BRIDGING THE CHASMS: CONTEMPORARY ANARCHISTS IN THE U.S.

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Studies of anarchists across disciplines have largely focused on famous personalities and major historical events or on contentious protest actions and violence. In a 21st century context in which anarchism has an ever more significant influence on social movements in the U.S. and around the globe, understanding how anarchists understand that label is increasingly important. This paper aims to contribute to an understanding of the meaning of anarchism through the words of anarchists themselves. In this study, I interview 22 anarchists from three U.S. cities about what anarchism means to them and about if and how they practice their ideology in their everyday lives. I find a high level of unity around several core values regardless of the interviewees' backgrounds or affiliations. Beyond that base level of unity, we see extensive variation across the sectarian divisions asserted by dominant theoretical works, both findings suggesting that such dichotomous, antagonistic frameworks may be overly simplistic. In addition, I explore a rhetorical device that appears frequently in the interviews and connect it to a pervasive sense of marginality. This "marginality within marginality" may have several sources, including punk music and subculture, which I argue contribute to the perpetuation of a notion of unbridgeability between types of anarchists.

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

Despite being objects of cultural fascination, anarchists remain misunderstood people in socio-political society in the United States. To many, anarchism is synonymous with chaos and disorder, and anarchists are frequently represented as agents of such in popular media. The root of the word anarchy (*an-archy*, from the ancient Greek *anarchia*) literally translates to "without ruler" or "without authority," making anarchism the belief in and/or pursuit of a society without authority, and anarchists those who identify with anarchism. Anarchists have been a perennial presence on the political left since well before the Paris Commune, and in recent decades, anarchism has come to take on a central role in radical social movements in the U.S. as well. In the wake of evident failures of State Communism and liberal Socialism to deliver on promises of social liberation, many on the left have turned to anarchism – a camp that had pointed to the flaws in authoritarian iterations of leftism since before the any Communist or Socialist party came to power. Furthermore, the influences of feminism and intersectionality on the left dovetailed with anarchist conceptions of power and revolution (Epstein 1991), making anarchist ideas more influential, in a process many have come to call "the anarchist turn" (Blumenfeld et al. 2013).

Social movement organizing has increasingly taken on anarchist formations, as was evident in the Occupy movement's near universal use of anarchistic practices like spokescouncils, general assemblies and some type of consensus process (Cornell 2011), despite no central organization dictating these structures. Anarchist influence, both overt and covert, in social movements is demonstrably on the rise, to the point where an "anarchist sensibility," as Barbara Epstein puts it, is now the dominant philosophical standpoint among young radical activists (Epstein 2001:1). In this context, understanding what is meant when someone identifies as an anarchist becomes increasingly crucial. It is the goal of this study to contribute to that understanding.

This paper contains two main sections. The first section is a literature review in which I investigate the ways anarchists have been studied in the past, in order to situate my research on anarchists in the U.S. today. Historical research on anarchists has mostly focused on biographies of the most famous anarchists, on efforts to republish their writing, and on studies of major anarchist uprisings and events. This has led to an ironically top-down or "elite" approach to understanding historical anarchism. Meanwhile, social science work on anarchists has typically concentrated on the most contentious manifestations of anarchist activity, typically involving black masks, dramatic protest actions, smashed windows, and confrontations with police – the types of behavior that conform the closest to a popular conception of anarchism-as-chaos. These views potentially obscure the ways most anarchists engage with their political ideology and behavior most of the time. I then introduce Murray Bookchin's influential dichotomy between social anarchists and lifestyle

anarchists. Bookchin claims anarchists historically and presently can be categorized into these distinct and "unbridgeable" camps. Bookchin's framework is widely accepted within and without anarchist scenes, but my interviews appear to contradict the existence of such a fundamental and concrete split among anarchists.

In the second section I present the results of my research with anarchists. I attempt to flesh out our understanding of contemporary anarchists based on the words of "ordinary anarchists" from a diverse set of backgrounds. The study is based on interviews with 22 anarchists from three U.S. cities about what anarchism means to them and if/how they practice their politics in their everyday lives. Based on these qualitative interviews, this paper explores contemporary anarchism through participants' own thoughts and experiences with anarchism in practice.

I find widespread unity in several key areas that demonstrate that the anarchist label implies a political framework beyond shared identification with the word. Beyond broad areas of unity, there is a high degree of variation in the political and practical beliefs of anarchists. I also identified a common rhetorical phrase indicating an affinity for marginality within anarchist circles, which I connect to the influence of punk music on anarchist culture in the U.S. Finally, I put my findings in conversation with one another in hopes of fleshing out the subjectivity of individuals who identify as anarchists, and argue against Bookchin's contention that there exist distinct, "unbridgeable" subgroups within anarchism.

2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. SURVEY OF THE FIELD: THE STUDY OF ANARCHISTS

This paper discusses a study of anarchists, and as such, it is important to situate it within the field of previous studies of anarchists. I distinguish here between the ways people have studied *anarchists*, and the ways people have studied *anarchism,* though of course the two are connected. That is, in this review I am concerned with researchers in various fields who have studied people who identify themselves as anarchists. The goal of this section is to map out and make visible the field of the study of anarchists, especially the methods and approaches through which researchers have gathered knowledge, so as to best position my research. It must be stated that the literature I review in this "survey of the field" is literature that is in English. A great deal of additional work on anarchism and on anarchists exists in other languages, particularly in Spanish, French, Italian, and Russian, which I do not address. In addition, while my research relates to anarchists in the U.S. specifically, the historical literature I discuss relates to anarchists all over the world. There is not enough work on anarchists in the U.S. alone to constitute an entire field in which to

situate my research, and in the case of biographies, the internationalist views and practices of many anarchists make zeroing in on nationally grounded studies difficult.

For my purposes, I will break down existing studies of anarchists into five broad methodological categories: Historical, Autobiographical, Sociological, Ethnographic, and Law Enforcement. The first category is the most populated, and can be subdivided into histories relating to individuals (biographies), and histories related to events or groups. The last two categories, ethnography and law enforcement, are the sparsest, though both contain useful information.

2.1.1. Historical Studies of Anarchists

Biographical methodologies are rather straightforward and consistent, using historical documents, personal letters, and journals and other autobiographical notes. Still, the subject choices of biographical studies are instructive. Historical treatments of individual anarchists mainly consist of biographies of the 'great' anarchists, and these studies are relatively numerous. The most studied anarchists are Mikhail Bakunin (Masters 1974, Mendel 1981, Leier 2006), Pyotr Kropotkin (Woodcock and Avacumović 1971, Osofsky 1979), Emma Goldman (Falk 1990, Falk ed. 2003, Rudahl 2007), and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (Hyams 1979, Woodcock 1987). There are even more combinations and republications of the writings of aforementioned anarchists and other famous 'leaders' like Errico Malatesta. In addition, there exist biographies on other major thinkers, as well as on famous

anarchist "terrorists" like Leon Czolgosz, Alexander Berkman, and Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti.

That nearly all published biographies about anarchists are about the same few famous people is not surprising, considering the natures of biographies and publishing. However, the paradigm of studying the historical 'greats' is so strong it appears to blind some writers to potentially more interesting and alive subjects. For example, Edward Krebs wrote *Shifu, Soul of Chinese Anarchism (*1998) based in large part on interviews with one primary source, an old anarchist named Mo Jiping, who Krebs met in Taibei, China in 1972 (xi). On one hand, Krebs' attempt to bring Western attention to Shifu (born Liu Shaobin), a prominent anarchist martyr in the early 20th century, and to use his story as a conduit to the presentation of a revisionist history of left radicalism in China, is laudable. On the other hand, Krebs had at his disposal a veteran of the Chinese anarchist struggle who survived until the 1970s, and he chose to use that person exclusively for his knowledge of a more famous, dead anarchist, rather than to tell his own story.

The single-minded focus on the "great" anarchists is even more apparent in *Anarchist Voices* by Paul Avrich (2005). This massive work comprises many dozens of interviews over the course of decades with the family members, friends, and acquaintances of famous historical anarchists. The book's purpose is to color in our picture of these figures through accounts given by still-living people who knew them personally. Avrich's title makes it appear as though his book is a collection of interviews with anarchists, but as he acknowledges, many of his interviewees are

not themselves anarchists, while others are anarchist ideologues and activists in their own rights (2005:xi).

There are myriad intriguing accounts and opinions contained in this large volume, and in that regard it is invaluable to students of anarchist history. It also provides excellent second-hand information on the iconic anarchists. However, the sole purpose of the interviews relates to interviewees' deceased famous family members or friends. The interviewees are selected and categorized based on their connections to the famous anarchists they knew, and the 'voices' of the interviewees are there to tell us about the big names, not tell their own stories.

As with biographical histories of individuals, the historical methodology of events and groups is fairly consistent, relying on historical documents, personal letters, diaries, and so forth for their data. Also like biographical studies, these works tend to center around major historical events such as the Spanish Civil War, the Russian Revolution, and famous anarchist terrorist attacks.

One article that stands out in the historical study of anarchists is Sharif Gemie's 1994 essay "Counter-Community: An Aspect of Anarchist Political Culture." In this piece, Gemie uses the writing of historical anarchists, primarily the writing of anarchists in the early– to mid – 20th century, to argue for a changing anarchist culture. Gemie quite correctly identifies the problem of anarchist histories having "… reduced the subject to the biographies of a few celebrated writers, or to the experience of particular moments of revolt," and articulates his intent to emphasize lesser-known anarchists over the big names (1994:350). Nevertheless, Gemie ends up relying heavily on the latter to make his arguments. His points are relevant to

contemporary anarchism, particularly in matching theory to practice, but despite his stated intent the article ends up in the realm of theory much more than it interrogates the views or behavior of anarchists themselves.

2.1.2. Autobiographies

There are fewer published memoirs and autobiographies by prominent anarchists than one might expect; among the biggest names only Kropotkin and Goldman penned formal autobiographies. Goldman's *Living My Life* (2006) is a long, two-volume work, which is like a ledger of the political events and struggle she lived through. Kropotkin wrote an autobiography of sorts called *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (1930), but while this book contains a wealth of information on society, revolutionary contemporaries, and politics, it has almost no words of reflexivity; Kropotkin does not so much as mention his relationship to his wife in his autobiography.

The autobiographical methodology is perhaps the simplest and most straightforward, in that a person is writing about her own life, and in the case of these anarchists, much of the information contained in their autobiographies seems to be either narrative-factual or theoretical. However, one particular book merits attention as an example of how this form of research can embody anarchist subjectivity.

Alexander Berkman compiled *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (1999) after his attempted assassination of Henry Frick and subsequent 14-year prison sentence.

The work mostly covers that span in Berkman's life, though it contains references to his childhood in Russia and political organizing in New York City. The book serves as a fantastic description and analysis of US prisons in the early 20th century, but is also highly relevant to the study of anarchists. First, Berkman's accounts of the anarchist organizing that planned 'the deed' and later plotted to break him out of prison, as well as his discussions of the culture of immigrant Russian Jewish anarchists in New York City are all important for understanding anarchists during the time that is often considered their heyday.

More importantly, Berkman's reflections reveal a great deal about his own identity as an anarchist. In the memoir, Berkman is highly reflective of his own thoughts and feelings, especially the evolution of his ideology, sexuality, and identity as he experiences new things. His attention to these transitions and his evident honesty and willingness to confront contradictions in his thinking makes this an exemplary self-study of an anarchist. Methodologically, this memoir is something like the perfect long-term interview; it manages to capture Berkman's humanity and personhood in ways that speak about the anarchist as a subject, not just about the events he witnessed and participated in.

2.1.3. Ethnographies

Direct Action: An Ethnography, by David Graeber (2009) seems to stand alone in the category of formal ethnographic research on anarchists. The substantial book includes participant observation in meetings and actions, as well as interviews with

members of a particular anarchist direct action network in Canada and the US in the era of WTO-protest-inspired summit hopping. Graeber quotes transcripts from meetings, looks at organizational culture and procedures, and provides analysis, all of which are filled in with stories and lengthy quotes by interlocutors. As good ethnographies do, it paints a picture of its subjects through their own understanding of the world. Of course, this worldview was probably relatively easy for Graeber to grasp, since the avowed anarchist scholar did not have to "go native" – he already was a 'native'. Despite the methodological rigor, Graeber's study looks at a particular *milieu* of anarchists – a somewhat stereotypical one that is often understood to be representative of all anarchists by the media and other outsiders (this *milieu* has been accused of sometimes encouraging that narrative themselves). In line with that reputation or not, Graeber sometimes generalizes from his direct action network community to anarchists in North America writ large.

While Graber's seems to be the only formal ethnography of anarchists, I argue that George Orwell's book *Homage to Catalonia* (1952) is best classified in this area as well. *Homage to Catalonia* is a memoir of Orwell's time as a foreign serviceman in a communist militia during the Spanish Civil War. Orwell's perceptiveness, attention to everyday detail, cultural analyses, and attempted objectivity make the work almost ethnographic in nature, despite the writer's deep personal investment (Graeber too is invested in the politics of his subjects). Orwell served on a communist rather than an anarchist militia, but the political party his unit was attached to was enemies with the Spanish Communist Party and was for years allied with the anarchists, some of whom he worked with closely. In addition,

much of his rich socio-cultural analysis focuses on the anarchists, including the cultural shifts from an anarchist-run Barcelona to a Communist-run Barcelona. Orwell writes about anarchists based on his relationships and observations, taken from his personal experience in fighting alongside (and sometimes against) them, humbly attempting objective analysis but repeatedly acknowledging his positionality, making *Homage to Catalonia* an exceptional work.

2.1.4. Sociological Studies

For the sake of this survey I am considering as sociological those studies that examine the social and cultural dynamics of current individuals and groups of anarchists, either internally or relating to society at large. Theoretical works on anarchism often contain aspects of sociological observations, so I am only including the research that's primary focus is sociological.

The majority of these studies look at "black bloc"[1] formations and other direct action tactics and networks. Black blocs leapt to prominence in the wake of the 1999 "Battle of Seattle" riots against the World Trade Organization, an event that is widely considered pivotal in the anarchist turn, and since then anarchism has been all the more closely associated with black bandanas and projectiles.

[1] A black bloc is a term given to any group of mask-wearing, black-clad militants in a protest, demonstration, or riot. The name does not imply any specific type of organizational structure or ideology, though the formation and style of the black bloc is closely tied to certain brands of anarchism. Black blocs are controversial in that they are typically confrontational with police, and if there is property damage going on in an action in which a black bloc is involved, it is more than likely that the two are connected.

In "'We're Here, We're Queer, We're Anarchists': The Nature of Identification and Subjectivity Among Black Blocs" (2010), Edward Avery-Natale attempts to analyze anarchist and queer identities through the black bloc practice of mask-wearing during protests, particularly the demonstrations against the G-20 in Pittsburgh in 2009. Avery-Natale uses theory to analyze the mask-wearing practice and its effects on anarchists' subjectivity, but acknowledges that it is important to reference that theoretical take with what anarchists themselves think about it. To accomplish this, Avery-Natale uses a single *zine*[2] that came out in Pittsburgh following the G-20 protests. The concept of "facelessness as fluidity" is one of Avery-Natale's focuses, and, ironically or not, one of the aspects of zines is the 'faceless' anonymity of the author(s), which can make the contents appear both universal and particular at once. Avery-Natale acknowledges the absence of authors in the zine he chooses (2010:107), and for his purposes it may not pose a methodological problem – it certainly does not stop him from producing interesting analysis. But it also does not necessarily provide a window into anarchists' subjectivities in their own words beyond the possibly individual author of the zine he uses.

Another article, "The Black Bloc Ten Years after Seattle: Anarchism, Direct Action, Deliberative Practices" by Francis Dupuis-Deri (2010) specifically studies the relationship of black bloc tactics to anarchism.[3] Dupuis-Deri uses interviews with black bloc participants in North America and Europe as well as field

[2] 'Zine' is an abbreviation of magazine, used by anarchists to designate a homemade information or propaganda booklet.
[3] Dupuis-Deri also published an updated version of this piece as a book, *Who's Afraid of the Black Blocs?* in English in 2013. However, the book is less a study of anarchists and more an exploration of black bloc tactics worldwide. Therefore I use his 2010 article in my review.

observations in actions and meetings involving black blocs. (It sounds to me as though his participation preceded this study.) The article defends selective use of force and emphasizes emotion in political decision-making. The interviews seem to be answering for the black bloc, almost functioning as a sophisticated defense of black bloc tactics and participation to counter the media's demonization of the tactic, which is lamented by Dupuis-Deri (2010:53). We do not learn much about interviewees aside from their opinions on the black bloc or more general political views. Indeed, the interviewees' own words are used minimally.

Other articles broaden their gaze but still center around the same subject matter, for example Nik Heynen's article "Cooking up Non-violent Civil-Disobedient Direct Action for the Hungry: 'Food Not Bombs' and the Resurgence of Radical Democracy in the US" (2010). Food Not Bombs is an anarchist project[4] to feed the homeless and hungry, operating along non-hierarchical, prefigurative lines. Heynen explores these forms of organization, but still orients those practices using direct action tactics.

There are also emerging examples of research that does examine less sensational anarchist practices. In "Rethinking Prefiguration: Alternatives, Micropolitics and Goals in Social Movements" (2015), Luke Yates discusses the meanings and practices of prefiguration in Barcelona's radical autonomous spaces and social centers. This article is based on a qualitative empirical methodology, including open-ended interviews and field observation over the course of six months between 2009 and 2010 in Barcelona, Spain. Though this study took place

[4] While typically treated as an anarchist project and understood to be run locally by anarchists, FNB is not explicitly an anarchist organization.

outside the U.S., which is the area of interest for my research, it is included here because of the field methodology employed, which is rare in the study of anarchists, and the focus on less dramatic activities. Yates conducted 24 audio-recorded interviews, which he analyzed in the context of ethnographic observations to produce his conclusions. The article contains extended quotes from his interviewees and Yates weaves their stories into his arguments smoothly. Yates' is one of the only articles of this type that does not specifically look at direct action tactics.

While academic work of this kind in English is extremely limited, it is important to note that there are several anarchist attempts at investigating the meanings and practices of everyday anarchists, which are published in zines and contain a wealth of interesting information. Examples are "Beyond Gallery Walls and Dead White Men" (no date) and The Anarchist Interview Project (2013).

2.1.5. Law Enforcement Studies

This section is included for the single piece I was able to find because of how important the law enforcement perspective on anarchists is. Like Graeber's ethnography and many of the sociological studies, this piece focuses on direct action groups, but from the perspective of those trying to stop them. "Anarchist Direct Actions: A Challenge for Law Enforcement" (2006) was written by Randy Borum, a professor from the University of South Florida who specializes in military and police intelligence, terrorism, and national security; and Chuck Tilby, a police officer in Eugene, Oregon, and is intended as a guide for law enforcement on anarchist

subculture and direct action tactics with the aim of disrupting them and neutralizing their effect.

Borum and Tilby begin with an overview of the anarchist political philosophy and subculture, an understanding of which they think will make law enforcement agents more capable in combatting direct actions. Their sources for this information are unclear – perhaps they gathered information from zines, anarchist websites and publications, and possibly from informants or undercover agents – though judging from the picture they paint, how closely they attempted to study anarchist counterculture is dubious. The authors then outline some parameters for direct action tactics, the information in which probably comes from either personal experience with, and/or informal interviews with officers experienced in dealing with direct action tactics. Finally, Borum and Tilby pose some recommendations for how to counter anarchist tactics.[5] Woven throughout their account are tenuous attempts to argue that anarchists pose a potential violent threat to the U.S. by quoting anarchist proclamations about revolution while presenting examples of other types of terrorist organizations that have nothing to do with anarchism.

This article is important for the study of anarchists because it gives a small window into how law enforcement agents instruct each other to view anarchists. Surely more exists in this area that I do not have access to, and there may be many reasons for an interested social scientist to pivot research in this direction.

It is also worth including because anarchist social scientists have been criticized by their non-academic comrades for functionally, if accidentally, providing

[5] These are fairly shocking in their apparent disregard for ethics or constitutionality.

police with potential field guides to anarchist organizing by publishing studies on these groups. In theory, law enforcement articles on anarchists should tell us something about the way police understand these groups. If Borum's and Tilby's piece is any measure, law enforcement researchers are either incapable of understanding anarchists' works on anarchist counterculture and organization, or they have not read them very closely.[6]

2.1.6. Gaps in the Study of Anarchists

There is ample shelf space in the university library dedicated to the study of anarchism, but a relatively small subset of this work in English is directed towards research on anarchists. Of those that do study anarchists, most works are biographical or historical, focusing on the famous individuals and events. Sociological and anthropological studies of anarchists tend to examine confrontational and dramatic direct action tactics. The consequence of this is the association of anarchism with the revered names of dead anarchists like Pyotr Kropotkin, Mikhail Bakunin, and Emma Goldman, weighty historical moments like the Spanish Revolution, terrorism, and the loose but convenient connection between historical terrorist attacks and today's confrontational protest actions, such as black blocs. These foci represent veritable blinders to the practices, interactions, and meanings most anarchists engage in most of the time.

[6] A recent article in *Police Magazine* titled "Understanding the Black Bloc" contains a slightly more accurate portrayal, but still perpetuates the same false, unsubstantiated narrative of anarchists as "opportunistic purveyors of violence and destruction."

The goal of this paper is to push the defining characteristics of anarchism from the great names and revolutions, and from the black masks and Molotov cocktails, toward everyday practices, understandings, meanings, and applications. This intervention will hopefully lead to a better understanding of a practical tendency and political orientation that is fast growing in importance.

2.2. AN UNBRIDGEABLE CHASM? ANARCHISTS TODAY

Apart from studies that examine anarchists themselves, a great deal of theoretical work and political propaganda exists, attempting to define and categorize various types of anarchism and their historical lineages. For example, Robert Graham breaks anarchism down into three broad historical periods, each further divided into shorter episodes, allowing us to understand anarchism today in its historical context (2005, 2009, 2012); Michael Schmidt defines anarchism in waves, as is often done with feminism (2005); Richard Day argues for a "postanarchism" that transcends previous iterations of antiauthoritarian formations (2005). Of all methods for understanding anarchists today, however, Murray Bookchin's dichotomy between "social" and "lifestyle" anarchisms is among the most influential.

Murray Bookchin, philosopher, historian of the Spanish Revolution and founder of the "social ecology" school of anarchist thought, begins his book *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm*: "For some two centuries,

anarchism… developed in the tension between two basically contradictory tendencies: a personalistic commitment to individual autonomy and a collectivist commitment to social freedom" (2001:1).[7] Bookchin generally labels these two irreconcilable strains of anarchist thought "lifestyle anarchism" and "social anarchism," respectively. He proceeds to lambast lifestyle anarchism as juvenile and destructive, while endorsing the potential of social anarchism to revolutionize society.

According to Bookchin, during the hitherto international peak of anarchism, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the organizing of anarcho-syndicalism and anarcho-communism rendered anarcho-individualism "moot," and righteously discriminated against that tendency as "petty-bourgeois exotica" (2001:4). However, the political defeats suffered by social anarchists left the conceptual door open for postmodern, egocentric individualists to occupy the meanings of anarchism. Bookchin makes his points ardently – the language used here is not (my) hyperbole but indeed is a somewhat dulled version of the ire Bookchin expresses in *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* – indicating his own frustration and his intent that the book be used to correct past failures. Bookchin's book represents an attack on those anarchists he perceives to be the enemies of organization and radical progress.[8] Bookchin's aggressive work did not go unnoticed by his opponents among anarchists, but love it or hate it; his work is heavily influential for

[7] *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* was originally published in 1995.

[8] A great deal of space in this book is taken up by what amount to strawpeople arguments and personal attacks, for example the significant page space Bookchin devotes to deriding Hakim Bey for pedophilia – a noble pursuit, but hardly relevant to the argument at hand.

anarchists.[9] Prominent among his detractors, Bob Black's polemic *Anarchy After Leftism* (1997) one-ups Bookchin's hostile tone in its fervent argument that lifestyle anarchism is an invented category. Instead, Black draws the line between "heterodox" anarchists – who are dynamic, experimental, and good – and "traditionalistic" anarchists – who are dogmatic, defunct and bad (Black 1997:12). Like many others who respond to Bookchin, Black's contribution does not challenge the notion of the chasm, it merely shifts it to fit his categories.

Whatever the dividing lines, the idea that there are unbridgeable chasms between types of anarchists is prevalent, borne out in theoretical debates and sometimes personal and organizational antagonism between various subgroups such as anarcho-syndicalists, insurrectionaries, eco-anarchists, anarcho-communists, libertarian socialists, and so forth. Many of my interviews reflect the implicit belief that these chasms exist, and some explicitly asked about my intentions for the study, voicing the apprehension that it would be used to take a side in these divisions. One person even refused to answer a question about her brand of anarchism (insurrectionism) out of concern it would fuel sectarian rifts. Other people seemed to want their interviews to clarify these splits based on their side's correctness.

There appears to be widespread belief among anarchists that there are these chasms between types of anarchism, but my interviews suggest these chasms might be a mirage. A Bookchinian view would predict an interview study with anarchists

[9] Many interviewees referenced it, and Bookchin's dichotomy is frequently used by anarchist writers and theorists, whether or not he is cited, for example in *Facing the Enemy* by Alexandre Skirda (2002:58).

such as mine to reflect the social anarchist versus lifestyle anarchist dichotomy, with respondents neatly falling into these two opposing categories (according to opponents like Black, they should also fall neatly, albeit into different categories). In fact, the interviews reflect certain points of unity across anarchist tendencies, as well as wide variation that crosses over and contradicts labels, both refuting the notion of a fixed dichotomy between types of anarchists.

3.0. METHODS

This study is based on face-to-face interviews with anarchists conducted in New York City, the San Francisco 'Bay Area', and Pittsburgh during the summer of 2014. The interviews were qualitative and semi-structured, lasted between 40 minutes and two hours, and took place in cafes, collectives, workplaces, and homes. In total I conducted 21 interviews with 22 individuals (a couple in NYC preferred to be interviewed together), including eight respondents in NYC, eight respondents in the Bay, and six respondents in Pittsburgh. Demographically, 12 respondents were men, eight were women, one person identified as a genderqueer transman, and one person identified as gender-nonconforming. Two respondents were Black, three were Latino, one identified as multiracial, and 16 were white.[10]

Interviewees were contacted through three methods. First, I reached out to existing contacts in the movement and asked them to put me in touch with anarchist acquaintances of theirs. Second, I spent time in anarchist spaces such as cafes, bookstores, and book fairs and introduced myself to people. I met my initial

[10] Many interviewees discussed their racial and ethnic identification openly, but for others I made a judgment call about their identity, which may be inaccurate in some cases. Additionally, several of the people I am categorizing as white noted identification with "othered" or "ethnic white" groups, such as being Jewish.

respondents through these two methods. While I continued to employ the first two approaches, I also utilized "snowball" sampling, asking interviewees if they knew of others I could contact.

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, which has been identified as the interviewing style best suited to investigating less-researched aspects of social movement dynamics (Blee and Taylor 2002). Because respondents often discussed personal relationships and feelings about events that were very close to them, paying attention to silences, body language and demeanor was particularly important in interpreting their words (Weiss 1994).

Using in-depth interviews with individuals in different groups and social *milieus* in different regions makes sense as a starting point for a methodology to study individuals who associate with an acephalous movement. The methodology I employ focuses on the voices of anarchists themselves, representing a bottom-up approach to understanding contemporary anarchism in the U.S.

3.1. LOCATIONS

Locations were selected for a combination of subcultural importance and practicality. NYC and the Bay Area (primarily Oakland) were chosen based on their respective reputations in the movement for the presence of strong but different anarchist subcultures (Skoczylas forthcoming). New York City is a historical hub of

anarchist activity, and was the origin and largest site of the Occupy Movement. The San Francisco Bay Area also has a historical reputation for being a center of radical political activity, and Oakland is regarded as having the most politically advanced and tactically aggressive Occupy site. In addition, a great deal of prominent anarchist publishers, both print and online, are based in either New York City or the Bay Area. Pittsburgh fills a geographic and cultural space in between the two coasts, and also has a vibrant anarchist scene, much of it related to punk music. Pittsburgh also experienced a surge of anarchist activity leading up to the G-20 conference in that city in 2009, which drew demonstrations reminiscent of the "summit hopping" era of the turn of the millennium.

3.2. POTENTIAL RISKS

Ethical research practice necessitates taking responsibility for how one's research might materially affect those being studied. My purpose in conducting this research is to better understand anarchism in the U.S., and hopefully build a bridge or two. In taking on this project, I am also considering how the research could potentially have unintended effects.

There are multiple issues associated with studying groups that are engaging in radical political activity. There are additional concerns that arise when studying a group that may have members who are breaking the law or planning to break the

law. Any illegal behavior was omitted from fieldnotes and interviews where it is not directly relevant to the topic being studied, and nothing specific is published herein.

Beyond that, there is the potential application of this research for covert, anti-movement police purposes. Local police and various federal agencies routinely infiltrate groups they see as subversive, and anarchists often fall into this category (Borum and Tilby 2006; Loadenthal 2014; Monaghan and Walby 2012). While recent revelations about the scope of domestic spying make it clear that government security agencies need no help from social scientists when it comes to gathering raw data, any information on anarchist individuals and groups could potentially be of use from an intelligence-gathering or *agent provocateur* perspective.

As a standard precaution I felt it was important to change people's names, and I did so in all cases apart from those people who preferred I use their real names. Other details unrelated to substantive content were also changed to avoid unnecessarily identifying participants. In addition, all participants were contacted and offered a copy of this paper before it was finalized.

3.3. GENRALIZABILITY AND LIMITATIONS

Despite attempting to contact anarchists from a variety of backgrounds and with a range of perspectives, my sample has limitations. First of all, this study is based on the perspectives of 22 anarchists, and no matter how rigorous the selection method,

no 22 people can truly speak for an entire community, especially one that disdains hierarchy. The three sites were chosen for their difference and importance in the U.S. anarchist scene, but also do not represent the full spectrum of anarchist communities in the country. For example, one contact suggested I go to New Mexico to interview the heavily indigenous anarchist population in the Navajo Nation and surrounding area. If I had, no doubt the perspectives from those interviews would have been substantially different in one way or another from the ones I conducted.

In the sites I did visit, my interviewees were mostly white. Many people talked about the whiteness of U.S. anarchism, and it may be the case that the majority of those who identify as anarchists are white, but it is also possible that despite my attempts, I was simply unable to get in contact with enough non-white participants. It is worth noting, however, that my findings were fairly consistent between the views of the white and non-white anarchists I interviewed.

The largest demographic problem with my subject pool appears to be age. All interviewees were under the age of 45, and most were in their 20s and 30s. I interviewed two teenagers, but I do not have the voices of anarchists from earlier generations than the 1980s. I was in touch with two people in their 60s, but unfortunately due to logistical and health problems, respectively, neither was able to meet with me. Adding in perspectives of older people would have added more information overall, and would surely have enriched my ability to analyze my findings in historical context as well.

My own positionality in this study doubtlessly affected my access to different anarchist scenes and possibly influenced the information provided by respondents

(Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007). During interviews several people commented on me being white and a man, often in the context of talking about how white and male anarchists are. While I am confident in my ability to navigate identity issues, my presentation and appearance probably impacted the results of my research in some way, likely in terms of access to interviewees, their likelihood to respond to my request for interviews, and their manner and phrasing during the interviews. It would be interesting to see how results from a similar study conducted by a person or people with different racial/ethnic, gender, and sexuality presentation than mine might differ from what I found.

The demographic gaps in my interviewees – primarily racial/ethnic, geographic, and age – limit the generalizability of this study, and future research looking at these areas would add much to our understanding of anarchists in the U.S. today. That being said, the anarchists I interviewed described the "typical" anarchist as being white, meaning my sample might not be too far off from the demographics of U.S. Americans who identify as anarchists. Furthermore, as this research is intended to add to our understanding of contemporary anarchism, the views of relatively young anarchists are important.

Finally, the data produced from these interviews is based on people's words, not their behaviors. How closely participants' actions fit their discussion of their actions is a matter this study is not equipped to evaluate. These interviews and analysis are meant to provide a foundation; ethnographic research using the findings herein could potentially add a great deal to our understanding.

While my findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of anarchists in the U.S., it is my hope that these findings reflect trends that are widely applicable; reactions to early presentations of this paper and discussion of my research indicate that they are.

4.0. FINDINGS

4.1. UNITY AND VARIATION

4.1.1. Unity

Something one will encounter with relative frequency when discussing anarchism with those unfamiliar with anarchists is the belief that anarchy mean "anything goes." The term "anarchy" is often used by fields such as international relations as well as in common parlance to mean chaos. Anarchists are commonly depicted in popular media as those who revel in and pursue chaos, essentially equating anarchism with violent nihilism[11] (and this is not a new trend). However, the interviews in this study make it clear that there are coherent boundaries that can be drawn around a positive ideological definition based on the views of those who identify themselves as anarchists.

[11] A few overt examples of this include the popular television series "Sons of Anarchy" (2008-) which liberally deploys the circle-A symbol and is about violent, marauding bikers; the depiction of the Batman villain "Joker" as a psychotic anarchist in the blockbuster *The Dark Night* (2008); and the action movie *XXX* (2002), in which the antagonist is an anarchist who wants to destroy the world.

There are three distinct commonalities in the transcripts that make it clear that the people I interviewed are part of an identifiable group called anarchists beyond their self-identification as such. These commonalities, all referenced by nearly everyone in some way or another, are: Belief in radical social transformation, belief in direct action, and opposition to all forms of social domination (usually expressed as politics that are anti-state, anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-racist). Quotes below illustrate these articulations. Though I group them together for legibility's sake, many of these quotes speak to multiple areas of commonality.

4.1.1.1. Belief in radical social transformation

> (Speaking about debates with her Communist, Black Nationalist father) We have a core disagreement because he thinks anarchy means chaos, and for me it is not chaos. Within anarchy there is going to be so much order – within anarchist practice there already is… he sees anarchy as only a temporary solution toward a socialist state, whereas I see socialism as a temporary solution towards anarchism.
> -Niqui

> I would say that the heart of the philosophy is that proper both ethical, moral and efficient organization of industrial society is one that is directly democratic and has workers councils and all that sort of stuff. And that involves a change in the political system and removing the false authority or the bad authority of the current capitalist and politician, while also involving a change in the industrial system itself.
> -Fred

> The state is a way of structuring human relations, mediated by authority figures. And if you remove an authority figure you can have different forms of mediation, different forms of societies
> -Harris

Anarchism to me is a belief in each other and a belief in 'the commune' and a belief in the genuine goodness of people, of humans. And that there are many different types of systems of power in place that are strategically working against people to express that kind of support and relationships toward each other… I think the thing for me is that I associate the kind of power that a lot of socialists and state-oriented communists seek with some of the systems of power that hold us back from expressing our genuine human integrity.
-Jamie

4.1.1.2. Direct action

Anarchism for me is both a system of morals and ethics. It's a DIY culture and also self-determination by individuals and communities.
-Liberty

Although I look for people I identify with, I also look for people who are involved in the things I want to be involved with, who are doing things for themselves. And it is an endless network, where together we can approach and change certain things. And those networks, you know maybe there's liberals in there. Like at work, at any job I've had so far, people might even be Republicans or right-wingers, but if they came to organize in the community, the point is for the people in a community to be able to weigh all the ideas and make decisions and act for themselves.
-Amaro

[Anarchism] is very much a movement of working class people fighting for liberation against capitalism without relying on help from politicians and political parties and things like that.
-Brad

Doing it, as opposed to thinking or talking about it, is so central. It seems somewhat surface but to me it goes into the base interactions between people on a day-to-day basis… I think it's about going back to the question of intermediaries. What is the

fewest number of intermediaries that we can have between people – and especially hierarchical intermediaries – between people and cooperative mechanisms.
-Casey

4.1.1.3. Opposition to oppression

… and then I realized that really I was dealing with all forms of dominant power relationships and I wanted to go more to the root of the problem and I wasn't satisfied with some of the answers I was getting from the radical labor history. So I guess all of that combined led me to anarchism. Also it seemed totally natural. Dealing with gender issues how can you not think about dominant power relationships? So that also felt intuitive. Like you couldn't just stop with wage labor. You have to think more holistically about ways in which people are oppressed.
-Marisa

… anarchy is fighting to destroy the state, to destroy hierarchic social organization.
-Harris

When you read especially non-Western anarchist writing… it's just so clear. Nothing is an add-on. No victory unless it's a victory for class, gender, everyone.
-Dinah

I'd say anybody who considers themself an anarchist should be anti-capitalist, anti-statist, feminist, anti-racist, and internationalist.
-Elijah

Well [anarchism] means the process of overcoming domination in society, primarily from the state, but also hierarchical relationships and capitalism. So those three things, not in any particular order. But to me it's always been a movement of the working class and oppressed against the powers that oppress us.
-Eric

It is worth noting that the concepts of freedom and liberty were articulated by only several people – noticeably few considering the attention paid to these concepts by many classical anarchist thinkers. Those who did use those terms typically did so to distinguish anarchist leftism from Communist leftism (sometimes with the labels "libertarian socialism" or "libertarian communism"). These concepts were embedded in the views of most interviewees, but the words were not commonly used, which may or may not be related to the association of those terms with pro-U.S. propaganda and the political right. Two respondents commented on this pointedly. For example, according to Harris, "anarchism is about individual liberty, which I hate to say now because of right wing libertarianism, but it is about the individual freeing themselves as well as the collective freeing the individual." It is possible that this self-consciousness around the use of "freedom" and "liberty" might be one barrier to their more widespread deployment.

4.1.2. Variation

Beyond those common agreements, *there is wide variation in views and the deployment of concepts* among the anarchists I interviewed. Feelings on organizing philosophy, identity politics, working within the system, the practicability of anarchism today, democracy and consensus, socialism and communism, violence and nonviolence, and more differed widely, as did people's style of presentation, both verbally and physically. Surprisingly, there was no ascertainable variation

between locations.[12] Rather, the interviews reflect variation across cities, as well as across just about all other points of identification.

Some believed working within the system is practically important for anarchists:

> I really wanted to show people that, I'm from Newark, there are a lot of messed up things in Newark, and I'm in a position very few Newarkers are in [being a lawyer], and I also have the mind and the spirit to want to make change so that it's better for everyone…. If you're talking about fighting the state, you need representation. I used to think that if I ever had to go to court I'd study and I'd represent myself. Bullshit! Like nobody can do that… they teach this magical language to us, you know? It's a con, right? And if you're familiar with the con you know how to manipulate the law… the government wants to eat alive everyone it can, and if you don't have a lawyer who is going to defend you against that, then you're at the mercy of the state. And that's the opposite of what I want. I want to fight the state, I want to make sure people are well represented, people have power against the state. And that's in defense. Affirmatively, we can use certain tool and organize to build, and you have the legal skills to build and push for big changes, or set up things we want and cover our asses.
> -Amaro, who is a lawyer

Others thought of anarchism as requiring a sharp break from state forms and the status quo:

> Well I guess I would define the practice of anarchism as a separate collective. Like we as a collective would be… defining our own rules and defining our own norms, as a collective that is separate, or is trying to be separate as possible. And I think that to me radicalism… I mean as a purist vision. If we were really anarchist we would be

[12] This may have had to do in part with people relocating.

> trying to act as independently as possible.
> -Natalie

Some, like Brad, who is a member of the modern incarnation of the International Workers of the World (IWW), see anarchism as a working-class-based movement in Marxian terms: "I see it as a movement of working class people fighting for liberation against capitalism without relying on help from politicians and political parties..."

To Niqui, on the other hand, Marx's assessment of economic relations bears less and less resemblance to our reality in the 21st century, and sees contemporary anarchism as being grounded in the conscious work of anti-oppression:

> It is undoing the internalized oppressions of society and trying to heal the violence that the state has put into people's bodies through centuries and centuries of ancestral genocide. So that is one thing I think is extremely important in anarchism is the effort to address the issue of identity politics and to work to create a world where people of many different identities can live together with respect.

Some believe anarchism can and must be practiced everyday to the greatest extent possible, while others believe anarchism is a political and social goal the conditions for which are not present in the U.S. today, but may be in in other places or in the future. Some believe in organizing among anarchists in tight-knit affinity groups with a maximum degree of cohesion, while others believe in organizing in broad coalitions with those who have different politics, or in organizing with the apolitical around community issues. Variation of these sorts abounds for the anarchists I interviewed.

4.1.2.1. Variation across Labels. Perhaps because of the wide umbrella of political beliefs anarchism appears to cover, and presumably in order to identify oneself with others who share more similar beliefs, many people adopt labels for their anarchisms, such as insurrectionary, anarcho-syndicalist, anarcho-communist, eco-anarchist, anarcha-feminist, libertarian socialist, and so on. A significant number of respondents disdained labels for themselves altogether, though those in this latter category often continued to use labels to identify others. Surprisingly however, interviewees' *use of labels differ widely in content from the ways others described the very same labels*. For example, Harris, an anarchist from Pittsburgh who identifies with insurrectionary and lifestyle labels, was staunchly against democracy:

> Everyone likes democracy. It's almost like the sign that no one is thinking about it seriously… democracy itself is a state form. It's based on adjudication, it's based on an authority figure mediating our relationships… I'm tired of leftists saying: 'This isn't a real democracy! We need real democracy!' How much more voting do you fucking want? How many votes and referenda do we need before we're free?

Harris goes so far as to say, "anarchist democrats are contradictions in terms." However, Avery, who is from the same city as Harris, and who also identifies with insurrectionary and lifestyle anarchisms – in fact, he cited some of the very same publications – thought not only democracy but voting was an important component of his anarchism:

> I think voting in local elections can be very important, especially if it's someone who can bring some sort of small immediate change that is very good… for local

> elections, like if some third party, Socialist, whatever, decided to run that would be a good reason to vote. If not just for the sake of having a third party candidate get close.

Another insurrectionary anarchist from NYC, Tariq, took Harris' approach to democracy, saying "democracy is at its core authoritarianism." More than democracy though, Tariq railed against identity politics:

> I'm just gonna come right out and say it: I think identity issues are ripping apart the Left in the U.S. People take things too personally… they think their personal is the extent of their political.

Meanwhile, Liberty, an insurrectionary anarchist from the Bay, had nothing to say about democracy, but felt identity politics and a commitment to the struggle against oppression within the movement were crucial to the very definition of anarchism. In combination with anti-oppression work, Liberty felt that organizing within communities was central to anarchist praxis: "living as an anarchist is a lot about mutual aid, dedication to fighting oppressive forces that people in your community face."

Dinah is a Bay Area anarchist who spent a great deal of time deriding insurrectionists, saying, among other colorful things: "I don't touch insurrectionists with a ten-foot fucking pole!" But at the heart of her critique was insurrectionists' neglect of organizing in communities, a notion seemingly belied by Liberty's quote above.

These few examples revolve around insurrectionary anarchism, a label that served as a lightening rod for many intramural criticisms of anarchism, but these types of theoretical crossed-wires appear to be present across anarchist labels. The high degree of variation encountered in this study indicates that within the broad areas of agreement, anarchism as a political and social ideology may be more diverse than it appears, even from the lengthy list of commonly used sub-labels. Importantly, *the variation in beliefs does not correspond with sectarian divisions between sub-labels*. In fact, the interviews point to anarchists having more in common between tendencies than the sectarianism indicates, both in the sense that individuals who identify strongly with opposing labels often share views on particular issues, and also in the sense that respondents in general tend to agree on the need for a diversity of beliefs and practices, with a few widely shared exceptions (capitalist exploitation, social domination, and reliance on formal political structures).

This is not to take away from the in many cases substantive differences in ideology and behavior between anarchists and groups of anarchists, both historically and today. Likewise, many theoretical works have attempted to articulate a "best" or "correct" anarchism, to be distinguished from false or confused applications of the concept. This finding does not necessarily invalidate any of those real differences or theoretical attempts, it merely points to: 1. a unity on core concepts, and 2. a diversity of ideas and beliefs held by contemporary anarchists, neither of which conform well to established labels within anarchism.

4.2. MARGINALITY WITHIN MARGINALITY

There was a particular rhetorical move that emerged in a majority of respondents' comments that merits special attention. Interviewees commonly phrased their views with qualifying statements about how many or most anarchists probably do not think the same way:

> Well, my understanding of those terms, which is not broadly shared (chuckles)... it's probably a minority position, but...
> -Fred

> … I think a lot of [anarchists] would absolutely disagree and I think most of those people would define anarchism very differently than I would.
> -Jamie

> … but also there are a lot of people out there who identify as anarchists who might not agree…
> -Elijah

> … I know what a lot of anarchists probably say about CrimethInc., but…
> -Avery

In and of itself this type of phrasing points to a confusion and insecurity around who anarchists in the U.S. actually are. However, qualifications often led to outright criticism of other anarchists. When levying critiques, respondents would often speak as though the other groups or individuals are popular or in a majority

position, going on to describe their own behaviors or beliefs in reference to “bad” or “fake” anarchists:

> There is a good anarchy and then there is anarchy that you put in quotes, you know?
> -Harris

> A lot of anarchist scenes are frustrating because they don’t look or feel anarchist in practice.
> -Liberty

> … but I don't think those things – think they're often expressed by anarchists in infantile ways.
> -Eric

> In a lot of anarchist spaces it's like if you haven't read the right thing… you know I've read quite a lot and I can hold my own debating different points of Marxism or whatever. But to me I want to talk about it in context of praxis.
> -Casey

> I don't know, I don't feel affinity with most [anarchists]… it just feels like posturing to me. It doesn't feel like there's any real thinking about strategy... I also think that anarchism feels like this club of straight white boys that is really uninteresting to me.
> -Phoebe

> It’s not only me who thinks about the typical anarchist as a 15-year old white boy from the suburbs who… you know, wears circle-A shirts from Hot Topic. To them it’s a fucking aesthetic.
> -Jasmine

> I’m lucky I have a crew, but it’s rare to find anarchists who are down to organize.
> -Dinah

Many anarchists I interviewed were heavily critical of other anarchists, often specifically targeting particular tendencies within anarchism, a trend that comes out somewhat in the quotes above but is expressed in much more depth and with much more vehemence in passages from the transcripts that I will not include. Common threads are that anarchists are too white and masculine, are more interested in style than content, and are not willing to organize. The commonality is not in the specifics of the critiques – although there are common themes, as mentioned – but in the framing of those critiques as coming from a minority position. Interviewees frequently set themselves up as representing a minority among anarchists – as representing the margins of the already-marginal anarchist sociopolitical sphere, which is to say, *as the margins of the margins*.

4.3. TRANSITIONS

If these interviews are viewed in terms of respondents' personal stories, there emerge some common phases of development and transition. Of course, not everyone told their story chronologically, but aspects of stories of development can be assembled from various answers to questions in most interviews.

Many people went through a "punk phase," usually in an introductory capacity, where they associated with punk music and lifestyle for its basic rejection of mainstream social stratification, and are exposed to anarchism through that

scene. Most people transitioned out of the punk scene, and many of these people are critical of punk anarchism for its vapid politics and individualism. Others are still into punk music and lifestyle, despite sharing many of the same critiques of it. Common transition points that are frequently cited as prompting changes of political, philosophical, and social identity are college and organizing experience, but relationships stand out as a prime catalyst. Finally, *transition itself was prominent is nearly all interviews*, with people describing their views as having transitioned multiple times; in many cases people described their current political beliefs as being in transition. Multiple interviewees described anarchist praxis as a process of continual learning, while only two described their politics as being fixed and unchanging over time.

4.3.1. Punk

More than half of the respondents I interviewed cited punk music and/or participation in the punk subculture as being important in their radicalization process as anarchists. This number might likely represents a low estimate of the anarchist population in the U.S., considering my initial contact list was not drawn from a punk subculture (since I personally have not participated in this), and because I did not ask specific questions about it, so some interviewees for whom punk was important in an earlier stage of their lives may have simply not mentioned it.

Most respondents who mentioned punk talked about it as part of their introduction to anarchism. Tariq, from NYC, described contemporary anarchism in the U.S. as having a "punk feel." When I asked why, he explained:

> I think it has to do with situationism. The Sex Pistol's manager was very influenced by the situationists. He was… (Tariq can't think of the manager's name, so he whips out a laptop declaring, "we'll get to the bottom of this!" After a moment of focused typing, he shows me the screen with images of the Sex Pistol's album covers and show posters, then goes on) Malcolm McLaren was his name! So you can see how situationist the art is. And they came to represent anarchism in early punk rock.

Situationism, explained Dinah, an interviewee from the Bay, is heavily influential for insurrectionary anarchists, who in many cases are the most visible and most iconic representatives of anarchists. "The insurrectionists take from situationism… it's performative and emotive," she said. Several other respondents made the same connection.

Whether or not Tariq's location of the anarchist-punk merger is accurate, many respondents became accustomed to anarchist symbols, language, and a variety of politics through the punk scene. Most of these people were introduced to anarchism through punk as teenagers, and gravitated towards a, as one person put it, "fuck the system" politics. However, experiences organizing and personal relationships drove people to expand the rejectionist politics of many punk scenes to a more sophisticated anarchist ideology that is more positive. This later development led to heavy critiques of punk anarchism as simplistic, childish, and even destructive:

> When I was a young punk (smiles as she says it) you know it's sort of the like the "no gods no masters" idiom, right? And looking at how deeply – and it definitely reflects the inherent criticism of hierarchy, but it's also incredibly simplistic…
> -Casey

> And you know, being in the punk scene… the punk anarchism I was exposed to was like "fuck the system, let's drink ourselves into a stupor and do drugs!" The punk scene was a lot of drinking and white misogynist behavior.
> -Liberty

> As a teenager I was into the punk rock scene, and I had a very individualistic sense of believing in anarchy… I did not like authority, I didn't like cops, I didn't like my parents, and you know, I liked to get drunk and go to shows… but I didn't have any political analysis per se, other than just a rejection of authority in general.
> -Elijah

Punk music was also often connected to whiteness. Two interviewees derisively described punk as a "white boys club" (more than a few respondents used that exact same phrase to describe anarchists as well), and several articulated an analysis of punk as a subculture bred from white, middle-class youth who feel alienated from and resentment towards their assumed social privilege. This feeling of social alienation lends itself to the side of anarchism that is focused on rejection of authority, which is precisely what respondents who radicalized around punk describe. However, despite the common association between punk and whiteness, most of the non-white people I interviewed also felt affinity towards punk. Interestingly, while many white interviewees who cited punk as important for them at a previous stage were both critical of it and sought to distance themselves from it

now, four of the six non-white people I interviewed talked about punk, and while two of them were also heavily critical, all four still felt a connection to either the music, the style, or both.

4.3.2. Relationships

A very common theme among the anarchists in this sample was the impact relationships have on individuals' political growth. Some people came to anarchism through a mentor of some sort (usually a teacher or an older friend they looked up to) and many described radicalizing and developing as anarchists through romantic and sexual partnerships. Once in the anarchist scene, a very common emphasis was the community and comradery it offers (and requires).

> [My partner] and I met when we were both like: (starts shouting, mocking youthful exuberance) "WE'RE POLITICAL! WE DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS BUT WE'RE ACTIVISTS!" And then we started to really understand together what it meant, and when we felt really isolated as radicals, we had each other, which was phenomenal. I think without that relationship I never would have had the persistence to continue to do political work.
> -Elijah

> (Telling a story about friends of his radicalizing) He started to flirt with this girl in our philosophy class. And I watched this happen because they sat near me in class. And so I watched their relationship develop, which was adorable and beautiful. And I could listen to them – I was friends with them, I wasn't just eavesdropping – but I could listen to them start to talk about politics, cut their teeth on each other, but while flirting. So it was kind of sexy nerd flirting, political philosophical flirting, like, (puts on an exaggerated sexy voice) "what do you think about Raskolnikov's

politics?" type shit. So they grew and started [their city's] Occupy thing and became great activists together… Passion breeds action.
-Harris

(Speaking about her partner) I couldn't do this if it wasn't for this relationship. It is amazing to work together. Tariq can do things I can't, so it's great to work together.
-Anita

I had friends who were in [an anarchist group]. One of my closest friends, she had decided I should be involved, and she invited me and my partner in, and we were into doing it.
-Phoebe

I think if you like the people you're with, and you know they're a good person, then it's easier to say, "ok, we might not agree but I know where you're coming from," and you can talk through things the ways friends would talk through things. So yeah, I think the relationships are probably one of the most important aspects of the building process.
-John

Emphasis on relationships makes sense for anarchists both in their radicalization process and their understandings of their praxis. Anarchist ideas are not frequently taught in schools or by popular entertainment, and the word anarchy itself is easily misleading and can be alienating; it stands to reason that many anarchists were introduced to these concepts by social scenes and by people they trust. Furthermore, based on interviewees' enthusiasm in telling these stories, there is some spark about romantic and sexual relationships that appears to mix well with the experimentation and acceptance of a new, exciting, and active radical political ideology. Anarchism as a philosophy has always been tied to praxis – that is, to the

practice of political ideals in organizations. As Michael Schmidt puts it, "the rule, as always for anarchists, is that the means determine the end…" (Schmidt 2005:2). Today, prominent threads in contemporary anarchism, heavily influenced by feminism, queer theory, and intersectionality, prioritize praxis even more than previous generations of anarchists (Epstein 1991). This connection to praxis is borne out in interviewees' stress on relationships as central to good organizing. While many people talked about relationships are potentially distracting or destructive to organizing, most people also talked about their importance for solid organizations, affinity groups, and communities.

5.0 ANALYSIS

If Murray Bookchin's dichotomy of social anarchism and lifestyle anarchism were accurate, one would expect views that fit into those opposing camps to emerge in interviews with anarchists. The results of my study reveal something much more complex. As a baseline, all of the people I interviewed had points of agreement in common. Most importantly, all anarchists I interviewed – including self-described lifestyle anarchists and one self-described libertarian – expressed a desire to see collective social change and emphasized cooperation; things Bookchin says are absent for lifestyle anarchists and libertarians.

Other parts of Bookchin's critique appear to hold true or partially true, but the fluidity of identities further complicates the usefulness of his categories. For example, after organizing with the new Students for a Democratic Society, John gravitated to anti-civilization and 'deep-ecology' anarchists, tendencies Bookchin lumps within lifestyle anarchism. Ironically, John reports moving into those tendencies as a result of reading Bookchin's older work.[13] "Originally I started reading Emma Goldman, and for awhile I was really into Bookchin, and I think from

[13] *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* was published late in Bookchin's life.

Bookchin I kind of moved into the kind anti-civ thing, you know I hung out with a lot of anti-civ people." However, John's experience in those organizing circles eventually turned him off to their ideas:

> I went to a couple of Earth First! gatherings and it was interesting, but not quite... you know I like the critique [of society] but I think how that critique is lived isn't necessarily great. The anti-civ thing… you know I just realized there's no future to that vision. Or if there is there is only a future for very few people. It can become anti-human. It can become very dark.

While John's eventual critique was not far off from Bookchin's, it was Bookchin's ideas that moved John toward "anti-civ" work in the first place, while his own ideas later moved him away, with those moves being gradual and non-contentious. As in this example, many anarchists have differing individual preferences in terms of the tendencies and social groupings they associate with, and these are complex, fluid, and non-linear.

Bookchin's perception of the prevalence of postmodern ideas in contemporary anarchism is also quite correct. However, while Bookchin associates postmodernism with lifestyle anarchism, it appears to exist as conspicuously among tendencies he would group with social anarchism as it does for anyone. Most interviewees expressed explicitly anti-utopian visions of revolution, prefiguration, and social transformation, more than one of them referencing the Zapatista adage to "make the path while walking."[14] For example, Jamie, from Oakland, CA, works with

[14] A version of this quote is attributed to Paolo Friere, but in my interviews (and elsewhere) it is associated with the EZLN.

inner-city youth at a progressive non-profit, continually stresses the need for organizing in communities, and even jokes about his personal stylistic difference from the iconic radical (he was dressed in bright colors). Yet his conception of anarchist revolution was heavily postmodern:

> Anarchism for me is a set of principles rather than a specific experience. So when I was young I would be trying to create utopian images of what I wanted to see and how we could get there. I don't really do that anymore. I'm not particularly interested in that, because… I've found that I'm ok with the fact that I don't know what things should look like. Because if I knew what things should look like then everyone would have to follow what I thought things should look like. And that sounds like an authoritarian world to me, so I really don't want that.

Based on his organizing, profession, and activist experience, Jamie could be comfortably classified as a social anarchist in Bookchin's terms, yet his views reflect a version of the postmodern influence[15] Bookchin says is a hallmark of lifestyle anarchism, one which deemphasizes positive organizing.

Bookchin's "chasm" is based in theory, and seems to bear little resemblance to the reality of anarchists' identities. However, the articulation of this chasm certainly appears to have been useful for creating and perpetuating other chasms within anarchist communities. The impact of Bookchin's assessment has been deep judging alone from the number of people in this study who used his terms to describe themselves and others, whether or not they like Bookchin himself. The social anarchism versus lifestyle anarchism split feeds pre-existing sectarian

[15] Sometimes called "post-anarchism", though I resist using this term myself due to a personal distaste for the conceptual obscurity generated from overuse of the prefix "post."

tendencies, and could be involved in a cyclical perpetuation of the culture of marginality within marginality.

Bookchin's chasm provides neatly categorized theoretical enemies within anarchism upon whom one can both blame anarchist failures and identify oneself in reference to. Otherwise, it provides a sounding board for opponents to proffer their own dichotomies. Either way, the culture of marginality within marginality leads to the perception that there is a vaguely constituted mainstream anarchism that is to be resisted, a conceptual structure upon which Bookchin's dichotomy fits comfortably. Opponents of Bookchin, Like Bob Black, perpetuate this cycle by adding further animosity to the debate and creating different but no less divisive categories. Black's contribution to the marginality within marginality phenomenon is plainly illustrated in the title to (and content of) his short essay "Anarchism and other Impediments to Anarchy" (2009).

Of course, this is not to say there aren't real, substantive differences between the beliefs and practices of anarchists – there certainly are. Wide variation on myriad topics emerged from the interviews I conducted, some of the views being quite incompatible. Aside from these disagreements not conforming to named sectarian divisions, the fluid, transitional quality of ideology and praxis most interviewees expressed indicates that the incompatibility between viewpoints is temporal and tenuous. Even if Bookchin's "lifestyle" assessment of, for instance, punk anarchists were true, many of the people who become anarchists in the punk subculture transition in their politics and behavior while maintaining their identity as anarchists. These transitional aspects of people's politics were most often

credited to personal relationships, primarily mentor figures and romantic or sexual relationships. Anarchists' focus on praxis and the personal legitimates these transitions as well as their sources, making for a dynamic and adaptable ideology, if one that is hard to pin down. To use the previous example, Jamie transitioned from envisioning a utopian society as the goal to a more experimental, postmodern model of revolution – that is, he transitioned between political frameworks that are incompatible – but retained his identity as an anarchist throughout the process. In other words, there may be chasms, but they are distinctly bridgeable. Anarchists are identifying with a common ideology and lifestyle despite part of that identity entailing the eschewal of some other members of the identity. If collective identity can be summed up in Polletta's and Jasper's words as "a perception of shared status or relation" (2001:285) then anarchism in the U.S. appears to represent a confused yet powerful identity that transcends apparent chasms even as it attempts to perpetuate them.

In general, anarchism as a deeply acephalous movement in the U.S. is vulnerable to fractures. Anarchism could be understood as the epitome of acephalousity, in that anarchists do not simply not have a leader or central figure, but the rejection of such an authority structure is central to the definition of their ideology. Having no even remotely agreed-upon authority to adjudicate disputes and validate perspectives can lead to both strengths and weaknesses. The culture of marginality, which engenders people with mistrust and even disdain for all things perceived as too popular, both fits into and serves to perpetuate the ill-defined and internally contentious nature of anarchism in the U.S.

One strong influence on the culture of marginality within anarchism seems to involve the intertwining of anarchist culture with punk culture. A great number of interviewees reported radicalizing around punk music and local punk scenes, which often use anarchist language and iconography. Whether or not they still identified with it, most people who had a history with punk anarchism were deeply critical of it as being vapid and stylistic. Nevertheless, the common experience of radicalizing around the punk scene – and the understanding of a close stylistic and cultural association between punk and anarchism, even for those anarchists who did not radicalize around punk – seems to have a lasting effect on U.S. anarchist culture.

David, who is from a town in the Northeast but who lives in Oakland, radicalized around punk rock and articulated a cultural argument for punk's influence on anarchism through his own experience, which is worth quoting at length:

> In middle school I had the typical trauma a lot of American kids go through, like gay-bashed, beaten up for being an effeminate kid, didn't fit in socially, and felt deeply alienated. And that's when I found punk rock. Punk rock taught me I wasn't fucked up, society was. It taught me the fact that I didn't fit in was in fact a badge of honor, and people who fit into society like this are in fact the crazy ones, and the maladjusted ones are the sane ones… So from a pretty young age in middle school the thing that gave me a sense of belonging also gave me a political lens through which I could make meaning of my own sense of alienation.
>
> And so I gravitated toward a punk rock style of anarchism, which is primarily based on alienation from society, choosing to reject society and building subcultures that provide some breathing room and validation. But nowhere in those politics was there any serious discussion of changing society. It was all about rejecting the

> mainstream and anything associated with it. It didn't even occur to me that politics could be about relating to the mainstream of large social blocs of people and changing the conditions of their lives. The anarchism I learned [from punk] was exclusively about building marginal subcultures, and our value is determined by our marginality, and the more marginal we are the more legitimate we are.

The value of non-conformity fits with a more political anarchism as well. However, where punk culture is the introduction to anarchism, the value placed on marginality may be internalized and imported from punk into the political anarchist sphere. It is possible that marginal identities such as those of punk and anarchism attract a certain type of person beyond that person's predilections for radical politics of social justice and/or cultural rebellion (Traber 2001). Either way, those who enter anarchist subcultures through punk may (further) graft marginality into their identity. As they become familiar and comfortable in anarchist subculture, and increasingly spend their time and energy there*, that subculture may begin to appear to them as their new mainstream*. The internalized value of social marginality then directs them to define themselves in oppositional reference to what they perceive as the anarchist mainstream. Since there may not in fact be an anarchist mainstream, or if there is it is very difficult to ascertain, this allows just about everyone involved to make this move.

For example, punk music and culture are often connected to working and middle class whiteness, which many anarchists, often (self-)deprecatingly, associate with anarchism as well. For example, Niqui, a Black anarchist from NYC, was blunt with her take on why anarchism in the U.S. is so white: "I blame punk rock." Multiple white people who had radicalized around punk agreed on both the source and the

negativity of whiteness in U.S. anarchism; David, Phoebe, Jamie, and Liberty all used the exact phrase "white boys club" to describe the connection between punk and anarchism, while several other white respondents, some of them men, used the term "white boys" to describe the character of many self-described anarchist scenes, always in a pejorative manner. Here, whiteness and boy-ness are not merely referring to anarchists' skin color and gender, but the "unchecked" whiteness and heteromasculinity of their behavior. When I asked Natalie what a typical anarchist looked like, she responded: "Kind of like you." I smiled, and she followed up quickly, laughing: "Well they don't *act* like you… but yeah, a young white guy" (emphasis and age characterization hers). Natalie is also white, as were many respondents who spoke out against the negativity of white behavior among anarchists. By identifying excessive whiteness and maleness as negative aspects of anarchist scenes and "calling that out," white and/or male anarchists are able to distance themselves from those socially dominant identities – some interviewees self-consciously suggest they feel compelled to do so – and locate themselves in a positive, minority political identity within anarchism, if not a minority racial or gendered identity.

This move to marginalize oneself within their own chosen political identity was common among respondents, but that is not to say there is no reality to any of their sectarian claims. To be sure, there are legitimate differences between political tendencies within anarchism, which are borne out in interviewees' wide variation in opinions and beliefs about politics, strategy, and praxis. In terms of the identity politics example above, just about anyone who has spent time in anarchist circles will likely report coming into contact with domineering white, male behavior among

participants. However, anarchist scenes are hardly the only ones on the political left with privilege problems, let alone the rest of U.S. society. In her ethnographic work with alternative hard rock music scenes (which overlap with punk), Mimi Schippers describes rampant sexist behavior among men, despite the scene's stated feminist ideals, sometimes articulated by the same men who at other times behave in sexist ways (2000). As well as a forum for self-marginalization, the emphasis on identity oppression within anarchist scenes may be in part a reaction of disappointment to the perpetuation of those dynamics within a political sphere that claims to subvert them.

Anarchism itself is a political ideology on the margins of the political spectrum, as anarchists set themselves apart from the mainstream by an outright rejection of the current political structure. They also set themselves apart from the rest of the radical left by rejecting pre-constructed replacement systems that Social Democrats, Socialists and Communists propose. In many cases, anarchists' lifestyles (and just styles) serve to further marginalize them, often intentionally so. This marginality is a snug fit with punk rock, which is wrapped up in social alienation and rejection of the mainstream. However, the merging of punk with anarchism may have the side effect of alienating many anarchists from each other and undercutting the movement's ability to interconnect and grow by imbuing the political ideology with an irrational suspicion or rejection of popularity of any kind.

Anarchists' proud history of losing their revolutionary struggles also dovetails with the current value placed on marginality. This is not a necessary connection of course, nor does it appear to be present with all anarchists in other

parts of the world. It is worth bringing into the discussion nevertheless due to its possible influence on contemporary anarchist culture. The most celebrated and discussed instances of historical anarchist uprisings (or strong anarchist presences in mass uprisings) – the Paris Commune, the Spanish Revolution, the Mexican Revolution, and so forth – were all defeated comparatively quickly. Furthermore, betrayal at the hands of Communists and Socialists is a theme that comes up repeatedly in both anarchist literature and in my interviews. In this case, the history of losing has two potential consequences. First, anarchists have not sustained an overt, large-scale political project for long enough to have betrayed their own ideals, in stark contrast to Communists. This allows anarchists to retain a sense of purity in their revolutionary ideas. It also allows anarchists to levy critiques on other radical systems from a perspective of relative safety, since they can criticize real historical examples of failed systems based on rival ideologies, while they have none of their own to be scrutinized. Second, the history of losing may imbue anarchists with a pessimistic outlook on their chances for political victories. These can combine to fuel the culture of marginality within marginality built into cotemporary U.S. anarchism, in that the safety of levying critiques from a position of relative powerlessness and an overall pessimistic outlook can be applied within the anarchist subculture as well as outwardly.

The high value placed on marginality is evidenced in many anarchist writings as well as in interviews. CrimethInc. Ex-Workers' Collective is a popular publisher of insurrectionary and lifestyle anarchist propaganda, and their literature demonstrates passionate approval of non-conformity and social marginality.

Nowhere is this sentiment clearer than their book *Expect Resistance*, in which a large typeface heading (probably half-sarcastically) proclaims: "With a little hard work, you can make yourself feel alienated by just about anything" (2005:149).

To those unfamiliar with anarchism, that many anarchists have a great deal in common in terms of their beliefs and practices might come as a surprise. In fact, anarchists in the U.S. may well have more in common than even they recognize. The sectarian divisions anarchists discuss in their interviews appear to be more rooted in a combination of cultural marginality and the perpetuation of the Bookchinian myth that fixed, unbridgeable chasms exists between fundamentally opposed anarchisms than they are in actual ideological or practical differences.

6.0. CONCLUSION

Studies of anarchists have largely overlooked the beliefs and practices of everyday anarchists, and in a radical political environment in which anarchism is an increasingly significant force, it is important to understand what is meant by the term "anarchist" in the minds of those who associate with that label.

Murray Bookchin's argument that there are two distinct, unbridgeable camps within anarchism has been influential in identifying and perpetuating splits among anarchists, but it is not backed up by interviews with anarchists themselves. Anarchists' identities within their ideological and social circles are more fluid than a hard distinction like Bookchin's allows, and their actual disagreements do not match his breakdown (or many others).

Examining contemporary anarchism in the U.S. through the voices of 22 anarchists, I find broad unity on three core points, irrespective of sub-labels and sectarianism: Belief in radical social transformation, belief in direct action, and opposition to all forms of social domination. These similarities demonstrate that being an anarchist is an at least somewhat cohesive political identity beyond people's common identification with the label.

Beyond those agreements, there is wide variety in interpretation of anarchist meanings and practices, and a great deal of fluidity between them. These variations cross specific sub-group identities, belying the "unbridgeability" of Bookchin's chasm, as well as sectarian assertions made by Bookchin's opponents and many anarchists. Anarchists appear to have more in common across sub-categories than they realize, including a prevalent agreement on the importance of disagreement.

The appearance of a chasm that seems to make Bookchin's analysis ring true may actually have more to do with a culture of marginality within anarchism. This "marginality within marginality" might be related to the intertwining of anarchist and punk cultures, and the fact that many anarchists radicalized through punk. Regardless of the degree to which that connection is significant, the unity on some basic issues and the variation within that unity does not obey sectarian lines. Anarchists in the U.S. appear to maintain unity on core issues without a leader or central organization, while their disagreements are varied and are largely unrelated to perceived sectarianism. Anarchism, it seems, might be more orderly than even anarchists believe.

7.0. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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