Anarchism and critical management studies: a reflection from an anarchist studies perspective

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Riding the wave of nearly twenty years of global activism, anarchism has established a niche hold in a diverse range of research fields. It would be a wild exaggeration to say that anarchism research has entered the mainstream, but hardly an embellishment to argue that the possibilities of the anarchist turn have been recognised by significant groups of scholars. Richard J. White and Colin C. Williams, in their contribution to this special issue, outline the potential for critical management studies: anarchism not only offers a framework to 'expose, subvert and undermine' dominant assumptions about the social order but also a set of distinctive and innovative alternatives to it.

The value of adopting an anarchist squint in CMS might be measured by the challenges involved. A number of contributors explain the want of anarchism in the field by pointing to the fundamental tension that exists between the concepts with which CMS operates and the ethical principles that anarchism champions. Benjamin Franks probes definitions of 'business' and 'management' to identify a 'corporocentric' value system in business ethics which 'privileges market values' and runs counter to the bioethics of social anarchism. Patrick Reedy observes similar problems with accepted conceptions of 'organisation'. Starting from Ahrne and Brunsson's 'complete' formulation, he argues that this assumes the existence of hierarchy and a highly centralised apparatus for decision-making which regulates members by command, compliance-monitoring and sanctions. These impossibly strict criteria not only run counter to ordinary-language understandings of organisation, suggesting that some groups called organisations are in fact something else (would the OECD qualify as an organisation on these criteria?) they also normalise a set of practices and

behaviours that are antithetical to any conceivable form of anarchism. As a result, however, Reedy argues that anarchism 'suggests a different set of evaluative criteria for thinking about the everyday practices of alternative organisations. Even the simple but rarely considered idea that organisation should primarily exist in order to meet the material, existential and social needs and desires of its participants creates and evaluates space that moves us beyond the usual consideration of struggle and resistance in conventional workplaces'. In other words, because CMS appears to operate in a conceptual universe that is hostile to anarchist perspectives and testing for anarchists to negotiate, it's possible to find a positive stimulus for CMS in anarchist thinking. Indeed, the inventive and productive ways that anarchism has approached questions of organisation in theory and through practical experimentation might be seen as its primary contribution to CMS.

Anarchism and organisation

'Anarchists are not against organization'. Martin Parker, George Cheney, Valerie Fournier and Chris Land are of course right, but the contrary view remains stubbornly persistent. The idea that anarchism is against organisation is not explained solely by the historical misrepresentation of anarchist thought: some anarchists have argued that the capacity for groups and individuals to behave anarchistically makes the construction of organisational systems redundant and potentially risky. Anti-organisation currents cut across the left-right, communist-individualist divide that Franks discusses and they are not restricted to the forms of Stirnerism lampooned by Fernando Pessoa (which Brigitte Biehl-Missal and Raymond Saner examine). However, there's a considerable distance between the principles of anarchist anti-organisationalism and the anti-organisation ideas that critics of anarchism ascribe to anarchists without discrimination.

As Pierre Guillet de Monthoux's essay suggests, one of the central tenets of the anti-anarchist anti-organisation thesis is the apparent resonance of classical elitist critique with anarchism. On this account, Robert Michels's iron law of oligarchy exposes a truth about bureaucratic degeneration and the effects of state centralisation which anarchists might accept. However, the conflation of elitism with anarchism encourages a parallel elision of organisation with hierarchy. Correctly understood as an antonym for hierarchy, or priestly rule, anarchy is thus also wrongly interpreted as the antonym of organisation. Proudhon described anarchy as 'no-rule', yet it appears to stand for no rules, underpinned by a philosophical critique of authority that renders decision-making impossible. This construction works against anarchism in two ways. As anti-authoritarians, anarchists emerge as critics of organisation by default, whether or not they

actually call themselves anti-organisationist, and hopelessly idealistic to boot. Indeed, in the light of Michels' insistence that anarchist communism was not an exception to the 'law' that he formulated, (though he argued that it was more resistant than either syndicalism or parliamentary socialism, the main target of his attack), the presumed anarchist rejection of organisation appears futile. Unlike elitists, who embrace the oligarchic tendencies apparently latent in organisation, anarchists can only advocate for fluid alternative practices knowing that they will inevitably solidify time or, as Frenzel's analysis of climate camps shows, by mirroring what are deemed to be statist practices. For as long as anarchist conventions are described in oppositional terms, anarchism will inescapably be shown to be incapable of delivering any of the functions that organisation makes possible. At the same time, concepts that feed into contestable mainstream conceptions of organisation (of 'decision-making', 'rule', 'membership' and so forth) remain unexamined.

Anarchists who explicitly disavow organisation sometimes appear to follow the logic of this argument and moralise the concept. As Fabian Frenzel argues, this is the approach taken by Ahrne and Burnsson, which he also adopts. Hierarchy, membership, rules, monitoring and sanctions, he argues, are entailed by organisation. Networks, on the other hand, 'are social forms without organization'. In anarchist circles, organisation is sometimes conflated with a particular idea of power. Bob Black's view is that 'organization makes inevitable the crushing of an individual who is right by a machine which is wrong' (1994: 48-9). The worry here is about fetishism and the homogenising, disciplining practices that allegiance to policy encourages. Members of organisations might not seek to oppress others, but they nonetheless end up coercing them because they prioritise the well-being of the organisation over the interests of any of its members.

Anarchist anxieties about organisation are more productively read in the context of the new elitism of sociologists like C. Wright Mills than the classical elitism of Michels. Anarchists might agree that Michels pinpointed some of the factors that contribute to the degeneration of even radical groups and the centralising tendencies active on organisations operating within the framework of the state. This was precisely the point that Gustav Landauer made of the German Social Democratic Party. It played, he argued, on the 'reactionary tendency of an oppressed people' in 'the most shameful way' to construct 'an extremely strict party rule ... strong enough to crush on every occasion the rising germs of freedom and revolt' (Landauer, 1896?: 2). Nevertheless, critics of party politics like Landauer approached organisation as critics of elitism, not as elitists fearful of 'the mass' and the principle of democracy.

Unlike elitists, anarchists have often distinguished between organisation as a social practice and organisation as a statist form. This was the approach adopted by Colin Ward, who features in several of the contributions here. As a result, some anarchists have defined anarchism in explicitly – and critics might say narrowly – organisational terms. To quote one activist group, anarchism might be defined 'simultaneously' as 'both a critique of authoritarian forms of organisation which foster manipulation and passivity, and a theory of free organisation... organised from below rather than without' (Black and Red, 1977). Even those who might quibble with this description normally accept that anarchism has an organisational dimension: the idea that organisation need not entail hierarchy is hardly contentious. As Black argues, Stirner's Union of Egoists, the thinnest organisational current within anarchism, is a form of organisation – 'for mutual self-help for just so long (and no longer) as it suited any egoist to deal with it' (Black, 1992: 184).

Acknowledging the limitations of anti-anarchist organisation critique raises some thorny issues about the potential for anarchist or anarchistic organising within the statist organisational mainstream. This is the theme in several of the essays. Chris Land and Daniel King present a case study of a UK voluntary sector organisation to illustrate the enormous pressures active on radical groups to adopt practices that run counter to their professed aims. Equally, examining the attitudes of French publishing and multimedia workers, Elen Riot argues that the prospects for the adoption of anarchist organisational practices are remote where there is no collective memory of lived, shared experiences. It might be argued, as Marcelo Vieta contends, that history is a potent source for contemporary activism. Riot believes otherwise. And even though she finds that an awareness of historical traditions helps shape contemporary projects, she argues that anarchism cannot be learned from historians. Riot is not alone in squeezing out the ghosts. Perhaps because anarchism has come to scholarly attention through recent global activism, the outstanding contribution of anarchist organising to CMS seems to come from recent practical activity, especially social movement practice, not from anarchist history.

Anarchism and the anarchistic

The tension between anarchism and the anarchistic or the conditions that anarchists variously link to anarchy and the possibility of challenging orthodox organisational behaviours through radical experimentation informed by social movement activism is examined by a number of contributors. Marius De Geus's discussion of Kropotkin's work gets to the heart of this tension. In *Mutual Aid*, he argues, Kropotkin presented a historical sociology of the state in which he

highlighted the continued existence of un-colonised traditional communities that remained under the radar of the state and the resilience of anarchistic practices that by-passed or resisted statist controls. Kropotkin's account pointed to the interruption or inhibition of a potential for social development, which he linked to an evolving and increasingly self-conscious expression of anarchist ethics. Anarchism, he argued, described a commitment to the protection of these residual communities and the fostering of the anarchistic behaviours they encouraged in conditions that were inimical to them: the historical rise of the state in Western Europe left both traditional and new mutual aid societies vulnerable to further encroachments. Anarchism, on this account, described a politics committed to the expansion or defence of these communities. For Kropotkin, as De Geus explains, it included a theory of change and entailed advocacy for communism in order to ground fully anarchistic practices and to protect against future degeneration. Kropotkin's twin concerns were the possibility of unlimited individual accumulation and the creation of economic inequalities that might support the establishment of systems of political subordination and/or the concentration of political power facilitating institutionalised injustice through slavery and exploitation. Yet Kropotkin's idea was that the process of revolutionary change would support social and cultural diversity. Anarchy would provide the space for communities to devise their own social practices and codes of behaviour which, for Kropotkin, had the potential to support the expression of an anarchist ethics.

J. Christopher Paskewich's discussion of Colin Ward's adaptation of Kropotkin's thesis in *Anarchy in action* demonstrates how the tenor of this argument has changed in the post-war period, where wholesale structural change appears unfeasible. Ward's two key observations, Paskewich argues, were that '[p]eople in every country around the world have created some spaces or groups that are self-determining and non-hierarchical' and that 'people have been encouraged to misunderstand their own natures' as competitive rather than co-operative. Also drawing on Ward, White and Williams make a similar point. They note: 'anarchism ... is a description of a mode of human organisation, rooted in the experience of everyday life, which operates side by side with, and in spite of the dominant trends of our society'. One effect of this recasting has been to treat everyday practices as exemplars of anarchy rather than, as Kropotkin argued, sites for the expression of an ethics which demonstrated the viability of anarchist revolutionary politics. For White and Williams, the empirical analysis of household work shows that 'anarchist forms of organisation – underpinned by mutual aid, reciprocity, co-operation, collaboration and inclusion – are found to be deeply woven into the fabric of everyday "capitalist" life'. Another consequence is to identify the characteristics of social movement organising – networks, syndicates, autonomous groups, collectives and affinity groups – to

show how principles that underpin experiments might be transferred from one location to anarchise another.

Paskewich finds a key to management orthodoxy in autonomy, creativity and freedom. Simon Western similarly uses contemporary movement practices to delineate a conception of autonomist leadership based on values of spontaneity, autonomy, mutualism, networks and affect. Notwithstanding anarchist rejections of leadership, he argues that autonomist leadership is consistent with anarchism. Parker, Cheney, Fournier and Land propose three principles to develop alternatives to mainstream management norms: individual autonomy, solidarity and responsibility to the future. It's difficult to object to any of these, but there's a risk that the structural conditions which, in Kropotkin's view, inhibit the full realisation of these values, becomes divorced from their independent evaluation. In this way, the aspirations of anarchists who organise in projects, setting up infoshops, zines, skools, squats and housing co-operatives, in kitchens, gardens, bicycle workshops and micro-breweries are adapted to modify precisely the institutions that activists seek to abandon.

David Bell highlights a philosophical risk with the analysis of anarchist principles. Anarchism, he notes, 'is frequently (mis)understood as the belief in absolute freedom, which is (to be) brought about through the eradication of hierarchies that impose power over the individual.' Canonical writers including Stirner, Proudhon, Bakunin and Rocker expressed wariness of treating any concept as an 'absolute'. Even while describing himself as a fanatical lover of liberty, Bakunin recognised that the freedom was defined differently by elites than by those excluded from this group and would remain always contestable. Biehl-Missal and Saner's discussion of Pessoa's story of the anarchist banker highlights the absurdities that follow from the apparently rigorous application of an abstract idea – also individual freedom. Although the context is shaped by an equally problematic desire to seek an escape from all 'social fictions', Pessoa's treatment of anarchist freedom provides the Banker with a justification to amass unlimited wealth in order to resist the controlling influence of money. Avoiding the pitfalls of abstract analysis, Bell returns to a practice-based approach, examining a self-consciously alternative collective musical improvisation as an ideal form. The risk of seeking to replicate these practices, Bell notes, is recuperation. De Monthoux notes the smooth corruption of Jerry Rubin's 'do it' into a sales pitch for pliant consumption; invitations to workplace morning raves, motivated by a bid to improve productivity and team-working, speak to a similar process of absorption and manipulation (Campagna, 2013). But there's another risk that Bell overlooks. He argues that a commitment to communism, understood as a Marxist critique of material relations, is required to provide the necessary reinforcement to anarchist organisational experiments. Re-injecting

Wardian analysis of anarchist practices with a Kropotkinite concern to realise structural change, Bell by-passes anarchist theory in favour of Marxist analysis.

Angela Wigger notes that anarchism has sometimes been described as Marxism's poor cousin, lacking a distinctive critique or analysis of capitalism. What anarchism 'lacks', however, is a theoretical touchstone. Because anarchism has produced different sociologies of the state, provided an array of anthropological studies of stateless living and offered a range of critiques of capitalism, variously inflected with class, feminist, queer, ecological and postcolonial thinking, anarchists differ significantly in their treatment and understanding of anarchism. The weight that groups or individuals attach to particular organisational principles will depend on the ways in which any of these themes and approaches are understood and combined, delimited by possibilities of existing practice. Nevertheless, it is possible to elaborate anarchist theory and to consider both the extent of the overlaps with non-anarchist forms of socialism and the significant questions that anarchism asks about the purposes of organisation.

Kropotkin is part of a significant anarchist tradition which rejects the legitimacy of the state's regulation of the political and/or the economic sphere, either for the sake of protecting the freedoms said to be contained within the other, or in search of some sort of ideal balance. As Franks argues, this current of anarchist critique has not been trained on the possibility of regulating neo-liberal regimes by strengthening democratic controls. Its vision is typically revolutionary. In this context, the question that is properly put to Colin Ward about his suggestion 'that anarchist organisations should be voluntary, functional, temporary and small' is not 'functional for who?' (as Parker et al. ask) but, 'functional for what?' This is the tack taken by Andreas Chatzidakis, Gretchen Larsen and Simon Bishop. Do we, as they suggest, continue to organise for growth 'where fulfilment, autonomy and freedom are sought through consumption' or for 'de-growth'? Should organisation be designed with a view to realising human flourishing and psychological well-being, as Ward's contemporary Paul Goodman argued, or to meet the demands of consumer markets and shopping-mall economics? Anarchist bioethicists might define function in terms of the health of species or, as Franks puts it, the recognition of 'the inherent value of all living entities'. Answers to these macro questions importantly shape the micro experiments which anarchists support.

Utopianism and prefiguration

Critics often seize on the impossibility of anarchist politics. Yet the consistent application of anarchist critique is wrongly interpreted as an inability to analyse the distinctive harms that different systems support. Anarchists are able to differentiate between market and legal freedoms and are sensitive to ways in which changes to regulatory policy produce different and more or less negative results for particular groups of people – the marginalised, exploited and disadvantaged. Indeed, anarchist ethics focus attention on the incentive structures and moral codes that underpin existing forms of organisation, as well as their effects. In their discussion of Sorel, Norman Jackson and Pippa Carter comment that it has become 'unacceptable, within the dominant discourse, to claim that the working class should be seen as oppressed', notwithstanding the introduction of a catalogue of austerity measures that have resulted in the 'intensification of labour, infantilisation of the workforce, mass unemployment, absence of a living wage, zero hours contracts, unsafe working conditions'. Anarchists are not such purists that they prefer to ignore these realities for the sake of the revolution to come. On the contrary, the everyday judgments that activists make about struggle and resistance – openly discussed in a range of anarchist media – are typically informed by assessments of policy changes in particular in areas like immigration, asylum, education, food production, development, land rights and the exploitation of natural resources.

Anarchist aspirations for change and the project of imagining alternative futures become unintelligible when anti-organisation arguments are read incautiously. Anarchists who seek to challenge the neo-liberal mantra 'there is no alternative' either emerge as misguided utopians because they are assumed to reject all that exists ('organisation') or prohibited from thinking about possible futures on the grounds that utopianism contravenes anarchism's anti-organisational principles. Drawing on contemporary postanarchist theory, this is the argument that Carl Rhodes makes:

> Anarchy here is in the form of 'ideological dissent' that contests corporate sovereignty and power... Such a requirement is not to be based on the ideas that we might be graced, deux-ex-machina, by a new form of self-management where all forms of oppression dissipate; no fantastical utopians. Instead it involves a recognition that the space between sovereign organization and anarchic ethics must be maintained. Politically, this favours dissensus as a practical ethico-politics over utopianism as an impossible dream. Such an ethics is enacted through a 'project of ethico-political resistance and critique that works against forms of coercion, inequity, and discrimination that organization so frequently and easily produce.

Several contributors note that prefiguration, or the demand for consistency of means with ends, fills the space between contemporary practices and utopian ideas of anarchy. According to Wigger, prefiguration demands that 'new forms of social organisation ought to be realised straightaway, while the means of social change must prefigure the anticipated anarchist future'. This formulation, however, suggests a division of activist practices, on the one hand, from long-term goals and the strategies designed to meet them, on the other. While it is the case that 'anarchists seek to stimulate solidarity activities and imitation' by 'exemplary political actions' prefiguration is more often described as a discussion about the interrelationship of present practices and future goals. In some accounts, the means and ends of struggle are collapsed in social organising. Frenzel outlines this relationship: 'Prefigurative politics focuses on the way of doing politics, its processes. The means of progressive politics need to be aligned with its ends'. Sandra Jeppesen et al. quote Federici and Caffentzis: the 'Anti-capitalist commons are not the end-point of anti-capitalist struggle, but its means'. In other accounts, prefiguration involves reading between utopian aspirations and experience, developing new practices in the course of organising and in the light of reflection.

As Vieta argues, the utopianism of anarchist prefigurative politics differs from the blueprint planning associated with early-nineteenth century utopian socialism or, for example, the less romantic kinds of blueprints devised Soviet planners. In prefigurative politics utopian goals are themselves scrutinised as part of the practice of experimentation. For some activists, prefiguration is intimately linked to resistance activity because the imaginative spaces for utopian dreaming are said to occur only in moments of crisis. Even then, there can be considerable variation in the elaboration of anarchist goals. Land and King emphasise work-based principles, commenting that Ward argued that '[t]he autonomy of the worker at work is the most important field in which [the] expropriation of decision-making can apply.' Vieta adopts a similar slant. Other anarchists (including Kropotkin) have emphasised community as a primary sphere, perhaps more open to the idea that expropriation of decision-making can apply in fields outside work (for example in health care or education) equally important to the expropriated. For Simon Collister 'hactivism offers a potent and powerful model of anarchist organizing'. It provides a 'prefigurative framework for twenty-first century anarchist organizing which offers a rich potential for experimentation and the creation of socio-technological solutions out of the immanent, irreducible social space of Postanarchism'.

In Jeppesen et al.'s work, prefiguration is linked to constitutive practices. They describes how a process of calling out to reveal bigotry or privilege, racialised or gendered behaviours has given way to calling in, a process designed to resolve

tensions through care and compassion. Both approaches support the goal of non-domination but the decision to pursue different methods importantly transforms the ethics of the group and changes the character of its organisational practices. The desire, they note, is 'to focus on building bridges ... for gentleness, pleasure, enjoyment and passion in life and in organizing'.

Constitutionalism, Paskewich notes, is typically associated with particular institutional doctrines, for example checks and balances or the separation of powers. Above all, it is associated with the desire to set decision-making arrangements in stone, in ways that render organisations incapable of confronting, still less addressing, forms of domination that arise subsequent to the constitutional settlement. On Jeppesen's account of anarchist organising, prefigurative politics enables individuals to be flexible about group practices and the commitment to anarchist ethics itself provides the dynamic for continual revision and change. Groups are constituted in a manner that requires individuals to behave in particular ways – respectfully, hopefully, with kindness – but responsibility for the group's constitution rests with the membership.

Anarchist sociologies of the state and CMS analysis suggest that the adoption of these kinds of prefigurative practices in organisations constituted within or by the state is challenging, notwithstanding the widespread evidence that anarchy remains active in capitalist and statist societies. However, the value of anarchism to CMS does not depend on showing that anarchy exists or that it anarchism provides a solution to all the evils of neo-liberalism and the state, only that there are multiple points of entry into organisational practice and that the strength of critical approaches rests on their adaptability and combination.

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