounter and equation—a horizontal, anarchic process—which produces a collective potential. And if this potential collective then acts in a *concerted* manner to grasp that “additional benefit,” then perhaps, given the spartan simplicity of our “social system,” we are back to the stage of an individuality—the unity-collectivity composed in the process of concerted action—in search of a new encounter, a new equation, a new collective potential, then perhaps a new concerted effort, a new unity-collectivity, and so on...

There isn't a lot left to account for in Proudhon's brief description. The two individualities encounter one another, see themselves in one another, note the benefits that might be gained by concerted effort and “se garantissent en conséquence l'égalité, ce qui revient à dire, l'économie.” What remains is presented as a consequence of the other steps. Having progressed this far in their encounter, the two individualities “consequently *se garantissent* equality, which essentially means *economy*.” The near equation of *equality* and *economy* might reward some additional investigation, but we know already that the process we're examining is the one that produces *collective force*, first in potential and then in actual form. So perhaps the sense of that equation is not shrouded in too much mystery. That just leaves a translation of the verb *se garantir* and some judgment about the sense of that “consequently.”

I initially presented the action in question as one of mutual “guarantee,” taking some cues from Proudhon's well-known tendency to talk about anarchic association in terms of “contracts,” “pacts,” “transactions,” etc. The move, familiar from works like *The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, of folding political functions into the economic realm is a useful one, but perhaps one that needs a bit of clarification in a context where “libertarian” capitalists are among anarchists most persistent rivals.

One way of thinking about the process of mutual guarantee would certainly be contractual. We can imagine the encounter of individualities, the mutual recognition and the noting of potential advantages in concerted industry, followed by some more-or-less formal sort of

agreement—a *contract*, a *pact*, a *transaction*, etc.—that would, as a consequence, mutually guarantee the equal status of the contracting parties. And that, I think, has been a fairly common way to read Proudhon's intent. But it is perhaps not entirely clear by what *anarchistic* mechanisms that mutual guarantee could function. It would seem to depend on voluntary submission to some sort of enforcement mechanism, posing problems for the kind of strictly non-governmental anarchism that I have been working toward.

However, *garantir* also has other senses. Apart from the uses related to insurance, collateral and formal contracts, it can also simply mean to *protect* or *safeguard*. Searching for a reading of the passage more consistent with the sort of anarchy we have been discussing here—and considering what seems to have been an emerging understanding of consequences in Proudhon's revision of the passage—we might, I think, propose an account of the process that skips that step of explicit contractual agreement. We would start, as always, with the encounter and mutual recognition, note the advantages of concerted effort, establish a collective potential and then perhaps we could envision the mutual safeguarding of an even footing as a direct result of those previous steps.

I am not certain that we can make the jump in every instance. Equation is almost certainly not without its own costs—both as a task and as a condition with consequences—and there is probably some balancing between potential gains and potential costs likely to intervene between the potential and actual phases of collective force. But if we are to take seriously the account I have given, back just a few paragraphs ago, about the *cycle* of encounters and concerted actions, taking seriously the ways in which our associations complicate our interests, essentially creating the fabric of both our unique individuality and our share of *society* (another term that, in Proudhon's hands, enjoys close relations with *anarchy*, *liberty*, etc.), then we might see some kind of mutual safeguard or protection as a fairly direct result of free association itself.

Guarantism, in that sense, would just be the consequence of *getting mixed up* with other people, with associations, with the world around us, etc. To draw on the egoist elements that we have been incorporating into this construction, we're talking about safeguarding others because we have not just seen ourselves in them, but have joined our *might* (puissance) to theirs, made them in some sense « our own » — a sort of *equation* perhaps not so alien to Proudhon's thought.



I think I'll leave things there for now, having already delayed this post a few days to deal with snow-shoveling and pressing domestic tasks. I expect that there is plenty here to chew on for a day or two. But I'll try to return fairly quickly to some thoughts on broader applications of the theory. We have covered a lot of the basic ground associated with *mutualism*, but not so much of that usually associated with federalism.

[Who is the Contr'un? — Introduction]

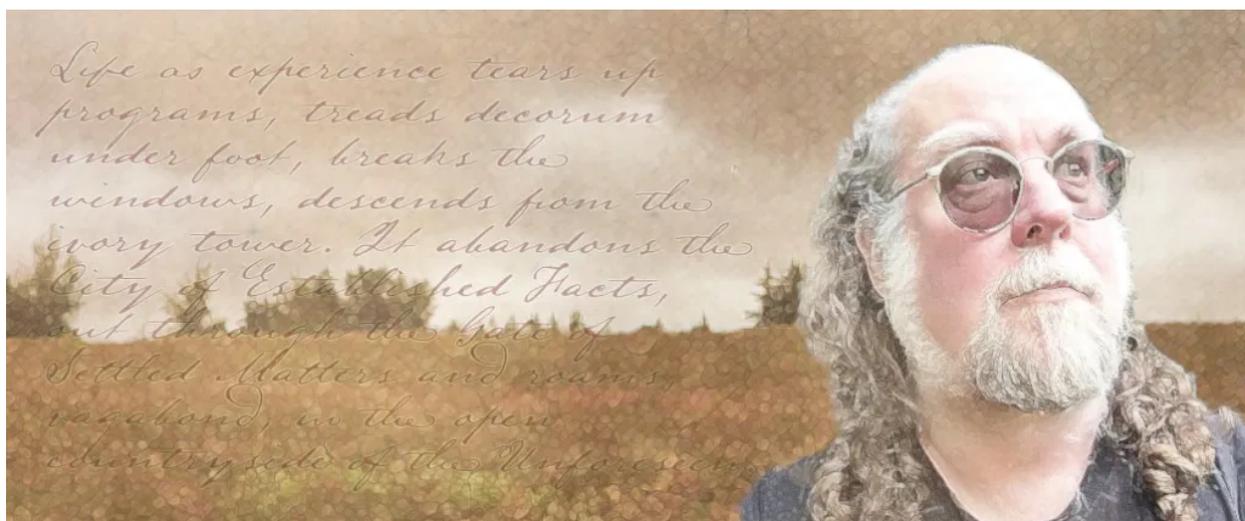
I am not, when all is said and done, an individualist—not, at least, in any exclusive or defining manner. Anyone who has followed my work can no doubt guess that I have derived a great deal of pleasure from the literature of individualism, and particularly from the anarchist individualism of figures like E. Armand. I count Stirner among my influences (and that guy with all the funny names among my friends), but neither am I an egoist. I'm generally of the opinion of Proudhon—("All these isms aren't worth a pair of boots!")—but I'll answer happily enough to anarchist, mutualist, synthesist.

Still, if I can't embrace individualism as an identity or an ideology, I've never seen the means to do without it as one discipline or practice among those necessary to life as an anarchist. And I feel fairly confident that, despite all of the attempts to jettison it along the way, the anarchist tradition has never found those means either. So it seems natural at this stage in the work on Our Lost Continent and the Journey Back to take the time to come to terms with anarchist individualism and begin to sketch out its place in the synthetic plain anarchism I am presently seeking to elaborate.

Were circumstances different, this particular part of the project might have waited for another time, but as the pandemic has shifted my focus to works on hand, and as the 20th-century individualists have captured my attention for the moment, I'm happy to embrace when circumstances have placed in front of me. And, with both the character of the material to be addressed and those rather unusual circumstances in mind, my intention is to tackle this phase of things somewhat differently than I have some of the others.

Taking my cues from the columns of papers like l'en dehors, I'll be organizing my thoughts about anarchist individualism in somewhat smaller and perhaps more easily digestible chunks than usual: sketches, notes, vignettes, perhaps a prose poem and perhaps some odds and ends scavenged from old posts and other writings.

And, indeed, to start things off, what better than on old entry introducing the figure of the Contr'un...



Who Is the Contr'un?

[Originally posted May 19, 2014]

Basically, the *Contr'un* is the star of the show here, the Whitmanesque subject who contains multitudes and is not contained between hat and boots, who spills out over all the property lines we might draw, at the same time drawing the world in without attempting to claim exclusive domain. It is the subject understood in its general economy. It is an individual characterized by an *antinomic* relationship with its own individuality, a counter-self, the one against the (absolutist) One. It is frustrating, messy (at least in the context of our attempts to draw clean boundaries, *improper* (in senses that draw out all the various connotations of the *proper*), and perhaps rather more *feminine* (in familiar, probably important, but also rightly contested terms) than we are accustomed to assume—and where the conventionally *masculine* elements don't seem in harmony with a *phallic* sort of identity. It is the form of the actors in a world where *solidarity means attack* (if I may be forgiven for that appropriation) at a more or less metaphysical level, where Universal Antagonism is the first fundamental law of the universe, but where the second is a kind of reciprocity that justifies that antagonism without seeking to destroy it.

In theoretical terms, a focus on the *Contr'un* as anarchistic subject has all sorts of consequences for how we think about *property* (non-exclusively, to begin) and how we think about *identities* (where perhaps the non-*exhaustive* character is the starting point.) As insights in those areas scale up, it has the potential to work a fairly complete overhaul on a lot of the familiar apparatus of anarchism. I've already made suggestions about a different sort of class analysis, as well as a different analysis of intersectionality. Most of that work, however, remains to be done, as just the question of *property* alone has been enough to occupy much of my time here for several years now. The time is coming to get right down to it, but there is some useful review and clarification to be done first.

In more personal, practical terms, the *Contr'un* is really the position from which this blog is written. My own opposition to absolutism and fundamentalism, even when it is the absolutism and fundamentalism of would-be anarchists, is at the heart of the project here. Historical work, archiving, and close reading of texts may seem like fundamentally conservative labors to some (often those who haven't done much of the work), but faced with the sort of false memory syndrome that afflicts so much of the movement, it's sort of amazing what can manage to be radical. I think about Joseph Déjacque's colorful opening to *The Humanisphere*:

I take possession of my solitary corner and, there, with teeth and claws, like a rat in the shadows, I scratch and gnaw at the worm-eaten walls of the old society. By day, as well, I use my hours of unemployment, I arm myself with a pen like a borer, I dip it in bile for grease, and, little by little, I open a way, each day larger, to the flood of the new...

and think, "right there with ya, brother." That absolutist *One* comes in a wide variety of guises, and in the last year I've been exploring some of the ways that anarchism itself might join the list of possibilities. In case it hasn't been clear, that doesn't seem to me to be any sort of idle speculation. From my perspective, it seems more like addressing a real, present problem in the movement. And that is what has suggested the necessity of focusing some attention of what I've been calling *contr'archy*, the aspect of anarchism that concerns itself with avoiding absolutism,

and returning to the metaphor of the two guns of mutualism, to all the ways in which the most consistent anti-authoritarian theory and practice may still threaten to blow up in our faces. On this more personal register, the Contr'un is me, and, I suspect, most anyone who wants to join me in my explorations here for any length of time.