

A NEW AMERICAN ANARCHISM:
THE DO-IT-YOURSELF CULTURAL RECLAMATION OF POLITICS

—

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of American Studies

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts

—

by

Nicholas Laskowski

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A NEW AMERICAN ANARCHISM:
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I. INTRODUCTION

ANARCHISTS. They were on the tip of the tongues of television news anchors across the country, and everyone knew what they meant: trouble. As the cameras panned over the destruction of corporate storefronts in downtown Seattle during the 1999 World Trade Organization ministerial conference, viewers gasped in horror at the terrible deeds a handful of black-clad young radicals could do. During the week of November 29th, 1999, millions of television viewers watched news coverage of “riots” in Seattle surrounding the ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization. These viewers would recall frightening tales of police-protester streetfighting and video clips of black-clad youth breaking windows of Starbucks and McDonald's. While perhaps most had heard of Seattle and would forget something so complicated as the WTO soon enough, few knew or would forget about the frightening anarchists that drew so much condemnation during the protests. The images of Seattle became the images of anarchism in the US since 1999, catching the eyes of staid centrists and radical youth alike. The experience drew new and widespread attention to an otherwise obscure subcultural phenomenon – the growing audience in the United States for the philosophies and tactics of anarchism.

Anarchism. In the 1990s United States, the word meant nothing beyond an obscure and extremist political philosophy advocating for the end of all government. It conjured images of the hated Unabomber and the archetypal anti-government bomb-thrower of earlier US history. To those that gave the matter any more serious thought, it carried a connotation similar to



“chaos,”¹ and an understanding of anarchism as a foolish set of extremist political views attractive to teenagers and angst-ridden youth “going through a stage.” To those calling themselves anarchist, however, anarchism represented a uniquely coherent philosophy of liberation that offered a fresh and exciting approach to politics and daily living. This understanding of anarchism breaks not only from popular opinion but from political history as well. The anarchism of today does not dwell in theoretical literature or histories of past labor militancy. Instead, today's anarchism infiltrates the lives and minds of many radical activists, promoting a militant approach to politics and an empowering emphasis on self-sufficiency and local projects in daily life.

The anarchist community within the United States has undergone substantial changes in recent years, most especially since the Seattle demonstrations of late 1999. In the more recent context of the revived antiwar movement, Dennis Roddy writes:

¹Lindberg, Christine A. *The Oxford American Thesaurus of Current English*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 25.



One of the most visible but least-explored tributaries of the anti-war left comprises a group of people, mostly young, who dress in black, conceal their faces with masks and combine street theater with street fighting. They call themselves anarchists.²

Both as a result of new activists entering the anarchist milieu and of new directions within the anarchist movement, anarchist thought and activism have been growing in their influence upon political activism and youth culture. Today's anarchism appeals to newer and younger activists, promoting a radical social critique and idealistic social vision as it offers pragmatic strategies for living an alternative lifestyle in support of that vision. The movement draws on rich traditions of the Do-It-Yourself spirit and a profound sense of disillusionment among contemporary U.S. youth. Concerned scholars of these trends must ask exactly what has caused these shifts and where these trends lead current political and cultural movements.

Motivations and Project Scope

This project aims to examine the intersections of anarchist politics and Do-It-Yourself culture in the context of a growing trend among youth in the United States since 1999. I am drawn to this topic for what I see as a trend with powerful potential, offering a new form of radical political activism to sectors of the United States that otherwise would be some of the most tranquil and invested members of society. There exist plenty of contradictions within the population and social context I study, and I do not wish to obscure these. Many (though not all) anarchists seeking alternative means of subsistence grew up in middle class white households in the suburbs. They are not the “oppressed masses” of the global South, nor do they claim to be. They are not the first individuals to seek to reconstruct the social and economic institutions that

²Roddy, Dennis. “Anarchists: Can they get it together?” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. 2 February, 2003. Lifestyle section, p. F-1.



affect them, nor the first to try most of the strategies mentioned here. That the subjects of my study predominantly occupy positions of strong privilege in our society might grant their political choices added force or legitimacy in our hierarchical society, but it does not make their actions better or more interesting than those that have taken similar approaches in different times or places. I have chosen to limit my study to the contemporary United States, not because it represents a hotbed of anarchist activism, but because activism in the U.S. holds a unique potential to influence global problems from the “eye of the storm.”* The culture and history of the United States lends itself uniquely to the modern anarchist mindset, emphasizing individual liberty and self-reliance.

What follows comprises a general overview of the relevant context and analysis to begin to understand the current phenomenon of Do-It-Yourself activism in the U.S. Here we have not space nor the need to exhaustively survey the history of North American anarchism or the deepest roots of Do-It-Yourself culture. What concerns us instead are the recent intersections between these and other strains of social and cultural thought and practice, as well as their current direction. The work of the CrimethInc. Ex-Worker's Collective receives considerable attention, not because it alone represents the new strain of anarchism, but because it serves as a highly visible and effective example of many of the larger trends and projects at work. The demonstrations in Seattle, too, did not mark the beginning of anarchism in the United States, but merely a flash point to define a period. The current phenomenon of DIY anarchism may not,

*Many might instead refer to the “belly of the beast” - but the belly of the beast is a tumultuous and uncomfortable place that is hard to escape; the United States instead resembles the eye of the storm: incredibly pleasant in a small area, and easy to leave, but exceedingly difficult to enter and highly damaging in all outward directions.



then, exist in an historical vacuum without parallel or precedent. One need not resort to superlatives and hyperbole, however, to realize that the new anarchism merits attention for its uniquely cultural approach to politics and the notable success it has had with these new politics. If anarchist accomplishments now do not sufficiently justify such a study, the potential of such a movement in the future leaves unlimited potential and fascinating possibilities. We might pursue an academic study of precision and thorough analysis, but we must constantly bear in mind our perspective. As Gloria Cubana reminds, “this is how the revolution begins: a few of us start chasing our dreams . . . daydreaming, questioning.”³ No thesis project can supersede daydreaming, and this project makes no attempt to be an exception.

Violence and Visibility: Anarchists Make the Evening News

The World Trade Organization demonstrations in Seattle caught a great deal of attention, surprising mainstream media and its consumers with the violent images of police overreaction and property damage. The demonstrations clearly had an impact on the public debate surrounding trade and globalization, as newspapers and magazines ran large-spread expository pieces on the controversies surrounding the WTO. Still, while the global justice movement gained a great deal of attention from the events, media coverage heavily emphasized the property destruction committed by a few hundred in a crowd of tens of thousands. Major news stories attempted to explain the origins of the damage to downtown storefronts, finding a convenient scapegoat in anarchism. “The destruction was carried out Tuesday with near-impunity by a

3Days of War, Nights of Love: Crimethink for Beginners. CrimethInc. Workers' Collective. Atlanta, GA: CrimethInc. Free Press, 2001. 275.



relatively small gang of self-proclaimed anarchists,”⁴ as one article explained. The *New York Times* arrived at one answer to how “the thin line was crossed from nonviolent protest to urban disorder” – “the anarchists were organized.”⁵ That the actions of the demonstrators in Seattle provoked as much interest in the global justice movement and anarchism as they did spoke both to the significance of the week's events as well as to the media's urgent need to delegitimize the demonstrator's cause.

News coverage of the WTO demonstrations overwhelmingly focused on violence and chaos, and anarchists soon emerged as the favorite target for newscasters' denunciations.

⁴Verhovek, Sam Howe. “Seattle Is Stung, Angry and Chagrined as Opportunity Turns to Chaos.” *The New York Times*. 2 December 1999. p. A16.

⁵Egan, Timothy. “Black Masks Lead to Pointed Fingers in Seattle.” *The New York Times*. 2 December, 1999. p. A1.



The WTO protests in Seattle may be remembered as the time when the words "pepper spray" first entered the vocabulary of the American public. From November 30 through December 3, as police took on demonstrators outside the World Trade Organization meeting at the Seattle Convention Center, you couldn't turn on a TV or open a newspaper without hearing how officers were using "tear gas, rubber bullets and pepper spray" to disperse crowds of protestors.⁶

These media reports rarely reported (accurately, at least) just who the police used these chemical weapons against – far more often peaceful demonstrators committing acts of nonviolent civil disobedience than window-smashing looters. As Ackerman describes, “A continuing theme in news reports was that the use of tear gas and concussion grenades was an appropriate response to "violent" activists.”⁷ Some dispute arose over the precise time at which police started using chemical weapons, which turned out to be two hours or more before any property destruction began. Yet media sources drew the tenuous link between the police violence and militant protest action repeatedly, always returning to the “self-described anarchists” as a convenient scapegoat.

6deMause, Neil. “Pepper Spray Gets in Their Eyes: Media missed militarization of police work in Seattle.” *Extra!* March/April 2000.

7Ackerman, Seth. “Prattle in Seattle: WTO coverage misrepresented issues, protests.” *Extra!* January/February 2000.



A CNN report from Seattle (12/1/99) claimed that "as tens of thousands marched through downtown Seattle, [a] small group of self-described anarchists smashed windows and vandalized stores. Police responded with rubber bullets and pepper gas."⁸

Anarchists emerged from the Seattle demonstrations with a new legacy in North American TV viewers' minds, one associated with millions of dollars of property destruction. The words of Lancaster, Pennsylvania Mayor Charlie Smithgall nearly two years later, following a minor altercation with anarchist members of Anti-Racist Action, hardly surprise: "We're worried . . . these are the same people who showed up in Seattle."⁹ By the close of the week of demonstrations in Seattle, anarchism had made its newest mark on the North American consciousness.

It was there that America discovered anarchism for the first time since Sacco and Vanzetti—in the intimidating form of the masked militants of the black bloc. "Street rage," blared *The New York Times*; "nightmare of protests," declared NBC Nightly News, as everyone from the Rainforest Action Network to the president rushed to separate the good protesters from the bad.¹⁰

While the news media certainly gave the North American anarchist movement free publicity, the association with violence would remain a harmful stereotype of the political persuasion.

From Seattle to the Situationists: A New Anarchism?

The media coverage of the Seattle demonstrations undoubtedly altered the public debate surrounding issues of international trade and globalization, and though it may not have persuaded millions of viewers to join the anarchist cause, it brought an unprecedented wave of attention to the growing movement. The new attention to a growing global justice movement provided a

⁸Ackerman,

⁹Smart, Gil. "2 anarchists arrested; They scuffled with police. Group caused more problems than the Klan they came to harass." *Sunday News* (Lancaster, PA.). 9 September, 2001. U.S./World section, Page A-10.

¹⁰Kaplan, Esther. "Keepers of the Flame: As Moderate Groups Turn Down the Heat, Anarchists Light a New Way for Dissent." *The Village Voice*. 29 January, 2002.



spark of publicity that made anarchism visible to a wider audience of youth growing increasingly disillusioned with mainstream society. A few of these took the next steps to find out what exactly this buzz was all about, and many young North Americans soon found themselves involved in an exciting social movement often compared to the quasi-mythical antiwar movement of the 1960s. Still others saw the footage and heard the tales of the anarchist “Black Bloc” and found themselves attracted to its radical militancy and fearlessness, discovering the mystique of the streetfighting anarchist. An overwhelmingly clear trend appears, as Malcolm Foster writes, that “anarchist views are spreading among young activists, thanks largely to the anti-globalization movement - or the global justice movement, as its supporters prefer to call it.”¹¹ Anarchist philosophy indeed found itself in a resurgence, “after years relegated to the oral history dustbin,”¹² but this resurgence did not merely repopularize an old ideology. The anarchism of Seattle and beyond represents a new breed of anarchism, and perhaps true to its ideology, it rabidly resists classification.

Just what sort of anarchism has attracted these young activists? Media representations, focusing on “violence” in the form of property damage, certainly did not help clarify the picture.

This groupthink has not only obscured the true nature of the protest violence—since the police have been by far the most aggressive perpetrators, from the pepper spray and nightsticks of Seattle to the fatal bullets of Genoa—but also made invisible a significant new development: **The anarchist fringe is fast becoming the movement's center.**¹³

Anarchism certainly did not gain such significant inroads in the global justice

¹¹Foster, Malcolm. “Despite poor image, anarchism is catching on among young activists disillusioned with capitalism.” Associated Press. 17 January, 2003.

¹²Kaplan.

¹³Kaplan.



movement solely by its association with violence, even if unpopular tactics may

have helped gain media attention.



But where the smashed window or street fight is what makes the television screens, anarchism as a philosophy does not require violence. For every smashed window, there are a dozen or more meetings about the fine points of collective decision-making and regional democracy.¹⁴

The particular style of anarchist groups visible in Seattle may have provided even more attractive force to onlookers than their diverse tactics. Anarchists have been widely identified by their appearance since the WTO demonstrations, primarily by the stereotyped black clothes and bandannas covering demonstrators' faces. Beyond their intended purpose in concealing identity, these features serve effectively as cultural markers of rebellion, drawing young activists into a subculture laden with mystique and symbolism.

¹⁴Roddy.



It is this penchant for anonymity, for noms de guerre, black garb and red-and-black flags of revolution that provide the current anarchist movement with both its cachet and its largest obstacle. Its foreignness makes it simultaneously alluring and repellent to onlookers.¹⁵

Roddy expresses a common question about anarchists today, asking, “they make headlines, but do they make sense?”¹⁶ To those that joined the global justice movement following the Seattle demonstrations, anarchism took on a very real sense, a new meaning to distinguish it from its distant historical associations. It represented not simply a facile opposition to government or a synonym for “chaos,” but a cohesive philosophy opposing all forms of hierarchy, accompanied by a militant lifestyle that made its every act a protest against the society that depended so completely upon hierarchical institutions.

Modern anarchists do not limit their social critiques to government alone, but oppose hierarchical relations in economic, sexual, and social fields as well as the political. Popular conceptions of anarchy still focus on its opposition to the state, but in doing so they miss the true principle behind today's anarchism. The *American Heritage Dictionary* lists three definitions for anarchism: the first speaks of the abolition of all forms of government, and the second mentions terrorism against the state; the third strikes more accurately at the point, citing a “rejection of all forms of coercive control and authority.”¹⁷ In basing their political views on such a broad-based opposition to oppression, today's anarchists create not merely a new anarchism but a new politics.

15Roddy.

16Roddy.

17“Anarchism.” *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000. 65.



The grassroots anti-globalization movement in the North, which seemingly burst out of nowhere to take on the WTO during the infamous "Battle of Seattle" in late 1999, is attracting considerable attention for its "new politics." Employing highly aestheticized modes of protest, this new movement embraces "trans-class" and transnational issues that are linked to corporate globalization. The movement actually encompasses a wide variety of political tendencies. However, due to its decentralized, coalitional nature and its association with street clashes between youthful protestors and police, its "new politics" is usually classified as either postmodernist or anarchist.¹⁸

These new trends in political activism flourish so freely within the philosophical boundaries of anarchism partly due to the wide-open, common-sense definition of anarchism in use among most activists. Rooted in the Greek origins of "anarchy," signifying "without a ruler,"¹⁹ contemporary anarchism does not limit itself to opposing government and attacking its institutions, but seeks to overcome and resist hierarchy and domination in all their manifestations. As Barbara Epstein describes:

18Cochrane, Regina. "(Eco) feminism as a 'temporary autonomous zone'?" *Women & Environments International Magazine*. 1 October, 2002. p. 24.

19"Anarchy." *American Heritage Dictionary*, 65.



For contemporary young radical activists, anarchism means a decentralized organizational structure, based on affinity groups that work together on an ad hoc basis, and decision-making by consensus. It also means egalitarianism; opposition to all hierarchies; suspicion of authority, especially that of the state; and commitment to living according to one's values. Young radical activists, who regard themselves as anarchists, are likely to be hostile not only to corporations but to capitalism. Many envision a stateless society based on small, egalitarian communities. For some, however, the society of the future remains an open question. For them, anarchism is important mainly as an organizational structure and as a commitment to egalitarianism. It is a form of politics that revolves around the exposure of the truth rather than strategy. It is a politics decidedly in the moment.²⁰

Thus, the anarchism that has attracted these new participants is not the post-Marxist anarchism of nineteenth-century Europe or the early twentieth-century United States – as much as this point evades the understanding of most analysts, a new anarchism is developing in the United States.

More than a philosophical base in Marxism, popular contemporary anarchism draws on a rich tradition of self-reliance in the United States known as Do-It-Yourself (DIY), and gathers tactics and imagery as much from punk music as from the French Situationists of the late 1960s. This modern anarchism draws on distinct cultural traditions within the United States, and it represents a new form of anarchism that feeds the imaginations of young North American activists like no other political philosophy or social movement has in recent years.

²⁰Epstein, Barbara. “Anarchism and the Anti-Globalization Movement.” *Monthly Review*, September 2001.



II. CHARACTERISTICS OF A NEW MOVEMENT

Many have noticed in recent years a resurgence of political activism and radical subcultures, particularly among youth in the United States. This phenomenon has been most often identified as having its noticeable beginnings in the protests against the World Trade Organization's Seattle Ministerial Conference in 1999. While it draws on ongoing and traceable traditions of youth culture, political dissent, and libertarian social values,^{*} it also represents a distinctly new development within these traditions, posing new questions for scholars and participants alike. To most in the United States, anarchism may not appear to bear any greater relevance today than in the past half-century, but to those familiar with the recent global justice movement that has received so much attention, anarchism represents more than just another marginal political sect. The global justice movement and anarchist groups in the US share a symbiotic relationship where each feeds the other publicity and participants.

The WTO demonstrations in late November of 1999 in Seattle drew considerable attention to a growing movement within the United States. Media sources, politicians, and academic sources have widely referred to this as an "anti-globalization" movement, though it is more accurately described as an anti-corporate globalization or simply global justice movement, reflecting the distinctly global organizing strategies of the activist groups themselves, and specifying their precise criticism of the "globalization" trend: its control by and bias towards corporate capitalist forces. Mark Engler describes the demonstrators' demands:

^{*}"Libertarian" here refers to the original sense of social liberation and individual liberty, not the narrower political philosophy advocated by the modern Libertarian Party.



Most generally, protesters charge institutions like the WTO and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with worsening global poverty and undermining democratic decision-making. It is true, however, that there's no single manifesto guiding the demonstrations. Part of movement's strength lies in its ability to draw connections between issues as diverse as the AIDS crisis, Third World debt, rainforest destruction, the growth of global sweatshops, and the privatization of basic services like education and electricity.²¹

The composition of this new movement caught special attention as the most unique factor of activist mobilizations like that in Seattle, or those in 2000 in Washington, DC (April, International Monetary Fund and World Bank annual meetings), Philadelphia (July, Republican National Convention), or Los Angeles (August, Democratic National Convention). For the first time in most analysts' memory since at least the 1960s, middle-class college students joined with union members, non-governmental organization (NGO) office staffers, and black-clad anarchists with a common target and strategy. These last participants stood out among the crowd: the images of "violent anarchists" breaking windows of corporate storefronts such as Starbucks and McDonald's burned themselves into the minds of news viewers around the country to bring attention to the new wave of anarchism in the United States.

²¹Engler, Mark. "From 'Anti-Globalization' to a World of Possibilities." *TomPaine.com*. Online: <http://www.tompaine.com/feature.cfm/ID/7148>. 27 January, 2003.



Things got serious when scattered groups of self-described Black Block anarchists, wearing all-black outfits with handkerchiefs or hoods covering their faces, started to smash windows and trash businesses, giving special attention to companies such as the Gap and Nike that have been accused of using low-wage or child labor to produce some of their merchandise.²²

The coverage certainly did not tend towards the favorable. One report referred to the presence of “anarchistic hooligans,”²³ at the demonstrations, and in another a store manager was quoted expressing his discontent that the police responded inadequately “while the anarchists were going crazy.”²⁴ As the media focused on fear and many supporters focused on a new vibrant spirit within the activist community, all observers focused on the same group: anarchists.

In recent years, anarchists have played a prominent role in many large global justice mobilizations, to the point where anarchist perspectives have come to have a serious influence on the global justice movement, more so than any other single political ideology. Even the global justice movement taken alone bears significant weight in the United States recently, drawing considerable attention to complex subjects of global trade and energizing a new generation of activists in the process. Media sources have noticed this, even if they tend to overlook it in their own reporting, and indeed they have noticed the anarchist wing of these mobilizations.

²²Lacayo, Richard. “Rage Against the Machine: Despite, and because of, violence, anti-WTO protesters were heard.” *Time*. 13 December 1999. p. 37.

²³Pearlstein, Steven. “Trade Theory Collides With Angry Reality.” *The Washington Post*. 3 December, 1999. p. A31.

²⁴Verhovek, A16.



In one, red-hot CNN Minute, the eclectic concerns of a planetful of protesters—environmentalism, Tibet, child labor, human rights—crystallized right where most of them didn't want to be: beneath the anarchist banner.²⁵

The influence from anarchist groups and perspectives upon the blossoming anti-corporate globalization movement has shaped organizational tactics and nascent political consciousness (especially among young activists), defined group boundaries, and provoked considerable debate and discussion within the movement.

Highly-visible anarchist contingents known as “Black Blocs” have raised a considerable stir since 1999 with aggressive street tactics at mass demonstrations, including property damage, vandalism, and occasionally engaging police in rock-throwing scuffles. These events have provoked public outrage and police repression, both aggravated by the identifiable and frightening appearance of these demonstrators – the “Black Bloc” names itself so for its tactic of dressing in dark clothes with face masks to evade law enforcement surveillance and prosecution. News media typically identify Black Bloc participants as “violent protesters” and “anarchists,” confusing the minority with the majority, but to activists in the global justice movement these actions have a clear name and an identifiable form. Though Black Blocs have typically been small portions of large demonstrations (and have even been declining in recent years as property damage elicits more intense police prosecution and negative media coverage), they have made anarchism more visible within global justice organizing.

Both as activists involved in the movement and as an element to be taken into account for protest planners, anarchists have had a considerable influence within the global justice

²⁵Krantz, Michael. “The Violence: How Organized Anarchists Led Seattle Into Chaos.” *Time*. 13 December 1999. p. 38.



movement. Increasingly influential in the movement, anarchists have emphasized resisting and resolving oppression within the movement, bringing concerns of hierarchy and domination to the forefront in organizational meetings and structures. Anarchists can attribute much of their success in these efforts to their militancy; they have not hesitated to form alternate organizations or events where existing ones failed to sufficiently address anarchist concerns. In Washington, DC, for instance, the Anti-Capitalist Convergence arose out of the main global justice organizing body, the Mobilization for Global Justice, following the April 16th, 2000 demonstrations against the IMF and World Bank there. The militancy of the Anti-Capitalist Convergence satisfied a need within the anarchist community that the Mobilization for Global Justice could not address without risking the loss of its NGO sponsors.

A Growing Anarchist Movement

Traditional manifestations of the US anarchist movement, such as organizations, publications, and conferences, have also grown in the years since the Seattle demonstrations, becoming a sizable constituency within the US left, rivaling the place of longstanding sectarian communist or socialist groups. Malcolm Foster describes some indicators of this growth:



AK Press, a publisher of anarchist and other radical literature in Oakland, California, said its sales have risen about 20 per cent annually the past several years.

Food Not Bombs, an anarchist network that serves free vegetarian food, has grown to about 150 chapters across the United States, up from 100 a couple of years ago, said Keith McHenry, who helped found the group in 1980.

On the academic front, more anarchists are invited to speak at conferences and more scholarly work about anarchism is published, said Cindy Milstein, a faculty member at the Institute of Social Ecology, a small leftist institute in Plainfield, Vermont.

"It's OK to call yourself an anarchist now," Milstein said.²⁶

Admittedly, determining the precise magnitude of the anarchist movement in the United States presents a daunting and potentially impossible task. One may recognize, however, the influence of the anarchist movement on other social movements or identify social conditions that have made anarchism particularly attractive to many disillusioned youth today. Within the global justice movement, the style and approach of many anarchists have helped to bring the contemporary anti-corporate globalization movement to the attention of more traditional anarchist thinkers, and have likewise brought anarchist philosophical thought to the attention of many leftists within the anti-corporate movement.

One anarchist group merits attention as particularly representative of this new brand of anarchism. The CrimethInc. (ex)Workers' Collective, or CrimethInc., offers a potent mix of mystique, manifestos, and manuals to define a new trend in anarchism. If nothing else effectively demonstrates the audience of this particular style of anarchist ideology, the press runs of CrimethInc. publications should – the collective recently distributed over 240,000 free copies of a 24-page introductory anarchist primer at a cost to the collective of near \$25,000.²⁷

²⁶Foster.

²⁷*CrimethInc. Com/munications*. "Fighting For Our Lives." "News Bulletin from the Fight For Our Lives: Mission Complete, Paper Unavailable"



CrimethInc. advocates an anarchism of projects. It currently supports a variety of ongoing efforts, including a canon of well-known publications, a handful of punk records, and summer tours. CrimethInc. began as a punk & politics zine, *Inside Front*, pointing to the punk music subculture as an important point of entry for many youth discovering anarchism. The punk music scene within the United States recent years has often intersected in its more political manifestations (such as hardcore punk, from which *Inside Front* arose) with contemporary political movements such as the anti-corporate one. A tradition of anarchist-oriented Do-It-Yourself living, most articulately espoused by CrimethInc. publications, has become especially popular among many young anarchists for ideological and pragmatic reasons, offering a distinct culture and lifestyle for this political and cultural phenomenon.

Growth of a Nascent Movement

The revitalized protest movement surrounding issues of capitalist globalization that began to catch widespread attention with the Seattle World Trade Organization demonstrations of November 1999 marked a new and different wave of political activism in the United States, significantly influencing political events as well as cultural discourse. Before Seattle's demonstrations, many dismissed the coherence or relevance of the growing global justice movement. This phenomenon built over time, however, emboldened by social factors particular to a growing sense of political disillusionment in the late 1990s. Naomi Klein, a journalist, describes her thoughts at the outset of writing her seminal book, *No Logo*:

When I started this book, I honestly didn't know whether I was covering marginal atomized scenes of resistance or the birth of a potentially broad-based movement. But as time went on, what I



clearly saw was a movement forming before my eyes.²⁸

Much of what blossomed in Seattle had developed for years in campus activism, where complicated issues of global trade began to take the center stage in struggles against sweatshops and corporate contractors.

. . . this was a rather sudden change in political focus; five years earlier, campus politics was all about issues of discrimination and identity – race, gender and sexuality, “the political correctness wars.” Now they were broadening out to include corporate power, labor rights, and a fairly developed analysis of the workings of the global economy.²⁹

Klein theorizes that much of this new activism arose out of a sense of frustration relating to the intensification of corporate branding campaigns in the 1990s. As the corporate logo encroached upon more and more elements of individuals' daily lives (whether it manifest itself through annoying pop-ups or watermarks on web pages or increasingly empty shoe commercials on TV), the conflicts present in the consumer-corporate relationship began to reach unbearable intensity.

The fact that companies like Nike and Microsoft became such household names made it that much harder to ignore the increasing set of accusations against them.

While the latter half of the 1990s has seen enormous growth in the brands' ubiquity, a parallel phenomenon has emerged on the margins: a network of environmental, labor and human-rights activists determined to expose the damage being done behind the slick veneer.³⁰

College students and cultural-political activists began using corporate brands against companies themselves, often in very Situationist-styled acts of *détournement*, which Lasn describes as “a perspective-jarring turnabout in your everyday life.”³¹ These actions would spin corporate

28Klein, Naomi. *No Space, No Choice, No Jobs, No Logo; Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. New York: Picador, 1999. 443.

29Klein, xix.

30Klein, 325.

31Lasn, Kalle. *Culture Jam: How to Reverse America's Suicidal Consumer Binge—and Why We Must*. New York: Quill, 1999. xvii.



images back on themselves, leveraging a company's public relations against its social practices through campaigns like “subvertisements” that re-tooled corporate ads with altered text or images for a new meaning. In doing so, the political opposition to corporate abuses discovered its magic button.

. . . as more people discover the brand-name secrets of the global logo web, their outrage will fuel the next big political movement, a vast wave of opposition squarely targeting transnational corporations, particularly those with very high name-brand recognition.³²

With this, the global justice movement emerged as the new political phenomenon, building energy towards the mass mobilizations such as those of Seattle that would draw so much attention.

It is telling that Klein published her book months before the Seattle demonstrations even occurred; the movement did not birth itself overnight. Activists had protested international trade and financial institutions before. Never did their efforts reach the magnitude of the broad coalition visible in Seattle, however – when environmentalists joined union workers and anarchists to express their frustration with a global economic system that offered them no voice. As more individuals gained a consciousness of the connections between global economic structures and local issues, the movement realized its strength.

. . . there is increasing evidence that globalism and localism . . . may be intimately linked, opposite sides of the same coin. The more that corporations globalize and lose touch with the concerns of ordinary people, the more that the seeds of grass-roots revolt are sown; equally, the more that governments hand responsibility to remote supranational powers the more they lose their democratic legitimacy and alienate people.³³

More than simply bringing people into the global justice movement, this locally-oriented global

³²Klein, xviii.

³³John Vidal, *McLibel: Burger Culture on Trial*, London: Macmillan 1997, p. 277. Cited in McKay, George. “DiY Culture: notes towards an intro.” *DiY Culture: Party & Protest in Nineties Britain*. McKay, George, ed. London: Verso, 1998. 3.



awareness has shaped the political phenomenon and directed its participants to other movements, such as the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) movement that shares so many links with anarchism. As McKay writes, “the trajectory of issues is from the global to the local.”³⁴ As anti-globalization protests increasingly seek to draw connections between global problems and local issues – both for participant outreach and message coherency – the growing movement has served as a feeder to the hyper-local culture of DIY and anarchism.

Anarchism Makes its Mark in the Movement

Anarchism has made waves in the new activist movement, forming a symbiotic relationship where anarchist principles guide organizations, tactics, and priorities within the global justice movement, and the movement provides a visible forum for anarchism to attract new activists into its fold. While media sources focus on the role of anarchists as “violent” protesters, many miss the more subtle infusions of anarchism in the broader movement.

³⁴McKay, 8.



No Logo author Naomi Klein has long argued that the global justice movement has an inherently anarchist feel. But as the months have rolled by since Seattle, more and more activists, with little fanfare, have come to explicitly identify as anarchists, and anarchist-minded collectives are on the rise.³⁵

Certainly enough explicitly anarchist projects and organizations have arisen to catch most activists' attention, and still many other activists identify individually as anarchists participating in broader coalitions. In Washington, DC, the anarchist-mainstream divide within the global justice movement has resulted in the formation of two separate coalitions working on IMF and World Bank demonstrations in the city. The Anti-Capitalist Convergence covers the more radical anarchist-leaning political ground while the Mobilization for Global Justice exists as the more legitimate-seeming coalition of NGOs, unions, and religious and community organizations. The Anti-Capitalist Convergence goes so far to say on its website that "Given that a third of the anti-corporate globalization movement is comprised of anarchists, you'll find them working everywhere in both coalitions."³⁶ Indeed, anarchists have a strong impact within the movement, and those with anarchist perspectives that do not explicitly identify themselves as anarchist may bear considerably more influence within the movement than the impacts of more avowed anarchism.

³⁵Kaplan.

³⁶*Anti-Capitalist Convergence*. "FAQ." Online: <http://www.abolishthebank.org/faq.shtml>. 1 September 2002.



There are many in the movement who do not consider themselves anarchists. These would include some of the older intellectuals, as well as some younger activists with experience in movements with other ideological leanings, such as the international solidarity/anti-imperialist movement, in which anarchism has not been a major influence. There are activists who do not identify with any ideological stance. Nevertheless anarchism is the dominant perspective within the movement.³⁷

Though anarchism has clearly permeated the global justice movement (for better or worse, no one seems to agree), it is not as clear exactly what this new anarchism means to its adherents.

³⁷Epstein.



III. JUST HOW ARE THEY ANARCHIST?

The anarchism apparent today within the global justice movement does not depend on any particular philosopher's work or a specific group's work – instead, to most global justice activists, anarchism represents a fundamental approach to life and activism with a particular set of priorities setting it apart from other perspectives. When activists encounter anarchism today, they need not look to published philosophical tracts; the attractiveness of anarchism in recent years has relied on its applications to everyday life and activism.



There are probably more people in the anti-globalization movement attracted to the movement's culture and organizational structure than to anarchism as a worldview. Nevertheless anarchism is attractive as an alternative to the version of radicalism associated with the Old Left and the Soviet Union. Many activists in the anti-globalization movement do not see the working class as the leading force for social change. Movement activists associate anarchism with militant, angry protest, with grassroots, leaderless democracy, and with a vision of loosely linked small-scale communities. Those activists who identify with anarchism are usually anti-capitalist; among these, some would also call themselves socialists (presumably of the libertarian variety), some would not. Anarchism has the mixed advantage of being rather vague in terms of its proscriptions for a better society, and also of a certain intellectual fuzziness that allows it to incorporate both Marxism's protest against class exploitation, and liberalism's outrage at the violation of individual rights. I spoke with one anti-globalization activist who described the anarchism of many movement activists as 'liberalism on steroids' – that is, they are in favor of liberal values, human rights, free speech, diversity – and militantly so.³⁸

Anarchism has appealed to the no-compromise segment of the global justice movement, attracting activists with its refusal to rely on legal permits or negotiated march routes, an insistence on leaderlessness, and an emotional sort of spontaneous, militant action.

Anarchists claim the fullest possible interpretations of all of the global justice movement's values, often drawing on a certain purist streak within some segments of the movement. Where the movement fights global domination, anarchists fight it locally too; where the movement opposes racist international policies, anarchists actively oppose racist tendencies within activist groups and racially-charged local police problems; where the movement advocates a socialist economics, anarchism stops at nothing short of full equality and collective property. In this sense, anarchism attracts those who seek to live the values of the global justice movement more actively and completely. In a largely youthful, somewhat inexperienced movement, this segment represents a significant portion of the crowd. Regardless of the details of anarchist philosophy, it appeals to a large number of global justice activists, such that the movement as a whole begins to define itself from the intersection between anarchist and other perspectives.

³⁸Epstein.



UC Santa Cruz professor Barbara Epstein, an expert on direct action, senses that anarchism has now become "the pole that everyone revolves around," much as Marxism was in the '60s. In other words, even young activists who don't identify as anarchists have to position themselves in relation to its values.³⁹

This has led to conflict before, as the lines between anarchist and non-anarchist sectors of the movement provoke distrust and misunderstanding. The most interesting facet of this, however, remains the fact that anarchism is the line at which the movement divides.

Dividing and Defining the Movement

The relationship between anarchist groups and more "acceptable" coalitions and organizations has marked a significant dividing point within the left, as criteria such as philosophical positions on property destruction take center stage in contested coalitions. While anarchist groups have been a noteworthy part of anti-corporate globalization efforts, they have also found themselves frequently shunned by groups seeking wider coalitions with religious or labor organizations. One of the most attention-catching segments of many demonstrations, the so-called "Black Bloc," has also found itself the most ostracized for its acceptance of property destruction as a protest tactic.

Many anti-globalization protesters reject the anarchist label and condemn combative acts. Yet the protests have been shaped by anarchism, both in theme - a call to return power to the local level - and in structure - small groups cooperating without central authority.⁴⁰

Few activists actively disagree with these more general priorities of activism. Even the most mainstream groups avoid explicitly hierarchical structures, and local coalitions still complete the majority of preparation work for any major mobilization.

The movement does not divide itself along questions of organizational priorities, but of

³⁹Kaplan.

⁴⁰Foster.



tactics. This division as much reflects as it has formed the political philosophies of contemporary anarchists. Considerable disagreement exists over tactical questions within anarchist philosophy, and the experience of these tactical debates has caused many to form their political identities in relation to these positions. The refusal of “mainstream” protest groups to consider diverse tactical approaches has soured many to the traditional social reform tactics of mass demonstrations and coalition-led mobilizations. Still, no one can deny that on organizational priorities little disagreement exists. Anarchists have promoted vibrant, personal affinity groups that emphasize creative, emotional actions and strong interpersonal bonds.

In debates over the sustainability of the global justice movement, the anarchists are mostly chalked up as a problem. But their spirit of cultural celebration, combined with an elaborate web of small, accessible collective endeavors, has clearly provided activists with skills, support structures, and points of entry.⁴¹

The relationship between the global justice movement and its anarchist wing can only qualify as a symbiotic one – anti-corporate globalization demonstrations have drawn attention to anarchism, and anarchists have revitalized the global justice movement with fresh ideas and techniques. While the two represent identifiable and distinct phenomena within contemporary leftist politics, their relationship does as much to define them as to connect them.

Action and Activism: What Does This Anarchist Movement Look Like?

Between typical misconceptions, inaccurate media portrayals, and the varying visibility of different types of activity, the ongoing activities of those who call themselves anarchists do not always make it to the public consciousness, but nevertheless the anarchist movement continues to busily carry out a multitude of projects and activities. While anarchist participation in massive

⁴¹Kaplan.



demonstrations catches the most attention from both mainstream media sources and movement activists, anarchist organizing reaches far beyond these sporadic mobilizations. In fact, far from focusing energy upon these centralized demonstrations, anarchist groups have used these central gatherings primarily as networking and conferencing opportunities for coordinating other activities among widely dispersed activists. One writer describes the North Eastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists and its participation in these mass demonstrations:

To a large extent it is these mass illegal actions which provided the glue that held NEFAC together in its early years. It was only at these summits where the militants from far-flung cities had a chance to converge en masse.⁴²

The habit of traveling around the country attending large demonstrations against targets such as meetings of international trade or finance organizations (including Seattle in 1999, Washington, Philadelphia, and L.A. in 2000, Quebec in 2001, and New York and Washington in 2002), the US government (Washington for several antiwar protests in 2002 and 2003), or the United Nations (New York in 2003) is known among activists as “summit-hopping,” and carries a distinctly pejorative connotation. Many activists speak harshly against those who neglect the daily grind of local activism and prefer popular, exciting mass demonstrations.

Mass protest mobilizations do not constitute most anarchist groups' main activity; rather the small groups autonomously organized at these demonstrations represent both an example and a starting point for the models of anarchist organization used in local communities. Groups organized on anarchist principles abound at large protest events, though they do not organize solely for these protests. “The movement is organized along lines understood as anarchist by

⁴²Feeney, Chekov. “An Irish Anarchist in the Northeast: Reflections on the North American Anarchist Movement.” *The Northeastern Anarchist*. No. 5, Fall/Winter 2002. Boston: Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists, 2002. 9.



movement activists, made up largely of small groups that join forces on an ad hoc basis, for particular actions and other projects.”⁴³ To many, these small “affinity groups” organized for a particular purpose and use at mass demonstrations in fact form the backbone of all anarchist organizational approaches.

Anarchists hold the ability to spontaneously and effectively organize as needed in high esteem – more than correct ideological positioning. Tizon highlights this in describing the nature of the anarchist movement: “Technically, there is no distinct anarchist community; only a few dozen energetic organizers who can recruit, when needed, a few hundred followers.”⁴⁴ This degree of flexibility reflects the priority many anarchists place upon utility and efficacy in their organizing: to most activists, whether a particular organization identifies as anarchist or anti-capitalist does not carry nearly as much weight as its usefulness in addressing a particular problem. In Eugene, Oregon, often considered a hotbed of anarchist activity, this has resulted in the vibrant activity of many issue-based groups rather than any monolithic anarchist organization:

⁴³Epstein.

⁴⁴Tizon, Alex. “Anarchists' muted applause: 'The big bully got a black eye'.” *Seattle Times*. 27 November, 2001. News section, p. A1.



The anarchist movement, which calls for the eradication of all forms of authority, has melded here with environmentalism, animal rights and what's left of the radical left to the point where activists flow easily from one protest group to the next.

You can be an anarchist one week, an Earth Firster the next, or you could call yourself a "green anarchist" and cover both bases at once. You could decry animal experimentation in the morning and attend an anti-war rally in the afternoon. It would all contribute to what Terranova calls "the community of resistance" in Eugene.⁴⁵

The one feature that links together the many single-issue groups and allows for activists' flexibility in participation is a commitment to non-hierarchical, anti-oppression organizing principles. These characteristics display the anarchist character of these efforts more than any public statement or visible criteria, and when explicitly anarchist groups do form, these principles become the focus of the group's identity.

Visibility or Violence: The Black Bloc

A handful of anarchist-oriented activities stand out among others as particularly visible, often comprising the public image of anarchist groups: the Black Bloc tactic at major demonstrations, Reclaim the Streets takeovers, and the playful games and showy demonstrations that occur within and on the margins of other larger events. The Black Bloc exists not as an organization, but merely as a tactic, one that arose out of European movements of the 1980s.

⁴⁵Tizon, A1.



The Black Bloc ethos and techniques were forged during protests against housing shortages in Europe. In the early 1980s, German and Dutch squatters seized thousands of abandoned buildings and actively resisted police attempts to remove them. Instead of passively resisting, the squatters fought back.

The most active among them donned black clothing and masks to conceal their identity and provide a degree of counter-intimidation against the heavily armed police. They called themselves the Autonomen.⁴⁶

Although Black Bloc “techniques of active resistance were slow to catch on in North America,”⁴⁷ they eventually gained currency among activists and began catching attention for their controversial tactics.

⁴⁶McGregor, Glen. “Who are those masked men?: The Black Blocs, the anarchist 'affinity group' that shut down the WTO in Seattle, is planning a repeat performance in Quebec City.” *The Ottawa Citizen*. 24 March, 2001. Sunday Observer, Page B1, Front.

⁴⁷McGregor, B1.



But in demonstrations against the American participation in the Gulf War, protesters began to adopt the black clothing and direct action favoured by the Autonomen. At an anti-war protest in Washington, D.C., anarchists clad in masks and black outfits smashed windows at the World Bank to protest what they called an exchange of blood for oil interests.

In April 1999, a group of 1,500 anarchists -- by then referred to in the activist community as a Black Bloc -- gathered in Philadelphia at a rally for Mumia Abu-Jamal, a former radio reporter on death row who, they argue, was wrongly convicted of killing a police officer.

But it was in Seattle that same year that the Black Blocs would achieve international prominence.
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These techniques certainly do not represent a majority of anarchist perspectives, but as property destruction attracted media attention and media coverage reached potential activists, Black Blocs increasingly came to define the public view of anarchist activists in the late 1990s.

The debate over property destruction occupies an enormous amount of social space within North American activist discourse, often inaccurately defining anarchists to other activists and the general public. Of course, the tactic only sparks such controversy due to its perceived effectiveness in attracting attention to otherwise little-known causes.

Of course there's still that nagging question of violence, as important to the movement as to the media, because, as Danaher of Global Exchange says, "The test of any tactic is whether it builds the movement. And you don't attract people to a movement that looks dangerous and messy." But there were plenty of half-a-million-strong peaceful marches in Washington, D.C., over the past decade that raised nary an eyebrow, while Seattle galvanized a generation.⁴⁹

The use of property destruction in Seattle certainly did bring publicity to the movement, but many activists (indeed, perhaps most) felt frustrated that the actions of such a small minority could give such a tarnished image to the entire movement. During the Seattle demonstrations, several conflicts broke out between those who would commit acts of targeted property destruction and those that feared the consequences.

48McGregor, B1.

49Kaplan.



On at least 6 separate occasions, so-called "non-violent" activists physically attacked individuals who targeted corporate property. Some even went so far as to stand in front of the Niketown super store and tackle and shove the black bloc away.⁵⁰

In the days following the events of Seattle, the line between activists who accepted property destruction and those who rejected it grew even clearer, as organizers representing the vast majority of non-violent demonstrators in Seattle rushed to separate themselves from the negative image brought on by a minority.

Most anarchists publicly decried last week's vandalism, which was perpetrated in part by local teens whose direct actions for social justice consisted of looting StarTACs from a cell-phone store.⁵¹

As a result of the ongoing debates, property damage has emerged as a defining point for many anarchists' political views.

Though it's hard to find an anarchist who doesn't fiercely defend the right to destroy certain kinds of property, placing vandalism of McDonald's in the respected tradition of the Boston Tea Party, most are also cautious that the movement itself not get too attached to this, or any other, particular tactic.⁵²

On one level, then, Black Blocs and associated property destruction have come to define the anarchist cause simply by the associations outside sources have made between the two; but in another sense the Black Blocs do fit well in the philosophical approach of the growing new anarchism.

In many ways the Black Bloc epitomizes spontaneous anarchist organizing principles. Black Bloc participants typically meet mere hours before an event, if at all, and arrive at all decisions through decentralized consensus. Participants generally accept the use of a "diversity

50ACME Collective. "N30 Black Bloc Communique." Online: <http://www.jimboland.com/anti-WTO/blackbloc.html>. 4 December, 1999.

51Krantz, 39.

52Kaplan.



of tactics,” often including property damage such as window-smashing and graffiti. The overriding priority lies in solidarity and mutual aid – Black Bloc participants understand a deep commitment to self-defense and watching each other's backs.

We buddied up, kept tight and watched each others' backs. Those attacked by federal thugs were un-arrested by quick-thinking and organized members of the black bloc. The sense of solidarity was awe-inspiring.⁵³

Mary Black, a Black Bloc participant, concurs; “. . . the Black Bloc maintains an ideal of putting the group before the individual.”⁵⁴ Increasingly, as the Black Bloc's activities have become associated with anarchism itself, criticism of the Black Bloc has mirrored criticism of the entire anarchist movement.

53ACME Collective.

54Black, Mary. “Letter from Inside the Black Bloc.” *Left Turn*. 25 July, 2001.



Instead of being a name for a set of tactics to resist police brutality at street demonstrations, “black bloc” has become an entity unto itself. It has taken on an entire subculture, persona, and a host of culturally specific no-no's (like engaging in popular culture or eating a hamburger). By definition there are no official leaders of the black bloc. There is no official organization that makes black blocs show up at demonstrations. However, in the minds of many who see and participate in black blocs, anti-authoritarian beliefs and militant action have become inseparable. In many anarchist circles today, one is not accepted as sufficiently revolutionary without proper black attire, knowledge of jargon, and in particularly awful cases, whether or not the person is a young white male.⁵⁵

While public and media perceptions play a major role in defining activists' view of Black Bloc tactics, the popularity of and widespread familiarity with Black Bloc tactics within the movement also play a major role in defining the shifts of perspective occurring within anarchism itself.

Reclaim the Streets and Playful Protests

Another recurring phenomenon generally associated with anarchist groups, known as Reclaim the Streets (RTS), has offered a particularly party-like atmosphere for public protest. Originating once again in Europe, Reclaim the Streets events typically involve the shutting of a block or two of a city street, “reclaiming” the space for an anti-automotive, community-oriented festival of resistance.

⁵⁵Grosscup, Ben, and Doyle. “An Open Letter To The Anti-Authoritarian Anti-Capitalist Movement.” *Left Turn*. 10 February, 2002.



We are basically about taking back public space from the enclosed private arena. At its simplest it is an attack on cars as a principal agent of enclosure. It's about reclaiming the streets as public inclusive space from the private exclusive use of the car. But we believe in this as a broader principle, taking back those things which have been enclosed within capitalist circulation and returning them to collective use as a commons.⁵⁶

The events offer an opportunity to raise awareness about alternatives to automotive-based transportation and road-based community space uses, and have occasionally been organized in support of other specific causes, such as a longshoremen's strike in England. More than any single issue, however, Reclaim the Streets events foster a rethinking of definitions of public space, and they do so with an even more unusual approach to protest. Heavily inspired by such cultural iconoclasts as the French Situationists, Reclaim the Streets events emphasize spontaneity and autonomy, encouraging creativity in all forms and unleashed energy wherever possible. The result can often appear rather chaotic and even nonsensical to outsiders, with everything from standard protest banners to drum circles and food stands visible. Of course, this confusion itself constitutes a part of the intended message.

Not only is the confusion deliberate, but it is precisely this absence of rigidity that has helped RTS to capture the imagination of thousands of young people around the world. Since the days when Abbie Hoffman and the Yippies infused self-conscious absurdity into their "happenings," political protest had lapsed into a ritualized affair, following a fairly unimaginative grid of repetitive chants and scripted police confrontation. Pop, in the meantime, had become equally formulaic in its refusal to let the perceived earnestness of political conviction enter its ironic play space. Which is where RTS comes in. The deliberate culture clashes of the street parties mix the earnest predictability of politics with the amused irony of pop. For many people in their teens and twenties, this presents the first opportunity to reconcile being creatures of their Saturday-morning-cartoon childhoods with a genuine political concern for their communities and environment. RTS is just playful and ironic enough to finally make earnestness possible.⁵⁷

Reclaim the Streets represent a new and unprecedented style of demonstration, and as a phenomenon it flows upon the tide of the new approach to politics visible among the revitalized

⁵⁶Bailie, Del. *RTS Agitprop*, no. 1. July 1996. As quoted in Jordan, John. "The art of necessity: the subversive imagination of anti-road protest and Reclaim the Streets." *DiY Culture: Party & Protest in Nineties Britain*. McKay, George, ed. London: Verso, 1998. pp. 139-140.

⁵⁷Klein, 316-317.



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and redefined anarchist movement.



IV. NEW POLITICS FOR A NEW LIFE: LIFESTYLE ANARCHISM

The often-confusing differences of tactics and style visible in this new anarchism represent a fundamental shift in political approach for the contemporary movement: the new anarchism focuses on lifestyle applications of politics, particularly emphasizing a Do-It-Yourself approach to living. Growing increasingly disillusioned with the standard routines of political protest, many activists have felt drawn towards an approach to politics that does not depend upon measurable policy changes. This attempt to incorporate political acts of defiance and resistance into everyday actions seeks to win its victories hour by hour and minute by minute, gradually changing society through reconstruction and coercion rather than political maneuvering. One activist posted in the online forums of the DC Independent Media Center, explaining many activists' shift in priority towards lifestyle choices rather than momentous collective political action:

Direct action and civil disobedience are obviously not working too well these days because of the cops and law-enforcement. Shutting or slowing down these corporate financial meetings seems to be a thing of the past.

...

So what is the next step to replace direct confrontation?

STOP LIVING A CAPITALIST LIFESTYLE.

Drop out of the system. If people start leaving in droves to live their lives outside the capitalist prison, that will be even more of a threat to the system than blockading streets.⁵⁸

This approach does not pretend to cause dramatic social or political change overnight. Instead it responds to the perceived ineffectiveness of mass political pressure by atomizing political action into everyday acts, hoping to gradually destroy the existing socioeconomic structure and replace

⁵⁸Hood, Robin (pseudonym). "Necessary next step for the movement." DC Independent Media Center. Online: <http://dc.indymedia.org>. 30 September, 2002.



it with a new, anarchist-oriented future. Foster points out that the widespread nature of this approach: “Today, most anarchists say they strive to transform society from within, working toward a day when government will shrivel and disappear.”⁵⁹ This new anarchism clearly does not fit the popular stereotype of a violent movement that seeks to overthrow the government.

This Do-It-Yourself, lifestyle-oriented approach to activism certainly bears a considerable influence within the movement. As Bookchin describes as early as 1995, “it is already no longer possible, in my view, to call oneself an anarchist without adding a qualifying adjective to distinguish oneself from lifestyle anarchists.”⁶⁰ Part of the reason for this approach's ability to attract a large crowd of activists lies in its seductive integration of politics, emotions, and culture into a single identity.

⁵⁹Foster.

⁶⁰Bookchin, Murray. *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm*. Edinburgh/San Francisco: AK Press, 1995. 61.



. . . DiY Culture's a combination of inspiring action, narcissism, youthful arrogance, principle, ahistoricism, idealism, indulgence, creativity, plagiarism, as well as the rejection and embracing alike of technological innovation.⁶¹

While this approach has certainly made its enemies within the more staunchly political camp of platform-based anarchism, it has shown its ability to form a cohesive movement remarkably well in recent years. As an ideology that encourages its participants to integrate all aspects of their life, even apparent contradictions, into a cohesive whole, it has energized individuals to draw on strong emotions of anger and frustration to take action wherever possible. This approach serves as the ideological backbone of many activists' local projects.

Local Projects: The Energy in the Movement

In keeping with the lifestyle-oriented, Do-It-Yourself approach popular with today's activists, anarchists organize their efforts around distinct local projects rather than vague political campaigns, focusing on tangible and achievable goals within a bounded community. These projects draw on the DIY tradition of self-sufficiency as much as the revolutionary strategy of dual-power philosophy, satisfying immediate needs while also creating sustainable structures to provide alternatives to capitalist and state mechanisms. This dual-power strategy does not limit its aims to particular institutions such as the government or corporations, but instead seeks to remove in all their forms the root oppressions inherent in those structures.

⁶¹McKay, 2.



In confronting authority in all of its manifestations, anarchists have for centuries fought not just the attempts by outside authorities to control shared public space, but also the insidious encoding of authoritarian arrangements in public life itself. In embracing instead autonomy, spontaneity, and playful uncertainty, anarchists have long sought to unleash these unregulated dynamics in the spaces of everyday life, and to build emergent communities out of their confluence.⁶²

Thus, anarchists do not simply seek to defeat particular corporations' destructive practices through targeted boycotts, but instead they aim to eliminate the need for the harmful industries in the first place. This approach marks the difference between campaigning against McDonald's use of beef from rainforest-turned-rangelands in Brazil and starting a vegan food cooperative.

One might say that this approach represents an enculturation of political views – no longer consigning political concerns to the street or the ballot box, activists seek to reform their very lives to serve their beliefs. As Merrick, a road protester describes:

... we're not fighting one thing we don't like; we have a whole vision of how good life could and should be, and we're fighting anything that blocks it. This is not just a campaign, or even a movement; it's a whole *culture*.⁶³

The resulting localization and decentralization of energies reflects both pragmatic factors of ability and revolutionary concepts of building the alternate world in the shell of the current society. Admittedly, strategies like this might have a smaller net impact, but they also often offer a greater potential for success, and they reflect the decentralized world of local communities and economies that most anarchists advocate.

In a society trained to recognize political action only in the form of mass demonstrations or legislation, many anarchist projects might not appear explicitly political – but these activists know why they do what they do, even when they fail to communicate the message.

⁶²Ferrell, Jeff. *Tearing Down the Streets: Adventures in Urban Anarchy*. New York: Palgrave, 2001. 20.

⁶³McKay, 2.



. . . anarchists of all types today take to the streets in confrontation with contemporary projects of spatial control and exclusion. Some of these anarchist street fighters coalesce into small, ephemeral groups; others work to “dis-organize” larger assaults on the new spatial order. Some quite consciously base their actions on anarchist principles and theories; others invent their anarchy more out of their own direct actions and experiences. Almost all know the history of anarchist resistance, and proudly claim practical or spiritual affiliation with anarchists and anarchist groups of the past.⁶⁴

While Ferrell's claim that all anarchists share a familiarity of the resistance's history may seem a bit exaggerated, he makes an important point that a real political consciousness lies at the heart of most anarchists' activism. This grounding in anarchist political philosophies allow anarchists to link issues and campaigns from distant communities to their own local struggles, creating an identifiable global anarchist movement out of a myriad of local, small-scale projects.

While such battles are clearly disconnected by their distinctly local nature—it is after all a long way from making music on a Flagstaff street corner to dancing in Trafalgar Square—they're just as clearly connected by the identities and ideologies of their participants. . . . those resisting the authorities share not just an experiential taste for anarchic insubordination, but on-the-ground anarchist strategies of do-it-yourself culture and direct action and, in many cases, sophisticated understandings of anarchist history and theory as well.⁶⁵

These projects often may not carry any obvious markers of their particular ideological roots – all local efforts cannot be instantly classified as anarchist or not. Even when the individuals involved in a project do not identify as anarchists, however, few would disagree that these projects share an anarchist sensibility.

Projects abound within the anarchist community, and examining the growth of local efforts is one of the easiest ways of tracking the reach and magnitude of the new anarchist movement itself. Media sources or the North American public might not notice the spread of anarchism in this fashion, but a lack of public demonstrations does not in this case equal a lack of

64Ferrell, 20.

65Ferrell, 221-222.



activism. As Kaplan writes, “While the whole world wasn't watching, anarchists have spent their time between demos getting organized.”⁶⁶ Kaplan goes on to cite numbers: over 175 chapters of the vegetarian food reclamation project Food Not Bombs exist (Foster cites a founder of the group to confirm that around one-third to one-half of these chapters were formed in the last few years⁶⁷), and the decentralized internet news forum known as the Independent Media Center (or Indymedia) can claim centers in most industrialized urban centers and a rapidly increasing number of countries in the global South for a total of over 60 centers worldwide.⁶⁸ When major demonstrations happen, People's Law Collectives and street medic teams emerge visibly in many North American cities.

The 'Zine Scene

Amateur-produced 'zines that have flourished in the punk rock scene for years have blossomed and spread as anarchist projects as well, offering a more articulate outlet for the underrepresented political views common to anarchists. 'Zine culture is its own tradition and scene, and while many 'zines do not explicitly promote a political view, their approach starts as a profound dissent with the dominant social structures.

Espousing anarchism, denouncing capitalism, exhorting others to do-it-yourself, spreading the ideal of an authentic life, the vast majority of zines are critical of mainstream society and mass culture, and at least hint that there might be a different way. To interrogate underground culture as to its possible political impact is merely taking zines at their word.⁶⁹

'Zines differ from more traditional newsletters or magazines in their highly subjective, amateur

⁶⁶Kaplan.

⁶⁷Foster.

⁶⁸Kaplan.

⁶⁹Duncombe, Stephen. *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. London: Verso, 1997. 175.



approach to publishing. They tend to represent highly deviant subcultures or marginalized perspectives, and hence even non-political 'zines fill their pages with criticisms of mainstream social institutions. Still, anarchist 'zines do exist; some of the most widespread and long-running 'zines identify as anarchist.

Of all the traditional political philosophies it is anarchism that turns up most often in the pages of zines. *Anarchy*, *Assault with Intent to Free, Free Society, Instead of a Magazine* and *Profane Existence* (“making punk a threat again”) are all explicitly anarchist zines. But more common is the anarchy [Duncombe prints the circle-A symbol here] symbol and anarchist ideology scattered throughout the pages of personal, punk, feminist, queer – just about any – zines.⁷⁰

Much of anarchism's influence in the world of 'zines shares 'zines' roots in punk music, where rebellious and anarchist politics prevailed and key individuals participated in the anarchist movement.⁷¹ Lastly, like other anarchist projects, whether or not 'zines publicize their political consciousness, they represent the sort of dual-power approach to creating alternative structures that forms the foundation of most anarchist projects.

These networks make up a distinct material infrastructure of communication that uses the technology of mass commercial society – computers, copy machines, mail system – but steers the use of these technologies toward nonprofit, communitarian ends. The network also lends itself to an ideal of social organization. One of the reasons that anarchism is so prevalent as a philosophy in the underground world is that it is a close abstraction of the network: voluntary, nonhierarchical, with omnidirectional communication flows, and each citizen a creator/consumer.⁷²

This network of social resources both represents and serves the anarchist cause well – 'zines both satisfy a need for expression within the activist community and serve as an effective model of decentralized communication and publication. To this end, many local anarchist projects have incorporated 'zine-styled pamphlets as part of their outreach and publicity efforts. These pamphlets might replace press releases for a resource-starved countercultural movement,

70Duncombe, 34.

71Duncombe, 34-35.

72Duncombe, 178-179.



but they bring their own advantages: artfully pasted-together 'zines often attract a wider audience than bland and formal political statements, and they require considerably less specialized skill to produce.

Common Origins: the DIY Punk Scene

Significant portions of the new anarchist movement have arisen from the punk rock scene, a musical genre that has always felt more like a counterculture community than a musical taste to its participants. Even if most new anarchists have no interest in punk music or no experience in the punk scene before entering the anarchist movement, influential anarchist individuals and organizations have come from the punk scene, such as the founders of the CrimethInc. Collective. Punk has always emphasized rebellion, but beyond its trendy image among youth, punk has consistently held resistance-based politics close to its heart. The hardcore punk scene gaining in popularity in the 1990s epitomizes this pattern. As one hardcore punk fan writes, “[h]ardcore has always been more than a kind of music. It's a way of life. It's about being different, about not giving in to our sick society's rules and norms, isn't it?”⁷³ This deeply-rooted political impetus of punk has played into the consistent theme of the true-blue underground scene. As a genre constantly mined by mainstream culture for its exotic and shocking image, punk has developed a militant defensive side, wary of fads and “selling out” the true, political nature of punk.

⁷³Tobias Gndig, in *Inside Front*. No. 12. Atlanta: CrimethInc., May 1999. Letters section.



Presently, punk rock has become a fad . . . Hopefully some of the people attracted to the fad will learn of the true punk/h.c. culture and join us. And, hopefully we will learn to make ourselves something more of a movement than a fad so easily mimicked every ten or twenty years.⁷⁴

While this tendency towards a defensive insularity has often ostracized outsiders and created class divisions within punk, it has also kept the rebellious political spirit alive within the musical scene.

Much of punk's political spirit has formed out of direct confrontation with authority – as a rebellious, loud, and shocking youth movement, punk has drawn repression from authorities of all sorts. Recent expropriations of punk imagery and style by corporate advertising firms have only accentuated the conflict between punk and mainstream authorities.

It is one of the ironies of our age that now, when the street has become the hottest commodity in advertising culture, street culture itself is under siege. From New York to Vancouver to London, police crackdowns on graffiti, postering, panhandling, sidewalk art, squeegee kids, community gardening and food vendors are rapidly criminalizing everything that is truly street-level in the life of a city.⁷⁵

Particularly in England, this repression has sparked punk (and raver) communities to mobilize and resist the authorities, engaging in direct political activism not usually seen from the music genre most proud of its political rebellion.⁷⁶ This recent turn toward activism within the punk community has caught attention and attempts to draw historical parallels.

. . . I swear, the punks are the Wobblies of the new millennium—same in-your-face defiance of authority, same disavowal of a Disneyfied world, same black humor, same progressive ideals.⁷⁷

The confluence of punk and anarcho-syndicalist politics calls attention to the lifestyle ideology they share: Do-It-Yourself.

74Brian Alft, "Change is possible, it has to be won." *Inside Front*. No. 9. Atlanta: CrimethInc., December 1996.

75Klein, 311.

76Klein, 312.

77Ferrell, 28.



Just as DIY has offered a new and vibrant approach for anarchist political activism, its direct, hands-on approach has rejuvenated the punk scene and energized a new anarchist movement that has emphasized action above all else. Again continuing the comparison to the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World of the early 20th century, Ferrell writes:

The punks even operate along the lines of the Wobblies' direct action—they just call it “do-it-yourself,” or DIY. From the beginning in the 1970s, punk culture was built on DIY—that is, on the principle of direct action, of doing it yourself—as a way of stepping outside a world in which everything from music to food to fucking had become a corporate commodity, and of inventing instead a new world out of your own active disobedience. Three-chord punk “garage bands,” self-produced punk albums and 'zines (fan magazines), punk clothing ripped, torn, and reinvented by its wearers—all were overt attempts to create an alternative community based on antiauthoritarian autonomy.⁷⁸

In many ways the recent trends merely represent an extension of previously existing values to the political sphere. Punks have incorporated DIY principles into fashion for years, popularizing ripped clothes, patched clothes, and amateur piercings and tattoos, not to mention punk's de-skilled approach to making music. Only now has this trend moved beyond fashion and music into the realm of political activism.

⁷⁸Ferrell, 28.



Unlike other more straightforwardly *cultural* moments of resistance, such as, say, 1970s punk and 1980s anarchopunk, there is a tremendous emphasis in DiY Culture laid on actually *doing something* in the social or political realm, and rarely is that something as banal as traditional forms of mobilisation like marching on a demo and shouting in ragged unison 'Maggie Maggie Maggie – OUT OUT OUT!'⁷⁹

The shift from patching one's clothes to organizing one's community and resisting one's oppressors has invigorated segments of the punk community and caused many to discuss the potential of the punk scene as a politically revolutionary force.

Much like the existing 'zine scene, the networked infrastructure already in use within punk offers excellent potential for a DIY anarchist movement. Especially in the more marginal hardcore punk community, punks have been organizing shows and tours without the use of major corporate entertainment networks for years, spreading a decentralized base of knowledge and connections and building a distinctly Do-It-Yourself music scene. The editor of *Inside Front* and founder of the CrimethInc. collective frequently emphasizes the revolutionary potential of this amateur infrastructure:

Imagine if the hardcore scene wasn't just a bunch of kids wearing funny clothes, practicing their dance moves and camera angles at punk shows once every couple weeks. Imagine if everyone in the hardcore community, at least those who could (because of course not everyone can), quit their jobs and used all the potential energy we have as idealistic young people to try to develop a new way of life. We could use the networks we have already set up for touring bands, distribution, etc. to support each other in our attempt to break away from the employment system. Imagine how much creative energy would be unleashed, if we all stopped exhausting ourselves for “the man” and put the energy back into our own lives! Surely, all together we would be able to make something like that work. And then we would no longer be just another subculture with our own characteristic “rebellious music” and “fashionable clothing.” We would be a fucking *counterculture*, a force that would work effectively against the status quo we all claim to reject—for the contents of our daily lives would, by themselves, do more to change the way the world works than our words ever could.⁸⁰

This approach shares considerable common ground with the dual-power strategy prevalent in

⁷⁹McKay, 4.

⁸⁰Brian D., “How I Spent My Permanent Vacation.” *Inside Front*. No. 10. Atlanta: CrimethInc., August 1997.



anarchist thought, as it aims to completely reconstruct the necessary structures of society in a decentralized, explicitly anti-authoritarian manner. This trend seems to be the phenomenon McKay refers to in writing, “I do think that, even if it doesn't overtly espouse it, DiY Culture practises an intuitive liberal anarchism.”⁸¹ Regardless of whether or not the punk scene has always emphasized DIY values and tended towards anarchist political views, clearly the intersections between these perspectives now lie at the root of a new social phenomenon, uniquely posed to attract a new crowd of activists to the dynamic anarchist movement.

⁸¹McKay, 3.



V. CRIMETHINC. – SHADOWY SUBCULTURE ON THE MAIN STAGE

The CrimethInc. (ex)Workers' Collective, or CrimethInc., has become a well-known entity among young North American anarchists and activists in recent years, offering a potent mix of mystique, manifestos, and manuals to define a new trend in anarchism. Usually anonymous and occasionally pseudonymous, its individual contributors comprise a broadly-defined and decentralized anarchist collective that has become known for publishing and promoting a new, wildly popular, accessible, and trendy approach to anarchism. CrimethInc. is an entity that specifically resists categorizations, that abhors anything but the most self-consciously satirical titles, and yet essentially defines a contemporary school of anarchist activism.

Little is ever directly revealed about the details of the organization, and even its status as such remains in question. On the “Frequently Asked Questions” page of the main website, Nadia C. writes “The C.W.C. is totally decentralized. That means if you want to be involved, you should pick something you think CrimethInc. should do, and start doing it.”⁸² CrimethInc. forever emphasizes decentralization, claiming that “CrimethInc. is not a membership organization--it belongs to anyone who has the audacity to claim it, just as death belongs to anyone who can pick up a frying pan.”⁸³ CrimethInc. operates wherever its name appears, and encourages readers to become authors, using the CrimethInc. name and logos (available for download on its websites) as desired. As “Hakim Bey” writes for the CrimethInc. Central Committee for De-Centralization,

⁸²*CrimethInc. Com/munications*. “FAQ.” Online: <http://www.crimethinc.com/faq.html>, retrieved 20 December, 2002.

⁸³“CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47.” CrimethInc. Atlanta, GA. 3.



“CrimethInc., just like the rest of your life and the whole world for that matter, is *whatever you make it*. Get busy.”⁸⁴ As a collectivizing pseudonym, the name serves its purpose:

By putting the CrimethInc. tag on our projects, we can avoid attracting attention to ourselves (and communalize the work we've done, offering credit for it to whomever calls themselves an Ex-Worker), while simultaneously establishing that the project is part of a larger current of anti-capitalist/anarchist action.⁸⁵

That CrimethInc. maintains almost no other definition for its organization and projects employing its name serves as a check against the sort of self-perpetuating organization that would be so contrary to the principles of Crimethought. In this sense, CrimethInc. both intentionally and functionally exists as a name only:

The greatest resource a non-hierarchical, largely mythical organization like CrimethInc. has is its reputation: if this can be put at the disposal of all, then the authority CrimethInc. has can be effectively undermined. The moment of revolution is the dissolution of the revolutionary organization--that is, the appropriation of its resources *by everybody*.⁸⁶

As a name, logo or – perhaps more appropriately – a brand, CrimethInc. offers itself for sacrifice, constantly alert to the possibility of its own irrelevance, and its own pragmatic intent, as shown in a subsection of the “Worker Bulletin #47:”

“We” are still here if you need something to rebel against. . . . The only thing to do with something you have put on a pedestal is knock it off. If, once you realize your mistake, you find that you need to reject us, rebel against us, assert your selfhood and independence from us, then by all means do it!⁸⁷

CrimethInc. has constructed itself as a paradox: it has become a social institution that represents the antithesis of an institution, an anti-organizational organization, and an anti-propagandistic propaganda machine.

84“CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47,” 8.

85“CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47,” 7.

86“CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47,” 7.

87“CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47,” 4.



The tangible, contemporary CrimethInc. entity exists as the synthesis of the conflict between CrimethInc.'s grandiose and propagandistic self-descriptions and its actual functioning roles and characteristics. CrimethInc vigorously eschews any definition of itself that would suggest a self-perpetuating organization. In its literature it remains shrouded in the shadowy language of an underground revolutionary organization on the verge of an insurrection, but its reputation as a prolific publishing organization quickly disarms such satire among those familiar with the group.

There's an undeniable pleasure to be found in secret societies and clandestine plots; with CrimethInc., one can indulge in mythmaking to one's heart's delight, without ending up supporting some vanguardist power elite.⁸⁸

Of course, CrimethInc. is not creating a new subversive movement – it's exactly this sort of organization that CrimethInc. distinctly opposes. In *Days of War, Nights of Love*, “Nietzsche” explains that CrimethInc. takes directly the opposite approach:

And it may be that a good strategy to avoid the stultifying effects of becoming a Movement, and the dangerous attentions of careerist historicizers (like Greil Marcus), is to do our work within supposedly “dead” movements, like punk rock. By doing so, we emphasize two truths that cannot be emphasized enough: that the Life and Freedom we seek can pop up anywhere, unexpected, unpredictable--if that's not the case, we really are in trouble--and that there never *could* be a Movement centering around Life itself, since it can be found *anywhere*, but expected nowhere.⁸⁹

Presumably CrimethInc. authors have identified the archetypal insurrectionist guerrilla army as one of these “dead” movements, all the better from which to appropriate imagery and vocabulary. In all, CrimethInc. may shroud itself in any variety of appearance, though it appears that all of this mystery and legend serves only to add a distinctive and attractive character to an organization that otherwise might become too self-important in its own functions and structure. CrimethInc.'s

⁸⁸“CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47,” 7.

⁸⁹*Days of War, Nights of Love: Crimethink for Beginners*. CrimethInc. Workers' Collective. Atlanta, GA: CrimethInc. Free Press, 2001. 170.



use of satire serves as a safeguard against taking CrimethInc. too seriously, just as its insistence on pseudonymity for its authors prevents any focus on individuals in a non-hierarchical group.

CrimethInc. advocates an anarchism of projects, and it has many of these ongoing itself, including a canon of well-known publications, a handful of punk records, and summer tours. The collective is nothing if not busy. Nadia C. explains the collective's inability to respond promptly to letters, giving some idea of the project-based activity of the group.

Everyone who answers the CrimethInc. mail and email is involved in a hundred other projects. We're not interested in becoming more efficient, because were [sic] all committed to living full, adventurous lives, without division of labor or acceptance, of productivity as a value--rather, we hope to empower others to be able to do everything themselves, so efficiency on our part will be unnecessary.⁹⁰

The decentralized nature of the group makes any single account of its activities inherently unreliable and inaccurate, so only a compilation of every act or work ever to bear the CrimethInc. name would constitute a meaningful summary of the activities of the collective. A page titled "Present CrimethInc. Projects" in *Days of War, Nights of Love* gives some idea:

Ongoing CrimethInc. activities as of this writing include several publications (magazines and tabloids covering a variety of subjects, one local newspaper, and a whole host of independently published "zines"), writers' groups, hiking and camping clubs, urban hunter/gatherer teams, political action cells (involved in projects ranging from Reclaim the Streets, Food Not Bombs, and Critical Mass to more clandestine undertakings), squats and community centers, free stores and cafés, book and literature distributors, graffiti and postering teams, thieves' guilds, and experimental art/music collectives . . . as well as several less specific projects and a few we would do well not to mention.⁹¹

Certainly, a few particular types of activity stand out in the group's history. CrimethInc.'s printed publications hold prominence among these, including the popular 'zines *Inside Front* and *Harbinger*, the well-known books *Days of War, Nights of Love*, and *Evasion*, and a variety of Do-

⁹⁰CrimethInc. *Com/munications*. "FAQ."

⁹¹*Days of War, Nights of Love*. 258.



It-Yourself manuals, traveling journals, and associated propaganda. The group also operates as an independent record label for a handful of punk bands, most notably the group Catharsis. While just the production and distribution of these works constitutes a massive task, CrimethInc. members have also organized workshop tours throughout the US, film festivals, and set up several feature-filled websites. Lastly, rumours circulate that a number of CrimethInc. members live together in the “CrimethInc. house” in Greensboro, North Carolina. Collective members have organized many actions above and beyond these explicitly CrimethInc.-branded projects, though these constitute the primary canon visible to other activists.

The published works of the CrimethInc. Workers' Collective fall into a few distinct categories: philosophical and ideological tracts explaining the principles of “Crimethink,” Do-It-Yourself technical manuals, traveling journals, 'zines, propaganda, and audio recordings.

CrimethInc.'s Philosophical Works: Coherence or Chaos?

The philosophical/ideological tracts of CrimethInc. espouse the energetic, empowering, and even entertaining principles of Crimethink. In 2001, CrimethInc. published a full-length book of this material, *Days of War, Nights of Love: Crimethink for Beginners*. Focusing mainly on “criticism of the established order,”⁹² *Days of War* takes the tone of a self-help guide, somewhat evangelically admonishing the reader to reconsider the basic constructions and conditions of their own lives and reconstruct them to reflect the new worldview it promotes. In the “Afterwor(l)d,” Gloria Cubana asks:

As it stands, how much *living* do you have in your life? How many mornings do you wake up

⁹²*Days of War, Nights of Love*. 11.



feeling truly free, thrilled to be alive, breathlessly anticipating the experiences of a new day?⁹³

Days of War gives foundation to its self-empowerment tirades with the more thought-out examinations of modern society. It includes ideological (noticeably Situationist-inspired) critiques of subjects such as capitalism, culture, and gender, but consistently maintains a practical, accessible tone, attempting to avoid dogmatic jargon and complex intellectualism. The book makes every effort to make these philosophical tracts attractive and relevant, compelling the reader with unusual topics such as hygiene, sex, space, and domestication – an innovative step toward everyday activity in a distinctly revolutionary work. Frequent cartoons and captions break up the text, as do periodic chapters of “A Short History of the CrimethInc. Workers' Collective,” which include fact and fiction without distinction, taking the reader from tales of medieval gnosticism to the Paris communes and mythical accounts of late-1990s CrimethInc. actions. As Zack Furness writes in his review of the book for *Bad Subjects*, “this book represents everything that is creative and beautiful about anarchism.” With *Days of War*, CrimethInc. specifically attempts to portray anarchist thought as passionate and vibrant, avoiding dry or sterile expositions of theory and emphasizing the relevancy of topics discussed to daily life.

Two other CrimethInc. publications, the 'zine *Fighting For Our Lives* and the pamphlet “CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47,” elaborate on many of the same ideological issues as those in *Days of War*. The “CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47,” a “top secret communiqué for members only,”⁹⁴ aims to explain the nature of CrimethInc. itself and offer the organization's name as a potential tool for organizing. In essence, this 12-page pamphlet constitutes CrimethInc.'s

⁹³*Days of War, Nights of Love*. 275.

⁹⁴“CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47,” 1.



manifesto of the anarchist revolutionary organization, forever emphasizing the irrelevance of the organization itself as anything but a tool. A sampling of the subtitles of the pamphlet gives a good idea of its content:

Ⓢ *THERE IS NO CRIMETHINC.
CRIMETHINC IS SIMPLY YOU.*⁹⁵

Ⓢ *“WE” ARE STILL HERE IF YOU NEED SOMETHING TO REBEL AGAINST.*⁹⁶

Ⓢ *BUT YOU WILL NOT BE FREE UNTIL YOU REALIZE THAT WE DO NOT EXIST.*⁹⁷

Ⓢ *WE HAVE AT HAND THE GUNS FOR WAR. NOW, TO SEIZE THEM.*⁹⁸

Ⓢ *SOME STRATEGIES*⁹⁹

CrimethInc.'s tone of empowerment comes through in the “Worker Bulletin #47” as the voice of some legendary underground vanguard issuing a manifesto in a desperate attempt to throw off its own authority, as seen in this “Postscript for the Faithful:”

In the words of another wise woman: *nothing is true, everything is permitted.* We're trying to give *permission*, not instructions--don't take us on our word, whatever you do! Less faith--more *mercilessness*, my friend.¹⁰⁰

This very self-conscious writing of the “Worker Bulletin #47” presents another interesting contradiction within CrimethInc.--the simultaneous need to analyze and explain the collective itself in an attempt to improve the state of the activist community, as well as to focus on broader pictures of anarchist outreach and social change. *Fighting For Our Lives*, published in the fall of 2002, addresses this, presenting itself as an accessible primer on anarchism and thus directly attacking the topic that *Days of War* skirted around in 2001. Again, CrimethInc. sticks to a

95“CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47,” 3.

96“CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47,” 4.

97“CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47,” 5.

98“CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47,” 9.

99“CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47,” 10.

100“CrimethInc. Worker Bulletin #47,” 6.



common-sense, colloquial approach, explaining simply, “Anarchism is the revolutionary idea that no one is more qualified than you are to decide what your life will be.”¹⁰¹ *Fighting For Our Lives* represents a massive outreach effort for CrimethInc.--the collective invested over \$25,000 to print and distribute 250,000 copies of the 24-page 'zine,¹⁰² attempting to reach non-anarchists with this accessible introductory material:

This free paper discusses, in simple language, what is anarchist in everyday life, and how those spheres of cooperation can be expanded. It addresses common questions that often deter people from exploring anarchist ideas and approaches, and endeavors to help introduce new terms and possibilities into the public consciousness--as well as to celebrate the times when we've realized those possibilities, for those who have been consciously participating in the anarchist project for years or decades already.¹⁰³

CrimethInc. displays here one of its strongest characteristics, a tendency towards self-criticism and strong rejection of even its own reputation as an authority, as even this clear exposition of anarchist ideas comes with a disclaimer:

Mass-produced material like this is no substitute for individual expression, decentralized activity, or cultivating community, but it can be used to initiate and encourage those beautiful things. We're not trying to speak for everyone, but to make it clear that everyone can speak; we're not trying to define anarchy for everyone, but to undermine misunderstandings so everyone can begin that conversation afresh.¹⁰⁴

The three of these publications together reveal clearly CrimethInc.'s approach to anarchist publishing, including a careful avoidance of authoritative manifestos, the use of accessible and understandable writings to reach a broader audience, and an emphasis on an energetic and erotic side of politics and activism.

101*Fighting For Our Lives*. Olympia, WA: CrimethInc. Free Press, no date (fall 2002). 12.

102*CrimethInc. Com/munications*. “Fighting For Our Lives.” “News Bulletin from the Fight For Our Lives: Mission Complete, Paper Unavailable”

103*CrimethInc. Com/munications*. “Fighting For Our Lives.”

104*CrimethInc. Com/munications*. “Fighting For Our Lives.”



Manuals for a DIY Movement

CrimethInc. shows its true pragmatic colors with its Do-It-Yourself (DIY) manuals, including the *DIY Guide I* and *II*, *The Walls Are Alive*, *On the Possibilities of Student Life*, and *Dropping Out*. These publications focus on the practical and the tangible, offering tips, tricks, and techniques for all sorts of “useful” skills. The variety of skills represented here reflects at once both the decentralized nature of anarchist publishing methods as well as the wide reach of the DIY philosophy. In philosophical substance these publications vary little. The first *D.I.Y. “How To” Guide* (a.k.a. *DIY Guide I*) opens with the bare note:

we need to build a community in which we can share resources and rely on each other. this includes sharing information and learning how to be autonomous as a community. that is the purpose of this zine. there is no scarcity [sic] of individuals (or teams) that can do totally amazing things. fuck specialists and professionals---we don't need them...¹⁰⁵

The first guide includes tips on silkscreening (for patches, shirts, etc.), wheatpasting (for posters), guitar intonation (to avoid paying specialists), herbal medicine and gardening, and copy scams (to defeat corporate copy center security mechanisms), among others. The second guide, *DIY Guide II*, includes information on such skills as shoplifting, trainhopping, herbal gynecology and abortion, safety-pin tattooing, changing automobile oil, sewing, cooking for large groups, publishing, and building skateboard ramps, to give a cross-sectional sampling.

The Walls Are Alive, a graffiti manual distributed by CrimethInc., bears no author or even CrimethInc.'s logo, and provides an in-depth (12 half-pages) coverage of graffiti techniques and planning. An even smaller publication, *On the Possibilities of Student Life: CrimethInc. for College Freshmen* presents a series of ideas for exploiting collegiate resources in a quad-folded

105*D.I.Y. “How To” Guide*. CrimethInc. Urban Pirates. Greensboro, NC: CrimethInc. Urban Pirates, no date. 2.



single sheet pamphlet. In each of these publications, CrimethInc. attempts to display its pragmatic side, offering collaborative skill-sharing that is a core piece of its professed ideology. Still, these pragmatic DIY guides have consistently received less emphasis than CrimethInc.'s more literary works, though some sections of DIY tips have appeared in more popular CrimethInc. publications such as *Harbinger*. This only points out CrimethInc.'s true talents – many punk 'zines have printed tips on sewing or herbal medicine (a few even focus on such topics exclusively), though few authors achieve the eloquence and ideological coherence that CrimethInc.'s writers do.

Travelogues Against Capitalism

CrimethInc. has produced two extremely popular and noteworthy journals of traveling individuals, *Evasion* and *Off the Map*. *Evasion* consists of the compiled journals of a number (accounts differ as to whether one or several individuals contributed the journals, though the book maintains a consistent first-person narrative form) of traveling/squatting individuals. The protagonists have decided to avoid compromise with a capitalist socioeconomic order viewed as corrupt and evil, refusing to work or pay for goods and services in traditional fashions. The book swells with tales of dumpster-diving, shoplifting tricks, scams of all sorts, and constant hitchhiking, trainhopping, and squatting. Quite possibly the pinnacle publication for the “lifestylist” anarchist approach so frequently criticized, *Evasion* has become popular for its attractive no-compromise approach to anarchist life. The techniques used by the book's protagonists, nearly entirely illegal and frequently felonious, have become akin to legend among supportive anarchist circles.



While the protagonist(s) of *Evasion* frequently appear as explicitly male and usually as sexless, *Off the Map* appeals to many precisely because of its honest account of two women traveling through Europe. The text of *Off the Map* contains at least as much dream as drama, as the two protagonists explore their desires and thoughts through the forum of their traveling journals. Once again the emphasis is clear; the two travelers travel not to escape a society they detest, but in search of the world in which they dream to live. Each publication has become incredibly popular with CrimethInc. readers, to the point that printing of *Off the Map* (a 96-page photocopied 'zine) has become a burden for the collective, prompting several pleas for help in its reproduction.

Lastly, several publications combine several of the aforementioned elements into a broader 'zine format, most notably, the *Harbinger* and *Inside Front* 'zines series, as well as the more recent *Hunter/Gatherer* 'zine. These publications offer a better view of CrimethInc.'s origins and trajectory, as well as its philosophical perspectives that have attracted such a wide audience.

Inside Front and Beyond: CrimethInc.'s Start Inside Punk

From all available evidence, CrimethInc. began with the *Inside Front* 'zine, offering an unusually articulate voice connecting politics and culture in the hardcore punk scene. The 'zine ran for a period of seven years, culminating in the publication of its thirteenth issue in early 2001. The main editor of the project, most frequently known as “Brian D.,” moonlighted as a member of the hardcore punk band Catharsis and as a university student studying philosophy as he



produced the early issues of *Inside Front*.¹⁰⁶ The 'zine found its roots in the hardcore punk scene, a community *Inside Front's* editor insisted carried a deeper meaning and political potential than its appearance might let on.

¹⁰⁶*Inside Front*, No. 9.



You're probably reading this magazine because you're interested in music made by bands from the hardcore punk community. Why does this particular music speak to you? Hardcore music is filled with fury, with rage, with passionate desires and high aspirations. It is music for people who are discontent, who want more out of life, who are angry about something. I think it's safe to say that most of the people who are involved with the hardcore community are drawn to it because they are dissatisfied with the world around them, and are conscious that they want something more. This even includes those who only seem to be involved in it for entertainment and social interaction, for otherwise, why did they choose hardcore over other "youth subcultures"?¹⁰⁷

Perhaps as much to consistently lure less political hardcore fans as well as to contribute to the scene's DIY infrastructure, *Inside Front* always devoted a large portion of its pages to a comprehensive reviews section for hardcore punk music and other 'zines.

Inside Front identified itself as a "Journal of revolution. . . and hardcore punk,"¹⁰⁸ even as it fiercely criticized practices common to punk 'zines such as accepting corporate record-label advertisements to fund publication costs. CrimethInc. continued this policy as the *Harbinger* publishing project began, though by *Harbinger #4*, the removable ad supplement had been eliminated entirely. The new policy of ad-free publishing certainly kept CrimethInc. more ideologically consistent, though it raised publishing costs considerably. Throughout the *Inside Front* project, however, CrimethInc. stated its clear objections to more consumer-oriented models of the punk rock 'zine, instead proclaiming *Inside Front's* avowed goal of making the punk scene more than simply a subculture of music fans.

So the main purpose of *Inside Front* is to aid in the struggle of the hardcore punk community (and other counter-culture communities) to make it possible to choose lives and lifestyles different from the constricting, destructive ones the status quo offers us—NOT to sell music, to sell youth culture, or even to sell ideas.¹⁰⁹

To *Inside Front* editors and contributors, the hardcore punk scene offered a ripe example of a

107"Introduction: Manifesto for Inside Front Project Number Ten." *Inside Front*, No. 10.

108*Inside Front*. No. 11. Atlanta: CrimethInc., May 1998.

109"Editor's Corner." *Inside Front*, No. 10.



potential alternate infrastructure to challenge and subvert the mainstream system it opposed.



As a *community* (rather than just a 'scene', which would suggest that it is just another social clique), hardcore can perhaps serve to not only encourage the individuals within it to improve themselves mentally and physically, but also to support each other practically in our unified struggle to genuinely live our lives at odds with the status quo.¹¹⁰

Though *Inside Front* never declared itself a clearly anarchist project (indeed, anarchism is rarely mentioned by name in the 'zine), its view of the punk scene as an alternate society closely mirrored the dual-power revolutionary strategy advocated by many anarchist theorists. Furthermore, *Inside Front's* emphasis on the DIY aspects of punk led into an intuitively lifestylist approach to anarchism.

Beginning with *Inside Front*, CrimethInc. has consistently advocated a lifestyle-oriented approach to its Do-It-Yourself, anarchist-aligned politics. This emphasis even constituted the main goal and self-proclaimed achievement of *Inside Front*.

I think in the seven year history of this 'zine, one of our greatest contributions to the hardcore community has been our emphasis on the subject of lifestyle: that how you eat, what you wear, where you live, how you spend the typical days of your life is more important than what you do on Friday night, or what musical taste or ideology you subscribe to.¹¹¹

This lifestyle-based approach to revolutionary politics undoubtedly appeals to members of the punk scene more than a dry analysis of economic structures. The punk scene has long defined itself by personal markers such as piercings, tattoos, and clothing; that daily actions could signify and put into action a broader political perspective does not demand a great leap of understanding. As with many among the new generation of activists, lifestyle approaches to politics also offer a potentially more effective and direct means of transforming the world than traditional methods of advocacy and influence-peddling.

110“editor's corner.” *Inside Front*, No. 9.

111“Editor's Introduction to the Final Issue.” *Inside Front*. No. 13. Atlanta: CrimethInc., 2001. p. 2.



That's why Inside Front has concentrated largely on issues of lifestyle. You pose little threat as a weekend warrior, with your daily life (and thus all your capabilities to think, act, and produce) still at their disposal as a student or worker. But if you try to follow your dreams full time, you enter into direct conflict with the system that would keep you doing other things. You have to be a revolutionary every day, not just for special events, to make that work. The payback is greater, too, of course. And people who try to make a full life out of freedom, rather than a weekend cause, are ultimately more dependable in any struggle for change; they show up to volunteer at Food Not Bombs because they need to eat, not just to assuage their middle class guilt.¹¹²

In the context of a dynamic and often-debated anarchist political scene in which “lifestyle” anarchism is frequently branded as self-indulgent and bourgeois, CrimethInc.'s unashamed statements offer a bold and refreshingly forceful voice among the discordant chorus.

The firmly-rooted spirit of DIY pervades CrimethInc.'s projects, each imbued with an energetic and vibrant lifestyle approach to anarchist politics that attracts as well as it agitates. From underground publication efforts to film festivals and skillsharing tours, CrimethInc. consistently focuses upon the direct, exciting applications of its politics, never missing a chance to draw connections between fun and social revolt. In the program for a film festival held in Olympia, Washington in late 2002, one CrimethInc. cell writes this “Understatement of Purpose:”

To transform movie-watching back into the social event it once was. To share skills and perspectives, and nourish the do-it-yourself ethic of our community. Ultimately, to put an end to capitalism once and for all, so that every weekend might possess the best aspects of this one.¹¹³

It is through projects like these that the true revolutionary strategy of CrimethInc. reveals itself. The CrimethInc. revolution does not exclude social priorities or mass movements, but it begins locally and individually, with an act of energized empowerment.

¹¹²“Reclaim the Streets.” In *Inside Front*, No. 12.

¹¹³“Free Olympia HeArt and Film Festival: de.program.ming.” Olympia, WA: CrimethInc. Far East, no date (fall 2002). 2.



The word 'revolution', as we use it, is not a word for an armed uprising that is supposed to take place in some far-off future. We use the word to describe the moment when an individual succeeds in taking a life that was boring and meaningless to him or her and making it fulfilling and worthwhile.¹¹⁴

This ability of to connect the personal with the political, the malaise to the movement, and the apathetic to the anarchist gives CrimethInc. its irresistible appeal to a disillusioned generation feeling trapped in the monotony of modern life.

CrimethInc.'s strongest asset lies in its ability to reach out to those outside of its familiar community of anarchist activists and hardcore punks. Its role in fostering an energized anarchist spirit among those just developing a political consciousness has made a noteworthy impact in the anarchist movement.

114“Punk Rockers, One More Effort To Become Revolutionaries.” *Inside Front*, No. 11.



... the **CrimethInc (ex)Workers Collective** is one of the best and brightest things to happen to N. American anarchism since *TAZ* hit the streets in 1991.

Like Hakim Bey's fabled epistle, CrimethInc documents are hugely popular among non-activists, non-anarchists, and people who have never been members of ARA [Anti-Racist Action], NEFAC [Northeastern Federation of Anarchist Collectives], or the ELF [Earth Liberation Front].¹¹⁵

CrimethInc.'s approach directly attacks malaise and disillusionment, widespread sentiments that have primed many for the principles of the new anarchism. Sharing its postmodern ideas of rebellion with a field of theorists as diverse as the Situationists, Hakim Bey, and the primitivist John Zerzan, CrimethInc. focuses on the deepest-seated feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction provoked by a hypermodern age.

Nothing could be more crippling than the feeling that we are part of a *chain* of events, an inescapable chain reaction that predetermines everything we do, everything that is possible.¹¹⁶

Broad appeals like this one form the backbone of CrimethInc.'s visceral political arguments that lure its many thousand readers. Through its vivid writing and creative approach, CrimethInc. takes its place among the most innovative of anarchist works and projects. It is a unique approach, form-fitted to today's socio-political context, and it does as much to form as it does to draw upon the DIY-oriented, lifestyle-centered new anarchism.

115Sunfrog. "The Punk Rock Candy Mountain." *Fifth Estate*. Fall 2002. p. 50.

116"A Short 'History' of the C.W.C." *Days of War*, 17.



VI. PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE NEW ANARCHISM

The new anarchism that has grown in popularity and reach in recent years has revealed a philosophical departure from much of the dominant strands of anarchist theory of the past, drawing on new sources and ideas to form a more personalized and attractive approach to politics. Where anarchists of the late nineteenth or early twentieth century often defined themselves mostly by their continued debates with Marxist socialists, modern anarchists have largely ignored Marxism altogether. While much of anarchist theory still shares considerable common ground and origins with more traditional socialist approaches, many found socialist paradigms and rhetoric both unpopular and ineffective following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989.



The anarchist mindset of today's young activists has relatively little to do with the theoretical debates between anarchists and Marxists, most of which took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has more to do with an egalitarian and anti-authoritarian perspective. There are versions of anarchism that are deeply individualistic and incompatible with socialism. But these are not the forms of anarchism that hold sway in radical activist circles, which have more in common with the libertarian socialism advocated by Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn than with the writings of Bakunin or Kropotkin. Today's anarchist activists draw upon a current of morally charged and expressive politics.¹¹⁷

Much of this difference has to do with the fact that the current writings of Chomsky or Zinn (neither of which write primarily anarchist theory, but both of whom openly sympathize with the general perspective and give it voice among their analyses of US foreign policy or political history) offer considerably more accessible and relevant texts than the obscure, dated, or even out-of-print texts of more traditional scholars such as Bakunin or Marx. In a sidebar on “the New Anarchism” following the Seattle WTO demonstrations, *Newsweek* focused on the accessible sources of inspiration popular to contemporary anarchists:

117Epstein.



The movement's roots reach back to turn-of-the-century radical Emma Goldman but it owes its current revival in large part to the influence of punk bands like Rage Against the Machine and Chumbawumba, whose latest album includes a CD featuring linguist Noam Chomsky. Eugene, Ore., is a movement hot spot and writer John Zerzan has a growing audience there. Zerzan shares the antitechnology views of his close friend, Unabomber Ted Kaczynski.¹¹⁸

Zerzan has gathered a particularly large following in some circles, prompting considerable debate and argument over his primitivist writings that have called society a “totalizing racket”¹¹⁹ and arguing against technology, culture, agriculture, language, and art, among other things. His unrestrained criticism of modern society has struck a chord with many new anarchists who feel alienated from the “natural” or “authentic” world, though many criticize his extremist views. Hakim Bey, author of *The Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ)*, has significantly influenced many new anarchists with theories that address the individual needs of activists to feel energized and life-affirmed by demonstrations and actions. This view has drawn predictable criticism that Bey focuses on the ephemeral and neglects struggles for lasting change. These new theories do not necessarily place themselves as exclusive to more traditional views of radical political activism, but they have attracted more attention among new activists than standard leftist theorizing. Rather than founding thinkers Marx, Bakunin, or Kropotkin, contemporary anarchists look to the likes of John Zerzan, Hakim Bey, Guy Debord and the Situationists, Noam Chomsky, and Emma Goldman for direction.

This new anarchism emphasizes accessible concepts of personal freedom and directly liberatory practices applicable to daily life, drawing more on the recent work of descriptive analysts and social critics than proscriptive strategists of the past. At times this may seem to

118“The New Radicals,” 38.

119Zerzan, John. “The Nihilist's Dictionary.” In *Future Primitive and Other Essays*. Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 1994. Accessed online: *Spunk Library*, <http://www.spunk.org/library/writers/zerzan/index.html>, retrieved 1 May 2003.



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approach a “lowest common denominator” sort of common-sense approach to anarchism.



While they accepted the term anarchist, some suggested that “anti-authoritarian” or “humanist” better expressed their basic belief that all governments and corporations are bad and should be drastically curtailed if not abolished. Many are articulate and evidently well read, but few said they wished to discuss much about their upbringing.¹²⁰

In this more direct, less theoretical approach, modern anarchism draws on a tradition often linked to Emma Goldman, who wrote:

“Anarchism is not . . . a theory of the future. It is a living force in the affairs of our life, constantly creating new conditions . . . the spirit of revolt, in whatever form, against everything that hinders human growth.”¹²¹

This conscious emphasis that theory alone cannot make a sustainable political approach also draws from the Situationists. As Guy Debord said and CrimethInc. has appropriated,¹²² “Revolution is not showing life to people, but making them live.”¹²³ Cochrane further identifies a trend towards the slick and attractive in current anarchist politics, leaning towards individualist approaches.

120Verhovek, Sam Howe and Joseph Kahn. “Dark Parallels With Anarchist Outbreaks in Oregon.” *The New York Times*. 3 December, 1999. p. A12.

121Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Dover, 1969), page 63; as quoted in Ferrell, 243.

122*Days of War, Nights of Love*, 163.

123Cited in Lasn, xvi.



The highly aestheticized individualism embraced by both camp- and neopagan-oriented anarchafeminist activists suggests that their anarchism is individualist rather than socialist and that it is ultimately in keeping with "postmodern" anarchist Hakim Bey's notion of the "temporary autonomous zone" or "TAZ."¹²⁴

Altogether the new anarchism draws significantly from sources advocating an individualist and personalist approach to anarchism, not necessarily eschewing or opposing the more socially programmatic approaches of longer-standing theorists, but bringing a new importance to the direct applicability of anarchism to participants' daily life.

The currently popular strains of anarchism have redefined the goals of anarchism, often using the same terms in a new way, conveying a fresh sense of urgency to putting anarchist thought into practice. While much of past anarchist theory may have focused on principles of justice and long-term strategies for achieving anarchist-styled liberation on a grand social scale, current texts emphasize the immediately relevant aspects of this struggle. CrimethInc. displays this trend well in its definition of freedom:

Freedom is to be found only in the sensation of acting, of self- (and thus world-) creation, of the realization through practice the old saying "nothing is true, everything is permitted."¹²⁵

In addition to emphasizing the "realization through practice" of this value, CrimethInc. describes freedom as something to be discovered, rather than planned or struggled toward.

The moral is that in a situation where all meaning is already attributed, freedom is irrelevant, for all your possible actions are already determined. Freedom is to be found only in new spaces, in the brand new moments when fresh elements come into play and you have to create yourself from scratch.¹²⁶

This differs significantly from previous Marxist-oriented approaches that would treat a concept such as freedom as a sort of revolutionary ideal to be worked towards and fought for – instead,

¹²⁴Cochrane, 3.

¹²⁵*Days of War, Nights of Love*, 104.

¹²⁶*Days of War, Nights of Love*, 104.



CrimethInc. and other modern anarchist writers promote a direct view of a freedom that must be discovered and enacted in daily life. While critics point out the individualist nature of this approach that fails to emphasize a long-term strategy, it also fits within the dual-power or “prefigurative” strategy common to many new anarchists.

“Prefigurative organization” is an unlovely phrase used to describe a particular kind of political action that occurs when radicals try to embody the values which they are trying to realize in the wider society within the very structure of their own movement. Political movements seldom are prefigurative in this sense.¹²⁷

This approach attempts to use broad values and principles of anarchist politics to reconstruct the institutions and actions of daily life, an approach highly critical of “waiting for the revolution” that seeks to empower the individual to start making change in the present. Critics point out that this approach does not demand a commitment to a longer-term social struggle, but neither does it exclude this perspective. In the most sympathetic view, these approaches that emphasize the immediate and personal action hope to draw in new participants with a particularly applicable and attractive politics in order to build a longer-term movement that opposes the oppressive structures of the current society as it builds alternative institutions.

Criticism and Debate on Cultural Anarchism

This approach has drawn severe criticism from many angles, including those who criticize cultural or immediate aspects of the new anarchism that they view as opposed to a more prolonged and strategic political activism. Cochrane refers to these new anarchist politics as “a decadent, elitist, and ultimately depoliticized aesthetics.”¹²⁸ Stephen Duncombe similarly criticizes the 'zine scene for mistaking cultural production with political action:

¹²⁷Bouchier, 97.

¹²⁸Cochrane, 4.



Within the underground culture, the alienation that marks the rest of society is challenged, denounced, battled, and vanquished. But since all of this happens on a purely cultural plane, it has little real effect on the causes of alienation in the wider society. In fact, one could argue that underground culture sublimates anger that otherwise might have been expressed in political action.¹²⁹

Thistle exemplifies this trend in discussing the need for 'zines to embrace surrealism.

Sometimes activist 'zines can come off as too serious and self-important. I feel we need a balance in our paper: not just analysis, critique, and exposure of institutional atrocity but also examples of creative, playful thought and action.¹³⁰

Certainly many critics would argue that seriousness is precisely what 'zines need to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in supporting and instigating a powerful political struggle. This summarizes the general debate surrounding the new anarchism: those who favor the new approach see its effectiveness in energizing and attracting new participants and making anarchist politics real in a way that no theoretical text about the revolution could. Meanwhile, those who take issue with the new anarchism see it as decadent and privileged, avoiding serious issues in favor of enjoyable and attractive “styles” of activism that do not force real change at all. As Balash argues, “[c]alls to 'live without dead time' seem extraordinarily callous when most of the earth's population are forcibly not permitted to live without hunger pangs or dead children.”¹³¹

Even CrimethInc. itself is wary of its own irrelevance.

It shouldn't be hard for the resourceful reader to come up with examples of movements that have begun by channeling vital forces and ended as pathetic parodies of them: for politics, the Communist Party; for arts, surrealism, or jazz, or “emo” hardcore; for culture, the hippies, the beatniks, the punks.¹³²

This wariness of falling into ineffective self-indulgence might help the new anarchism to keep

129Duncombe, 190.

130Thistle, May. “Surrealism, Poetry, & Anarchy: An introduction.” *Fifth Estate*. Fall 2002. p. 28.

131Balash, Timothy. “Nihilism U.S.A. - McAnarchy in the Playpen.” Online:

<http://www.connect.ab.ca/~mctsoul/playpen.htm>, retrieved 23 February, 2003.

132*Days of War, Nights of Love*, 169.



itself in check, though this would not satisfy all critics – some would argue that the new anarchism does not merely risk irrelevance but actually harms the greater cause of libertarian socialism.

One writer in particular has led a vigorous debate over the ills of the new anarchism, which he identifies as “lifestyle anarchism.” Murray Bookchin published his vitriolic tract *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* in 1995, responding to what he perceived as a selling-out of traditional socialist values by modern anarchists.



The failure of anarchists – or, at least, of many self-styled anarchists – to reach a potentially huge body of supporters stems not only from the sense of powerlessness that permeates millions of people today. It is due in no small measure to the changes that have occurred among many anarchists over the past two decades. Like it or not, thousands of self-styled anarchists have slowly surrendered the social core of anarchist ideas to the all-pervasive Yuppie and New Age personalism that marks this decadent, bourgeoisified era. In a very real sense, they are no longer socialists – the advocates of a communally oriented libertarian society – and they eschew any serious commitment to an organized, programmatically coherent *social* confrontation with the existing order.¹³³

To Bookchin, the development of “a latter-day anarcho-individualism” in the U.S. and Britain threatens to undo whatever the traditional anarcho-socialist left has accomplished, indeed he claims that “[i]ts preoccupations with the ego and its uniqueness and its polymorphous concepts of resistance are steadily eroding the socialistic character of the libertarian tradition.”¹³⁴ As a longtime writer on leftist and anarchist theory, Bookchin takes particular issue with the overwhelming youth of the present anarchist movement and what he perceives as an ephemeral, trendy approach to activism.

Indeed, lifestyle anarchism today is finding its principal expression in spray-can graffiti, postmodernist nihilism, antirationalism, neoprimitivism, anti-technologism, neo-Situationist “cultural terrorism,” mysticism, and a “practice” of staging Foucauldian “personal insurrections.”

These trendy posturings, nearly all of which follow current yuppie fashions, are individualistic in the important sense that they are antithetical to the development of serious organizations, a radical politics, a committed social movement, theoretical coherence, and programmatic relevance.¹³⁵

Bookchin does not adequately answer just how precisely these forms of activism are “antithetical” to a more sustainable and prolonged vision of political struggle, but despite his distinctly crotchety tone, the new anarchism's failure to emphasize solid organizational development and political commitment merits attention.

Bookchin's argument has reached considerably beyond his own pages, defining a split

133Bookchin, 1-2.

134Bookchin, 8-9.

135Bookchin, 19.



within anarchism that has provoked copious debate and mudslinging from all sides. Balash describes the new anarchism as “McAnarchy Lite.”



Whereas the traditional anarchist project has been to build truly democratic communities void of coercive and exploitive social relationships and committed to nurturing their members so they may fully realize their potentialities as individuals, this new and improved McAnarchy Lite would have everyone an eternal feral child clutching, if not a stuffed Disney character, certainly a stuffed Tristan Tsara.¹³⁶

A variety of terms to describe the split abound. While Bonobo distinguishes between “visionary anarchism” and “anarcho-organizationalism,”¹³⁷ Balash divides between “individualist” and “collectivist” anarchism.

¹³⁶Balash.

¹³⁷Bonobo, Pono. “Instead of a Primer: on isms, schisms, & anarchisms.” *Fifth Estate*. Fall 2002. p. 40.



. . . the fuss over labels merely obscures a verbose, if not particularly intellectually fruitful, replay of many standing arguments between the social or 'collectivist' anarchist and what is usually referred to as the individualist anarchist and has, historically, found most of its adherents in John Wayne's America.¹³⁸

While all seem to understand where the conflict lies, the terms of the debate consistently fail to portray it accurately. Bookchin's chosen "lifestyle anarchist" term degenerates into little more than a slur, and attempts to name or define precisely what of the longstanding anarchist left one wishes to defend falter for a lack of any serious list of accomplishments from that perspective.

138Balash.



Since those designated as lifestyle anarchists would never embrace that tag, these debates all too often become one-way arguments, with the *true class warriors* engaging in a kind of more-anarchist-than-thou judgmental, fundamentalism.¹³⁹

Still, the difference is real and the split does matter to anarchists. While anarchists traditionally have emphasized building labor unions or political groups to prepare for a general strike or a state-felling insurrection, new anarchism focuses more personally on the cultural sphere. An end to the debate seems unlikely.

¹³⁹Bonobo, 40.



Sadly, the lifestyle anarchism vs. real anarchism arguments have not dried up. There's been a recent rejuvenation of righteous, judgmental jibes against white, middle class, hip, cultural activism within anarchism. As cookie-cutter condemnation goes, these voluntarily homeless, traveler, shoplifter prophets who pen the poetics of train hopping, dumpster diving, scandalous sex, and other hedonistic and hopeful trajectories are merely spoiled rich kids for whom revolutionary activism is nothing more than trifling amusement, a punk rock version of spring break at Daytona Beach, or the anarchist alternative to "going on tour" to see Grateful Dead rip-off bands.¹⁴⁰

There remains some truth to these blanket criticisms, for as Feeney points out, the origins of the current surge in anarchism bring a different and especially cultural perspective to the political arena.

140Bonobo, 39.



The current anarchist movement has much of its roots in the culture of punk, squatting and counter culture. It remains very isolated from the day-to-day lives of most working class people in North America.¹⁴¹

This approach to anarchism certainly does differ from the syndicalist or anarcho-communist approaches familiar to Bookchin and his generation, though the question of just what this new anarchism offers for the radical activist community remains.

While certainly criticism of the new anarchism brings up crucial points about the potential for irrelevant self-indulgence in a growing youth subculture, Bookchin's fears seem exaggerated at best. As the debate continues, Bob Black proceeds to tear Bookchin down with the same vigor Bookchin used on his enemies.

¹⁴¹Feeney, 10.



Simple logic aside (where Dean Bookchin* cast it), the Dean's empirical assumptions are ridiculous. North American anarchism is not "in retreat"¹⁴², it has grown dramatically in the last twenty years. The Dean might have even had a little to do with that. It is leftism which is in retreat. That this growth of anarchism has coincided with the eclipse of orthodox anarcho-leftism by more interesting varieties of anarchy doesn't conclusively prove that the heterodox anarchies are the growth sector, but it sure looks that way. For instance, the North American anarchist publication with the highest circulation, *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*, is on Bookchin's enemies list^{143, 144}.

While clearly the new anarchists promote a different sort of anarchism than Bookchin would like, it seems clear that the new anarchism represents an authentic anarchist perspective nonetheless and that it is making great strides towards bringing new participants into the movement. Certainly, critics would point out, moral and political views cannot be viewed as in a marketplace, where the most attractive philosophy signifies the best philosophy; still, the attractive role of new anarchism to draw in new individuals to the anarchist cause seems worth serious consideration. Many analysts have criticized this trend toward the personalization of politics, believing its subjectivity to be a sort of failure. This lifestyle-focused approach, however, has allowed direct experience to form individuals' political perspectives and theories, ensuring the relevance of politics to their own lives. Furthermore, this approach does not attempt to deny the personal effects political actions and activism may have on their participants, so it can capitalize on the life-changing experiences that much direct political action provides.¹⁴⁵ Where serious reservations remain surrounding the role of new anarchism in building a sustainable movement, the new anarchism likewise deserves serious credit for the revitalization of anarchism it has stoked.

*Black refers to Bookchin's former position as Dean of Goddard College in Burlington, Vermont.

142Bookchin, 59; as cited by Black, Bob, n.p.

143Bookchin, 39, 50; as cited by Black, Bob, n.p.

144Black, Bob. "Murray Bookchin, Grumpy Old Man." In *Anarchy After Leftism*. Eugene, OR: C.A.L. Press.

Online: <http://www.sniggle.net/anarchy/grumpy.html>, retrieved 23 February, 2002.

145Bouchier, 95.



To effectively understand the perspective of these much-maligned “lifestyle anarchists,” one must remember a critical distinction: whether lifestyle-oriented or not, at its best the new anarchism is still anarchism, and remains open to other approaches and perspectives. Bonobo highlights the necessary openness of any anarchist vision.



People frequently challenge anarchists to explain exactly how to arrive at an anti-authoritarian world; it's as if to propose a new society requires us to detail every contingency and respond to every counterargument. As much as a solid game plan would help any world-changing adventure, most anti-authoritarian activists are not strategists and politicians with a foolproof battle plan. Anarchism's appeal is in its eclectic, elusive, and slippery nature: not a system but an attractive decoupage of desires; not a template but a tempting poetry of suggestions; not a unified Movement but the collective moves of autonomous collectives.¹⁴⁶

The goals of the new approach to anarchism do not include laying out a perfect set of directions for the impending revolution or gradual transformation of society towards an anarchist vision. Rather, it attempts to open participants' minds to the point where these discussions can occur and real action can begin on the local and individual level to make these visions more and more of a reality. This willingness to decentralize and even atomize the political vision of anarchism characterizes the new anarchism as more “individualist” than more traditional varieties, but this word too represents an oversimplification. The emphasis on individual action within the new anarchism does not lie on the *individual* but on *action*. Brian D. of CrimethInc. describes his lifestyle approach to politics in the terms of this sort of commitment.

More than what I eat, whether or not I use drugs, and what bands I go to see, the bottom line for me as a member of the hardcore community and the counterculture in general is this: *stay unemployed*. Do whatever it takes, but keep my time and my labor to myself.

...

Finally, and most importantly, I'm voting both with my dollars *and* my time and energy against the existing system.¹⁴⁷

In a context of political activism where most other protest-oriented activities seem ineffective and frustrating, the personalized and cultural emphasis of the new anarchism gains relevance. Feeney points out that the Black Bloc tactic must “be seen in the context of a political landscape where the only permissible demonstrations are terminally demoralizing and where any step outside this

146Bonobo, 44.

147Brian D., “How I Spent My Permanent Vacation.” In *Inside Front*, No. 10.



quickly leads to criminalization and fierce repression.”¹⁴⁸ When one considers that to many of today's young activists “traditional” radical activism seems to refer mainly to precisely these boring sorts of demonstrations, the rhetorical divide present in the debate surrounding the new cultural anarchism takes on a new meaning. The difference between the newly cultural anarchism that emphasizes lifestyle choices and local projects over overtly political actions and the traditional anarchism that identifies itself more strongly in a tradition of labor-oriented socialism does not lie so much in strategic difference as in perception and motivations for participation among anarchist activists.

148Feeney, 9.



VII. UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY ANARCHISM: YOUTH SUBCULTURE

Sociological studies of “youth culture,” while often dismissed from within social movements, offer a useful method of understanding the appeal and social role of the new anarchist movement. Analyzing the ideology behind the new wave of anarchism does not suffice to understand the movement unless one also includes a thorough study of the motivations for these ideologies and this activism. Understanding the new anarchist phenomenon through this approach helps to elucidate the movement's role in shaping (and being shaped by) a greater social context. The popularity of the current anarchist movement develops from distinct reasons: a widespread sense of social alienation and political disillusionment fills many sectors of the North American population, creating a sense of dissatisfaction and unrest among the young and youthful that anarchism addresses well.

As much as mainstream analysts may like to dismiss them, subcultures exist in a social context, addressing a particular social need for a specific population sector, reflecting a real void or contradiction within the mainstream social structure. Brake provides a useful functionalist definition of subcultures:

My argument is that subcultures arise as attempts to resolve collectively experienced problems resulting from contradictions in the social structure, and that they generate a form of collective identity from which an individual identity can be achieved outside that ascribed by class, education and occupation. This is nearly always a temporary solution, and in no sense a real material solution, but one which is solved at the cultural level.¹⁴⁹

As a result, subcultural values and norms develop in juxtaposition to the values of mainstream

¹⁴⁹Brake, Michael. *Comparative Youth Culture: The Sociology of Youth Cultures and Youth Subcultures in America, Britain and Canada*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985. ix.



culture – the values of youth culture appear as an inverse reflection of those of adult society.¹⁵⁰ Subcultures are inherently rebellious, existing as a counterpoint to the dominant culture. As a result, mainstream culture (and particularly the state) often acts to repress or exclude subcultural views from cultural dialogue due to the threat such rebellious attitudes pose to the dominant social order.¹⁵¹ All of these rebellious values, of course, base themselves in a critique of the existing social order, often proposing an alternative order. While the social critique offered by youth subcultures frequently does not pose a direct threat to operation of dominant social structures, it threatens to socialize the young in a manner incompatible with the existing order.

. . . if the young are not socialised into conventional political, ethical and moral outlooks, if they are not programmed into regular work habits and labour discipline, then society as it is today cannot continue.¹⁵²

When factors such as generational politics join the fray, this concern of social malfunctioning only intensifies, as discontented members of a youth subculture today may well find themselves in a position to reform or reorder social structures decades later. The degree to which the counterculture of the 1960s terrified the mainstream adult population of the US, as well as the concessionary efforts the dominant social order made to pacify these malcontents, offers excellent proof of the relevance of these subcultural critiques.

The level of articulation and effectiveness of the social critique varies between subcultures, bringing different types and magnitudes of response from defenders of the status quo. These critiques represent a fundamental component of subcultures, reflective of their dominant “host” culture.

150Brake, 40.

151Brake, 26-27.

152Brake, ix.



Subcultures address themselves to structural problems, and implicitly contain a critique of society, admittedly often inarticulate and tangential. This has been explained away, especially in neo-functional models, as the problems of a transitional phase in adolescence.¹⁵³

Especially in the case of youth subcultures, mainstream adults typically dismiss the subculture's social critiques as symptoms of a adolescent stage of rebellion and dissatisfaction. This convenient response allows the dominant social order to continue ignoring the dissenting voice, but when these critiques do have deeply rooted social causes, this approach only aggravates the problem and strengthens the subculture's resolve.

¹⁵³Brake, 26.



. . . If, however, some of them are not going to grow out of it but develop a pride in what they are, feeling little in common with the laws of a society they feel alienated from, then there is a serious problem for that society.¹⁵⁴

Likewise, severe repression from the rulers of mainstream society has proven itself thoroughly ineffective at defusing subcultural momentum. In the case of anarchist activism, widespread police repression and targeted arrests have only questionably deterred activists – especially as individuals perceive themselves as targets and subjects of inevitable repression, its deterrence factor diminishes. Frequently, (as in the case of mass arrests of radical protest groups at demonstrations in Seattle, Washington, and Philadelphia) politically motivated police actions have served to further support subcultural critiques and galvanize observers in their support for the subculture.

Alienation and Disillusionment: Fomenting Subcultural Resistance

Anarchist subculture feeds off of a strong sense of alienation and disillusionment present among North American youth today, and while pinpointing the origins of this sense of dissatisfaction poses a difficult task, the presence of a popular subcultural social critique serves as evidence that real origins do exist. Many sources have highlighted the role that apparent contradictions within the social order have in fostering subcultural dissent. Bouchier identifies a long-running contradiction in US society relating to the often-emphasized “freedoms” of the United States:

The more fortunate citizens of the United States have an unusually large measure of freedom of speech, association, religious and political belief, physical movement, consumption, personal lifestyle and so on. They do *not*, however, have certain “positive” freedoms. For example, Americans do not have the freedom to control the placement of dangerous industrial plants or dumps in their environment, to influence the probability of nuclear war, to prevent the export of

154 Brake, 26.



jobs to Latin America and the Far East, to determine the education of their children, to prevent the crime in their streets (and boardrooms), to choose the advertisements and television programs they watch, the nature of the work they do, the physical fabric of their communities, the adequacy of health care they receive, or a thousand other mundane yet vital everyday things which will determine the quality and even the length of their lives.¹⁵⁵

In the 1990s, many of these missing freedoms only became more apparent to some citizens, as debate over health care (HMOs), media and internet content (V-chips, ratings, and parental controls), youth's exposure to advertising (Channel 1 and tobacco ads), and trade and job security (NAFTA) all arose as significant issues in which average citizens had little decision-making input.

Other authors cite other markers of social disintegration, though all agree: current subcultures arise out of current and real social problems. Popular primitivist theorist John Zerzan cites “teenage alienation and suicide, homelessness, environmental degradation as symptoms of the plant's despair.”¹⁵⁶ Kalle Lasn, editor of the culture-jamming magazine *Adbusters*, focuses on a loss of connection with a theorized natural environment:

The generations alive today—who cannot recognize an edible mushroom in the forest or build a fire without matches—are the first to have had their lives shaped almost entirely by the electronic mass media environment.¹⁵⁷

Newsweek may summarize the cause of discontent best in the context of the social phenomenon it feeds by focusing on perceptions of alienation:

¹⁵⁵Bouchier, David. *Radical Citizenship: The New American Activism*. New York: Schocken Books, 1987. 9.

¹⁵⁶Verhovek and Kahn, A12.

¹⁵⁷Lasn, 4.



But there does seem to be a common sense of alienation among a surprising number of Americans. Dan Seligman, head of The Sierra Club's trade office, defines the new mood as a feeling of "loss of control" in a world of rapid change and turbocharged global capitalism. "The things people believe in are less secure. Their communities are more fragile. They're more isolated, and it all adds up to a growing sense of insecurity and powerlessness despite the improving economy. And people are beginning to connect that to corporate power, media control, and politics stacked against them."¹⁵⁸

Overall, the roots of the spreading sense of dissatisfaction and desperation fit into two general categories: alienation from work and other daily interactions with social institutions, and disillusionment with dominant political structures.

Recent shifts towards a more service-based economy in the United States have resulted in less satisfying jobs for many young people, leading to a profound sense of alienation from the social institution of work. Duncombe traces many 'zines' emphasis on (and opposition to) work to transformations in the US economy in recent decades that have left middle-class young people even more disillusioned and "proletarianized." As the economy has increasingly shifted towards the service industries, low-wage, temporary, non-union, tedious jobs have multiplied. The young people taking these jobs in lieu of the more opportunity-laden entries their parents found recognize their own downward mobility and become disillusioned with the institution of work.¹⁵⁹ Klein recognizes that many young service workers have connected global economic situations with their globally-oriented corporate employers, realizing the inescapability of their condition.

The claustrophobic sense of despair that has so often accompanied the colonization of public space and the loss of secure work begins to come to life when one starts to think about the possibilities for a truly globally minded society, one that would include not just economics and capital, but global citizens, global rights and global responsibilities as well.¹⁶⁰

Especially in recent years as the US economy has turned downward, many young people are

¹⁵⁸"The New Radicals." *Newsweek*. 13 December, 1999. p. 37.

¹⁵⁹Duncombe, 74-75.

¹⁶⁰Klein, 442.



finding themselves trapped in low-wage service jobs, and even job prospects for those leaving college do not offer the optimistic sense of mobility familiar to a previous generation. The resulting sense of alienation and hopelessness is only compounded by the inability to influence major social policies that many people feel.

As US politics veer more towards trendy spectacle and slick marketing campaigns, many citizens demonstrate an increasing sense of disillusionment with the political system of the self-proclaimed capital of the free world.

Noam Chomsky, probably the most prominent American anarchist, believes the philosophy's appeal comes from the "discontent of people feeling they have no control over the decisions that concern them." He points to declining voter turnout over the years as evidence.¹⁶¹

This perspective resonates far beyond anarchist circles, but ultimately no philosophy capitalizes on this sentiment quite as well as anarchism. Reflecting the growing consumer consciousness that has fueled corporate responsibility campaigns on college campuses particularly well, Lasn describes the slick facade of US democracy:

America is no longer a country. It's a multitrillion-dollar brand. America™ is essentially no different from McDonald's, Marlboro or General Motors. It's an image "sold" not only to the citizens of the U.S.A., but to consumers worldwide. The American brand is associated with catchwords such as "democracy," "opportunity" and "freedom." . . . America™ has been subverted by corporate agendas. Its elected officials bow before corporate power as a condition of their survival in office. A collective sense of powerlessness and disillusionment has set in. A deeply felt sense of betrayal is brewing.¹⁶²

As each new election brings with it larger and larger campaign contributions, the failures of the US political system become readily apparent to many citizens, frustrated with the slick, spineless images of politicians on television. While few will admit to outright mistrust or hatred of the US government, its flawed mechanisms of influence-peddling and scandal cover-ups poke holes in

¹⁶¹Foster.

¹⁶²Lasn, xii-xiii.



the system's "consumer confidence."

Decades of Republican assaults on the basic functions of government, capped by a presidential election decided by dirty tricks and partisan courts rather than by popular will, have plowed the soil for a generational politics that is suspicious of political power.¹⁶³

For an emerging youth generation that came of age during Bush and Clinton presidencies, frustrated by Clinton's incessant scandals and constant partisan bickering, the appeal of an anti-statist subculture grows yearly.

While distrust of one's government has permeated US political traditions since the nation's founding, an increase in apparent hypocrisy and the accompanying citizen reaction combine to set the stage for a significant subcultural dissent. In the days following the formation of the Department of Homeland Security and the passage of the USA PATRIOT act, Bouchier's words from 1987 only ring truer:

... the process of centralization of power in America has now arrived at a point where it is creating a deep contradiction between the liberal democratic ideology and the experience of ordinary citizens. Americans are traditionally suspicious of power. At minimum, they demand that it should be clearly controlled by democratic mechanisms and visibly effective in realizing popular goals.¹⁶⁴

That the centralized power of the federal government only increases, combined with recent attempts by the executive branch to draw the nation into an unpopular war, have created irreconcilable contradictions with the image of politics presented in US history textbooks. Duncombe writes that 'zine writers and their audience have been conditioned by "post-Vietnam, post-Watergate, post-actor-as-president mainstream politics," finding hypocrisy in the "world of stage-managed falseness" that stands in opposition to every popular notion of American

163Kaplan.

164Bouchier, 9.



democracy.¹⁶⁵ A dire situation presents itself as the current political climate of the United States, spreading disillusionment far and wide. As Bouchier writes, “[i]t is characteristic of the age that few people feel that their problems and discontents can be solved through political action.”¹⁶⁶ For better or worse, this sense of disillusionment has left a void ripe for anarchist values that call for a more personalized, direct approach to politics in the face of an intransigent and dehumanized bureaucracy.

A Target Audience for Anarchism?

The individuals attracted to and participating in the new anarchist scene reflect a predominantly middle-class perspective, and while many are young, the movement is not as exclusively adolescent as stereotypes typically portray it. Certainly the largest influx of new participants in the anarchist community come from the young adult age group, often individuals from early college ages to their mid-20s. Still, the analysis of the recent trend as a youth subculture does not depend on particular ages of its participants.

¹⁶⁵Duncombe, 32.

¹⁶⁶Bouchier, 3.



. . . the type of behaviour witnessed in youth culture is also found in bohemian cultures, certain working-class occupations, rather than in the younger *per se*. The youthful, rather than the young, create youth culture.¹⁶⁷

Certainly most anarchist activists might sense this youthfulness – despite an older crowd of anarchists publishing and reading journals and attending conferences, the majority of participants in street demonstrations and local projects lack both age and experience. Many within the movement have criticized this demographic breakdown.

¹⁶⁷Brake, 86.



The fact that North American anarchism still by and large remains a movement of young people within a particular counter culture has been a serious impediment to the growth of the movement itself. While, on the one hand there is a constant stream of new members from the disillusionment and frustration experienced by young people in this extraordinarily alienated society, on the other hand there is a parallel drop off of members as they grow older and start to lose the sense of excitement and romance of sticking two fingers up at the establishment.¹⁶⁸

Yet even while the age of participants may not vary considerably, their occupations do. Partly from an attempt to avoid compromising commitments to a capitalist labor system perceived as oppressive, many anarchist activists work part-time, flexible jobs that pay poorly but offer the maximum freedom in scheduling time for activist commitments. This has its advantages in a movement so proud of its projects.

Some don't have full-time jobs, but instead spend most of their time working for change in their communities. They start urban garden projects and bike libraries; they cook food for Food Not Bombs and other groups. These are thinking and caring folks who, if they did not have radical political and social agendas, would be compared with nuns, monks, and others who live their lives in service.¹⁶⁹

Certainly the diversity of anarchists' work within the movement far supersedes the diversity of backgrounds represented in the community, something few activists deny but which many discuss only with a note of frustration and resignation.

Activists' background often proves even more elusive to determine, as many either hide their class identity or alter it with voluntary “downwardly mobile” career choices. As Brake points out, in a scene focused on “dropping out” of the capitalist and authoritarian social system;

. . . the very notion of 'dropping out' presupposes a location in the class structure from which to drop (and to return), as opposed to the harsh reality of working-class life, which is instead a flight from the 'never had'.¹⁷⁰

Still, while individuals' backgrounds hold significant relevance for understanding the draw of this

168Feeney, 11.

169Black, Mary.

170Brake, 84.



youth subculture, its working dynamics often relate more to the present economic situation of many activists, which shows a greater breadth of positions.

The Anti-Capitalist set tends to be far more mixed by background than, say, the middle-class student movement, and no deep pockets are keeping them afloat now. Their genius is in making use of the wealth all around them—whether human resources or capitalism's leavings—despite a lack of cash or access to traditional forms of power.¹⁷¹

Of course, many anarchists' chosen lifestyle alleviates some of the more dire-seeming financial conditions. The movement's embrace of alternative structures serves at least as much for its own sustainability as it does for a philosophical commitment to “dual power strategy” or anything similar. Brake describes these middle-class youth cultures:

¹⁷¹Kaplan.



Explorations may also be made of alternative adaptations of middle-class forms of dominant institutions, for example, 'alternative' life styles, communal child care, 'free' schools, fringe medicine, self-awareness groups and so forth. Often these involve a fusion of the distinctions between work and leisure – 'work and play' – and a relationship to material production involving a connection to surplus where welfare provision, or the use of rejected consumer goods, provides a modest minimal standard of living.¹⁷²

These widespread practices of dumpster-diving, shoplifting, and alternative service institutions make many anarchists' lifestyles possible. Of course, even these provisions would not suffice without the scene's rabid anti-consumerism.

After spending any significant amount of time around the nonhierarchical, collective sensibilities of these anti-capitalists, you can begin to feel your entire life is corrupted by absurd power imbalances, your apartment overrun by excess goods.¹⁷³

The fact that the popular anarchist ideologies inherently address issues of lifestyle and subsistence opens the movement to many looking to make major changes in their lives and add a somewhat sustainable element of challenge and risk to their lifestyle. Those with longer-term commitments, however, such as children or loans, frequently find themselves excluded precisely because of this low-cost, low-income lifestyle.

Why individuals enter the anarchist scene, often making these significant lifestyle changes, remains one of the simplest puzzles to solve: the subculture specializes in injecting a sense of empowerment and excitement as many activities as possible. Public political demonstrations offer the most obvious example:

Direct action is a proclamation of personal independence. It happens, for the first time, at the intersection of your self-consciousness and your tolerance for being screwed over.¹⁷⁴

True to its anti-authoritarian spirit, the anarchist subculture fills its activities with self-affirming

172Brake, 84.

173Kaplan.

174Lasn, 130.



practices. Learning to survive in the urban jungle off of reclaimed food grants dumpster-divers a satisfying sense of self-sufficiency. Participation in local projects may teach new skills through practice, offering a sense of professional development in a distinctly anti-professional environment. Kaplan interviews one activist who describes the recruitment value of this sense of empowerment:

Ben, 21, an NYU dropout who now cooks food each week for the homeless denizens of Tompkins Square Park through Food Not Bombs, says **anarchism's egalitarianism helps attract youth who are new to politics of any kind.** "Some of the drunkest kids I've ever seen are now going to Food Not Bombs meetings and taking responsibility," he says. "Once they find a place where they're not on the bottom rung, where they can take initiative, they do it. They start out listening to a Subhuman song and they end up reading Noam Chomsky."¹⁷⁵

Without a doubt, individuals find lasting value in the anarchist scene, something largely absent from their perceptions of the mainstream social settings of work and school. A meeting of anarchists discussing subtle philosophical aspects of nonviolence particularly surprised Kaplan with the participants' commitment and interest:

. . . most striking, if you listened in, would have been the gently earnest tone of the debates, and the palpable humility of the participants. . . . Everyone spoke briefly and passionately and stopped to really listen, and speakers reflected on how much they had to learn.¹⁷⁶

Perhaps most significantly, by emphasizing a lifestyle wholly consistent with one's values, anarchist activists take control of their own lives and escape the bitter hypocrisies of the dominant social order that alienated them in the first place.

New Anarchism: Moving Beyond Class Politics and Subcultures?

Certain advantages accompany the new anarchism's status as a middle-class youth subculture, though some clues indicate that the phenomenon might have a broader social impact

175Kaplan.

176Kaplan.



than its origins might suggest. Compared to working-class subcultures, middle-class youth subcultures draw more heavily upon the values and norms of the dominant social order, often “stretching” them to greater applications.¹⁷⁷ The new anarchism’s emphasis on the Do-It-Yourself approach, accordingly, represents a “stretching” of the mainstream values of individualism and self-reliance. Middle-class cultures also exhibit a tendency to emphasize broad international aspects of their values and to have “a longer influence over their members’ life styles” than working-class subcultures.¹⁷⁸ These last points relate to the middle-class movement’s struggle to connect its work to its participant’s lives, since it does not battle against material needs like working-class movements do. As a result, the middle-class subculture emphasizes the personal nature of its politics intensely, drawing a significant emotional connection between its participants and their work.¹⁷⁹ The middle-class social movement must frequently find innovative ways to break out of standard class politics, since class-based oppressions do not apply as directly to a middle-class constituency.

A personalized, *cultural* approach to social rebellion results from the privileged position of a middle-class social movement, offering what Brake terms “a symbiotic relationship between the culturally rebellious, and the tradition of militant radicalism found in the young intelligentsia.”¹⁸⁰ The combination of culture and politics here offers a truly revolutionary possibility that potentially might address common concerns about the movement’s relevance.

One self-critical punk wrote in *Inside Front:*

177Brake, 83.

178Brake, 83.

179Brake, 106.

180Brake, 105.



Hardcore punk must not be a merely self-referential “youth culture” if it is to make any real difference in our lives, let alone our world. Over the past forty years, subculture after subculture has come and gone, over and over and over, and not one has been able to create permanent change in the lives we lead. If hardcore is to be just another subculture, in which young people participate for a few years, it will be powerless to do anything for us. These so-called youth “movements” never move anyone anywhere at all; there's nothing like a youth culture to quarantine you with your peers, give you a prefabricated identity as an answer to the insecurities of growing up in a hostile world, waste your outrage and passion in ritualized (and very safe) gestures of rebellion, and send you back out into the world dazed, disillusioned, and neutralized... ready to begin your adult life as a cog in the wheel of mainstream society.¹⁸¹

If any social movement of recent years carries the potential of evolving into more than simply another youth subculture, the new anarchism appears well-positioned to do so, as it draws upon long-standing middle-class values of United States society while simultaneously reaching beyond class politics and mainstream norms to offer its participants a fulfilling and empowering cultural environment.

181“Punk Rockers, One More Effort To Become Revolutionaries.” *Inside Front*, No. 11.



VIII. DEEP ROOTS OF ANTI-AUTHORITARIANISM IN THE UNITED STATES

While distinctly different from today's anarchism, from the earliest years of the republic, there existed a distinct trend of anti-authoritarian, radically democratic values in the United States. The very spirit of escaping the political bonds of Europe in the New World along with rationalist values of governance contributed to the highly democratic small town meetings of New England and continued to manifest an anti-authoritarian trend through the formation of the new republic.

The United States was born in rebellion against external rule and founded on a set of democratic and utopian values that positively encouraged continued rebellion against any and all forms of government control.¹⁸²

Among European immigrants, North American civilization still primarily consisted of small, rural townships where local legislative councils made nearly all public decisions. Bouchier cites Paul Goodman, describing the lack of a central state in these early years:

Paul Goodman described the early years of the republic as “Virtually a community anarchy with regard to central or state governments.” This was a time when the frontier still allowed at least a temporary escape from political surveillance, when communications were bad and government had not yet achieved its later efficiency of bureaucratic control.¹⁸³

Even Thomas Jefferson still emphasized these values, making such famous comments as “that government is best which governs least,” and “the earth belongs to the living,” defeating the idea of a social contract that could cross generational lines.¹⁸⁴ In Jefferson's First Inaugural Address he revealed the skepticism of government powers that pervaded the early republic:

Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself. Can he then, be

182Bouchier, xxi.

183Goodman, Paul. *Drawing the Line*. New York: Free Life Editions, 1977. 116. As quoted in Bouchier, 36.

184Bouchier, 36-37.



trusted with the government of others? Or have we found angels in the form of kings to govern him?¹⁸⁵

This tradition of anti-authoritarianism continued throughout early United States history, though never recognized explicitly as anarchist or anti-authoritarian.

Intellectual anarchism entered the mainstream of American political thought, not in the form of these inward-turning theories, but through the more accessible writings of Emerson, Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and later Henry George.¹⁸⁶

Typically this tradition has made its way into the pages of history as a “democratic” tradition, though it represents a radically different view of democracy than politicians use today.

Historians typically forget or omit a tradition that Bouchier identifies as democratic protest in the first two centuries of North American history. This tradition shares similar motivations with today's anarchism, though history typically records it inaccurately as a failed attempt at a socialist movement in the United States.

Through the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, radical political activity in America tended toward one of two forms, which I will call democratic protest and equalitarian protest. They were not incompatible—indeed they often appeared side by side—but each elevated a different principle. Democratic protests were historically the earliest, and they are most readily lost to sight when we look at this history.¹⁸⁷

These “equalitarian protests” more closely represented a socialist vision and never took a firm hold in the new nation. The democratic protests, however, shared a vision of equitable community participation that today's anarchists also emphasize.

185Jefferson, Thomas. “First Inaugural Address.” In Perkins, George and Barbara Perkins. *The American Tradition in Literature*, 8th Ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994. 232.

186Bouchier, 53.

187Bouchier, 26.



Democratic protests claimed, in some form, that citizens owed political obligation first to the communities they lived in, and last (or not at all) to the political state. . . . In other words, democratic protests were made by citizens *organized as communities* against governments or other powerful institutions that tried to impose illegitimate rule from outside.¹⁸⁸

While this sort of early democratic activism took many forms, thus obscuring its own history even as it made it, Bouchier affirms that “[i]n their strongest and most radical form they corresponded to the social or cooperative ideal of anarchism.”¹⁸⁹ As the federal government centralized its power and anarchism gathered other, more pejorative associations, these democratic protests largely fell into forgotten history, though the deeply-rooted spirit of anti-authoritarianism which fueled them continued to make its mark.

As the nation evolved, its political trends did likewise, and liberalism emerged as the primary political identity, subsuming or subverting most other political traditions with its broad reach. Bouchier defines “classic, Lockean liberalism” as concerned first and foremost with protecting the property rights of individuals, demanding political obligation from those it protects.¹⁹⁰ Both democratic and equalitarian traditions of protest were overruled and subsumed by liberalism.

188Bouchier, 26.

189Bouchier, 27.

190Bouchier, 28.



In the founding decades of the United States, liberalism became the dominant ideology of American society more or less by default. . . . The extraordinary success of liberalism rested on the fact that, until well into the twentieth century, it gave the impression of including the other two visions.¹⁹¹

As liberalism gained ground, equalitarian protest took to the formation of a mass movement, and for most purposes democratic protest had been “squeezed into the equalitarian mold, or dismissed as backward, nativistic, and irrelevant,” though it remained active on a local level.¹⁹² Anarchism itself acquired its bad name in the late nineteenth century:

In the last quarter of the [nineteenth] century, public attention was diverted by the direct actions of anarchists of European origin, mostly immigrants from Germany. It was these radical immigrants who gave anarchism the stereotype of a movement of half-crazed, violent foreigners. Their fascination with the meaningless “propaganda of the deed,” with terrorism and with bombings, were out of joint with American political culture. The Haymarket bombing in Chicago in 1886 (which may not even have been the work of anarchists) was the signal for a wave of repression which all but wiped out this kind of anarchism in America and gave an evil reputation to its very name.¹⁹³

As a result, this period managed to effectively marginalize both democratic protest traditions as well as American anarchism to history's filing cabinet, though the shared root of both traditions continued on in other forms.

Enter the 20th Century

A more explicit sympathy for anarchism developed in the 1960s, though the term still remained shrouded in the legacy of political violence from the nineteenth century, and the new counterculture again principally employed anarchistic principles while avoiding the title. As Epstein points out, the movements of the early 20th century primarily acted as reform movements, petitioning the state for improvements – throughout this process, however, the movement retained its share of the US anti-authoritarian legacy, to reappear vibrantly in the 1960s.

191Bouchier, 28-29.

192Bouchier, 28.

193Bouchier, 54.



Within the movements of the sixties there was much more receptivity to anarchism-in-fact than had existed in the movements of the thirties. In the thirties, Communists, radical trade unionists and others demanded state action on behalf of working people and the poor, and succeeded in pushing the New Deal toward the left. In a context in which the left was, with some success, demanding a shift in the orientation of the state, anarchism had little place. But the movements of the sixties were driven by concerns that were more compatible with an expressive style of politics, with hostility to authority in general and state power in particular. Relatively few sixties activists called themselves anarchists or, for that matter, anything else. Especially in the early sixties, many activists rejected all ideologies and political labels. Nevertheless, many activists were drawn to a style of politics that had much in common with anarchism. Many of them, if asked what left tradition they felt closest to, would probably have named anarchism.¹⁹⁴

As Foss determined in comparing the countercultural movement of the 1960s to other social movements, the movement in the US following 1967 employed a highly subjective form of politics, based on personal experience. The movement manifested itself through informal associations “where a new 'life-style' is practiced and developed.”¹⁹⁵ This subjective and personal approach to politics lent itself well to both a large middle-class following and connections to an earlier tradition of radical democracy that emphasized a community-based view of freedom.

That the counterculture was anarchistic is indisputable—its two most insistent themes, after all, were freedom and community. This was the transcendental, romantic anarchism of Thoreau, rather than the hard-edged political anarchism of Bakunin or Goldman.¹⁹⁶

Like all social movements, this movement had its roots in a serious critique of the dominant society, particularly political authority – once again identifying the key contradiction of the social order as that between community and alienation.¹⁹⁷ The anarchist-oriented “freedom” of this movement made itself particularly visible in the common slogan, “do your own thing,” though even here the emphasis lay in the community-based solution: doing one's own thing signified not

194Epstein.

195Foss, Daniel. *Freak Culture: Life-Style and Politics*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1972. 65.

196Bouchier, 77.

197Bouchier, 90.



abandoning all social restrictions, but rather forming or joining a community, often a commune or intentional community.¹⁹⁸ The key development of the movement of the 1960s, with respect to the current anarchist scene, lay in its lifestyle focus of integrating personal and political life.

This, in the end, may prove to be the most important contribution by the sixties movements to a new radicalism. For most of the sixties radicals most of the time, there was no sharp division between personal life and political action. Political action was unapologetically about personal life and how to make it better.¹⁹⁹

As discussed previously, this step opened the door for the movement to effectively reach out to and make inroads with the dominant middle class of the United States, a drastic change of strategy for a liberatory social philosophy such as anarchism.

The 1970s ultimately saw the less-effective fallout from this lifestyle movement, where large-scale social activism faltered and returned to a local approach.

198Bouchier, 79.

199Bouchier, 95.



During the 1970s, writes Katinka Matson, the compiler of a compendium of techniques for personal psychological development, there occurred “a remarkable change in the way we perceive ourselves and the world. . . . Today we are turning inward: we are looking for personal definition, personal improvement, personal achievement, and personal enlightenment.”²⁰⁰

This change clearly represented a failure to many observers, including Murray Bookchin, who cited Matson above. The retreat from national-level political advocacy did, however, allow the activist movement to pause and re-orient itself. This too, would continue a tradition of radical democracy and decentralization visible throughout US history, and laid the foundations for several techniques and strategies used by anarchist activists today.

In the late seventies activists influenced by a perspective that drew from anarchism, pacifism, feminism and environmentalism initiated a movement against nuclear power, which they hoped would go on to address other issues, eventually becoming a movement for nonviolent revolution. They created a distinctive style of politics by drawing the concept of the affinity group from the history of Spanish anarchism, the tactic of large-scale civil disobedience from the U.S. civil rights movement, and the process of decision-making by consensus from the Quakers. . . . The version of anarchism that circulated within the movement called for egalitarian community based on small, autonomous groups.²⁰¹

These same methods have found their way into regular use by new anarchist activists today, especially in the context of mobilizing large demonstrations like those of Seattle and Washington.

Today, the anarchist movement can trace the development of its core values back to the earliest days of US history, sharing both its strengths and weaknesses with a long tradition of North American anti-authoritarianism. The 'zine scene which Duncombe analyzes draws directly upon the legacy of early small-magazine writers such as Thomas Paine, sharing similar priorities and battling similar problems.²⁰²

The personalization of politics is one way in which zinesters confront the distance between themselves and a mainstream political world in which they effectively have no say. When pamphleteers wrote in the eighteenth century, some were arguing for a hands-on democracy: a

200Bookchin, 9.

201Epstein.

202Duncombe, 15.



political system in which individual citizens could participate directly, and one that seemed within their power to create. Even those who argued against such a participatory democracy, like James Madison, did so because they feared it was a real possibility. It no longer is. The republican ideal of a personal attachment to politics remains part of our ideological heritage, but in practice it is repudiated. Politics for most people has become something “out there,” something to leave to the professionals: the politicians, pollsters, and media pundits. As a 1995 poll reveals, 89 percent of Americans feel that the people running the country are somewhat or definitely “not like them.”²⁰³

²⁰³Duncombe, 30-31.

Footnote from Duncombe:

The poll, of 1,045 registered voters, conducted by *US News and World Report* is reported in Michael Barone, “The New America,” July 10, 1995, p. 22.



Duncombe cites Alexis de Tocqueville in identifying one negative aspect of zine culture firmly rooted in United States tradition: their insularity. As de Tocqueville asserted of early citizens' associations and organizations, the zine culture offers such a diversity of outlets for personal energy that many individuals hardly leave the zine scene to leave any more far-reaching impact.²⁰⁴ Similarly, the most unique-seeming trends of the recent lifestyle anarchist scene have their historical precedents in the 1960s and the intervening decades.

²⁰⁴Duncombe, 70-71.



What is occurring today with Crimethinkers and communards, eco-warriors and free-food scavengers, ravers and graffiti artists, squatters and train-hoppers reflects the notion of *class suicide* made popular in the 1960s by the Black Power movement. . . . Many who got political in the late 80s and early 90s began with a wholesale rejection of “middle-class values” concerning family, hierarchy, patriarchy, monogamy, work ethics and with an embrace of the “cultural revolution” represented by punk rock, plagiarism, queer nations, sex-positive feminism, the mail art/zine scene, and earth-centered spirituality.²⁰⁵

This modern development draws significantly, then, on the pioneering use of lifestyle-oriented politics of the 1960s, where traditional anti-authoritarian values met with personal experience of the middle-class youth to create a new politics. Still, in many ways the new anarchist movement shares more with its older historical counterparts than with the 1960s counterculture. Tom Hayden writes:

205Bonobo, 39-40.



As a grass-roots movement seeking the overthrow of what it sees as an oppressive system, Seattle '99 was more like the Boston Tea Party than the days of rage we knew in the late '60s.²⁰⁶

As Hayden points out, the new anarchist movement, and even to a large extent the global justice movement, has reclaimed the legacy of true direct action that disrupts the authority structure, in place of the reformist petitioning of 1960s movements.

Enduring Themes of North American Anti-Authoritarianism

Themes of anti-authoritarianism and individualism run like twisted threads throughout US history, defining each other through their juxtaposition for over 200 years. One particularly forgotten and misunderstood movement of history, the Anti-Federalists, represent a particularly coherent early version of this anti-authoritarian resistance.

Political theorist John Schaar reminds us of the continuing anti-Federalist tradition: “Some significant part of the American soul has always belonged to the Anti-Federalists. Their disinherited successors have appeared in . . . all those who have cherished the values of conservation, variety and self government over the values of exploitation, centralism and hierarchy.”²⁰⁷

As for Anti-Federalists, who valued not simply individual freedom, but self-determination in a social context, today's 'zine writers seek not to escape society, but define their own role in it.

The idea of not allowing your creativity to be stymied by any “authoritarian system” is the essence of American individualism. . . . Zine creators, as primarily the sons and daughters of the American middle class, are trained to be intellectuals. Schooled in the ideology of self-sufficiency, they enter the world prepared to make *their* mark on the world. However, the contemporary United States is a far different place from the idyllic land of independent yeomen that Thomas Jefferson once imagined. Most Americans work for someone else, or if they are “lucky” they employ others and become a dependent cog in a larger system, in either case showing up the American Dream to be just that: a dream.²⁰⁸

In both of these cases, individuals seek greater control over the society in which they live,

206Hayden, Tom. “What Was That All About? Tom Hayden, longtime activist, says the protest in Seattle will have a greater impact than Chicago in '68.” *The Washington Post*. 5 December, 1999. p. B5.

207Schaar, John H. “Anti-Federalists Arise,” *The Nation*, 22 January 1983. p. 87. Quoted in Bouchier, 35-36.

208Duncombe, 179.



not individualist withdrawal from that society or individual satisfaction apart from it. The anti-authoritarian tradition of radical democracy differs strongly from individualism or individualist anarchism in this regard, though they are often painted with the same brush by critics and defenders of the status quo.

Still, the debate over individualism in the anarchist movement continues. One writer to

Inside Front remarks:

The U.S. has a tradition of a very individualist anarchism, . . . Everything in U.S. culture is about individualism and this has a strong influence upon anarchist ideas there. People see anarchism as a way to free yourself from society, not as a way to build a new society to live with the other people. I think that this is a reflection of the whole heritage of American society, the myth of the self made man, is a thing that can only happen in a society that is very capitalistic and with enterprise values like American society has.²⁰⁹

The writer inadvertently points out the important realization that the individualism which so pervades US culture carries a negative connotation – when leveled against anarchism, it represents a distinctly pejorative connotation of escapism. Murray Bookchin and other critics of the new anarchism have widely attacked the new anarchism for reverting to “individualist” anarchism that seeks personal gratification in place of social change.²¹⁰ Individualist anarchism, however, has never existed as a significant force in US history:

Hardly any anarcho-individualists exercised an influence on the emerging working class. They expressed their opposition in uniquely personal forms, especially in fiery tracts, outrageous behavior, and aberrant lifestyles in the cultural ghettos of fin de siècle New York, Paris, and London. As a credo, individualist anarchism remained largely a bohemian lifestyle, most conspicuous in its demands for sexual freedom (“free love”) and enamored of innovations in art, behavior, and clothing.

It was in times of severe social repression and deadening social quiescence that individualist anarchists came to the foreground of libertarian activity – and then primarily as terrorists. . . . It [individualist anarchism] came to prominence in anarchism precisely to the degree that anarchists

209Fred, “Letterbombs to the Editor.” *Inside Front*, No. 13. p. 8.

210Bookchin, 8.



lost their connection with a viable public sphere.²¹¹

As Bouchier has pointed out, the dominant and most unique tradition within US radicalism has been that of “radical citizenship,” or “the politics of radical decentralization and positive freedom.”²¹² The sense of freedom present in radical citizenship emphasizes community – while individualism has played an important rhetorical role in US history (especially as it has been an emphasized component of the liberal tradition), it does not serve as the foundation of these radical social movements. Instead, “radical citizenship implies a higher and more progressive image of society than possessive individualism and that it is not merely, as is often claimed, a naïve hankering after a simpler past.”²¹³ Despite widespread misconceptions of history, radical citizenship stands distinctly apart from the individualist idea, and it in fact carries greater social currency in the United States than even individualism.

While the dominant social order of the US has held individualism as a simultaneous straw man and carrot on a stick, Bouchier's criteria of radical citizenship has more accurately defined the tradition of anti-authoritarianism in the United States. Individualism in the US always stands as an idea rather than a real trend, because all individuals still desire community environments. The true American Dream does not stop at fighting one's way to the top and enjoying the comforts of elite status, but rather of carrying one's family and descendants to the top of the social ladder, supporting a self-determined community structure. This ideal is exemplified by the anarchist tradition of radical citizenship.

211Bookchin, 8.

212Bouchier, xxiv.

213Bouchier, xxv-xxvi.



Radical citizenship is rooted in the unfashionable belief that people are capable of being free, and of cooperating to sustain their freedom. It echoes a political tradition that has been deeply repressed in modern societies, the tradition of anarchism--not the anarchism of the mad bomber but the more social and cooperative variety which was the principal nineteenth century rival to Marxism. Anarchism, of course, is a long and perfectly respectable tradition of political thought concerning the uses of power. As its adherents never cease to repeat, its linguistic root means "without a ruler," not "without order." Both anarchism and Marxism address the question of what people want, as *social* rather than *individual* beings, when they look at the chaos of competitive individualism and wonder if there might be a better way. Such theories offer connectedness and meaning to people whose lives are isolated and meaningless, and serve the same essential purpose as any other political or religious creed. They are--or can become--the driving force of radical movements for social change because they offer something that is missing from the individualistic social ethic.²¹⁴

While many representatives of the dominant social order attempt to display anarchism and individualism each as incomplete desires best served by state liberalism, the truly North American tradition of anarchism requires an anti-authoritarian social component lacking in liberalism. The new anarchism now, equal to the radical citizenship of US history, demands a positive freedom not merely of individual liberty, but of democratic community autonomy.

214Bouchier, xxiv-xxv.



IX. CONCLUSIONS: A NEWLY CULTURAL APPROACH TO POLITICS

The new anarchism apparent in recent years in the United States represents not merely the evolution of a political movement, but a reformative shift in politics itself. While those attracted to other social movements may be drawn in by ideological affinity or organizational pull, the new anarchism, lacking either ideological consistency or institutionalized organizations, has increasingly drawn new adherents through a cultural reach. Where other political organizations and movements publish or speak about their proposed reformations of the world, DIY anarchists have said less and done more. DIY mechanisms of procuring and distributing ordinary necessities such as food, housing, and cultural commodities within a supportive community setting have allowed many young activists to begin living a life more consistent with their values. Strategies of activism that procure food, housing, or transportation for their participants also lower the living costs of those individuals, often allowing them to work less and spend more time on activist projects within anarchist social circles. In this fashion, the new anarchists have built a movement more effectively than any simple political advocacy organization could.

Arising out of cultural developments within punk music and youth subculture, the new DIY anarchism has appropriated the terminology and rhetorical imagery of historical anarchism, shifting the focus of anarchism from political philosophy to culture and lifestyle. As many youth in the punk movement began to embrace the rhetoric of anarchism for its rebellious reputation and extremist political approach, the meaning of anarchism began to shift for those familiar with the punk scene, and increasingly for the broader population as well. Public views of anarchism slowly drifted away from their historical associations to bomb-throwers and obscure political



philosophers towards a spirit of youth rebellion and alternative lifestyles combined with radical political approaches. Johnny Rotten might be considered as much a celebrity of the new anarchist phenomenon as Karl Marx or Emma Goldman. While certainly historical anarchist theory has provided a solid philosophical backbone to the work of many modern anarchists, the anarchist phenomenon no longer depends upon such a body of theory for definition and support. DIY anarchism has emphasized a particular lifestyle and approach to culture which incorporates politics, but is not limited by it. Anarchism today signifies less an affiliation to the thinking of Bakunin, Kropotkin, or even the writers of CrimethInc., and more a commitment to the DIY ethic of living and a spirit that such a lifestyle stands in opposition to an oppressive system of economic, racial, political, and sexual oppression.

This new DIY anarchism does not seek participants' political affiliation, but their cultural participation – in doing so it offers a possibility to break through standard historical barriers of class and political spectrum separation to create a newly broad-based cultural phenomenon dedicated to social change. The CrimethInc. Ex-worker's Collective specifically eschews identifying itself as a political organization, instead crafting itself as a brand identity in a realm of cultural commodities. In this sense, CrimethInc.'s peers and opponents are not the Republican party or the Young Communists' League, but MTV, Sprite, and the GAP. CrimethInc. presents itself self-mockingly as a monolithic brand for the distribution of identity and ideas, thus both opposing and poking holes in the structure of corporate branding that has come to define the cultural sphere of United States society. This new cultural focus of anarchism has brought phenomenal growth to the movement at the same time as it has broadened the use of the term



“anarchism.” While some might fault the decreasing ideological rigidity of the movement, others would point out the increasing lifestyle consistency of the social phenomenon – today's anarchists overwhelmingly agree on priorities of self-reliance and mutual aid. The new cultural emphasis on Do-It-Yourself living has widened anarchism's audience beyond standard political divisions, as Epstein points out with regard to the global justice movement.



Their anarchism combines both ideology and imagination, expressing its fundamentally moral perspective through actions that are intended to make power visible (in your face) while undermining it. Historically, anarchism has often provided a too-often ignored moral compass for the left. Today, anarchism is attracting young activists, while Marxist socialism is not, or at least, not in the same numbers.²¹⁵

This rhetoric of culture and politics united in lifestyle has played off of deeply-rooted traditions in United States society to strike a chord with many North Americans not otherwise affiliated with or attracted to traditionally leftist politics, and this represents perhaps the most promising trend of the new anarchism. Still, questions remain unanswered. As Bookchin points out, United States society currently experiences a more widespread sense of disillusionment with the government than any time in memory, but yet the organized left fails to make meaningful social progress.²¹⁶ Will DIY anarchism offer a solution to the left's woes? The answer seems to rest in the loving care of an unconventional bunch of tattooed, pierced, and dredded activists, full of ideas, energy, and dumpstered bagels.

²¹⁵Epstein.

²¹⁶Bookchin, 59.



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