

1st Anarchist Studies Network conference

Possibilities for an Anarchist Psychology panel

Session 6: Friday 5 September, 16.30-18.30, Room U014

Abstracts

Panel convenor:

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There have been various explicitly Marxist psychologies that have had a significant impact upon theorising and research: most notably, perhaps, the works of Vygotsky, Seve and Holzkamp. But despite the sometimes prominent presence of anarchists within the discipline, there has been no similarly influential anarchist psychology. The contributors to this workshop will consider this situation, and invite participants to join them in discussing the contemporary possibilities for a robust anarchist psychology. Some issues that may arise include:

- What kinds of empirical research have anarchist psychologists already engaged in, and what does this tell us about the possibilities for an anarchist psychology?
- How and to what extent could the development of an anarchist psychology be informed by other explicitly politicised psychologies?
- Is a robust anarchist psychology necessarily a materialist psychology? If so, what kinds of materialism might it endorse, and how might its materialism inform its practices?
- To what extent are psychological theories that separate the individual from society (the great majority of them) compatible with anarchism?
- Can current social science and social psychological interest in process philosophy, experience, subjectivity and affect be recruited in the development of an anarchist psychology?
- Is the 'anti-fascist' psychology of Deleuze and Guattari necessarily an anarchist psychology?
- Since every theory of the social is also implicitly a theory of the individual, can we even define an anarchist psychology without simultaneously circumscribing what we mean by anarchism?

Our discussion of these issues will be seeded by a series of presentations:

1. Political Psychologies and Possibilities

John Cromby

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In this paper I will describe in very general terms some of the issues that may be attendant upon the development of an anarchist psychology. I will discuss the relationship between individual and society as it is commonly understood within the mainstream of psychology, highlighting how psychological conceptions of the individual typically rely upon a notion of the person as rational, bounded, set apart from and contrasted against social relations. Whilst this kind of individuality might find echoes within some strands of anarchism, it is problematic in that it erroneously makes a sharp separation between the individual and the social that paves the way for various politically troubling strands of essentialism and reductionism. I will then outline aspects of three reasonably influential Marxist psychological theories: Seve's personality theory, Holzkamp's German Critical Psychology, and Vygotsky's account of how 'inner speech' emerges from the interplay of affect, thought, language and social relations. In summarising the strengths and weaknesses of each of these accounts, I will draw out what I think they might tell us about the possibilities for an anarchist psychology.

2. A life of immanence: Deleuze's route to an anarchist psychology

Steven D. Brown

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Hardt & Negri's (2002; 2005) well known re-imagining of autonomist thought gives 'multitude' a central role. This is carefully selected from a family of classical terms in political theory—populus, plebs, vulgus, turba, multitudo (see Montag, 1999). Between them they capture notions such as 'population', 'labouring class', 'the crowd' and 'the masses'. Multitude has complex relations with all these terms. Crudely put, multitude is the collective seen in terms of its pure potentiality (as with Agamben's 1994 notion of 'bare life'). As such it is by no means an uncontroversial or unproblematic term. The introduction to the symposium notes that any conceivable psychology has to orient itself to some version of the individual and some version of the collective. If multitudo can serve as the latter then what can act as the former? Spinoza's political theory is the touchstone for Hardt & Negri, and for Deleuze. Spinoza offers 'conatus' (or 'endeavour to persist in being') as a pre-personal 'will' or a-subjective singular motive force. This notion animates Deleuze's late work on 'life' and 'style'. In this paper I will show how conatus is developed in Deleuze's work as a coherent account of 'experience without a subject'. It is this version of experience, unbounded by an a-priori transcendental ego nor with limitations on 'what a body can do', that might inform a version of psychology able to enter into meaningful dialogue with anarchism.

3. Thoughts on Composition, Collectivity, and Affect

Stevphen Shukaitis

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What could an anarchist psychology be if, rather than presupposing the existence of a pure ecstatic creative subjectivity in need of liberation (as often done in various strains of anarchist thought and the Situationists), it investigated what conditions would be necessary for the emergence of such positions? That is to say, rather than assuming the existence of individual or collective positions (or to give precedence to either one), to explore the process of individuation: the ethics of relations between individuals and collectivities in their dual process of emergence. It is in this space and process, composed by the affective relationships and interactions emerging there, that an anarchist psychology (which necessarily is based on an inquiry into the nature of the social) can contribute to the formation of liberated forms of interaction and sociality.

4. Becoming, Subjectivity and Experience: pointers and pitfalls

John Cromby

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In this short presentation I will summarise some of the themes and issues that run through the previous papers with respect to notions of becoming, and with respect to notions of subjectivity and/or experience. Notions of becoming are being taken up widely within contemporary social science; their emphases on the always-unfinished character of being and the ever-emergent potentialities of experience seem to have much to offer an anarchist psychology. Similarly, notions of subjectivity and experience have recently been garnering attention, both in a series of (largely unrelated) books and in a new journal. I will suggest that it is in the overlaps and distinctions between these concepts that we might find some useful pointers toward the development of an anarchist psychology, as well as gaining some sense of the pitfalls that any such attempt might have to negotiate.