
Contemporary anarchist geography owes a lot to its roots in 19th century Europe (Springer 2012, 2016). Major figures such as Kropotkin and Reclus are still continually and heavily drawn upon in contemporary research, and with good reason (see, for example, Clark and Martin 2013; MacLaughlin 2016). *Historical Geographies of Anarchism* looks at both the early part of anarchism’s evolution and speculates on its potential future(s). The book provides an overview of strains of anarchist thought that originated and were put into practice in various locations across the globe. The applied nature of anarchism is striking as many chapters provide examples of how anarchist thought is inseparable from everyday actions. The book is divided into three sections. The first covers “Spaces of the History of Anarchism”, with the second and third centring around “Early Anarchist Geographies and their Places” and “Anarchist Geographies, Places and Present Challenges”.

Opening the first section, Carl Levy traces how the space of the city was influential in early anarchist evolution. Levy notes how cities were instrumental in disseminating anarchist thought via publications across borders and nations. Often this was helped by the influence of immigrants. He also notes how anarchism intersected with various countercultural artistic movements such as Futurism and Dada. Levy traces out how anarchists took inspiration from the city by simply observing that the newest inventions or biggest economies also came with drawbacks for the majority of the people. The space of the city is at least as relevant today if not more so as urbanization and the creation of “mega cities” is becoming a worldwide trend.

Following two chapters on anarchist publishing in Europe and the Americas (by Andrew Hoyt and Davide Turcato), Julian Brigstocke closes Part 1 of the book with a look at humor in
1880s Montmartre, Paris—a place which became well-supportive of anarchist thought. The neighbourhood accepted those from all walks of life without judgement, and creative thought was abundant in visual art, writing and performative protest, often possessing a satirical edge. Montmartre was exceedingly self-aware, but its attempts at what looked like self-deprecating humor turned out to be sharp jabs at mainstream society. Brigstocke elucidates how humor is a way of saying what one truly feels, even if such thoughts are revolutionary, violent, or offensive, in a more culturally accepted manner. Anarchist humor brought to light the violence of authoritarianism while also advocating anarchism’s own structural and epistemic violence as a force disruptive of established, normalized thought.

In the second section of *Historical Geographies*, after Francisco Toro examines Elisee Reclus’s work from a degrowth perspective, Federico Ferretti ruminates on the idea of nationalism in the early anarchist geographers Dragomanov, Kropotkin, and Reclus. This nationalism was not of or for their own home countries, but for foreign ones—the lands of other oppressed peoples. The idea was to build national identities independent from monarchies in order to form self-governing nations free from the confines of external and coercive control. In this way, peoples could govern themselves, a notion at the very heart of anarchist praxis.

Pascale Siegrist looks at Kropotkin and Reclus historically, examining the context and history of their work and anarchist geography. Part of this examination includes the tension between the two—anarchy and geography—as they are sometimes separated and never mentioned by these thinkers as explicitly tied together. That is, there was no “anarchist geography” to Kropotkin and Reclus. Yet their work often covered both simultaneously, cloaking one in a disguise of the other, conflating the two to the point of becoming anarchist geography without the phrase needing to have been coined.

Siegrist mentions how these two radical geographers are continually and strongly drawn upon in current critical strains of thought on a wide range of subjects. Yet, Siegrist also notes that much modern homage stops short of embracing the full weight of Kropotkin’s or Reclus’s
work. The reasons lie in history and the anarchism/Marxism split. Siegrist’s observations made me reflect on the lack of attention paid to other animals or species in much of current anarchist geography. In a time of mass extinction, anarchist geographers are addressing the environment, perhaps by virtue of their academic trade, the environment’s animal inhabitants are largely overlooked. While this does of course include wildlife, anarchist and animal geographies also embrace animals close to home: animals we eat as food or keep as pets. These relationships have spatial and political implications not often touched upon. A couple exceptions might be Gillespie and Collard’s (2015) volume Critical Animal Geographies and Nocella et al.’s (2015) edited collection Anarchism and Animal Liberation. But these books are rather isolated examples. Nocella et al.’s book is explicitly grounded in anarchism, and Gillespie and Collard’s in geography, but little has been written about nonhuman species within anarchist geography, notwithstanding Richard White’s (2015) chapter in Gillespie and Collard’s edited collection, and White and Springer’s (2018) recent essay. I see the animal question as an additional present-day scientific challenge of anarchism.

The final section begins with essays by David Crouch on applications of the late Colin Ward’s concept of social anarchy, and Rita Velloso who examines anarchist insurrection near Brazil. However, what I find more cutting-edge are the last two essays in the book. The first of which is by Anthony Ince and Gerônimo Barrera de la Torre, who attempt to connect a (historical) geography of “the state” with archaeology by offering ways in which archaeology assists and complements geographical study. One major way is the insight from archaeology that the state is a comparatively recent socio-political structure in human civilization. Thus states have beginnings but also have ends. They note how this contrasts with prevailing wisdom within human geography of the state as a given and constant object of analysis. Ince and Barrera de la Torre also focus on statism by emphasizing the myriad forms the state can take, and has taken. They trace the formation of states and the emergence of inequality: when inequality elevated some at the expense of others, this privileged position then had to be legitimated and sustained.
The authors reject the idea that societies without a state are developmentally deficient, or that complexity in social relations is only found in the West.

In the final chapter, Barrera de la Torre and Narciso Barrera-Bassols emphasize the point that there is no single version of anarchy; it is instead as varied as those who practice it. The authors conceptually distinguish the Western perspective on anarchy from what they refer to as “other” anarchies, as many non-Westerners view anarchy as another colonizing Western ideology (see also Barker and Pickerill 2012). Under the category of “other” Barrera de la Torre and Barrera-Bassols include many influences from Indigenous cultures, specifically noting that Mexican and other Latin American contributions to anarchy and geography have been overlooked even by critical geographers. A significant point the authors make is how Indigenous peoples often have deep, meaningful connections to the environment (the land) and to nonhuman animals. Perhaps most importantly, Barrera de la Torre and Barrera-Bassols seek to draw connections between Western and “other” anarchies (and geographies) as a way to create local anarchies that exist with a global perspective. They give an example of Mesoamerican countries where authority circulates through the community and each member participates in decision making.

Ultimately, *Historical Geographies of Anarchism* is a critical, reflexive look at the political philosophy of anarchism as compared to its geographical roots. By highlighting some shortcomings of the theory, the book looks to the future by suggesting ways to create a unified movement based on the diversity of its practitioners. As such, it breaks new ground in anarchist geography, as well as creates innovations with and within Indigenous studies.
References


