

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Jeffrey Shantz, *Active Anarchy: Political Practice in Contemporary Movements*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011, 180pp. \$US 60.00 hardcover (978-7391-6613-0).

In *Active Anarchy*, Jeff Shantz details a number of case studies that demonstrate the influence of anarchism on contemporary social movements. Although the case studies provide a somewhat limited scope — they stem from the late 1990s and early 2000s and focus almost exclusively on activities in Toronto, Canada — *Active Anarchy* is a useful contribution to a number of recent sociology texts that underline the participatory and egalitarian principles that have made anarchism a prominent influence on movements that aim for radical social transformations.

To contrast with typical caricatures of anarchism as a menacing and chaotic disorder, Shantz provides a detailed analysis of anarchist practices. He illustrates the nuanced and principled commitment of anarchists in their efforts at “organizing, publicizing, and putting their bodies on the line” (p. 112). Grounding contemporary case studies in literature from the classical anarchist tradition, Shantz relates how anarchist movements are motivated by sentiments of “mutuality, conviviality, affinity, and affection” (p. 127) that aspire to build new communities and institutions. Unlike the fictitious anarchist menace often promoted by police and media, anarchist movements are better exemplified by their commitment to others through community building, an opposition to violence (state and non-state), and respect for life and freedom.

Active Anarchy aims to detail what Shantz calls “everyday anarchy.” He says that “rather than take an approach that views anarchism as a political or revolutionary movement that ‘enters into’ specific social struggles, I address those anarchists who emphasize the immanent anarchy in everyday practices of mutual aid and solidarity” (p. 2). Shantz avoids discussions that are overly-theoretical or uncritical celebrations of anarchism by offering case studies that demonstrate how anarchism draws on previous traditions but can “also innovate and experiment” (p. 153). In focussing on practices of everyday anarchism, he positions his work against many of the recent ethnographies on anarchism in the global justice movement.

Shantz argues that much of the focus of academic literature on anarchism is simply “a jumping off point” for discussions of political theory (p.

3) or as “a metaphor for anti-globalization politics more broadly” (p. 24). While *Active Anarchy* pays tribute to many of the new manifestations of anarchism, Shantz is sceptical towards political expressions of anarchism that take the shape of lifestyle-politics. He is careful to acknowledge some positive elements of new movements, but his identification with “class struggle anarchism” is prominent throughout the text; so much so that there are points in his narrative where his primary antagonists are not capitalists, or the church or the state: they are contemporary anarchist writers like David Graeber and Richard Day. These authors (and others) have detailed the influence of anarchism within the Global Justice Movement, relying on a complex analysis of power and domination that places class within a mix of oppressive structures and practices of contemporary capitalism. Shantz clearly disagrees with their lack of class struggle emphasis.

Shantz cautions against the lifestyle-oriented politics of affinity, noting that some contemporary writers have ignored the “renewal of explicitly class-struggle oriented forms of anarchism that have emerged recently as contemporary anarchists come up against limits in the politics of affinity” (p. 42). To underline the class-struggle practices of everyday anarchism, Shantz explores a number of anarchist-inspired projects; from long-term free schools and infoshops, to short-term black blocs and street reclamations. Throughout seven case study chapters, he examines the limits and possibilities of affinity-based organizing and consensus decision-making processes, and provides ethnographic accounts of DIY politics, punk movements, book making, dumpster diving, and direct action tactics.

Theoretically, *Active Anarchy* includes an informative chapter on anarchism and social movements. Merging theoretical imprints of anarchism with contemporary literature from social movement studies, Shantz uses anarchist-inspired movements to demonstrate how conventional sociology of social movements is over-dependent on state-centric and integrationist frameworks. To provide an empirical demonstration of how social movements literature discounts movements that seem “unreasonable,” Shantz offers a useful examination of black bloc tactics, as well as the broader meaning and pedagogical contribution of the black bloc to contemporary movements that challenge capitalism and the status quo. As an interesting theoretical contribution, Shantz sketches out Foucault’s obscure notion of heterotopia (pp. 91-92; 103-104) as a conceptual framework to understand the proliferation of anarchist sites and spaces in contemporary urban landscapes. Shantz relates how heterotopias refer to counter-sites that, unlike “the nowhere lands of utopias” (p. 91), are actually existing sites of difference and counter-conduct.

Shantz's case studies mostly comprise anarchist efforts in Toronto. In the chapter on "heterotopias in Toronto," which I found to be the most informative and engaging, Shantz relies on his participation with two projects in Toronto: a collective bookstore (infoshop) named *Who's Emma?* and a collectively-run meeting space called the Anarchist Free Space. Shantz provides a detailed account of the internal decision making processes. The chapter includes a reflective critique of the internal gender and power dynamics, the challenges of addressing identity politics and establishing principles of unity, as well as a number of other factors that these collective projects encountered, some of which contributed to their unravelling.

In a separate chapter, Shantz puts forward a call to study the "criminology of resistance" that would include the "criminalized activities undertaken by anarchists (and others), e.g., graffiti, squats, pirate radio, sabotages" (p. 49). While he offers a useful outline, his exploration of the criminalization of dissent was somewhat disappointing because of its narrow focus. The chapter consists of a critique of the 2001 *Anti-Terrorism Act*, and dated examples from late 90s and early 2000s of protest policing and police aggression. There is, however, little mention of the surveillance efforts that have targeted animal liberation and radical environmental movements; nor does he engage with much recent literature on social movement suppression and criminalization.

Active Anarchy's most appealing element is its well-written and thoroughly engaging narrative that sustains interest because of its thoughtful reflection and very clear commitment towards a more egalitarian and free society. The major drawback of *Active Anarchy* is the dated nature of the case studies, which are focussed on the late 1990s and early 2000s. The text seems to have been written in the early and mid-2000s; while it was published in 2011, this time gap gives a somewhat artificial and distorted picture of "contemporary" anarchist movements. This shortcoming is compounded by the fact that the author did not update the text to include recent literature on anarchism and social movements. As an introductory text that includes a good historical background on anarchist movements and numerous case studies, it could be used in advanced undergraduate classes or graduate classes. It is most relevant for courses or reading groups on social movement studies, political sociology, or sociological theory. Overall, the text is well worth reading for scholars with an interest in the sociology of social movements and anarchism because of Shantz's engaging narrative and insightful analysis. It provides a useful theoretical contribution that underlines the everyday practices of egalitarianism and participatory democracy that are at the foundation of everyday anarchy, while also outlining some useful - though dated - case

studies to support the claim that anarchism is at the center of movements that aim to live in more compassionate and sustainable communities.

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