

Against Anarchism's Academisation

Anarchist Pedagogies Collective

Jan 7, 2024

We write this text with the biggest preoccupation, grief, anger, and frustration. Many of us have been aware of the co-option by many academics and academic institutions; we have been aware of how academic circles constantly co-opt anarchist theories, analysis, and authors. We also have experienced a larger number of anarcho-curious academics who think anarchism is an “interesting” theoretical framework for them to explore while then bringing with them a wrecking of the social, political, and economic critique that decades of anarchist activism have developed around our principles. We believe that this is the natural consequence of the scientific method that was embedded into neoliberalism, which fragments everything and destroys the connections between our everyday struggles to political analysis, causing us to lose the radical and militant parts that help us understand and adapt to these historical times. As they “study” anarchism, they use it as if it were a new toy in their thought experiments, while constantly trying to shove it into their neatly labelled academic boxes and refusing to recognise that it (like many things) will never truly fit. This is, of course, seen from a white European perspective because we are aware that a lot of groups and spaces outside of that region are much more aware of the importance of the resistance against the academisation of anarchism, and they tend to be much more coherent and consistent in their praxis.

In the last few decades, we have experienced how academics have used anarchism as a theoretical tool, though they have not done anything to bring about change with regards to the increasing ecofascism, corporativism, and globalisation of neoliberalism in the last 40 years. In addition to this, we have a myriad of examples of anarcho-curious people destroying anarchist groups from the inside when they infiltrate anarchist spaces with their own capitalist values where hierarchisation, oppression, and individualisation are introduced into our spaces. This helps to destroy our organisational capacity because they create and maintain power dynamics that give many of us even more work to do. We don't just have to try to create new radical spaces against our classic common enemies, but we also have to fight our internal saboteurs. It is not strange that a lot of comrades are absolutely burnt out. This internal sabotage by the anarcho-curious has happened in many different spaces, from radical publishing houses to squats or book fairs. Time after time, we experience an alienation from our own principles and spaces because we won't deal with our own internalised oppressive attitudes that prevent us from behaving in ways aligned with anarchist principles, and we allow an additional destruction when our own spaces become altered by the deradicalised, dissolving all of our theoretical analysis.

No gods, no masters, no husbands...and no academic idols.

We want to focus on the last part of this sentence. In our everyday struggles, we want to ensure that we are giving space to activists who most of the time either are in prison, upholding local communities, being criminalised, or are simply just trying to survive in this ecocidal post-capitalist phase.

Here is where our anger arises: All of these anarcho-curious people are impostors from the academic world, and they are just co-opting our principles in order to pretend they are radical and keep on climbing the academic ladder. Instead of actively participating in anarchist spaces and actually engaging with any of the projects around them that seek to reject capitalism, they come to merely visit and extract information for their own personal gain. There are no ethical boundaries for how they approach their work and even fewer with regards to their direct impact on the support and aid that our comrades in the streets receive.

Then again, we have some academics who in a certain degree actually try to practice the ethical coherence that is demanded of defining ourselves as anarchist, and we don't academise our activism. On the contrary, we hold our roots directly in the struggles, being very clear that working in academia just helps us pay the bills. We are workers with a social status, but we are workers nonetheless.

That is why we are utterly enraged when, in the last couple of weeks, we have encountered some situations that exemplify yet another fight we must undertake. That is the use of certain anarchist figures who are tokenised by academics in order to pretend that their work brings radicality and real change in the world. This, of course, is done in absolutely disgusting liberal spaces and organisational structures that absolutely do not have any pretense whatsoever of neither opening for anarchist theoretical work nor the abolition of oppressive structures or neoliberal values. They abuse certain Western anarchist figures in their own impostor syndrome so that they may gather funding which is then used to support the careers of certain academic individuals but never to support anarchist and other aligned radical groups or spaces, and they never even try to give mutual aid to oppressed people. In other cases, we have self-defined anarchist research groups that are tainted by using neoliberal buzzwords or only ever welcoming openly anarcho-curious academics in their research spaces like an ideological poison.

It would be lovely to know what the hell the David Graeber Institute, the Emma Goldman Awards, the Ferrer i Guardia Foundation or the Anarchist Virtual University: Ivan Illich are thinking when they either do not mention the political background of the people whose names are being idolised or openly conflate people with ideologies they did not claim. They also fail to explain how in the hell they will defend the use of these figures in neoliberal practices, though that would be quite difficult to do when they're so clearly maintaining them. Some of these groups are based in academic contexts and headed primarily by academics while using academic structures and rules; others are directly supported by governments or fall under a government scheme, literally bringing more and more radical work under the control of the state and its institutions. According to the missions of these organisations, some openly state that you must continue contributing to the work of their chosen individual and continuing their vision, putting the focus entirely back on that idolised individual over anything else. We wonder how these individuals would feel being memorialised in this manner. Would they come back from their graves only to have a heart attack at the sight and die in flames once again?

The betrayal and dangerous dissolution of the radical ethical coherence in anarchism between our everyday struggles from the theorisation of anarchist principles might be one of the reasons

why anarchism is not perceived as a real threat anymore. We are aware that both in the US and EU contexts that anarchists are criminalised, but we can't accept to become academised and neoliberalised just for our own survival and that of our ideas. Actually, we should be defending ourselves from these awful attacks; we should fight against the academisation and tokenisation of anarchist historical figures, theories, practices, and work. In centering only a few names and ignoring their own anarchist positions and how those positions impacted their own time on this planet, we would be fighting back against what should be seen as nothing more than an open attack on our own principles.

We don't want academic idols. In fact, we don't want *any* idols at all. It's one thing to be grateful for having people who have helped us with their activism and through their writings to continue the construction of free societies based on anarchist principles, but it is something completely different to abuse their names only to pretend to be radical when the only thing you do is to destroy long radical traditions that have constantly been under attack and for which a lot of individuals have paid and continue to pay the price for with their freedom and their lives because they continue to fight against every hierarchy that threatens the liberation of all people.

We are aware that the recognition of individual work is important, but we still must kill our idols, even when they work in academia. We hope that several comrades can become aware that we are all flawed humans and that any historical anarchist figure, like ourselves, has never been perfect. The struggles have always been collective and so has our resistance, and so our fight should still be to abolish any oppression at the same time as we build strong alternatives outside the state, capitalism, and other oppressive institutions.

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