

Editors' Introduction

Anarchism's *Other Scene* Materializing the Ideal and Idealizing the Material

Duane Rousselle & Jason Adams

While more will be said about this below, we begin this issue in the simplest fashion: by recalling a few of the basic questions according to which the interventions here were initially assembled:

- Is it the case, as Marx famously held in *The German Ideology* and *The Poverty of Philosophy*, that anarchism has failed to account for the full complexity of the ontological?
- Has there been a lack of concern within anarchism (historically speaking) with the actual circumstances that would make social transformation possible?
- Has anarchism been a theory for which materiality was, as Marx put it, “distorted in the imagination of the egoist,” producing a subject “for whom everything occurs in the imagination?”
- Should “Sancho” (Max Stirner), for example, have “descended from the realm of speculation into the realm of reality”?
- Is the opposition of materialism and idealism itself a barrier to a higher, more powerful convergence, as recent anarchist/anarchistic thinkers from Hakim Bey to Reiner Schürmann (and beyond) have argued?

Certainly, we would not reduce these questions purely down to a simplistic confrontation between “Marxist materialism” and “anarchist

idealism”—and, particularly not today, when, in the wake of numerous post-anarchist and post-Marxist interventions, “anarchist materialists” and “Marxist idealists” alike are at least as common as their inversions were in the past.

The case of Hakim Bey is perhaps one of the best examples of such reversals, in the anarchist camp.

The first lines of his 1994 book *Immediatism*, for instance, asserted the seemingly post-Kantian point that “all experience is mediated—by the mechanisms of sense perception, mentation, language, etc.—& certainly all art consists of some further mediation of experience.”

But the central argument from this point forward in his book is the reverse: Bey essentially quantifies mediation as a matter of degree, championing the “least mediated.” And yet, is it not the case that all experience is simultaneously an experience of mediacy and immediacy, of both conscious experience and unconscious experience, at once?

Today in particular, the experience of mediacy has been rendered in the form of immediacy as never before. By which we mean to say that what is experienced as immediacy is in fact mediated by a technoculture of digitally-networked social media and digitally-augmented broadcast media, as well as by perception and recollection, language and discourse, economics and politics. The “everyday” experience of the world as “unmediated” today—the sense that in the age of social media, we’ve finally overcome the tyranny of the editor—is an effect of a particular mode of perception, as it appears for a particular person, or a particular people, at a particular place, a particular time.

Today, ironically enough, the reigning hegemonic formation is not that of the mediate, but much to the contrary, precisely that of Bey’s “immediatism.” It is interesting then, that the term serves as a critique of mediation, an advocacy of returning, as much as possible, to direct, embodied, sensory experience—the very mode within which we are most thoroughly controlled, precisely because we fail to comprehend the mediation of the immediate that we imagine as truly immediate.

For abolitionists in the 19th century, the term immediatism referenced a rather different kind of critique: a temporal one. Immediatism referred at that time to a rejection of gradualism and an advocacy of abolishing the “peculiar institution” of slavery—right here, right now (“immediately”). The more radical abolitionists at least, recognized that all experience, including the

experience of labor, is mediated, at a minimum, by the mode of production within which we necessarily live.

Immediatism in Bey's sense, as the reigning mode of perception, ignores precisely this: that registerable differences internal to mediacy/immediacy are actually differences of kind, not differences of degree. Tasting food and smelling flowers are in no way "less" mediated than reading newspapers or surfing the web; live media such as theater or musical performance are not necessarily any "more" immediate than more delayed mediums, like DVDs or CDs; and in terms of the demand for imagination championed by Bey two decades ago, film and television (as numerous "broadcast literature" examples attest to today), can require at least as much as print and radio, live theater, or live music.

Capitalism in its digital form—or authority more broadly, as it exists for us all today—relies not upon the logic of mediatization but that of *immediatization*: the invisibilization of the conditions of possibility for immediacy, which produces profound consequences for everyone. Immediatization rerenders everything from art to philosophy, science to religion, and politics to love, so that they all reappear as the capitalized instantaneity, interactivity, and ubiquity that characterize experience in our network-centric media environment.

The attendant commodification, however, is no more reducible to exchange-value in our time than it was in previous modes of perception. Because it also requires the allure of use-value, exchange-value never wholly sums up the process of commodification. The twin tendencies of digital technoculture and digital capitalism alike are such that production and consumption fall into indistinction: from Google to Facebook and YouTube to Twitter, consuming today means producing just as producing today means consuming.

Today, the Spectacle is no longer opposed to the Spectator: the Spectator now participates in producing not *the* Spectacle, but one's own, personal spectacle, networked with literally millions of other Spectator-Producers who are all engaged in the same activity—instantly, interactively, and ubiquitously. The greatest danger to aesthetics today (contra Bey) is not alienation from sensation by way of the mass media, but the sensation of disalienation by way of social media.

The very person who formally introduced the term "post-anarchism," then, was himself caught up within ontologies which we still wrestle with today—and which form the core of this issue of *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies (ADCS)*. In 2010,

Lewis Call announced, in the inaugural issue of *ADCS*, that post-anarchism was finally here to stay.

Post-anarchism, it appeared, was finally *on the scene*. The 2011 publication of *Post-Anarchism: A Reader* and *The Politics of Post-Anarchism* seemed to validate Call's claim. Post-anarchism was definitely *on the scene*, but *which* scene was it on? The question had long been asked: was post-anarchism a form of anarchism or was it something else entirely (such as post-structuralism)? Wasn't this a variation of the topological question: is post-anarchism inside (the tradition) or is it outside?

Here then, we assert that post-anarchism was (and is) *the other scene* of anarchism. Friends of the Freudian field will immediately note the distinction here: *the other scene*, for Freud, was one that was paradoxically *outside* the human animal but only to the extent that it was intimately *within* the human animal. For Freud, as for Lacan, *the other scene* was the hidden realm that has the privileged designation, namely, the unconscious. Thus, post-anarchism is the examination of anarchism's unconscious suppositions, those which remain imperceptible to "immediate," "everyday" experience.

We would be remiss if we did not add that post-anarchism is also the movement toward an articulation of anarchism's unconscious truth. There is thus, without a doubt, a negative as well as positive aspect to post-anarchist thinking. In any case, post-anarchism opened up a space within anarchist studies—and this continues to be the privileged function of post-anarchism—through which anarchism's own latent epistemological and ontological assumptions are questioned.

This, then, is our first point: *post-anarchism is a space that opens up anarchism to its own unconscious productions.*

Our second point deals with the consequences of the opening up of the privileged space of post-anarchism: post-anarchism was an answer to a demand that things must be different. Post-anarchism emerged as a response to a demand that anarchist studies and anarchism itself must be different. It is because anarchist studies must be different that it must also be more (and not less) true. Post-anarchism is a consequence of a demand made in the direction of a more true understanding of our political and philosophical tradition. If, therefore, the first point was that post-anarchism opened up a space for the analysis of anarchism's *other scene*, then the second was that post-anarchism was an answer to a demand that things be different and therefore more true.

All of this leads to our third, and much more relevant, point:

ADCS was inaugurated through a risk made by answering this demand for something different and therefore more true. The sum of these three points lead to the statement: *ADCS* was born so that anarchists (and those attracted to anarchist ideas) might not be overtaken by the representation of events as “immediate.”

This was the sole aim for this journal: we must make ourselves worthy, as Deleuze and Guattari famously put it, of the full complexity and dynamism of the event. It was not without purpose, then, that Call wrote the following in his introduction to the first issue of *ADCS* on post-anarchism:

Indeed, I feel that we *must* do this, or risk being overtaken by events. Post-anarchism waits for no one. When I speak of post-anarchism today, I also imply that there was post-anarchism *yesterday*. (Call, 2010: 9)

ADCS was born so that anarchists might not be overtaken by the reductive representation of events by which we are surrounded: so that they might not be overtaken by the immediatization of the mediate. Our journal is the answer that we give to the endless revolutionary imperative that dawns upon us.

Since its inception, our journal has always been a little bit different.

We answered the demand of post-anarchism early and today we find post-anarchist thinking all around the world. We shall continue to answer the demand because it is our sole aim to become worthy of the event (of the virtual event), to become worthy of that which is always a noumenon, always beyond reductive representation. So, the question that we are asking today is one that we feel we *must* ask. It is a question that demands to be asked if anarchism is not to be overtaken by the last decade: rather than reifying the event, we must counter-effectuate the event, or restore to it the dynamism and complexity that consciousness—collective and individual alike—evacuates.

Lewis Call, then, was right: *post-anarchism waits for no one*. The question that we are asking today, then, is different from the question that we were asking *yesterday*. Today's question is: how do anarchists respond to the demand made upon them for a truly radical ontology, and not just one that asks us to return to the individual, sensory body?

Is it possible for anarchism to think *with* the new ontologies and new materialisms, and is it possible to build a deeper anarchist philosophy which does not reduce the world to what it is for

human animals within that world? Is it possible to think the question of a non-essentialist ontology?

Radical theory has always been beset by the question of ontology, albeit to varying degrees and under differing conditions. In recent years, in particular, political metaphysics has returned with force: the rise of Deleuze-influenced “new materialism,” along with post-/non-Deleuzian speculative realism and object-oriented ontology, all bear testament to this. In this same period, anarchism has returned as a major influence on social movements and critical scholarship alike. What, then, are some of the potential resonances between these currents, particularly given that anarchism has so often been understood/ misunderstood as a fundamentally idealist philosophy?

This special issue of *ADCS* considers these questions in dialogue with new materialism, speculative realism, and object-oriented ontology, in order to seek new points of departure. It is in this sense that our journal strives to become worthy of recent discussions in the wider political, cultural, and philosophical milieu.

The special issue is split into two major sections: “Ontological Anarché” and “Anarchist Ontology.” If, on the one hand, there are ontologies that are radically *anarchistic*, then, on the other hand, there are anarchists that are striving to create new *ontologies*. In some sense, these two approaches are digging from opposite sides of the same mountain. It shall be our task to show that they jointly create a single passageway through the mountain. On one side of the mountain: the *ontological* anarchists seem to be more skeptical about the political implications of their work. On the other side of the mountain: the *anarchist* ontologists seem to be more skeptical about the ontological implications of their work.

We begin with an article from Levi Bryant. Many anarchists have suspected that the new ontologies harbor profoundly *anarchistic* orientations. However, very few of the pioneers of these new ontologies have described their work using the conceptual framework of anarchism. But Levi Bryant *has* used the conceptual framework of anarchism at times: Bryant has made use of post-anarchist philosophy (especially the work of Todd May). This is what makes Bryant such an important point of departure for thinking about the convergence of anarchism and new materialism. In Bryant’s article for this issue of *ADCS*, he gives his readers a very concise introduction to his updated ontology. Readers familiar with his last (open-access) book, titled *The Democracy of Objects* (however, he often notes that the book

should have been titled *The Anarchy of Objects*), will notice that some of his conceptual framework has changed. Bryant's new ontology is named: *Machine-Oriented Ontology* (MOO). Here we have a brilliant example of how we can think *with* rather than *against* Einstein's general theory of relativity. Einstein offers us a profoundly *anarchistic* way in which to think about the relations that objects have within the world, and Bryant's brilliant writing offers us a passageway toward understanding Einstein's often misinterpreted and misapplied physical theories.

John W. M. Krummel, a former student of Reiner Schürmann, argues, through the work of Schürmann and Cornelius Castoriadis, that every metaphysic involves an imaginary first principle which grounds it. There is thus a profound similarity between the two thinkers: both Schürmann and Castoriadis acknowledge that meaning and order are subjected to radical finitude. This implies that order is fleeting and temporary. A challenge is therefore posed to us: how is it possible to move from such an imaginary ontology toward a materialist inspired practical political philosophy? This, it would seem, is the crucial question that most contributors to our volume seem interested in exploring.

As I've claimed above, the new ontologies, inspired by the speculative turn, have raised profoundly new questions about the meaning of political practice and political philosophy. The crucial question is: is it possible to move from ontological thinking toward political philosophy (and *vice versa*)? Hilan Bensusan looks backwards to the Heraclitean tradition and the notion of *polemos* in order to develop a "fire ontology." Bensusan makes a very powerful claim that "fire ontology" spreads and doesn't ground. Fire, unlike ground, operates through contagion rather than foundation.

This is how ontology and politics "meet on fire." There is thus a re-negotiation that takes place between ontology and politics. Ben Woodard, a veteran of the speculative turn, claims in his article that we need to rethink the assumption that ontology by necessity implies a form of politics. Woodard offers an analysis of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* as a form of ontological philosophy that is suited to thinking through ecological politics today. And so, in some sense, there is a secret solidarity between all of the contributors to this volume. Each, in his or her own way, seeks to undermine any *arché*, any foundational ontology, which claims that some beings are more important than others.

Jason Harman claims that the very notion of ontological *anarché* is bound up with some notion of an *arché*. The

alternative, Harman claims, is to think through the co-originality of the two as a form of being-*with*. The work of Jean-Luc Nancy therefore provides us with a nice point of departure for this possibility. Harmon asks: is it possible, after the speculative turn, to think a new form of radical community?

The second group of contributors are digging from the other side of the mountain. They seem more interested in the question of what the new ontologies are *for anarchism*. In this respect, we are honored to have an article from Salvo Vaccaro, and translated by Jesse Cohn. Vaccaro raises the question: is anarchism a philosophy? Moreover, is anarchism, as a philosophy, foundationalist? Once again we seem to be dealing with an ontology which is multiple in its becomings rather than singular, statist, or essentialist. Jared McGeough explores a similar theme in his article. McGeough discusses the tension that occurred between Mikhail Bakunin's and Schelling's philosophies. For example, Bakunin dismissed Schelling's ontology as idealist, and then found him to be a conservative stooge for the Prussian government. McGeough asks us to consider an alternative reading of the significance of Schelling's philosophy for anarchists: Schelling's philosophy is "unconditioned," it is a "system of freedom," and it "destroys origins."

In a curious article from Christian Greer post-anarchists are asked to question their indebtedness to Hakim Bey's post-anarchism anarchy. Post-anarchists, Greer argues, must return to their place of origin in Hakim Bey's ontological anarchism. His claim is that no post-anarchist commentator has sufficiently analyzed the occult aspect of Hakim Bey's work. Greer highlights the various esoteric overtones of Hakim Bey's ontological and post-anarchisms and encourages post-anarchists to begin to think through the relationship between esoteric philosophy (such as Chaos Magick) and anarchist political philosophy.

Tom Marling, in "Anarchism and the Question of Practice: Ontology in the Chinese Anarchist Movement, 1919–1927," provides us with a very rich discussion of the place of ontology in the philosophies of the Chinese anarchist movement during the early part of the twentieth century. The claim is that post-anarchist and post-left anarchist ideas can be unearthed from the historical record. There was a shift in anarchist theory that took place within Chinese culture during these years toward a more subjective and localized theory which was epitomized in the debate between two anarchist factions: the old guard of leftist classicalists and the younger group of quasi-iconoclasts. The

iconoclasts focused on pragmatism, locatedness, and de-centered analyses of power and revolution. What can we learn from this rich historical account?

Finally, Gregory Kalyniuk develops a Deleuzian inspired presentation of micropolitics in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novels. His belief is that these themes allow us to rethink anarchist political philosophy in a way which seems very faithful to Daniel Colson's post-anarchist neo-monadology. It is possible, Kalyniuk claims, to subvert the law through a humourous proliferation of successive contracts.

This issue of *ADCS* also includes a review of Mohammed A. Bamyeh's popular book *Anarchy as Order: The History and Future of Civic Humanity* by Shannon Brincat, as well as a sharp response to Brincat from Bamyeh himself.

Anthony T. Fiscella reviews Alexandre Christoyannopoulos's *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel*.

We've also included an interview that was conducted with Levi Bryant by the post-anarchist Christos Stergiou.

REFERENCES

- Call, Lewis. 2010. "Editorial — Post-anarchism Today." *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* 2010.1: <http://www.anarchist-developments.org/index.php/adcs/article/view/20/1>.