

Stephen Shukaitis

A Kaddish for Tikki Tikki Tembo

To take David Graeber's work seriously is to take play seriously, or perhaps better, to follow the subtle inversions where play becomes a serious mode of conceptual work. Graeber's ethnographic and historical forays operate less as the production of theory in the usual academic sense and more as the circulation of gifts: ideas offered with the open hand of low theory, tools that are both sharp and mischievous, never quite belonging to the disciplines that would claim them. What emerges is a trickster practice of thought, grounded in anarchist and autonomist traditions, that invents categories adequate not to the state's forms of capture, but to the everyday arts of living otherwise. Theory here is not a monument to authority but a bundle of gifts passed around: at once practical, playful, and oriented toward forms of life that persist beyond governance.

This short intervention explores how Graeber's approach resonates with broader cartographies of statelessness, from James Scott's evocations of Zomia to the histories of Alifuru communities in the Indonesian archipelago. These are not simply spaces where the state has not yet arrived, but spaces that have been actively shaped against its logics, where categories of thought themselves must be reworked to fit the texture of lived autonomy. Following Graeber and Wengrow's *The Dawn of Everything*, this also means undoing linear narratives of political evolution: history is not a march toward inevitable statehood, but a tangle of experiments where people repeatedly chose, refused, and reinvented social forms outside hierarchical capture. Low theory, in this sense, is not a reduction but a recalibration, a way of thinking at the scale of communities, of improvisation, of refusal. To draw on Graeber's method is to cultivate theory as an offering: a conceptual toolkit that functions best when it doesn't take itself too seriously, when it delights in its own trickster capacity to escape capture and to return, again and again, as a gift.

Dreaming with Value: Rereading Graeber Against the Grain of His Own Work

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What if the most overlooked key to David Graeber's sprawling, dazzling body of work has been hiding in plain sight all along, in his first major book on value? *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* has long hovered at the edges of his more widely celebrated writings on debt, bureaucracy, and direct action, as though a youthful experiment or preliminary sketch. Yet what if it is precisely here that we find the methodological and political fulcrum of Graeber's project: an anthropology of value as an anthropology of collective dreaming? This presentation argues that re-centering Graeber's theory of value allows us to grasp the subterranean threads binding together his later interventions, from the anthropology of debt to the anarchist reinvention of democracy. Rather than treating value as a dull economic category, Graeber turns it into a radical lens for mapping the production of meaning, imagination, and desire in common.

Reading him alongside Marx and Mauss but also beyond them, we encounter value not as false coin but as the shimmering residue of what worlds we think worth bringing into being. In the ideological rubble of neoliberalism, this is not simply an anthropological curiosity but a survival tool, a way of refusing the foreclosure of imagination. Graeber reminds us that any politics worth pursuing begins with asking: whose dreams are we valuing, and how might we exchange them otherwise?