Post-Anarchism: A Reader

Book Review

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Post-Anarchism: A Reader
Edited by Duane Rousselle and Süreyyya Evren

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Whether one views post-anarchism as a broadening of classical anarchist thought or a pragmatically impotent ideology immersed in the academic vagaries of French intellectuals, the multifaceted approach to resistance espoused in this movement has madean impact in the field of radical thought. In this collection of essays, Rousselle and Evren provide an invitation to explore the current debates raging within this field of post-anarchism. The selections in this reader are not presented canonically, but as a contextual overview of this developing current of theory.

Evren, in the introduction, positions post-anarchism in the third period of anarchism since the nineteenth century, closely aligned with the antiglobalization movements. Theoretical shifts in the history of anarchism, then, culminate around three historical events: the First International in 1856, the May 1968 protests, and the World Trade Organization protests in 1999. However, understanding the history of anarchist theory as a linear narrative of historical events belies the complexity of anarchist literature. At the same time, ignoring the historical period within which anarchist streams of thought developed is equally problematic. Herein lies the crux of the matter, according to Evren, instead of critically reappraising a broad spectrum of classical anarchist thinkers from a post-structuralist perspective, many post-anarchist writers portray the classical anarchist tradition as chained to a modernist perspective devoid of imagination. The four sections of this reader speak to this conundrum.

The first section of the book presents some of the major figures in the field of post-anarchism: Saul Newman, Todd May, and Hakim Bey. Newman, by dismissing classical anarchism as narrowly focused on two constructed subjects (class and state), argues that post-structuralist political theory is best espoused through a post-anarchism lens of collective, localized forms of resistance with a radicalized subjectivity. May echoes this sentiment by arguing that post-structuralist theory, in its emphasis on self-determination over political representation, is more anarchist than traditional anarchist theory. Bey underscores this point by pointing out the lack of diversity in traditional anarchist movements today. Succinctly, as a theory based in the rejection of representation or fixed human nature, post-structuralism lacks a political import.

In the second section, various authors dissect the multitude approach of post-anarchism in terms of practice. If post-anarchism broadens the concept of power beyond class and state to include gender, race, sexuality, and ethnicity, then a new understanding of power is necessary. Anton Fernandez de Rota, in his essay, explores

the cyborg as a representation of these excess identities, immersed in a web of power. Tadzio Mueller, argues quite persuasively that our collective identity puts us all in positions of oppressed and oppressor. As a corollary, power is not an element to overcome, but a pervasive web to untangle. Mueller recommends post-anarchists activists to participate in a diverse array of counter-hegemony tactics. Both Richard J. F. Day and Jason Adams criticize nonhegemonic practices as recreating the very structure they aim to dissolve: namely, by universalizing single identities (gender or race) as the primary form of oppression over all others. Day argues that many new social movements become hegemonic in their critique of alternative movements. Using the antiglobalization movement as an example, Day calls for all movements to search for relations of equivalence and create "constellations of opposition."

Having established post-anarchism theoretically and practically, the third portion of the reader opens up broader critiques of post-anarchist thought. Sandra Jeppesen attacks the prominent thinkers of post-anarchist thought as largely white, male, Eurocentric writers. Allan Antliff argues directly against May's contention that classical anarchism lacks a theory of power and fails to accomplish its own agenda. Repositioning post-anarchist thought within the larger field of anarchism, Benjamin Franks praises post-anarchist thought for illuminating the dogma and essentialism found in classical anarchist thinkers, but criticizes post-anarchists for ignoring the equal importance of class while championing individual agendas.

The final section of this book is somewhat of an outlier to the rest of the text, with the exception of Hilton Bertlan's essay critically reappraising Emma Goldman through a post-structuralist lens. In her analysis of Goldman scholarship, Bertlan illuminates the breadth of Goldman's thought beyond a singular political focus on the feminine. This is the exact project Evren calls for in the introduction. The rest of the essays are varied, and are included in an attempt to show the theoretical dexterity of post-anarchist thought in the field of cultural studies. Though Lewis Call's essay detailing the post-anarchist attributes of Buffy the Vampire Slayer is entertaining, several of the essays should have been integrated into other sections of the book. Nathan Jun's excellent essay rediscovering post-anarchist elements within the classical anarchist canon, illuminating the need to continue producing alternative modes of thought and resistance, would have been better situated in the second section of the reader.

Inevitably, certain readers will quibble with the exclusion of any number of post-anarchist thinkers and activists. However, the collection successfully achieves the goal of providing an entry point to the discussion, not providing a scholastic lineage. Whereas comparable anthologies on the subject (Erika Biddle, Stevphen Shukaitis, David Graeber, eds., Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations, Collective Theorization [Edinburgh, UK: AK Press, 2007]; Randall Amster, Abraham

DeLeon, Luis Fernandez, Anthony J. Nocella, II, Deric Shannon, eds., Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy [London, UK: Routledge, 2009]) are pitched to an academic audience, the selections in this compilation are both accessible and digestible. Rouselle and Evren offer a provocative glimpse of post-anarchist thought through the views of its proponents and critics.

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