

CALL FOR PAPERS FOR PUBLICATION (Edited Volume)

Imagining the Future: Anarchist Thought and the Study of the Past

“Years ago, I concluded that all concentrated forms of energy in human hands become dangerous. The state mutates into the tsar, the lane becomes the sterile corridor of the freeway, the fire morphs into a nuclear pile, the songs go corrupt and become propaganda. Freedom becomes slavery and valor descends to shock and awe.”

Charles Bowden (The Wisdom of Rats, *Harper's Magazine*, 2010)

In a 1997 review article titled ‘Archaeological Theory: What’s on the Agenda?’, Michael Shanks speaks of the “need for radical archaeological imagination” (p. 398). As politically committed scholars, for us this need goes beyond achieving a pluralism of theoretical and methodological approaches; we want to promote an interdisciplinary academic discourse that embraces political idea(l)s that come from outside the scholarly space. If, as Shanks alerts us, an unreflective archaeological practice constitutes a threat to the past, then any kind of scholarship that lacks political imagination is a threat to the present and to the future. Where Shanks remind us, “it is good to think, and it is good to listen,” we want to think outside the box and listen to those who embody difference.

Starting from the recognition that academia is an exclusionary political project and science an instrument of power, we consciously crafted the Radical Archaeological Theory Symposium (RATS) of 2009 around the topic of the political ideology of anarchy, because it rejects hierarchies and attempts to be inclusive of difference. Moreover, mainstream politics, and even those scholars who style themselves as ‘radical,’ often relegate anarchy to the realm of the politically imaginary. We could bemoan this positioning or seek within it the space to imagine a different past, present and future. In this publication, inspired by RATS 2009, we want to explore the potential links between, on the one hand, anarchist and maybe utopian ideas of a future yet-to-come and, on the other hand, intellectual interpretations of past societies. Rather than accepting scholarly readings of the past that describe pre-/historic societies as a mirror image to our present capitalist society or, alternatively, that continue to follow the romantic primitivism that has so long been prevalent in the discipline of archaeology, we wish to open the academic spaces that we occupy to a new kind of political imagination, which commits to ideas that are considered marginal, utopian, or even confrontational by some.

The topics that we want to discuss in more depth in this publication were born out of the challenge to engage—as politically committed anthropologists, historians, philosophers, and so on—with ideas drawn from the political philosophy of anarchism, and first and foremost with the belief that hierarchies of any kind are inevitably corrupting, oppressive, and dehumanizing. Here the link between past and present is explored in critical and self-critical ways, by dismantling established ways of interpreting the past as well as by finding new ways of looking at the present and of imagining the future. For example, how can we conceptualize a past that was not organized around hierarchies, but on

principles that correspond much more to what would today be considered a 'counter-culture' or 'sub-culture'? That is, what if those practices that are considered 'anti-establishment' today were more accepted and normalized in the past? We could think of non-sedentary life styles—the nomads of the past and the hitch-hikers or traveler kids of today—or of unprompted ways of living, with retreatism and exodus (in Paolo Virno's sense) as accepted practices of moving in and out of communities at a whim. Other scholars have explored more habitual and often anti-statist ways of living, for example through rituals and performances that create community, where interpretations of past and present practices inform each other, too. Such different ways of viewing the past open up new and heterotopic spaces in historical imagination.

Another set of topics that we are interested in establishes connections between past and present societies, where the present is explored as a past-gone-wrong. Such work investigates the spaces and places of the recent past in order to trace genealogies of conflict, colonization, and exploitation. Those places of abjection where civilization is at a loss, where conflict arises, and where capitalism shows signs of doom and failure—the waste landscapes at the fringes of metropolitan areas, for example; or the poverty-stricken streets that give rise to racially motivated conflict and violent class struggle—are looked at in a critical historical perspective. Inquiries are made about why those places of abjection develop, how humans have responded to them in the past, and what we ourselves imagine as politically meaningful rejoinder at this 'eve of destruction.' The latter is a task that is especially close to the heart of the young scholars whose work we would like to include into this volume. Not only did we come of age during a century that told us about the end of ideology, but we also experience on an everyday basis the destructive power of global capitalism in a Deleuzian 'society of control.' We try, both in the scholarly papers presented here and in the political work we do in our time away from campus, not to be afraid of our radical imaginations of a better world. We refuse to accept the end of ideology and believe that our scholarly work will in fact be enriched by a commitment to political ideals that integrate leftist strands of thinking—from Anarchism to Marxism and beyond.

At this point we want to stress one last thing: that is, the age-old Marxian idea that theory must be dialectically paired with practice. Theory without practice leaves us in the ivory tower of a depoliticized academic venture that is not only unmotivated and dissatisfying but plain irresponsible. However, if some think that anarchism can easily be viewed as a principle of practice only, one goal of this publication is to examine the extent to which anarchist practice—however broadly viewed—can be theorized, because the most immediate, embodied practice is still grounded in discursive knowledge, even when it takes highly spontaneous forms.

If you would like to be included in the volume, submit the title of your paper, name(s) of author(s), abstract (not exceeding 300 words), and a brief bio about yourself that includes a list of any previously published books, anthologies, or other publications. Send your submissions to Maria Theresia Starzmann <mstarzm1@binghamton.edu> Submissions must be received via email by February 1, 2011. (All submissions should be in Word or Open Office format if sent as an attachment).