

Anarchy in the Age of Dinosaurs

Review

Egg Syntax
John Brinker

2003

a review of

Anarchy in the Age of Dinosaurs by the Curious George Brigade, Mosinee, WI, 2003, 154 pp, \$6. See pages 63–64 to order.

For a few years, the CrimethInc. collective has been willfully monkeying around with our assumptions about anarchism. Most recently, the CrimethInc. mantle has been taken up by a collective calling itself the Curious George Brigade. With *Anarchy in the Age of Dinosaurs* (AAD), the Brigade romps on the jungle gym of anarchism with an innocence both inspiring and exasperating.

Big-hearted and rough-around-the-edges, AAD reads like a compilation of late-night journal entries: inspired, rambling, and alternating between profound and hokey. Its central metaphor is that anarchists—“small, warm-blooded creatures”—are poised to inherit the Earth after the inevitable fall of pleistocene capitalism. Are our values so natural and good that they will effortlessly replace the old order? Some anarchists share this conceit with other left-liberal ideologues.

The Curious George Brigade doesn't really believe in that old teleology, though; they just like to toss ideas around. With a short attention span, the writing flits around in a caffeine-addled way. Past all the tangents and feints, a shape begins to emerge. The real mission is never admitted but implied everywhere: the book is a ragged and eloquent apology for “lifestyle anarchism.”

The Brigadeers defend the idea that anarchism should be a “philosophy of living,” rather than political ideology or organizational platform. This idea is still provocative because it threatens to sever anarchism's connection to the thread of Enlightenment thinking, away from the Berkman and Bakunins, away from the Paris Commune and the Spanish Civil War—away from historical touchstones.

The authors want to see modern anarchism join the flux of what they call “Folk Anarchy.” “... not a faction, splinter group, or rebellion against another tendency,” their magpie approach promotes anarchy as culture, as a lived reality, from Peruvian shantytowns to nodes in the North American traveler scene. It's a rhizomatic anarchy that pops up everywhere in new guises, adapts to different cultural climates, and still retains an essential character.

In a book filled with hip jargon, “Folk Anarchy” may be the one term from AAD that we'll still be discussing ten years from now. The authors' favorite trick is to unearth some dialectic embedded in modern anarchist debate and then rhetorically “transcend” it by inventing some third category that makes a compromise or reframes the argument. So—taking a cue from Erich Fromm—they find a tension between “duty” and “joy” and supersede it with “meaning.” Instead of “anarcho-purity,” we should be practicing “anarcho-pride,” and so on.

The worst thing that CrimethInc. has inherited from the anarchist writing of the past 30 years is a love for the rhapsodic power of the word over the ability to communicate. At its worst, AAD slides into early-1990s fluff as in

the chapter heading: “Surfing the Fractal Waves of Revolution.” That kind of stuff isn’t even printed on rave fliers anymore! Elsewhere, they play the old CrimethInc. trick of misattributing and detourning quotes, subverting the reader’s attempts to situate ideas in the framework of Western philosophy. While their disrespect for intellectual property is admirable, this practice can come off as flippantly avoiding attribution of sources.

Confounding our notions of what a book should be, AAD’s various chapters sketch out ideas in a ‘zine style. With its tentative quality, this book is consistent with all the ideas that make CrimethInc. projects so vital and challenging. AAD deals briefly with many of the hot topics in anarchist circles today, like consensus decision-making and race in anarchism (see facing page). New areas of interest, like “heroic communities,” mutiny, intentional inefficiency, and the Third World city make brief appearances in AAD.

A section on the shantytown as a model for the anarchist city is both inspiring and a little off-base. The authors demonstrate why the shantytown is the apotheosis of anarchist living: robust public space, ownership-by-use, a functioning gift economy. Yet they simultaneously run the risk of over-romanticizing and minimizing the crippling poverty, squalor, and political disempowerment that many residents of these communities face.

The essay on inefficiency is, in some ways, the heart of AAD. For good reasons, some will never accept the kind of challenge that the Curious George Brigade mounts against bedrock Western values. But this essay is in many ways the best recent distillation of the zero-work philosophy as applied to collective organizing. While refraining from dogmatic prescriptions or lists of banned tools and activities, the authors challenge us to imagine new ways of valuing our time.

Like the Tin Man, North American anarchism seems at times to be missing a crucial organ. Perhaps CrimethInc. is our Wizard, placing a softly beating heart into all of our cold constructions. Who cares if the Wizard is bogus, so long as his gifts have the desired effect? AAD is a book that feels better than it thinks, but it looks you in the eye and dares you to start up a conversation with it. And we’d be missing out if we turned down the offer.

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