Anarchism, Organization and Management: Critical Perspectives for Students. **Edited by Martin Parker, Constantin Stoborod and Thomas Swann. Routledge 2020.**
Review by Jack Davis.

No gods, no masters…no gods, no managers?

While anarchism is frequently cited as both an anti-hierarchical theory and a practice of organizing in the social sciences, *Anarchism, Organization and Management* provides an eclectic foundation for engaging with anarchism in the management school. In their introduction, the editorial team of Parker, Swann and Stoborod quickly break down any immediate perceptions of anarchism as an abstract theory with little to offer management scholarship, or indeed management students. By outlining exactly what aspects and assumptions of management they seek to address, this opening section and serves to provide a useful and accessible overview to anarchism as a counter-point to the *inevitability* of hierarchical management:

"We want to use the word management to refer to an organizational form in which a specialist class of managers tell their subordinates how to organize themselves. Management – in this rather more specific sense – requires hierarchy. Power and reward are concentrated in a certain class of people, shaping the structure, space and strategies of managed organizations" (p.2).

It is due to this outlook that the book holds certain similarities to Graeber & Wengrow's (2021) "The Dawn of Everything", which sought to encourage us to ask better questions about the inevitability of hierarchy, authority and control throughout the history of human society. While smaller in scope, Parker et al's book opens the door for us to follow this challenging students, teachers and researchers to ask bigger, better questions around what our notion of 'common sense' management is. Moreover, this textbook uses anarchism to probe what the alternatives might be.

Anarchism, Organization and Management is a different sort of textbook to those which proffer a sense of "business as usual" (p.6). Rather than reproducing dominant ideas of the business school, the editors and contributors pose pertinent questions rather than purporting to offer answers. Anarchist thought and practice is conveyed as an opportunity to not simply *add* to conventional management techniques as novel way of reproducing them, but rather an invitation to question many of managements fundamental assumptions and practices which are too easily and frequently deemed "common sense" (p.1). From this foundation, the diverse and engaging chapters present various avenues through which anarchism offers alternative understandings and workable opportunities for challenging and changing the workings of hierarchy in managerial capitalism.

 However, where in outlook this textbook seeks to break with convention, in structure and aesthetics it retains aspects of the conventional style:

"We are also using text boxes to introduce important concepts and thinkers. Each chapter takes a standard management topic and begins by briefly rehearsing the sort of position that you are likely to find in the textbooks used in many management courses. After that, our

authors then try to mess things up, by asking awkward questions, introducing unfamiliar and even revolutionary ideas and providing evidence that doesn't fit the standard management picture" (p.7).

The book itself is divided into six sections, each comprising of between two and three chapters. Each section draws on a range of contemporary topics and examples, inviting students and scholars alike to re-imagine our understanding of organization and management through a broad collection of anarchist ideas spanning 200 years. The cohort of writers avoid the generic critique of anarchism as being *anti-everything* by providing numerous examples of what different aspects of anarchist thought are *for,* as well as where everyday examples of them already exist in practice*.* Moreover, the contributors draw not only draw upon an expansive range of anarchists but also provide introductions to more peripheral thinkers who have various levels of association to the movement; including Ivan Illich, Karl Marx, Adam Smith and Michael Foucault.

There are common themes which become apparent from the outset. Consistent with the principles of anarchism, each chapter offers some form of analysis around how we might organize (or manage) structures and cultures, systems of production and consumption or markets and accounts in social systems which reject hierarchy and authority. But what happens when we seek alternative organizational forms to the 'common-sense' hierarchies of the capitalist state and market? There are at times mixed results. Yet as frequently outlined in the textbook, this doesn't always mean failure.

Many of the examples given in the book hint at traces and possibilities, rather than a final or finished blueprint. Anarchism itself is a broad church - for want of a more anarchist metaphor - guided by principles of collective autonomy and individual freedom. This is what often makes it useful in engaging with complex issues at the level of the everyday human experience. A common thread within this nexus of theory and practice is the notion of anarchism embracing "the complex diversity of contemporary society at the human scale to avoid problems of grand schemes and plans, allows us to make everyday changes that help shape our future" (White & Williams, Chapter 17 p.227). There are distinct differences between crypto-anarchists such as Timothy May and classical, social anarchists such as Kropotkin (or indeed, those more 'practical' anarchists he influenced such as Colin Ward). There are tensions in the role of class and patriarchy between anarcho-feminists such as Emma Goldman and her contemporary, Lucy Parsons. The anthropological outlook of David Graeber's anarchism which highlights anarchism as a part of human culture won't always coincide with Bob Black's post-left anarchist individualism[1]. The chapters of *Anarchism, Organization and Management* provide a useful introduction to these different perspectives.

Anarchism presumes that social arrangements and identities do not need to be based on economic or managerial common sense, even as they evolve through various markets or consumption interests. By using anarchism as a means of critiquing the 'common sense' or 'business as usual' modes of understanding which are authoritatively projected within the majority of management textbooks, we are also provided alternatives to them. In chapter 15

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[1] By way of further example, Bob Black and Murray Bookchin had a disagreement about what the latter deemed an incompatibility between social and 'lifestyle' anarchism, which is addressed in the opening section of Bob Black's 'Anarchy After Leftism'. Anarchy after Leftism | The Anarchist Library

Earley asserts that "anarchism is not simply a political theory but rather a lived practice, an idea of how life should be lived" (p.242). In vogue with this statement, a large amount of the organizational alternatives offered within the textbook incorporate different understandings of consumption, markets and culture through exploring how we organise around them as aspects of everyday life[2].

For anarchists, many methods of enhancing individual and collective freedom develop through the idea of *self-management*; which entails "the ability of workers to individually and collectively make their own rules and control their own working lives free from external authorities" (Bloom, p.61). While in many examples this involves horizontal or co-operatively owned organizations ranging from bakeries in France (Riot & Parker, Chapter 8) to community centres in Chile (Casagrande & Rivera, Chapter 9), self-management also includes the management of our many identities (Bloom, Chapter 5). The anarchist emphasis on self-management leads to engaging pockets of discussion around people's sense of self in capitalist society, as well as how collectives might alternatively organise around aspects of both work and collective consumption projects. For instance, in Chapter 11, Sandstrom highlights how this involves processes of affective decision making in participatory economies where the "self-managed worker and consumer councils and federations propose and revise their own production and consumption plans regarding both individual and collective goods and services, over a number of iterations" (p.151). Through such contributions, the concept of self-management provides avenues for researching collective and convivial cultures of work and consumption, which offer a sense of community belonging that is so often found lacking in consumer research. Such research might begin with considering where and how existing organizations and communities' members do manage to sustain mutual support systems in order to explore and experiment with their various identities and 'selves'.

The anarchist emphasis on mutuality, collectivism and co-operation also offer scope for considering how we conceptualise aspects of consumption and work in digital economies through studying how different platforms might contribute to the emancipation and/or manipulation of the user. In response to increasingly precarious labour in the digital gig economy Ağlargöz and Ağlargöz (Chapter 12) unpack the importance of mutuality for the local organisation of workers in this respect. In Chapter 13, Kamstrup and Hustedan draw upon Murray Bookchin to tackle the question of platform affordances, and the way in which different technics afford certain forms of liberation or authority in their impulse and operation. In Chapter 15, Earley directly addresses where aspects of marketing are incompatible with anarchism (providing we ignore anarcho-capitalism), as it is a "a practice which requires the resources and technologies of capitalism" (p.209). It might be argued that anarchists have previously sought to 'market' themselves through propaganda - whether by deed, creative expression or something else entirely (Kinna, 2019, pp.99-103). Yet the theories and practices of anarchism also provide important insights into what more democratic consumption cultures and alternative markets might look like beyond the paradigm and technologies of marketing as it is currently understood. It is asserted via the works of David Graeber, that anarchism is a reference to lived aspects of human culture which are eroded as we allow hierarchy and authority to expand and invade our lives. In their

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[2] As highlighted by Colin Ward, "Anarchism is a description of a mode of human experience of everyday life, which operates side by side with and in spite of the dominant authoritarian trends in our society" (1982, p.14).

contributions, authors such as Early offer building blocks for considering how we understand and use markets, and how they might become more democratic:

"There is nothing to stop us thinking and acting in ways that help create emancipatory anarchistic modes of organizing, because we are demonstrable not creatures of the market. And we can do this from where we stand, in the here and the now." (Chapter 15. p.235).

This highlights the need for further interdisciplinary research in management which looks beyond managers and for-profit organizations. What would an ethic of care look like if we explored it along the principles of mutual aid? How might we begin to better understand identity projects through fluid membership to communities by focusing on the creative exploration and self-management of people's multiple selves? What might a more convivial consumer culture look like? In light of the ongoing political, economic and environmental crises we face, the task of asking different and often difficult questions both in the classroom and the research field is becoming increasingly urgent. It begs the question of what our market systems of consumption and production might look like if our consideration of value went beyond matters of the monetary and instead was "a discussion of collective flourishing and how we can live together with others on a planet of finite resources" (p.138).

For instance, what might we learn if we applied the following principles in our research practice?

1. Collective right to life more important than property rights or other abstract rights which need violence to enforce them. Not necessarily restricted to humans.
2. Determination of value is local, context specific and grounded in lives experience, even when claims to be universal and objective. The latter a result of some interest dominating others and appearing to be natural.
3. Expression of value comes from dialogue between equals.
4. Goal of value as conviviality: life enjoyed together with others. (Weir & Land, Chapter 10, p.138)

While *Anarchism, Organization and Management* is a textbook, it offers useful insights for researchers and teaching practitioners as well as students. With their cohort of contributors, Parker et al's book offers a range of new avenues for students and scholars to be critical about the ability of market managerialism to provide universal solutions to complex problems. Many of its chapters provide useful foundations for future discussions concerning what we deem 'common sense' in the nexus of the management school, as well as how we understand markets and people in various cultures of organization and consumption. It provides accessible overviews and examples for various aspects of anarchist thought, whether through post-anarchist lifestyle and the future of work, affordances of online platforms, sustainable possibilities of social ecology or the basis of mutuality in classical anarchism. By drawing on the long and practical history of anarchism, the numerous chapters show how successful anarchy might be possible, but is far from guaranteed. These chapters form the beginnings of new and different questions. They are a brief sketch of what will be longstanding conversations necessary for students and scholars to flesh out in the coming years over their courses if we truly do want to overt impeding social and environmental disaster. Indeed, if it

is the time to follow the mantra of '*No Gods/ No Managers*'[3], anarchism gives us some insight into what alternatives there may be.

References:

Black, B. (1997) *Anarchy after Leftism*. Anarchist Library. Available at: [Anarchy after Leftism | The Anarchist Library](#)

Graeber, D. & Wengrow, D. (2021). *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. Allen Lane.

Kinna, R. (2019). *The Government of No One: The Theory and Practice of Anarchism*. Pelican Books.

Ward, C. (1982). *Anarchy in Action*. London: Freedom Press.

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[3] No Gods/No Managers is a 1999 album by the US Hardcore band 'Choking Victim'. The album is well known for its overtly political and controversial lyrics. The title is a play on the anarchist phrase 'No Gods/No Masters'.