

**An Analysis of the Contemporary
Anarchist Movement:
The Discourses and Ideology of
Anarchists in the Providence Area**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ideological content of the contemporary anarchist movement. Recent scholarship has contended that the movement is defined by a dominant "small-a" or "new school" trend which is more similar to various new social movements than to classical anarchism in terms of movement practices and forms of organization. A minority "capital-A" or "old-school" trend more closely resembles the classical anarchist movement. I critically approach this distinction by interviewing twelve anarchists in Providence, Rhode Island. This is done through an analysis of anarchists' discourse and ideology, using Teun van Dijk's framework for ideological discourse analysis.

In light of my findings, I argue that the existing formulation of the small-a/capital-A anarchist distinction is founded, but that insistence on the small-a trend as definitive can obscure both the core ideological structure shared by the two trends and the persistence and complexity of the capital-A trend. Furthermore, the small-a/capital-A distinction can be made more nuanced by contrasting the two trends in terms of their respective representations of self-identity and social position. Comparison along these lines reveals that the small-a trend tends to see itself as privileged, while the capital-A trend tends to see itself as part of the oppressed working class. This difference has implications for the sub-groups' respective ideological practices as well as other aspects of their respective self-identities.

As a secondary concern, this thesis demonstrates the analytical value of a theory of ideology for the study of social movement emergence, trajectory, and outcomes. In turning an eye toward the largely neglected concept of ideology and seeking to capture the ideational complexity of the Providence anarchist movement, this thesis points to the possible constraining effects of ideological variation.

Key words: anarchism, ideology, discourse, culture, social movements, protest

Table of Contents

ii	Tables and Abbreviations
iii	Acknowledgments
1	Chapter 1: Introduction
3	Clarification of Key Terms
5	Research Objectives
8	Review of Literature
24	Case Selection
25	Data Collection and Methods
29	Structure of the Report
30	Chapter 2: Contemporary Providence Anarchism in Historical Perspective
31	A Brief Sketch of the Modern Anarchist Movement
35	Anarchism in America
42	Providence-area Anarchism
50	Conclusion
52	Chapter 3: The Ideology Shared by Twelve Providence-area Anarchists
53	Analytical Framework and Overview
55	Content Analysis: Themes of Commonality
57	Discourse Analysis: Structure of the Ideology
79	Conclusion
84	Chapter 4: A Critical Look at Small-a and Capital-A Anarchists
84	Framework and Overview
86	Self-Identity in Terms of Social Position
92	Activities and Roles
105	Self-Identity in Terms of the Anarchist Label
114	Conclusion
118	Chapter 5: Conclusions
119	Findings
123	Implications and Further Research
126	Works Cited

Tables and Abbreviations

Tables

Table 3.1 - Possible components of the interviewees' shared ideology

Abbreviations

DARE - Direct Action for Rights and Equality

IWW - Industrial Workers of the World

NEFAC - North Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists

ONA - Olneyville Neighborhood Association

SDS - Students for a Democratic Society

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2005, an article appeared in the weekly *Providence Phoenix* that featured "anarchy" in Rhode Island. Bringing together bits of anarchist history and snapshots of a handful of contemporary local anarchists, the article declares that there is a small anarchist subculture in Providence that carries on the anarchist ideals, if often without using the anarchist designation. That same year, there emerged local chapters of the Industrial Workers of the World as well as the North Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists, the former having a very old relationship with anarchism and the latter dating to 2000. By the following year, Students for a Democratic Society, with its own historical relationship to anarchism, also saw a local revival. And, rounding out the visible anarchist boom, an "Anarchist Book Fair" had become an annual event hosted at an annual block party put on by AS220, a local art space.

Five years later, each of these developments perseveres. Assuming there exists something that can be called a "transnational anarchist movement" (Graeber 2002; Graeber & Grubacic 2004; Gordon 2008), it seems appropriate to claim that this movement has a local manifestation in the Providence area. This local manifestation, at a glance, appears somewhat diverse: activist involvement and radical lifestyle choices on the part of individuals without formal organizations; organizing and activism on the part of organizations; students, recent graduates, an older generation more active in the years after the 1999 WTO protests. Existing scholarship suggests that what unifies this diversity is a commitment to the expansion of human freedom through the creation of

radical democracy *now* and the resistance to structures of hierarchy and domination. This scholarship also suggests that the diversity can be captured by two categorizations: on the one hand, a "new school," "heterodox," or "small-a," anarchist trend and on the other, an "old school," "orthodox," "capital-A," anarchist trend (Graeber 2010; Graeber & Grubacic 2004; Gordon 2008).

The Providence-area anarchist movement presents an empirical opportunity to engage and evaluate Graeber's and Gordon's claims about the character of the contemporary global anarchist movement. This is an important opportunity to take up; to accept these authors' claims without further research into the question would risk jeopardizing a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the movement. An understanding that more fully appreciates the nature of differences within the anarchist movement may also be important to anarchists, leftists, and other radical activists and individuals themselves. I hope that this thesis can be of some value to them.

As a secondary concern, a study of Providence anarchism addresses a gap in the existing social movement literature: the study of movement content, and in particular, movement ideology. As this thesis aims to show, ideology is a concept that can benefit the analysis of social movement emergence, trajectory, and outcomes.

Clarification of Key Terms

Before presenting my research objectives, main findings, and review of literature, I pause to clarify some of main terms I will use throughout this thesis.

Anarchists

I employ a conception that draws from Graeber and Grubacic (2004) and Gordon (2008), defining *anarchists* as those who: (1) value notions of freedom and equality which lead them to oppose authority and domination and by extension, social phenomena including, but not limited to, the State and capitalism; (2) orient their behavior, in light of those values and beliefs, toward creating nonhierarchical, non-compulsory social relations. Defining anarchists in this way allows me to apply the classification both to individuals who call themselves anarchists and to those who do not. I do this for two reasons. First, this definition is in accord with those found in body of anarchist scholarship I am addressing, that is, it ensures that the object of study is consistent. Second, in classifying individuals according to their ideology, I judge that values/beliefs and practices/behavior are more important than are labels of self-identity. I recognize here my participation in the construction of this particular anarchist kind.

Social Movement

Within the sociology of social movements, there is no consensus on the definition of *social movement* (Diani, 2000; Eschle 2005). I have chosen to use a definition which can be accepted by both the structuralist and social constructionist approaches to social movement mobilization studies. Following della Porta and Diani (2006), I understand

social movement as an expression of collective action, a distinct social process that consists of the mechanisms by which actors engaged in collective action do three things: (1) enter and persist in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; (2) associate in dense informal networks; and (3) share a distinct collective identity.

Do anarchist individuals and groups form such a phenomenon? First, any variation of anarchist ideology—given the definition I use—articulates opposition to the State, capitalism, and any oppressive actor or structure. Given that the collective action of anarchists is informed by anarchist ideology, anarchists are actors in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents (i.e. the State, capitalists, etc.); thus, anarchists demonstrate the first feature of social movement. Anarchists demonstrate the second feature in their communication and coordination within dense informal networks (Gordon 2008, 14-16; Graeber 2002, 70-71). As with the first feature, anarchist ideology—here the emphasis on autonomy of individuals and organizations—underlies the informal, horizontal network relations existing between anarchists.

Anarchists exhibit the third feature of a social movement in that they share a distinct collective identity. Even if we assume that there is more diversity among anarchists than Gordon or Graeber recognize, there remain common core values and beliefs (i.e., the primacy of human freedom and the rejection of domination) as well as modes of behavior (i.e. social relations that are nonhierarchical, voluntary, and based on mutual aid) which delineate a distinct anarchist identity (Gordon 2008, 14, 21; Barclay 1990, 15-16; Graeber 2004, 2-3). Thus, anarchists, insofar as they engage in collective action characterized by the three elements above, may indeed be conceived as comprising a social movement.

Ideology

Oliver and Johnston (2005) offer a "non-pejorative" conception of ideology within the context of social movement studies: ideologies as "complex systems of ideas that are systematically related and which describe and explain the world" (62). The authors call for the further refinement of this concept, distinct from the concept of *frames* (to be discussed later). For a more refined concept of *ideology*—since one has yet to emerge in social movement studies—I look outside of social movement studies and adopt one offered by the field of Discourse Studies. I use van Dijk's (2006) multidisciplinary conception of ideology which combines a social, cognitive and discursive component. By this conception, ideologies are systems of ideas or beliefs, "socio-cognitively defined as shared representations of social groups, and more specifically as the 'axiomatic' principles of such representations" (ibid: 115). Ideologies, in short, encapsulate the fundamentals of a group's self-image. *Ideological groups* are collectivities of people defined primarily by their shared ideology and the practices based on them (ibid: 120). The anarchist social movement is an *ideological group*.¹ I further elaborate this conception of ideology in the Data and Methods section towards the end of this chapter.

Research Objectives

My main inquiry is this: What is the ideology of the contemporary anarchist movement in the Providence area? My more specific inquiries are these: What are the components of this ideology and the interrelations between them? Are there distinct and distinguishable variations of this ideology, and if so, what characterizes them? In

¹ Ideological groups are distinct from cultural, national, or linguistic communities, which are not ideologically unified (van Dijk 2006: 120).

answering these questions I contribute to the existing debate about the nature of contemporary anarchism: How does the Providence-area case support, challenge, or complicate existing claims about the *small-a* and *capital-A* tendencies within movement? My final inquiry addresses contemporary social movement theory: What can an understanding of Providence anarchist discourse and ideology tell us about the way cultural factors influence social movements' trajectories and outcomes?

In order to address these questions, I have interviewed a dozen individuals in the Providence area who can be classified as anarchists according to my definition above. I have used a framework developed by Teun van Dijk (1995a, 1995b, 2006) to analyze these interviews as ideological discourse. This framework will be detailed towards the end of this chapter.

My findings illuminate the ideological schema of contemporary anarchists, lending support to but also complicating the positions of Graeber and Gordon: While a small-a tendency and a capital-A tendency are clearly distinguishable within the Providence anarchist movement, I argue that their insistence on the small-a character of contemporary anarchism can obscure the depth of their similarities as well as the empirical persistence and complexity of the capital-A trend.

Value of Findings

While some scholars, like Graeber and Gordon, have researched and written about the nature of the contemporary global anarchist movement, there remains a dearth of empirical study on the matter. Both Graeber and Gordon draw up two distinct anarchist currents without adequately researching the content of "capital-A" current. This thesis

brings to the Graeber-Gordon discussion an in-depth, systematic case study of anarchist discourses and ideology in the Providence area. Its merits with respect to this discussion lie in its use of a clear and well-developed theory of *ideology*. This allows for a systematic elucidation of a singular anarchist ideology. I interpret the meanings of the symbols that comprise this ideology and permeate the languages they use. I then outline the relationships between these symbols within a coherent ideological system. Such an explication of contemporary anarchist ideology is missing in the existing literature. It balances Graeber's emphasis on behavior and practices;² it builds upon Gordon's treatment of the movement as a *political culture*.

The use of van Dijk's theory of ideology is also useful in analyzing and delineating the variations of anarchist ideology. My findings uphold but complicate the basic distinction between a "small-a" tendency and "capital-A" anarchist tendency. The ideological category of *self-identity* proves the most fruitful in shedding new light onto the distinction: the two currents hold significantly contrasting views of their group-identity and social position. The small-a anarchists tend to understand themselves as relatively privileged while the capital-A anarchists tend to understand themselves as relatively oppressed. The Graeber-Gordon discussion has not been attentive to these dimensions revealed by ideological discourse analysis, the positions of those in different trends and their accompanying complexities.

Oriented secondarily toward social movement literature, this thesis contributes to a recent effort to examine the cultural aspects of social movements beyond strategic framing processes. As several scholars have maintained (e.g., Goodwin & Jasper 2004;

² His research is based in participant observation of the Global Justice Movement and Summit protests (Graeber 2009).

Johnston 2009a; Polletta 2008; Platt & Williams 2002), understanding cultural elements of movements like ideologies, identities, and emotions is important because they constrain and enable movement processes and general mobilization. In turning an eye toward the largely neglected concept of ideology and seeking to capture the ideational complexity of the Providence anarchist movement, this thesis illustrates the constraining effects that ideological variation can pose for a movement.

While a deep examination of relationship between ideology and other movement processes is beyond the scope of this thesis, my research lays some groundwork for further study of the anarchist movement by pursuing the preliminary questions "What is the content of the movement in question and more specifically, what is its ideology?" The importance of understanding the content of the movement one is studying seems apparent enough, but it has been an area that much social movement scholarship has ignored (Walder 2009). Methodologically, this thesis examines movement ideology in an innovative way by employing Teun van Dijk's model for ideological discourse analysis, a model that has not been previously used in social movement studies.³

Review of Literature

Social Movement Mobilization

The field of social movement studies has long been oriented toward two areas of inquiry. On the one hand, American social movement scholarship, rooted primarily in sociology, has tended to study the processes of movement mobilization, i.e., how and when movements emerge, develop, and fail or succeed. On the other hand, European

³ Previous applications have pertained to racist ideologies, not political ideologies or social movements.

social movement scholarship has been more multidisciplinary and has tended to seek macro-level structural reasons *why* "new social movements" have mobilized (Chesters 2011).⁴ The North American social movement mobilization scholarship is the body from which I borrow conceptual tools and in which I identify one of the two gaps addressed by this thesis.

Mobilization Theories

Until the late-1980s, the mobilization field was dominated by two structuralist currents: resource mobilization theory and political process theory. The former was a response to the preceding collective behavior approach (Smelser 1962), which proved unfit to explain the organized, strategic, rational student and Civil Rights movements. The resource mobilization approach focused on movement organizations—or *mobilizing structures*—and their ability to mobilize material and social resources necessary for collective action (McCarthy and Zald 1977). The shortcomings of this current in accounting for the movements' external contexts spurred the development of political processes theory. This current examined and theorized the relationship between institutional political actors and movements (Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Tarrow; 1983). The concept of *political opportunity structure*, or the spectrum of openness or closure of the political system in question,⁵ emerged from this trend as a central social movement concept.

⁴ "New social movements," such as women's, student, environmental, and anti-nuclear movements, have been perceived to be "new" given (among other traits) their generally non-proletariat constituencies, post-materialist values, and forms of action which replace or accompany conventional political forms of contestation (Chesters & Welsh 2011; Buechler 2000; Klandermans 1991; Inglehart 1990; Offe 1985).

⁵ Openness/closure has been conceived in different ways. In an early usage (Eisinger 1973), it was understood as the degree to which conventional avenues for making claims of local government and redressing grievances are available. Tilly (1978) expanded the notion of political opportunity structure to

By the late-1980s,⁶ mobilization and political process theory received a new challenge, a social constructionist approach which claimed that the two existing theoretical currents overemphasized resources, formal organizations and external political contexts, and largely ignored the role of culture in collective action (Buechler 2000, 38).⁷ Influenced by the symbolic interactionism of the 60s and 70s, this approach recognized the importance of interaction and symbols to the study of social movements. It assumes that symbols—whether conceived as meanings, interpretations, definitions, or identities—are crucial to the communication processes and interaction networks which comprise society and collective action (Buechler 2000, 40). This social constructionist approach saw initial expression in what came to be known as *framing* or *framing processes* theory. Spearheaded by Snow and Benford (1986, 1988, 2000), this approach focused on framing, or the creation and mobilization of meanings or interpretations (Ayres 2004), as a central social movement process.

The framing approach filled in the gap of explaining the subjective processes which mediate between *opportunity* for collective action/mobilization and collective action/mobilization itself (McAdam et al. 1996). More specifically, the approach argued that participant mobilization in movements varies according to the degree to which movement actors successfully perform the central framing tasks of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing (Benford & Snow 1988, 199).

the national-state level, also arguing that political opportunities change over time and influence activists' tactical choices. See Meyer (2004) for an overview of political process and political opportunities literature. Others, like della Porta and Diani (2006), have given attention to other aspects of movement context, proposing that *discursive* opportunity structures are also important. In the same vein, out of framing theory came the notion of *cultural* opportunities and constraints (Snow & Benford 2000).

⁶ This is about the same time that New Social Movement Theory emerged in European scholarship (Chesters & Welsh 2011, 10).

⁷ Culture being loosely conceived as shared ways of behaving and thinking, or as systems of symbols and meanings used in interaction.

Further Theoretical Developments

Social movement mobilization theory has seen two main developments since the frame theorists carried the culturalist perspective into the field. The first is an attempt at integrating the three main theoretical currents, based upon the recognition that all three types of factors (opportunity structures, mobilizing structures, and framing or other cultural processes) are important and interrelated. Some scholars have proposed a theoretical synthesis outlining those dynamic interrelations (e.g., McAdam et al. 1996; Meyer et al. 2002; Opp 2009). Others have combined, in various ways, certain aspects of each theory in order to explain the mobilization of particular movements (e.g. della Porta 1995; Cress & Snow 2000).⁸ While some of these attempts have been commendable, Buecher charges most others with "conceptual poaching", of appropriating concepts from the social constructionist paradigm and incorporating them into the preexisting structuralist paradigm as minor themes (2000: 53). This criticism is echoed by Goodwin and Jasper (2004), who argue that culture has been reduced to strategy in the attempt at synthesis or integration. Further criticism—at times from within the structuralist camps themselves—has charged synthetic attempts with dealing with too many variables and being unable to assess their explanatory power (Gamson & Meyer 1996, 275), for "run[ning] the risk of becoming a dustbin for any and every variable relevant to the development of social movements." (della Porta 2006, 17).

The pursuit of an alternative to the perceived structural bias and lack of focus has generated the second main development: the growth of a semi-autonomous social

⁸ In one of the more notable instances of such integration, Della Porta explains the emergence and maturity of radical-Left movements in German and Italy by examining the macro-level relationship between the State and social movements (political opportunities/political process), the meso-level emergence of small radical organizations (resource mobilization/mobilizing structures), and the micro-level life-histories and ideational orientations of militants (social constructionism)

constructionist paradigm which emphasizes cultural analysis of social movements that looks beyond the concept of framing.⁹ I refer to this current as semi-autonomous because, as Buechler (2000) and Walder (2009) note, some of these new culturalist efforts remain partially latched to framing processes; an example of this would be Polletta's work on storytelling as—among other things—a framing strategy particularly powerful in early stages of mobilization (2006). Still, this social constructionist trend has proven a fairly established and distinct paradigm. It is also the one in which this thesis situates itself.

Culture and Social Movement Mobilization

The social constructionist paradigm in social movement studies has generated the theorization and analysis of several cultural factors in striving for better theories of movement emergence and outcomes. An influential work for the culturalist approach to social movements is Swidler's (1986) essay which presents *culture* as a toolkit of meanings, beliefs, world-views, identities, stories, rituals, values, et cetera. Such cultural resources can be taken from a widely shared cultural stock and constructed into "strategies of action", that is, "ways of trying to organize...a life within which particular choices make sense...and for which particular, culturally shaped skills and habits...are useful" (ibid: 276). Hence framing theory, which focuses on the strategic fashioning of such extant cultural "tools" into collective action *frames*, for the purpose of serving a movement's ends (Snow and Benford 2000). As Goodwin and Jasper (2004) contend, however, framing theory tends to reduce culture to strategy, losing sight of the non-instrumental ways in which culture *shapes* action, including framing processes

⁹ The original framing current, although modified, also persists semi-autonomously as a non-major trend (e.g., Johnston & Noakes 2005; Ayres 2004; Snow & Byrd 2007).

themselves.¹⁰ Culture is broader than strategy; it both enables and constrains collective action, in ways that are not solely intentional or instrumental (Geertz 1983; Swidler 1986; Bakhtin 1986; Sewell 1992; Steinberg 1995; Goodwin & Jasper 2004). Goodwin and Jasper cite the example of Steinberg (1995: 60), who argues that "discursive repertoires" bound the set of meanings through which movement actors can construct frames and make tactical choices. In the same vein, Ringmar (1996) notes that identities are also logically prior to the strategic pursuit of interests; Goodwin and Jasper agree that "a group of individuals must know who they are before they can know what interests they have (2004: 24). The authors conclude that privileging frame analysis as the main form of cultural inquiry into social movements is unjustified.

Studies of other cultural factors and processes in relation to movements' emergence and trajectories have emerged in light framing theory's narrowness (and continued limitations of the enduring political opportunities approach). Among these main explorations are collective identity (Polletta & Jasper 2001), emotions (Jasper et al. 2001), and stories (Polletta 2006, 2009). Related works have continued to investigate the strategic use of culture. Johnston (2009b), for instance, explores the "cultural toolbox" available to nationalist militants in 1990s Chechnya and their innovative use thereof. Leach and Haunss (2009) propose the concept of *scenes*, or a type of free space, to help explain social movement mobilization. They demonstrate the concept's utility by applying it to a study of the German autonomous movement.

Others have given increasing attention to the ways in which culture "sets the terms of strategic action" (Polletta 2008: 80). Polletta's survey of cultural approaches

¹⁰ Through the concepts of *narrative fidelity* and *frame resonance*, Snow and Benford (2000) have come to integrate into their framing theory a consideration for the constraining role of "culture out there."

moves away from ideational forms of constraint like identity and discursive repertoires. Instead, she focuses on dominant, constraining *cultural schemas*—expectations about how things do and should work—that are institutionalized in the spheres in which movements contend. She highlights the way in which movement actors struggle against such schemas, particularly the trade-offs they face in conforming to or challenging such conventions in their strategic action. An effect of such an approach is that the culture/structure divide becomes more fluid: structures are understood as dependent upon cultural schemas and cultural challenge is seen to sometimes reproduce existing structures (2008: 90).

Polletta and others have called for more research into the non-ideational, not-simply-strategic aspects of social movements' emergence, trajectories, and impacts. Others, however, like Johnston (2009a) and DiMaggio (1997, 2002), note that the cultural turn in movement mobilization studies could benefit from a cognitive approach, one allowing us to consider aspects of mental life as part of culture.¹¹ While Polletta is less interested in ideational cultural factors ("Culture is Not Just in Your Head," 2004; 2008), Johnston (2009a) holds that they comprise one of three main categories of cultural factors. Johnston, similar to Polletta, is more interested in the category of *performances*.¹² It is my contention, however, that the turn away from ideational factors in cultural analysis is premature and costly to a fuller understanding of movement emergence, trajectory, and outcomes.

¹¹ This call for a cognitive research rests on the perspective that culture is both socially performed and cognitively based.

¹² Although he admits that intentional behavior does not take place without an idea preceding it (2009a: 7).

Ideology: The orphan of social movement studies

Within a series of chapters in the Johnston and Noakes (2005) collection on the framing perspective, Oliver and Johnston debate the concepts of *frames* and *ideology* with Snow and Benford. The former echo Buechler's remark that "ideology has become an orphan in social movement theory (2000: 200)." It remains accurate to say that the social constructionist current, while attentive to social-psychological *framing*, has largely ignored the broader concept of *ideology*. As Buechler points out, such neglect is problematic because it prevents us from conceptualizing the wider role of ideas in social movements (2000: 200). It may be true that most movement participants are not motivated by ideological systems as much as they are by a sense of injustice or unfairness (Moore 1978). Nevertheless, ideology (having wider dimensions than frames) does play some role in motivating movement participation (Oberschall 1995),¹³ while also helping to define movement goals and practices (Swidler 1986).¹⁴ The ideological shaping, or constraint, of movement practices in particular is an important relationship that is overlooked by framing and other culturalist approaches. Furthermore, as Beuchler (2000) suggests, ideology—as a collectively-shared system of meanings—also fosters collective identity and solidarity within movements. The various ideational aspects of movement content encapsulated by *ideology*—and their relationships to different movement aspects—are not sufficiently accounted for in other cultural approaches to movements.

¹³ Oberschall contends that ideology—conceived as a "thought world" with moral, cognitive, and emotional structure—has just as much as motivating force as rational (material) interests (ideology as weapon in a fight for economic advantage) or strain (ideology as attempt to view psychological anxiety).

¹⁴ For Swidler, ideologies—conceived as explicit, articulated, highly organized meaning systems—play a powerful role in organizing social life and can "*establish* new styles or strategies of action." They can also directly shape action itself (ibid: 278). Ideology's influential capacity is especially important in the context of "unsettled lives," times of social transformation when culture is contested. Social movements, by definition, exist in such contexts of contestation and transformation, and often "carry" ideologies which compete with existing cultural frameworks (1986: 280).

Through quite general, the neglect of ideology—variably conceived—in recent empirical study has not been total. Della Porta's (1995) study of radical-Left movements in German and Italy finds that, on the meso-level of his multi-level analysis, movement organizations' recruitment success correlated positively with the militancy of their ideology. Moreover, bonds of solidarity—fostered by ideology—became especially important in sustaining mobilization. A study by Platt and Williams (2002) also lends support to the theoretical claim that ideology can help motivate movement participation. They offer their own notion of ideology as a rival to other cultural-symbolic concept used in the recent cultural analysis of mobilization (such as stories/framing, collective identity, and emotion). In applying their concept to an analysis of letters written to Martin Luther King, Jr. by segregationists, they find that there were variations of segregationist ideology and that the construction of these variations acted to mobilize the letter writers' movement participation. Finally, in one of the most recent studies of ideology, Della Porta (2009) takes a more fully ideational approach to the Global Justice Movement, focusing on the culture of deliberative democracy in social forums. She breaks down the components of the overarching ideology that guides social forums—deliberative or participatory democracy—and examines the difficulties of practically working out a corresponding democratic organizational model. Her concept of ideology stresses the categories of values and goals.

These few studies of movement ideology have been valuable to the further development of the social constructionist approach to social movements. It is clear, however, that there remains a dearth of theoretical and analytical attention to ideology, as well as to movements' content more generally (Chesters & Welsh 2011: 10; Walder

2009).¹⁵ In view of the dual neglect of ideology and movement content, a real gap exists in social movement literature which this thesis helps to fill. If we are to understand how ideology constrains/enables thought, discourse, and social action—and thereby influences mobilization processes and outcomes—we need to begin by looking empirically at movement ideologies in a more nuanced way.

Importing a Theory of Ideology

Earlier in this chapter, I began to explain van Dijk's definition and theory of ideology. The theory ideology warrants some further elaboration. Ideologies are the axiomatic principles, or the fundamentals, of a group's self-image. They are constructed from a biased selection of basic social values and organized in group self-schemas. Such schema involve categories, including a group's "identity, actions, aims, norms and values, and resources, as well as its relations to other social groups" (2006: 115). These schema—the contents of ideologies—form the cognitive interface (ideology) between individual thought, action, and discourse, on the one hand, and groups, group relations, and institutions on the other. In this way, ideologies are both cognitive and social. There are five additional aspects of van Dijk's framework (1995a, 2006) which will be useful to highlight:

- (1) Ideologies are distinct from the practices and discourses based upon them, and there is a two-way relationship between ideologies and practices/discourses.

¹⁵ Chesters & Welsh (2011) note that such "ideological indifference" is characteristic of political opportunities and mobilizing structures theory, but it also appears to be a problem for social constructionist approaches. Walder (2009) criticizes the dominant theoretical orientation toward social movement *mobilization* for being too narrow. He argues that more scholars should ask: what kind of movement is mobilized and why this kind? More specifically, he proposes investigating and theorizing the relationship between social structure and movement orientation (that is, the aims and contents of movements). The limits of structural explanations—and alternative explanations—should also be explored.

- Ideologies partly control what people do and say,¹⁶ but concrete social practices or discourses are needed to acquire ideologies in the first place.
- (2) Ideologies are not personal beliefs of individual people; they are those fundamental beliefs which are inter-subjectively shared. Accordingly, to refer to individuals' belief systems, I will use the term *personal mental models*, which may very well contain ideologies.
 - (3) Ideology is distinct from the concept of collective identity used by Polletta and Jasper (2001) because collective identity is the positive "feeling of connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution...It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form a part of personal identity" (285). I integrate the two concepts, taking collective identity as the identity category within ideological schemas.
 - (4) *Ideological groups*, like the anarchist movement, are collectivities of people defined primarily by their shared ideology and the practices which derive from them.¹⁷ For members of these groups, ideologies serve social functions: "they influence social interaction and coordination, group cohesion, and the organized or institutionalized activities of social members aimed towards reaching common goals" (van Dijk 1995a: 32).
 - (5) People acquire, express, and reproduce their ideologies mainly by text and talk, so the analysis of discourse is the most relevant approach for studying ideology. Ideological discourse, however, is always personally and contextually variable.

The above the framework which I employ in this thesis to systematically uncover and reconstruct the structure of anarchist ideology and illuminate the nature of its variations; it is the framework with which I address existing questions about the content or character of the contemporary anarchist movement. In so doing, I offer a new perspective onto the small-a/capital-A anarchism division.

The Anarchist Movement: Formulating its Main Currents

The most prominent scholar of the contemporary transnational anarchist movement is David Graeber, an anthropologist and self-identifying anarchist. Rooting

¹⁶ Ideology is non-deterministic: "members do not necessarily and always express or enact the beliefs of the group they identify with" (van Dijk: 2006).

¹⁷ These groups are distinct from cultural, national, or linguistic communities, which are not ideologically unified (ibid: 120).

most of his claims in his ethnographic research into the Global Justice Movement (see Graeber 2009), Graeber presents a consistent characterization of the movement across several of his essays. Graeber conceives of anarchism as "an ethics of practice—the idea of building a new society 'within the shell of the old,'" which is founded on several core principles, including: "decentralization, voluntary association, mutual aid, the network model, and above all, the rejection of any idea that the end justifies the means...." (2004). The practices of the anarchist movement, then, focus on opposing the power of compulsory or hierarchical human relations and creating "true democracy"—both in order to "widen the scope of human liberty" in the present. Accordingly, he identifies three essential traits common to all variations of anarchist ideology: anti-statism, anti-capitalism, and prefigurative politics (that is, "modes of organization that consciously resemble the world you want to create" [ibid]).

But the anarchist movement does not have total ideologically unity; Graeber identifies two main anarchist tendencies. The majority tendency is generally comprised of younger activists who are less informed by ideas from older anarchist movements than by indigenous, feminist, ecological, and cultural-critical ideas, among others:

According to Chuck Munson, who as manager of infoshop.com, has conducted the most comprehensive surveys of the North American anarchist community, roughly 90% of American anarchists do not identify with any particular sect or tendency at all. They are what I have elsewhere referred to as "small-a" anarchists, non-sectarian or even anti-sectarian, tending to operate outside of anarchist-only groups, and whose ideological practice largely consists of teaching by example. (Graeber 2010: 124)

Whatever the figures, Graeber contends that these *small-a* anarchists comprise most of the movement and are "the real locus of historical dynamism right now" (2002: 72). Due to their non-sectarian tendencies, many of these anarchists do not call themselves anarchists or are not very loud about their affinities (Graeber: 2004). As a result, their

prevailing presence within the movement may not be easily perceived. It can also be difficult to discern the small-a tendency because it has been entangled with other political traditions, such as feminism. For instance, anarchist or "true" democratic decision-making process is essentially the same as "feminist process" (Graeber: 2010). Experimentations with such process has, in fact, been a strength of the small-a/new generation, who—as Graeber puts it—are "much more interested in developing new forms of practice than arguing about the finer points of ideology" (2004).

Graeber is reluctant to label the second, minority tendency. In an early essay on the anarchist movement, however, he notes that this tendency is comprised of "what one might call capital-A anarchist[s]" (2002: 72). It is likely he is wary of the term *capital-A anarchist* because its original usage meant something like "dogmatic, authoritarian dupe."¹⁸ Despite his apparent efforts to move away from the term, Graeber's presentation of the minority tendency recalls that original usage. Comprising this tendency are "those whose political formation took place in the 60s and 70s—and who often still have no shaken the sectarian habits of the last century—or simply still operate in those terms....[They] organize mainly through highly visible Anarchist Federations like the IWA, NEFAC or IWW" (Graeber 2004).¹⁹ Participating in such organizations as these are "proponents of positions and forms of organization that have barely changed since the 20s and 30s" (Graeber 2010). Opposing this tendency to the small-a tendency, Graeber conveys that the *capital-A* variation of anarchist ideology is *sectarian* and orthodox—even dogmatic.

¹⁸ See Neal (1997).

¹⁹ International Workers' Association (IWA), Northeast Federation of Anarchist Communists (NEFAC), and Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

Graeber's treatment of the capital-A anarchist tendency is unsatisfying. He explains it in no great depth, and indeed, seems to have little interest in it in the first place (this is clear in the disproportional attention he gives to each tendency). Through his ethnographic Global Justice Movement research, he has evidently spent much more time studying the small-a tendency. This may very well be with good reason; nevertheless, to delineate two distinct ideological trends without a deep understanding of *both* seems to be problematic.

Adjusting Graeber's Interpretation

In another recent work engaging closely the content of the contemporary transnational anarchist movement, Gordon (2008) revisits and challenges Graeber's claims. Gordon approaches the anarchist movement through the concept of a *political culture*, which allows him a more nuanced perspective. Gordon defines anarchism similarly to Graeber and agrees with Graeber's basic claim that there are two main anarchist currents. He points out, however, that capital-A anarchist groups are hardly a minority tendency. He also finds it doubtful that capital-A anarchists take their anarchism as dogmatically as Graeber makes it seem, "as if it were a 'party line.'" Most important, though, is that Gordon disagrees with Graeber as to how the two groups are different. Whereas Graeber sees the main difference between the two groups in their being dogmatic or not, Gordon sees it in their political culture, "their concrete activities, methods of organizing, and political language" (ibid: 25).

Gordon's use of the *political culture* leads him to be significantly clearer than Graeber in describing the nature the capital-A trend. For capital-A anarchists, according to Gordon, organizing amongst other anarchists typically occurs in formal organizations with elected

positions, rather than as individuals or in informal groups. In decision making process, they are less committed to consensus than are small-a anarchists. Lastly, their activities focus on workplace organizing, anti-militarist actions, and publishing; small-a anarchists, on the other hand, tend more to "ecological and identity struggles, communal experiments, and non-Western spirituality." In sum, the political culture of the capital-A anarchists is very similar to the traditional political culture of the anarchist movement before World War II. In this way, the differences in political culture between capital-A and small-A anarchists amount to a generational difference between and 'Old School' and a 'New School' (Gordon 2008: 25).

Gordon quickly moves past this question of trend-distinction into further examination of the new school group. In the other section of his book relevant to this thesis, Gordon reconstructs and traces the origins of the new school, or "contemporary" anarchist ideology.²⁰ He analyzes the *political language* used by anarchist intellectuals, websites, and movement organizations and finds that there are three main "idea clusters" that define the new school ideology: (1) resistance to all forms of domination, not just the State and capital; (2) references to *prefigurative politics* (conceived in the same way as Graeber); and (3) emphasis on diversity in the anarchist project and the rejection of prognostic blueprints for a better society (ibid: 20-21). From this third cluster stems an emphasis on the present tense: "non-hierarchical, anarchic modes of interaction are seen as an ever-present potential of social interaction here and now—a 'revolution in everyday life'" (ibid: 21).

²⁰ Gordon defines ideology as "paradigms people use (often intuitively) to handle ideas that are essentially contested in political language—'master frames' that fix the meaning, interrelationship and relative importance of essentially contested concepts in a self-contained whole" (ibid: 20).

Certainly, Gordon helps clarify the issue of understanding anarchist ideological variation. He rightly assumes that the difference in political culture is logically prior to one group being orthodox and the other being heterodox. He is also able to elaborate on the distinction in way that is more nuanced and ultimately more useful than Graeber's. However, Gordon produces a new problem when he proceeds to an exclusive study of the new school, or what he calls "contemporary anarchism," as though it were the only political culture within the movement. He moves too quickly past the issue of political-cultural and ideological anarchist variation, thus neglecting, like Graeber, the ideational complexity of the anarchist movement. Furthermore, his analysis of political language and ideology is unsystematic, drawing from scattered sources contained mostly to websites, writings produced by intellectuals, and statements by movement organizations.

In conclusion, the existing scholarship on the content of the contemporary anarchist movement points to the need for further research into the diversity within anarchist ideology. Graeber and Gordon have made significant contributions to the understanding of the "newer" or "small-a" anarchist current, but they leave wanting a more holistic understanding of anarchist ideology. Gordon offers some hints for the exploration of the ideological diversity, but does not pursue them himself. I contend that the debate about the content of the contemporary anarchist movement could benefit from a systematic, micro-level examination of the movement's discourse and ideology that uses van Dijk's better-developed theory of ideology. Van Dijk's theory takes account of significant ideational areas overlooked by the existing approaches, particularly groups' social positions and understandings of self-identity. Examining these areas and others

encompassed by *ideology* can help us better understand the variations of contemporary anarchist ideology.

This thesis seeks, secondarily, to illustrate that a deeper understanding of movement content—ideology in particular—is important to the study of movement mobilization as a preliminary first step. Ideology, like other cultural factors, deserves to be studied as a distinctive aspect of social movements. This is especially the case for radical dissident movements and so-called *new social movements* of the post-Fordist era. Attempting to thoroughly understand a movement's particular ideology sheds light on the lesser-known ways that culture enables and constrains movement actors. In approaching ideology through discourse, we can begin to see: how actors incorporate certain cultural tools; how they try to shape their practice according to their beliefs; how encountering dominant cultural schema can shape ideology; and how actors' social position can influence ideology.

Case Selection

To my knowledge, there are no previous studies or histories available on Providence area anarchism after 1930. A project focusing on contemporary Providence seemed valuable for this reason alone. With regards to the subject of the anarchist movement's contemporary content, Providence was an appropriate selection because on initial glance, it seemed to host both of the anarchist variations identified by Graeber and Gordon. This is to say, there are anarchists "capital-A" anarchist groups like NEFAC and the IWW. There are also anarchists not in those groups, among whom one could expect to find some "small-a" anarchists. So, Providence would potentially allow for an in-

depth, bottom-up examination of the ideological variations—and it did, ultimately, allow for this.

Providence is also a good place to study social movement mobilization in general. The abandoned warehouses littering the city scream "post-industrialism," "post-Fordism," or macro-structural conditions that should generate a new social movement like anarchism. One would also expect that such a high unemployment rate, paired with radical segments of a liberal university would be conducive to social protest and radical dissident ideologies. The presence of a large immigrant population is also interesting as a potential factor for future analysis, particularly in view of immigrants' centrality to the revolutionary movements of late-19th, early-20th century Rhode Island.

Lastly, with respect to considerations of data quality, Providence is a small city, so a small interviewee pool could be more representative than it would be in a larger context. At the same time, Providence's size and demographic diversity allows for diversity in interviewee selection.

Data Collection and Methods

Interviews

This thesis draws heavily upon data obtained through qualitative interviews. Over the course of several months, I conducted twelve semi-structured, in-depth interviews with individuals from the Providence area. I began with two contacts I had in the Brown University Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) chapter. From there I used snowball sampling and found interviewees who were former SDS members, one of whom led me to interviewees in the Northeastern Anarchist Federation (NEFAC) and the Industrial

Workers of the World (IWW). I found other interviewees independently by talking to people at the Providence Anarchist Book Fair during AS220's Foo Fest (see Chapter 2). I also contacted individuals who were interviewed for a *Providence Phoenix* article from several years ago which dealt with anarchism in Providence. Through that effort I found several older interviewees who had been involved in the Love and Resistance Collective, active in the early 2000s.

Many of the twelve interviewees refer to themselves as anarchists but some do not. In recruiting them for interviews, I informed them that I was researching anarchist ideas and practices in Providence. I took their willingness to be interviewed as an indication that they fell under the definition of *anarchist* I have used. In analyzing each interview at a later point, I reevaluated whether or not each interviewee could still be classified in such a way. Only one interviewee fell outside of my definition, and so I have excluded it from my findings.

The core interview questions pertained to past experiences and personal influences, self-identification, the meaning of anarchism, praxis,²¹ and reflections on Providence anarchism today. The semi-structured nature of the interviews ensured that I covered the same topics with each interviewee, while also leaving room for interviewees to talk more about (and thus convey) what most prominently figures into their thoughts. I conducted these interviews at locations selected by the participants to ensure that they felt comfortable and free to honestly answer any questions I asked. Participants verbally gave their informed consent to participate in this study. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed so as to ensure maximally honest responses. Interviews lasted between forty

²¹ I will use the term *praxis* in this thesis to stand for types of activities oriented towards ideological values and goals.

and ninety minutes, with most lasting approximately one hour. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

In this paper, I perform a content and discourse analysis of transcriptions. I use content analysis to determine the prevalence of certain themes within the interviews and discourse analysis for deeper examination. As will be detailed in Chapter 3, I employ van Dijk's framework for ideological discourse analysis. Given that the interview questions do not prompt heavily persuasive talk, I focus less on discursive strategies and more on the ideological schema found in the interviewee discourses.

Other Primary Sources and Secondary Literature

Provision of relevant historical background and other contextual information requires the use of additional sources. Background information for recent Providence-area history is only accessible through primary sources. To supplement the background information acquired through the interviews, I also use articles from the *Providence Journal*, the *Providence Phoenix*, the *Brown Daily Herald*, as well as the websites of organizations like Recycle-A-Bike, Direct Action for Rights and Equality, the Industrial Workers of the World, and the Northeastern Federation of Anarchists. For older history of the anarchist movement in Providence and elsewhere, I use the secondary literature.

Limitations

This project faces a number of limitations. This study does not intend to be an exhaustive or definitive account of Providence-area anarchism. First, it examines the anarchist movement through the lens of *ideology*. I am interested in uncovering and

analyzing the system of concepts and meanings which can be accessed by analyzing *discourse* (in this study, *talk*). Consequently, with respect to its empirical object, this thesis is more concerned with ideas and language than practices/behavior. That said, this thesis *does* address practices/behavior, but only indirectly, through the lens of interviewees' discourses.

My choice to focus primarily on ideology has an additional implication. This thesis does not try to overturn the existing distinction between small-a and capital-A anarchists and replace it with something else. Instead, I argue that looking at the anarchist movement through the lens of ideology (as posited by van Dijk) allows for new ways to approach the distinction.

I have only interviewed twelve anarchist individuals in the Providence area. Although I garnered a fairly diverse group of interviewees, it is not certain that my findings from this group can be generalized to the Providence area. My methods of data collection maybe have led me to miss relevant individuals and groups whose personal discourses and mental models might have complicated my findings. Though I was able to foster trust with my interviewees, I may have missed individuals of anarchist ideology who are averse to speaking openly about it with strangers. Furthermore, I learned after completing my data collection that there may be groups of artists in Providence who are less accessible but still anarchistic in ideology. Nonetheless, I have examined a body of individual discourses that is diverse and large enough to ensure that my findings remain robust even if there are ideological variations I have missed. As it is uncertain whether or not some of my findings are generalizable to the contemporary Providence area, it is also

uncertain whether they are generalizable to similar local contexts, such as Hartford, Connecticut or other small, post-industrial New England cities.

A final limitation of this project is the set of biases I brought data collection and analysis. In analyzing data, there may be the limitation of my bias as someone sympathetic to the anarchist movement. However, I am not an activist and do not identify as an anarchist; here I differ from Graeber and Gordon, both of whom do refer to themselves anarchists and activists.

Structure of the Report

The following chapters of this research will be divided as follows. Chapter 2 will provide a history of the anarchist movement internationally, in North American, and in the Providence area. This background chapter will provide a historical context which will help to better understand the findings from the interview data. Chapter 3 will present the findings with respect to the ideological structure shared by all of the interviewees. Chapters 4 will turn to my findings with respect to the distinction between small-a and capital-A anarchism. Lastly, Chapter 5 will summarize the all of the findings and their implications.

Chapter 2: Contemporary Providence Anarchism in Historical Perspective

In this chapter, I present some historical background that is necessary for a fuller understanding of contemporary Providence-area anarchism and the small-a/capital-A discussion. I first briefly sketch a history of modern anarchism, that is, the anarchist social movements, ideologies, and intellectual trends of the mid-1800s to the present day. During this period, many industrializing, and later de-industrializing, societies of Europe, the Americas, and elsewhere around the world saw the development of dissident anarchist social movements.²² In surveying the anarchist movements of the late 1800s and early 1900s, this history will provide a better understanding of just what an anarchists are being compared to when they are called "capital-A," "old school," or "traditional" anarchists. I then present a more detailed history of American anarchism, which will provide further context for understanding the "capital-A" classification while also outlining the supposed lineage of "small-a" anarchism (namely, the Civil Rights, feminist, and anti-nuclear movements). Finally, I piece together a history of anarchism in the Providence area, an adequate account of which has yet to be written. By the end of this chapter, we should have a store of information that will contextualize both the claims I am addressing and the claims that I make.

²² While indigenous forms of anarchist social organization and ideology also resisted the oppressive force of many modernizing societies (Scott 2009; Barclay 1982; Bodley), it is the history of anarchism within the latter which is more closely related to contemporary anarchism in Providence. Furthermore, this history is referenced much more frequently in the discourses of the interviewees and the analysis thereof presented in Chapters 3 and 4.

A Brief Sketch of the Modern Anarchist Movement

Anarchism, in its manifestation as a mass movement within modern societies, emerged in Europe during the second half of the 19th century. One of the early influential figures of this transnational movement was a French socialist named Pierre Joseph Proudhon. Writing in the 1840s, Proudhon defended individual freedom but asserts that individual personalities can only find their function and fulfillment in society (Woodcock 2009: 92). He argued against representative government, government in general, the church, property (as it existed), the free market, and authority in general, on the grounds that they each produce an unnatural order which suppresses individual liberty as well as the justice or equality on which liberty depends. As an alternative, Proudhon proposed the peaceful rebuilding of society into a decentralized federation of communes and workers' cooperatives (ibid: 20).

By the late 1860s, Proudhon's ideas had found support in his native France and amongst socialist circles across Europe and the Americas, particularly in Italy, Spain, and Russia. A group inspired by his ideas, called mutualists, spearheaded a rapidly growing transnational anarchist movement via the First International, which they also helped to found (Woodcock 2009: 92). Another major anarchist figure, a Russian named Michael Bakunin, set out in the 1860s to recruit members for his International Brotherhood. He and his envoys helped to spark anarchist movements in Italy, Spain, and Argentina where Bakuninist followers came to form their own national sections of the First International. Bakunin's philosophy is known as "collectivism," which concluded that individual freedom can only be realized with the freedom of everyone. He called for the violent

overthrow of the church and State as a way to achieve a free and equal society (Marshall 2010: 292-295).

The Paris Commune, a brief socialist experiment largely inspired by Proudhon's idea of federalism, was brutally repressed in 1871. The following year the First International collapsed after a split between the libertarian and authoritarian socialists (with Bakunin and Karl Marx at the forefront) (Marshall 2010: 264). While revolutionary activity in France would be outlawed until 1881 (ibid: 437), the 1870s saw the rise of anarchism in Italy and Spain. In Italy, affluent anarchists like Carlo Cafiero and Errico Malatesta helped develop a movement that stressed direct action—strikes, demonstrations, and insurrectionary tactics (ibid: 447).²³ In Spain, anarchist ideology and practice found wide support amongst both the rural poor of Andalusia and advanced workers in Valencia, Madrid, and Catalunya. This emergent Spanish anarchism was organized and efficient (though it also valued spontaneity and initiative) and *grupos de afinidad* (affinity groups) brought together individuals with similar ideologies into organization also based on friendship (ibid: 455).

The 1880s and 1890s saw the intensification of the anarchist movement. In France, the ban on revolutionary activity was lifted and a group of notable anarchist-communists like Jean Grave, Emile Pouget,²⁴ Peter Kropotkin, and Elisée Reclus stood out as leading activist-propagandists of the movement. During this period, the more violent tactic of "propaganda by the deed" resulted in a number of international anarchist

²³ In 1876, Cafiero and Malatesta argued for propaganda by the deed and persuaded a national anarchist congress to move from Bakuninist collectivism to anarchist-communism and to endorse insurrection (Marshall 2010: 447).

²⁴ He would later become a leading exponent of French anarcho-syndicalism.

terrorist acts and assassinations.²⁵ This development was met with heavy government repression and, by the turn of the century, gave way to the rise of anarcho-syndicalism.²⁶ The French *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) led the new current, which was distinct from other trade unionism in its rejection of political parties and participation in conventional politics. Direct action was the anarcho-syndicalist strategy, the most important tact being the strike; it was perceived as serving the emancipatory goals of workers themselves, that is, the expropriation of the capitalist class and worker control of production and distribution (Marshall 2010: 443). The CGT ultimately failed to provoke a revolutionary general strike and by 1914 had become a largely reformist trade union movement, but it inspired other syndicalist movements, most notably in Italy, Spain, Cuba, Argentina, and the US (to be discussed below). By 1919, Spain's *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT) enjoyed a membership of about one million (ibid: 455).

In the decade before World War I, as Marxist parties were rapidly becoming reformist social democrats, anarchism had assumed the lead of the revolutionary Left.²⁷ But by the war years, it had peaked in most countries, in many cases at the hand of State repression (e.g. fascism in Italy, the Palmer Raids in the US, the Bolsheviks in Russia, *Semana Trágica* in Argentina). Only in Spain was the movement still growing; when the Civil War broke out in 1936, the movement would have short-lived mass revolutionary

²⁵ Among the victims were French President Sadi Carnot in 1894, Spanish Prime Minister Antonio Canovas in 1897, Empress Elizabeth of Austria in 1898, and Italian King Umberto in 1900.

²⁶ As Woodcock explains, anarcho-syndicalism was distinct from anarchist communism in that it “emphasized the revolutionary trade union both as organ of struggle (the general strike its most potent tactic) and also a foundation on which the future free society might be constructed” (2008: 20).

²⁷ Important during this period were Kropotkin's anarchist communism writings. Anarchist communism was unique in that it was rooted in the contention that mutual aid or cooperation, not competition, is the most important factor of evolution. In addition to opposing the State, it also rejected the wage system in all forms and argued for communist economic order. As his thought developed, he related revolution more and more to peaceful developments rather than moments of revolutionary upheaval (Marshall 2010: 319-21; Woodcock: 175). Among the proponents of anarchist communism was Ricardo Flores Magón, a Mexican revolutionary who proved influential on Emiliana Zapata and the Mexican revolutionary movement (Marshall 2010: 510).

transformation, which is still regarded as one of the highest points of the modern anarchist history (Marshall 2010: 468, 504).²⁸

Anarchism as a transnational movement largely disappeared until the late 1960s. The New Left of the 1960s was generally Marxist and authoritarian, but anarchist tendencies began to re-emerge. In particular, the student rebellion and general strike of May 1968 in France helped to inspire a new generation of anarchists (Marshall 2010: 506). Anarchism found support within the rising feminist, peace, and Green movements (ibid: 452). In the US, anarchist theorist Murray Bookchin pioneered the social ecology movement within anarchist and ecological thought (Marshall 2010: 602). Syndicalist unions and confederations were revived in Uruguay, France, and Spain, and elsewhere. The 1980s were another quiet decade for anarchism, but with the end of the Cold War and the discrediting of Communism, anarchism began to re-emerge at the center of the revolutionary left. In 1994, the Mexican Zapatistas—though they do not refer to themselves as anarchists—set the left-libertarian tone of the anti-globalization/global justice movement. Murray Bookchin continued to be influential in the late-90s, positing a chasm between Social Anarchism and Lifestyle Anarchism and deriding the latter. In the years after anarchists and other protestors helped shut down the 1999 WTO summit meeting in Seattle, many have argued that anarchism, or at least its "small-a" variety, is the heart of the global justice movement (Ross 2008; Graeber 2002, 2009; Day 2005).

²⁸ With the outbreak of the Civil War, the CNT declared revolutionary general strike and called for the collectivization of land and factories. Anarcho-syndicalists took over production and distribution in Barcelona, and Catalunya effectively became an independent republic. With a mix of CNT and peasant initiative (at times the former was quite coercive) an estimated three million people were living in rural collectives by 1937. The social revolution, however, would begin to slow after a few months, as the government of Catalunya brought collectives under its control. By the middle of 1937, the Spanish anarchist experiment had been defeated by a number of factors, including anarchist collaboration in government, anarchist struggle with the Communists, inadequacy of CNT-led production, and the demands of the war effort (Marshall 2010: 468).

Anarchism in America

In the United States, a more formidable wave of anarchism emerged with the arrival of new European immigrants beginning at the end of the 1870s. These new left-libertarians gave rise to the first organized anarchist movement in the US.²⁹ They stressed solidarity and community and rejected the State on the grounds that it upheld property and privilege. The most influential individual was German immigrant and former Social Democrat Johann Most, who arrived in 1882. Most advocated syndicalism, communism, and propaganda by the deed through his journal *Freiheit* and his hugely-attended speeches (Buhle 1997:105).

The ideas of Johann Most found wide support among fellow German immigrants in Chicago, a hotbed of American anarchism in the 1870s and 80s. In addition to taking over the radical network of German-language gymnasiums, singing societies, fraternal halls and free schools which had been established by earlier radicals, these immigrant anarchists also published three papers which were widely circulated. One of the two American anarchist federations at that time, the International Working People's Association (or the Black International), was also based in Chicago.³⁰ This Chicago immigrant anarchism tended to be of the anarchist-syndicalist and anarchist-communist sort, emphasizing trade unionism and situated within the more general labor movement (Buhle 1997).

²⁹ The standard history assumes that most of the immigrants came to the US as anarchists, but an alternative thesis has recently been argued by Zimmer (2010); most immigrants were not anarchist devotees upon immigrating, but were rather radicalized by American working and living conditions.

³⁰ The other was called the International Workmen's Association, or the Red International, and it was based in San Francisco.

Anarchism caught the attention of the American public with the 1886 Haymarket affair,³¹ and, with Alexander Berkman's attempted assassination of Henry Clay Fick (a Carnegie Steel factory manager) and Leon Czolgsz's assassination of President McKinley, it quickly developed an image as a terrorist movement. According to Paul Buhle, a historian of the American Left, the Haymarket events and the subsequent state repression destroyed German leadership of revolutionary labor forever (1997: 105); this was a huge blow to the anarchist movement, and the terrorist image perceived by the public further brought it to a slow.

The movement did stay alive, however, primarily amongst Jewish and Italian immigrant groups. Hugely influential were Berkman and Emma Goldman, Jewish immigrants from Russia and long-time lovers who came onto the anarchist scene in the late 1880s and would widely propagate anarchism in writings and speeches until their deportation in 1918.³² Berkman and Goldman had been deeply influenced by Johann Most, with whom they both had personal relationships for some time. Anarchist ideology among Jewish immigrants, more generally, was influenced most heavily by the ideas of William Morris and Rudolf Rocker. Morris, an Englishman, had espoused a doctrine and a personal practice of openness or pluralism, and had seen socialism less as an economic doctrine and more as a redefinition of life. In London, he influenced future US immigrants like the Rudolf Rocker, a great anarchist intellectual whose ideas would come to drive anarchism among Jewish Americans. An exponent of anarcho-syndicalism, Rocker was also self-professed "anarchist without adjectives." He wrote:

³¹ At a protest rally in Chicago's Haymarket Square, a bomb was thrown at police as they moved to disperse the crowd; a number of policemen and protestors were killed, and some sixty others wounded. Seven anarchists were accused, though there was no evidence linking them to the bombing. Five were sentenced to death, and all seven became martyrs for the labor movement (Marshall, 499).

³² Under the Anarchist Exclusion Act of 1903.

My innermost conviction was that Anarchism was not to be conceived as a definite closed system, nor as a future millennium, but only as a particular turned in the historical development towards freedom in all fields of thought and action, and that no strict and unalterable lines could, therefore, be laid down for it. (Quoted in Buhle 1997: 107)

Buhle calls this “Enlightenment philosophy applied to the proletarian era,” and “its practical implications entailed a sense of revolution being made every day, in every life, rather than being postponed for some future eventuality” (1997: 107). Through the late 1880s and 90s, the Jewish anarchists expressed this current and held great sway in the early American garment unions. But when these unions disintegrated due to factional disputes and economic recession, the anarchists decided to join the ranks of the socialists and unionists. In doing so, they would act as something of an educational force.

Following the decline of the Jewish-based anarchist movement, anarcho-syndicalism began to take hold of the labor movement, particularly amongst the Italian immigrants. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) formed in 1905 and hosted some anarchist-syndicalist ideology, though its syndicalism strayed from the principle of federation and was diluted by Marxist influences. Like the German and Jewish anarchist movements before it, the Italian and anarcho-syndicalist surge quickly came and went (Buhle 1997: 107). By World War I, the IWW had been overtaken by the reformist American Federation of Labor. By the war’s end, the anarchist movement as a whole suffered a great blow in the form of State repression, the Palmer Raids. The case of Sacco and Vanzetti brought renewed attention to the movement in the early 1920s,³³ but American anarchism was effectively dead by the Great Depression (Marshall: 501).

³³ Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were Italians and active anarchists who believed in revolutionary violence. Paul Buhle writes that their conviction and subsequent execution “would be better explained, perhaps, as the revenge taken by a conservative elite for the labor turbulence of new immigrant communities. Little persuasive evidence was offered against the two defendants, accused of a robbery and murder in Braintree, Massachusetts” (1987, 24).

Up through a revival during World War II, anarchist ideas were quietly carried on by the Christian anarchism of Ammon Hennacy, Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, and their Tolstoy-inspired Catholic Worker movement. Among their values were rural simplicity, voluntary poverty, and community; they saw revolution in the peaceful building of a new society within the shell of the old. The World War II anarchist revival was led by the anarchist-communist and pacifist Paul Goodman who called for “revitalized self-governing communities to replace the increasingly centralized and militarized American State” (Marshall: 502).³⁴ After the war, anarchists participated in the Civil Rights Movement and then the New Left radicalism of the sixties and seventies. The core of the American New Left was Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), which, in its call for participatory democracy and direct action, proved fertile ground for the development of anarchist ideas and practices. However, SDS, and the American New Left with it, disintegrated by the early seventies, and anarchism gave way to the resurgence of right-libertarianism in the seventies and eighties (ibid: 503)³⁵

In one recent account of the history of contemporary anarchism, David Graeber writes that American anarchism³⁶ has seen a reemergence in the past two decades, “flowering most spectacularly in the alter-globalization movement” after the protest at the 1999 WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle (2010: 123). Arguing the position that contemporary anarchism emerged from related developments in the student, feminist, and

³⁴ Goodman is also known for asserting that “a free society cannot be the substitution of a ‘new order’ for the old order; it is the extension of spheres of free action until they make up most of the social life” (quoted in Marshall, 598). This echoes Godwin’s gradualism, as well as German thinker Gustave Landauer and the IWW’s mantra “building the new society in the shell of the old.”

³⁵ Right-libertarian ideology shares the anarchist valorization of individual freedom but lacks the commitment to collective freedom. This difference in core values render their respective ideological structures very different.

³⁶ Again, for Graeber’s analysis, this is anarchism as “a form of practice, an ethical system that rejects state power...and relies instead on classical anarchist principles of self-organization, voluntary association, direct action, and mutual aid” (2010: 123).

anti-nuclear movements—each rather anarchist in practice but not ideology—he offers a anarchist history of the past fifty years that helps to fill a gap left by Marshall and Woodcock. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was created, in part, as an alternative to the top-down structure and charismatic leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Its organization was decentralized and its decisions were made through a consensus process.³⁷ SDS, too, emphasized consensus and appeared to be inspired by the example of SNCC. However, the groups emerging from the SDS disintegration—Maoist factions, the Yippies and the Diggers, the Weather Underground—largely abandoned the project of creating egalitarian decision-making structures, focusing mostly on the principle of direct action and, with the exception of the Maoists, retaining variations of anarchist ideology (Graeber 2010).

The feminist movement, begun mainly as a reaction to the macho style leadership and general sexism within New Left activism, revived interest in creating egalitarian decision-making structures (Graeber 2010: 128). The crisis in early feminism around the ‘tyranny of the structureless’—the tendency for elite or leadership structures to inevitably arise in egalitarian groups—resulted in a heavy debate that would fade with feminism’s desertion of egalitarian organization, but would also persist amongst and prove influential on all those continuing to work in egalitarian collectives.

The anti-nuclear movement of the late 1970s was the site in which these dilemmas of egalitarian organization sought resolution. The leading anti-nuclear movement organization, the Movement for a New Society (MNS),³⁸ proposed the rather

³⁷ In general, this practice seems to be rooted the belief that decisions should be unanimous because no one should be expected to do anything against their will (ibid:125).

³⁸ MSN was based in Philadelphia and led by gay rights activist George Lakey. He, like many other MSN members, was both an anarchist and a Quaker (ibid: 128). See Cornell (2011) for a thorough account.

familiar idea of non-violent revolution through the creation and development of ‘prefigurative’ democratic institutions that would gradually come to form a new social order.³⁹ Guided by the practical experience of its anarchist and Quaker members, the organization instituted a formal consensus process which it disseminated throughout the movement. The anti-nuclear movement was also the first in America to organize by affinity groups in the tradition of the Spanish anarchists and to hold spokes-councils of affinity groups for the planning of protest actions. The movement did have considerable success in performing direct actions, but could not sustain a broader revolutionary campaign. It dissipated by the early 1980s (Graeber 2010: 128).

The principles of consensus and direct action were carried forward by radical AIDS activists and environmentalists, and in the nineties they would find expression in a new North American anarchist federation called Love & Rage. This federation was inspired by a newspaper by the same name and, before dissolving in 1998, would reach a peak national membership of several hundred (WEB 2003). The nineties, though, as Graeber describes, were “less an era of grand mobilizations than one of molecular dissemination” (2010: 129). In the middle of the decade, autonomous chapters of the group Food Not Bombs began to form all around the country, dumpster-diving produce thrown out by supermarkets and restaurants and using it to prepare free meals distributed in public places, typically to feed the homeless. Food Not Bombs groups were and continue to be committed to egalitarian decision-making. Other explicitly and non-explicitly anarchist groups sprung up as well, all becoming “workshops for the creation of direct democracy (ibid)” These “workshops” included cooperatives, anarchist

³⁹ This, of course, was not a new idea but rather a new articulation of the anarchist idea espoused in various forms by Goodman, the Catholic Worker Movement, the IWW, and others before them.

infoshops, Anarchist Black Cross prisoner collectives, squats, pirate radio collectives, and chapters of Anti-Racist Action. All this happened under the radar of corporate media and mainstream Left journals, and so the coalescence in Seattle in 1999 appeared to come out of nowhere (ibid).

The two years following the WTO protests in Seattle saw the rapid growth of American alter-globalization networks and collectives. Facilitated by the internet, Food Not Bombs chapters spread globally; a network of Independent Media Centers developed in the US and abroad, doing wonders for radical web journalism and communication about actions and events; and throughout the US, the Continental Direct Action Network disseminated models of egalitarian decision-making, intimately tying them to the practice of direct action. Before long the government repression that followed Seattle and further intensified after September 11 drastically weakened these developments in the alter-globalization and anarchist movements. In the past few years, however, the anarchist movement has begun to pick up once again,⁴⁰ and the anarchist principles of direct democracy and direct action have come to permeate the radical Left (Graeber 2004, 2010).

Graeber's account holds that this new, small-a anarchism descended from the Civil Rights, feminist, and anti-nuclear movement is the dominant form of contemporary anarchism. He contends that this main tendency and its recent growth are not readily perceptible because the anarchist press is dominated by Primitivists, Platformists, sectarians, and hyper-individualists. His claims are debatable; as he acknowledges,

⁴⁰ According to an imprecise but nonetheless revealing publication called the *Anarchist Yellow Pages* (a 2005 international directory of anarchist organizations), the US was home to more anarchist organizations than any other country, with 360 organizations spread across 160-some cities (Williams & Lee 2008).

organizations like SDS, IWW, and NEFAC have been revived in different forms, albeit based on new principles of organization and process.

Providence-area Anarchism

The state of Rhode Island itself was settled by Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, among other religious dissidents who promoted freedom, tolerance, and other values related to those of anarchism. It was not until the early 1900s, however, that Rhode Island saw the emergence of anarchism as a developed, distinct movement and ideology.

Rhode Island was the first urban, industrialized state,⁴¹ and by the 1830s, it possessed an articulate labor reform movement (Buhle 1987: 73). The labor movement persisted and grew along with industry, and the state's booming economy around the turn of the century increased the demand for immigrant labor. Among the groups that arrived were Italians. A 1915 Rhode Island Labor Bureau study shows that the Italian-born or Italian-descended population at the time was 55,000, with 85% in Providence. They were the lowest-paid major population group in the state. In terms of labor, they were mostly unskilled, had a high illiteracy rate of about 30%, and only 20% were naturalized to vote. Between lacking political power and economic leverage of skilled labor, and being prone to seasonal and long-term unemployment, the Italian-Americans were in a vulnerable position (Buhle 1978: 127-8). This position was solidified by the decline of New England manufacturing that began in the 1910s and resulted in the driving down of wages and

⁴¹ Slater Mill in Pawtucket—the first water powered, cotton textile mill in North America—was the cradle of the American Industrial Revolution. In 1824, it saw one of the first mill strikes in the US, led almost exclusively by women workers (Buhle 1987: 73). Later in the century, the state boasted the country's largest steam-engine factory, founded and operated by George Corliss (*Rhode Island Manual*).

intensification of sweat labor. It was within this context that Rhode Island anarchism first developed.

Across the United States, Italian immigration began to surge in the 1880s. Among the Italians were anarchists, who in the late eighties and throughout the nineties, formed groups throughout the country. They were assisted by the anarchist movement in their homeland; virtually every leading anarchist in Italy—even Malatesta—came to the US to help organize groups and start newspapers (Topp 1996: 123).⁴² The leading Italian-American anarchist was Luigi Galleani, a lawyer by training who immigrated to Vermont in 1903.⁴³ Galleani founded a newspaper called the *Cronaca Sovversiva* through which he disseminated his anti-organizational anarchist views.

Rhode Island hosted its share of “Galleanistas” who opposed any form of permanent organization, defended individual violence against tyrants, and called for the general strike and insurrectionary uprisings (Buhle 1978: 125). They were contained mostly to the group of stone cutters in Westerly but also had a presence as a small propagandist circle in Providence (Interview with Buhle 2011). Galleani himself frequently visited both groups (Buhle 1978: 125).

There were also anarcho-syndicalists who claimed membership in local chapters of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Within the IWW, they staged major organizing campaigns among shoemakers, hotel workers, barbers, piano workers, and textile workers. They sought to build “one big union” among building tradesmen, stone workers, textile workers, and others. Following the example of IWW success in the 1912

⁴² Malatesta visited for a few months and edited *La Questione Sociale*, an anarchist paper in Paterson, New Jersey founded by Pietro Gori. He returned to Italy after being shot and badly wounded by a rival in Hoboken (Topp, 124).

⁴³ He remained in the US until his deportation in 1919.

Lawrence, Massachusetts textile strike, the IWW led a major strike at Esmond Hill in 1913. A large success, the strike brought in hundreds of new members to the IWW and helped inspire a wave of strikes throughout the state (though the IWW would be only partly involved). The IWW was weakened soon after, however, as it could neither bear the subsequent press attacks nor the efforts of factory management to lay off its members and intimidate other workers (Buhle 1978: 131).

The IWW's local activity had peaked, and the anarchists of both Galleanista and syndicalist variety turned their attention to protesting the war. The labor movement moved ahead without the leadership of the syndicalists, and many anarchists were eventually jailed or deported when the government seized upon their anti-war stance through the Palmer Raids (Buhle 1987: 142). The 1920s saw further weakening of the Rhode Island anarchist movement, in part because the rise of Italian fascism created a rival radical ideology with which anarchism had to contend. Anti-fascism became a cause that brought some anarchists into action, as did support for fellow anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti. Theatrical troupes toured the state raising funds and demanding justice for the two men. Many non-Italians also joined the cause, seeing their participation as resistance to a case of conspicuous discrimination (Buhle 1987: 144). With the passing of the Sacco and Vanzetti episode, Rhode Island anarchism grew less and less visible.

Whereas the IWW and the anarchist presence therein weakened largely due to repression, the decline of the Galleanists was aided by a few factors. First, they were hampered by their extreme ideological attitude of anti-organization. Consequently, they lacked the resources and continuity provided by formal movement organizations. Second, Galleani himself began to "reconcile himself to militant sectors of existing labor

organizations, even mainstream" ones. It is likely that this change helped erode the unity of his followers. Finally, on national scale, "the Galleanistas were wiped out by repression during World War I, wiped out as fully as any American radical movement has ever been wiped out." Galleani himself, notes Buhle, "was sent back to die in a Fascist prison." Most remaining Galleanistas were quiet afterward, some fearful of speaking politically. Anarchists as a group were not active after 1930, and the local movement largely disappeared with the passing of that generation. (Interview with Buhle, 2011).

While the international anarchist movement began to reemerge with the rise of the New Left in the 1960s, Rhode Island did not see much of a revival. Anarchist ideology had some influence on a minority of individuals in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at Brown University, the University of Rhode Island, and Rhode Island College. According to Buhle, however, the main ideological current in these SDS chapters was of Maoist orientation. Furthermore, these SDS chapters were late to emerge and early to decline. Whether or not anarchist principles found their way through campus feminist movements and subsequent anti-nuclear activism—the general history offered by Graeber—is uncertain, due to a lack of source material.

The early eighties, however, saw a fairly vibrant punk rock scene in Providence, which carried forward an anti-authoritarian, anti-establishment attitude and the “do it yourself” or DIY ethic (Dyal 2008). Another variety of this more sub-cultural anarchism can be seen to have emerged in AS220, a nonprofit gallery and performance space created in the mid-80s. In addition to AS220’s rejection of hierarchy and exclusivity in the art world, it has largely been organized according to anarchist egalitarian principles

(Lehnert 2005; “New Challenge” Art Manifesto). Buhle attributes this rise of anarchist subculture to Rhode Island being a peculiar case, explaining that it was

Because of RISD and because people came to town to do DIY music and art, and they found all these empty buildings...[that] they could move into...and if you talked to people and asked them about ideology, they *might* describe themselves as anarchist with a small "a" rather than anything else. (Interview: 2011)

The collapse of the East Bloc also prompted young radicals to identify more with anarchism than any other ideology. The sub-cultural trend rooted in the arts continued through the 1990s (ibid). The late 1990s saw the establishment of Fort Thunder, or Lightning Bolt, an artist commune housed in an unused warehouse in Providence’s Olneyville neighborhood (Spurgeon n.d.).

The later nineties, in the US, saw the growth of the alter-globalization movement, but the extent to which it developed in Rhode Island is uncertain. Albeit, though, the years after the Seattle WTO protests saw an accelerated “molecular dissemination” of anarchism in Providence, to borrow Graeber’s term. The first major anarchist collective in some time, Love and Resistance, formed in 2000. It was initially intended to do defense fundraising for Camilo Viveiros, a Providence housing and tenant organizer who had been arrested during protests at the 2000 Republican National Convention in Philadelphia (Anarchy in the Northeast 2001: 20).⁴⁴ Putting forth what appears to be an impressively inclusive anarchism, Love and Resistance made such statements: “As people and anarchists we all look forward and work toward an end to the tyranny of politicians, the everyday fascism of bosses, the irrational hierarchies of class, race and

⁴⁴ According to an article in the *Nation*, Camilo faced thirty years or more on charges including aggravated assault against then-Philadelphia Police Commissioner John Timoney. He and two other protestors were acquitted of all charges in 2004 (Blanding 2004) His arrest and subsequent legal battle not only inspired Love and Resistance, but also a national network devoted to supporting Camilo by collecting donations for legal expenses and petition letters and signatures (Friends of Camilo).

gender and the coercion of prisons, hell and poverty” (quoted in Lehnert 2005).⁴⁵

Suggesting that the arts-anarchism current is something of a fixture in Providence, another Olneyville-based artist collective called The Dirt Palace was founded in 2000. Originally inspired by anarchism and feminism, it is now a self-described feminist collective that also sees itself in economic terms: “As a co-operative, we support each others' creative work, the community and the environment through collective, affordable, low-impact living” (dirtpalace.org). The collective also hosts the Providence chapter of Books Through Bars, “an organization that sends books to prisoners who are denied access to reading materials” (ibid). Love and Resistance and its anarchist members also came to support/involve themselves in Books through Bars, which formed in 2003 (providencebtb.org), as well as Food Not Bombs, Recycle-a-Bike,⁴⁶ and the cycling activism of Critical Mass (Lehnert 2005). Organizing around the Camilo trial also generated the anarchist newspaper the *Nor'easter*, which had a nine-issue run in 2002 and 2003.⁴⁷

By 2005 the growth of “little anarchisms, here and there” was significant enough to attract the full attention of a *Providence Phoenix* feature article (Lehnert). The end of the Camilo trial saw the fading of Love and Resistance, and those involved—along with new anarchists joining the scene—looked for other ways to be active. One new project, a

⁴⁵ Love and Resistance described itself as “a loose league of anarchists and activists....We organize and promote events featuring music, video documentaries, and vegan dinners. We have also worked with Books Through Bars to bring Insider Art, their collection of prisoner art, out of Philly for the first time. It has been on display for the past month in three different locations; an art space (“the Arc”), Broad St, Community Studio and currently the Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE) community organizing office. More recently there have been two very successful Critical Mass rides for which we have made posters and bicycle pennants” (Anarchy in the Northeast 2001: 20).

⁴⁶ Recycle-a-Bike is a “volunteer based community bike education and maintenance organization that promotes bicycling as a safe, fun, sustainable, and empowering mode of transportation” (recycleabike.org). It was founded in 2001 and is still running, though the anarchist presence within the group has diminished.

⁴⁷ This *Nor'easter* is not to be confused with the quarterly of the Northeast Anarchist Network of the same name, begun in 2008.

small producer of hand-made bicycle frames called Circle-A-Cycles, was founded in 2005 with the intent of becoming a cooperative. Currently, it seems to have realized that goal, describing itself on its website as “a worker-owned frame building cooperative”:

We specialize in custom **steel frames**, lugged, tig welded, and fillet brazed; **frame repairs and repaints**; and in our spare time, **smashing the state**....We hate the market and all it stands for, the commodification of life and desire and values. We hate all authority and all oppression. But what Circle A Cycles really hates is what the market has done to bikes - turning them into toothless playthings of yuppies. (circleacycles.com, their emphasis)

In addition to this anarchist economic activity—today a type of anarchist activity that is uncommon—2005 also saw the first annual Anarchist Book Fair in Providence, at AS220’s 20th birthday celebration (Lehnert 2005); it has since been a regular event at AS220’s annual Foo Fest. Also, by 2005, two more traditional forms of anarchism had appeared, namely, in the revival of a Providence chapter of the IWW—with a new, modified syndicalism—and the establishment of a Providence branch of the Northeast Federation of Anarchist Communists (NEFAC). The latter claims to “identify with the communist tradition within anarchism,” and stresses the necessity of anarchist organizations in the revolutionary struggle:

We recognize that a successful revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, we believe this must be preceded by organizations able to radicalize mass movements and popular struggles, combat authoritarian and reformist tendencies, act as a forum where ideas and experiences between militants can be discussed, and provide a vehicle for the maximum political impact of anarcho-communist ideas within the working class. In NEFAC we think that this activity can be roughly divided into three different areas: study and theoretical development, anarchist agitation and propaganda, and intervention in the class struggle. (nefac.net/intro 2002)

NEFAC, still active today, is the only explicitly anarchist organization in Providence. It currently has about ten active Providence members and meets once a month (Interview with Nick 2010).⁴⁸ Both NEFAC and the IWW, however, remain a small presence in the anarchist movement. The latter has seen occasional press after IWW organizer Alexandra

⁴⁸ NEFAC has a membership of about sixty people throughout the Northeast (Interview with Nick, 2010).

Svoboda was severely injured by police at a protest action in 2007; Svoboda was subsequently accused of assaulting three police officers. A new trial was ordered in May 2010 after a judge partly overturned the jury's verdict (Mulvaney 2010).

Student anarchism was given a boost in 2006 with the founding of a new SDS, with its first conference held in Providence (Phelps 2007). A Brown University chapter and a general Providence chapter were formed and would both serve as spaces for anarchist organizing—like the original SDS, they were committed to participatory democracy within and outside of activism, though perhaps more persistently. For the first two or three years, both chapters also stressed confrontational direct action; anti-war actions have included a “die-in” at the Providence offices of Textron Inc. (a corporation contracted by the U.S military for helicopters, armored vehicles and munitions), a sit-in at the National Guard recruiting office, and Funk the War roving dance parties⁴⁹ in the streets (Providence SDS Reportback 2008).⁵⁰ After eight members tried to enter a Brown Corporation meeting in 2007—as part of a campaign to democratize the university—the University responded with forcible disciplinary action. Largely in reaction to the consequent disciplinary troubles and with the turning over of membership, Brown SDS has since toned down its actions, though it continues its campaigns for university democratization and investment transparency (Wohlmuth 2008; Interview with Amy). Providence SDS has since dissipated, leaving Brown SDS at the core of Providence student anarchism.

⁴⁹ The roving dance party is seen as a political act of temporarily "reclaiming the streets" from the war-producing US government and joyously inhabiting the free space thereby created.

⁵⁰ One SDSer was arrested at the Textron action (Arsenault 2007); eight were arrested at the National Guard action (ibid 2008).

One final important development during the past decade of Providence anarchism is the involvement of anarchists in two radical community organizing groups, Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE) and the Olneyville Neighborhood Association (ONA). Neither one is explicitly anarchist, but both have received regular support over the years from some Providence anarchists (Lehnert 2005; Personal interviews with Amy and Tony). A number of anarchists are currently involved in the work of these groups, which are also quite anarchist in their organizational processes. DARE, on its part, espouses a general oppression and exploitation, specifically to: racism and white supremacy; sexism, patriarchy and heterosexism; capitalism; and imperialism. (DARE Principles of Unity 2009). The overlap with anarchism in principles is apparent.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided historical background that contextualizes the small-a/capital-A anarchist distinction. The capital-A category refers to the anarchist movement before the 1940s. The small-a category refers to the history of new social movements, particularly in North America. From a cursory history of recent Providence anarchism like the one just presented, it seems that the small-a/capital-A distinction may be accurate in capturing the variations within the movement. There is the "capital-A" anarchist-communism of NEFAC and the anarchist-syndicalism within the IWW, and there is some group of non-affiliated anarchists and non-self-identifying anarchists.

Much remains to be illuminated through a deeper analysis of the ideas that configure contemporary anarchism in Providence. The above history has presented a cursory, scattered picture of anarchist elements found in organizational statements: SDS's

participatory democracy; Circle-A-Cycle's anti-state, anti-market, anti-authority and anti-oppression; NEFAC's revolution by class struggle and its political anarchism and economic communism; DARE's anti-oppression of all sorts. But looking at organizations and their statements alone does not enrich the discussion—this is the level from which Gordon develops his account of contemporary anarchism. In order to develop a more profound and nuanced understanding of anarchism in Providence today, and to thereby contribute to the small-a/capital-A discussion, it is necessary to examine more systematically the mental schema of individuals that can be classified as anarchists and their group ideology. In the following chapters, I descend my analysis to the level of individuals and work upward.

Chapter 3: The Ideology Shared by Twelve Providence-area Anarchists

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, anarchism—both as a movement and ideology—has historically been characterized by a great deal of diversity. This is no less true today amongst Providence-area anarchists. But before outlining this diversity and examining the validity of the small-a/capital-A distinction in existing scholarship, it will be helpful to understand the underlying commonalities—those shared group beliefs and features that justify the naming of *anarchism* as a singular classification.

According to Graeber, those core beliefs and features are a high valuation of *freedom*, an opposition to oppressive human relations, and a goal and practice of creating true, participatory democracy. He claims that there are three essential traits common to all variations of anarchist ideology: *anti-statism*, *anti-capitalism*, and *pre-figurative politics* (that is, "modes of organization that consciously resemble the world you want to create.") Gordon, straying only slightly from Graeber, suggests that the last—pre-figurative politics—is a trait of the small-a anarchist current and not the capital-A current.

By examining the discourses of twelve individuals in the Providence area who can be classified as anarchists, this chapter maps and defines their inter-subjectively shared ideology. The ideology which I identify may or may not be representative of the ideology of the more general anarchist movement in the Providence area; it is an illustration of what that more general ideology might look like. My findings largely uphold Graeber's and Gordon's claims about the shared aspects of the contemporary anarchist movement.

My analysis adds to an understanding of those aspects through an elucidation of the meanings and interconnectivity of the shared ideological components. This exercise attests to the depth of commonality between any ideological sub-currents. In the Providence context, such commonality is an important fact of the anarchist movement obscured by Graeber's and Gordon's strong emphasis on the small-a current and cursory treatment of the shared ideology.

Analytical Framework and Overview

Teun van Dijk's research on ideology and discourse (1995a, 1995b, 2006) has shown that ideologies are expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication, that is, in various forms of talk and text. According to van Dijk's theories, ideologies are systems at the basis of socio-political cognitions shared by social groups. They are constructed from such group-defining categories as identity and membership, activities, goals, norms and values, social position, and resources (van Dijk 1995b, 138-9). These categories mark in-group/out-group differentiation and polarization and they are often expressed in discourse. In this way, discursive descriptions of group identity and membership, activities, goals, norms and values, social position, and resources betray underlying ideology structures. Such descriptions differentiate between in- and out-group, generally presenting the in-group (Us) positively and the out-group (Them) negatively (ibid, 147-149). The aspects of ideologies that are not expressed explicitly in discourse can be uncovered by examining discourse structures (such as figurative language, emphasis/omission, and lexical selection).

It is this framework that I use to examine the anarchist discourse and ideology in the Providence area today. The data that I have collected for analysis comes from twelve semi-structured interviews.⁵¹ Drawing from van Dijk's categories of ideology, I perform a content and discourse analysis of each interview transcription. Based on this analysis, I find recurring themes and meanings in the anarchist discourse that suggest a structure of a shared ideology. The main components of this common structure are: the values *individual autonomy*, *collective freedom*, and *participatory democracy*; the goals *empowerment* and *large-scale social structural change*; and the activity *issue-based activism and organizing*. These general findings align with and supplement Graeber's claims about the shared anarchist ideology. The more specific findings related to *empowerment* and *issue-based activism and organizing* stress, however, that all potential ideological variations are concerned with expanding freedom and ending oppressive human relations in the present-tense. This challenges one of Gordon's points: he suggests that such an orientation toward the "here-and-now" is more characteristic of small-a anarchists than capital-A anarchists.

In examining the complex system of symbols and meanings in their discourse, this chapter will also highlight three tensions which underlie the shared ideology, namely, the tensions between (1) the individual and collective, (2) meeting immediate needs and fostering autonomy/empowerment, and (3) remedying structurally-caused issues and taking a slow approach to structural change. While I will not examine these tensions in

⁵¹ Attempting to capture the diversity of anarchist ideology, I selected two current members of the Brown University chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), four recent college graduates who were previously involved with SDS, four men involved with both the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the Northeastern Federation of Anarchist Communists (NEFAC), a woman formerly involved with the now extinct Love and Resistance Collective. Not all of these individuals call themselves anarchists; some do, some do if pressed, and some resist the designation entirely. A discussion of these varying attitudes follows in Chapter 4.

great depth, they are important to note because they illustrate significant complexities which can be revealed when social movement content is closely scrutinized.

The remainder of this chapter comprises three sections: content analysis of interviews identifying possible components of shared ideology; discourse analysis of interviews clarifying the meanings of and relationships between the components of the shared ideology; and lastly, a recapitulation of the findings.

Content Analysis: Themes of Commonality

I first studied the data by performing content analysis on each interview transcription. The purpose of such analysis was to quantify the degree of consensus around possible core components of Providence anarchist ideology. Building from van Dijk's categories for ideological discourse analysis,⁵² Graeber's and Gordon's writings on contemporary anarchism, and themes emerging from the interviews, I arrived at the following seven categories: anti-capitalism; anti-State; individual autonomy/anti-authoritarianism; equality; participatory democracy; pluralism; issue-based activism and organizing. Table 1, below, summarizes the results. It is organized by interview number and theme; X's indicate that the theme was expressed in the interview.

⁵² Van Dijk's categories are: group identity, activities, goals, norms and values, position and relations, and access to social and economic resources (1995b: 148-150).

Table 1: Some basic components of contemporary anarchist ideology as manifested in Providence

Interview No.	Anti-capitalism	Anti-Statism	Individual autonomy/anti-authoritarian ⁵³	Equality	Participatory democracy ⁵⁴	Pluralism	Issue-based organizing and activism ⁵⁵
1	X	-	X	X	X	X	X
2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
3	X	X	X	X	-	X	X
4	X	-	X	X	X	X	X
5	X	X	X	-	X	X	X
6	X	X	X	-	X	X	X
7	X	-	X	X	-	X	X
8	X	-	X	X	X	X	X
9	-	X	X	-	-	X	X
10	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
11	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
12	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total⁵⁶	11	8	12	9	9	12	12

The results of the content analysis presented above provide some initial information about the structure of the ideology shared by the interviewee group. Four themes occur in at least eleven of the twelve interviews, including: opposition to capitalism; individual autonomy and opposition to authoritarian social relations, or that which involves hierarchy, domination, and/or oppression; issue-based organizing and activism in university, workplace, or community; pluralism or tolerance with respect to others and their beliefs. Surprisingly, rejection of the state was not mentioned in four interviews, and participatory or direct democracy was not discussed in three. These omissions of opposition to state and valuing of participatory democracy are not the

⁵³ In Interview 4, this is expressed as "resisting oppression" (p. 4); in Interview 6 as "rejection of domination" (p. 1) and "empowerment" (p. 3); and in Interviews 7 and 8 as individuals' control of their own lives (Interview 7, p. 3; Interview 8, p. 4).

⁵⁴ In Interview 11, this is expressed as "actual democracy" which is only experienced by "working class people" in labor unions (p. 1). In Interviews 8, 13, and 14, it is expressed as "direct democracy".

⁵⁵ Mentions of participation in and/or support for such activity are included.

⁵⁶ Three themes not appearing in this table occurred in a significant number of interviews: community (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8); solidarity (10, 11, 13, 14); personal change (2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14).

results of inconsistent interview structures. All interviewees were asked about the meaning that anarchism had to them, and none were asked specifically about their attitudes toward the state or participatory democracy unless either theme had been mentioned voluntarily. Rather, the omission of the anti-state theme seems to reflect an ambivalence on the matter or a relatively a lower prioritization of anti-Statism, while the omission of participatory democracy (in favor of the theme “non-hierarchical organizing space”⁵⁷) seems to reflect a high prioritization of anarchist egalitarian process *within* activist circles.

The omissions of the participatory democracy and anti-state themes in some discourses highlight a shortcoming of the content analysis and a need for deeper examination; the themes are oversimplifications that fail to capture the complexity of the shared meanings they represent as well as the ways in which they emerge out of discourses. These themes need to be relocated within the discourses of the individual subjects, where they can then be unpacked in order to discover their significance and to determine how they interrelate with other elements of the shared ideological system.

Discourse Analysis: Structure of the Ideology

In the preceding section, I presented the results of a content analysis that identified prominent themes of commonality arising from the interview discourse as well as their respective degrees of prevalence. In this section, I organize some those themes according to van Dijk’s categories of ideology structure and analyze their expression in

⁵⁷ Interviews 3 and 7.

the descriptions and narratives that comprise the interviewee discourses. In so doing, I hope to elucidate the system of interrelated meanings shared by the anarchist group.

Throughout the interviewee discourses there is an abundance of explicit thematic description or narrative, so it will also be less important to watch for more subtle discourse structures that would disclose elements of ideology. Furthermore, since this is not propaganda talk or text, I would not expect to see the rhetorical devices that might be found in more intentionally persuasive talk or text.

Norms and Values

In ideological discourse, it is essential to explore meanings that involve norms and values, meanings or mental representations “about what We find good and bad, right or wrong, and what Our actions and goals try to respect or achieve” (van Dijk, 1995b: 138). Norms refer to behavior and define what is allowed or not in what the in-group does, what its members should or should not do (van Dijk 2001: 43, 73). Values generally refer to the fundamental aims to be striven for by individuals and groups (ibid: 15). Together, norms and values function as the building blocks for group ideologies; they play a significant role in shaping group goals, activities, position and relations, and identity. The principal interrelated norm/value themes that pervade the anarchist discourses are *individual autonomy*, *collective freedom*, and *participatory democracy*.

Anti-Authoritarianism and Individual Autonomy

The history of anarchism presented in Chapter 2 and the Graeber-Gordon discussion would have us expect individual freedom to be one of the center-most

components of the anarchist ideology structure. This expectation is supported by the interview data; individual freedom—conceived by most of the group as autonomy—appears to be a major source from which other shared values and norms originate.

The values *individual autonomy* and *anti-authoritarianism* are complementary. All of the interviewees talk in various ways about anti-authoritarianism. This talk generally takes the form of expressed opposition to domination and oppression. Cory, a former member of SDS, stresses the importance of “liberating ourselves from all sorts of oppressions—gender and so forth, class oppression.”⁵⁸ Tony, a current member of SDS, stresses “the rejection of domination in every instance.”⁵⁹ And Sara, a Providence resident who has been involved with Food Not Bombs and a radical circus troupe, adds “the rejection of authority and domination in all its forms, even within ourselves and our communities.”⁶⁰ Oppression and domination are qualities that characterize social relations that are *authoritarian* or, in the language of other interviewees, *hierarchical*. Thus, *rejection of the state, gender inequality, racial inequality, class inequality* appear in numerous interviews. These rejections are motivated by an opposition to the authoritarian nature of the state, inequality of class, race, gender, etc.—which is to say, an opposition to the oppression and domination that these social phenomena produce. These negative-values, the opposition to authority/hierarchy and oppression/domination, have long been a defining feature of anarchist ideology.⁶¹

It is apparent that there is complementary value at the heart of *anti-authoritarianism* and the opposition to oppression/domination. This value is a certain

⁵⁸ Interview 3, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Interview 6, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Interview 10, p. 6.

⁶¹ Recall William Godwin’s exposition of anarchist doctrine in the last 1700s (see Chapter 2).

notion of *freedom*, and it can help to further explain the meaning of *anti-authoritarianism* as well as the logic behind most of components of an anarchist ideology. While freedom is not expressly discussed in all of the interviews, we can nonetheless gather its meaning and see how it figures into each individual's ideology. In one instance, a former SDS member named Ben asserts that, with respect to the question of "...who should have control over what people do, that individuals themselves ought have that."⁶² In this quotation, the normative "ought" carries with it a positive valuation of the state of having control over one's life—this can be called *autonomy*—and a negative valuation of the state of lacking such control. Control over one's life appears to mean control over those things which can be controlled, namely, those circumstances which are believed to come about by human volition. Domination and oppression can thus be understood as phenomena involving the limitation or absence of control/autonomy and for that reason they are seen to be objectionable. As another interviewee points out, a key aspect of autonomy is "taking responsibility"; having control over one's life means taking responsibility for it.⁶³ The assumptions entailed in valuing autonomy are fairly clear: individuals are capable of taking responsibility for control of their lives, and they want to.

As with the value of anti-authoritarianism, individual autonomy for these interviewees appears to have a rather straightforward meaning. This meaning, however, cannot be fully understood independently of two other concepts that appear across the individual discourses: the collective and collective freedom.

⁶² Interview 7, p. 3.

⁶³ Interview 11, p. 10.

The Collective, and Equality as Collective Freedom

Nick, a member of NEFAC and the IWW,⁶⁴ says of anarchism, “It’s for freedom...It’s about being able to manage your own life...do[ing] what you wanna do, but in a way that’s still, like, respectful to the community—that you have a responsibility to everyone around you.”⁶⁵ Statements like this reveal that the value of individual autonomy is not alone at the core of the anarchist ideology. This is to be expected; what has historically distinguished anarchist ideology from other socialist ideologies and right-libertarianism is the simultaneous valuing of individual autonomy and acceptance of social, or collective life.

What does this individual-social dynamic look like theoretically for Providence anarchists? To begin, the notion of "community" must be clarified, particularly given that the interviewees use it in at two major senses. For instance, Nick, in the quotation above, equates community with "everyone around you." Here, community signifies a general collectivity—in the same sense as "society", which also appears in a few of the interviews. This collective is seen as a group of individuals equal in their claims to autonomy and respect. This "equality" is an assumption and appears in certain expressions of interviewees such as, "I'm going to listen to you and approach you as an equal."⁶⁶ This assumption of fundamental equality between individuals is an integral feature of the anarchist ideology.

There is, however, a second meaning of "equality" that appears more frequently and visibly in the interviews: equality as the state in which individuals/groups have the

⁶⁴ The Northeastern Federation of Anarchist Communists and the Industrial Workers of the World, respectively (see Chapter 2).

⁶⁵ Interview 2, pp. 4-5.

⁶⁶ Interview 3, p. 5. Here Cory describes something he finds really important—what he sees to be the anarchistic way of relating to others.

same degree of autonomy as other individuals/groups.⁶⁷ When the interviewees present this type of equality as something desirable—as they do in criticizing various social inequalities—they suggest that they desire a condition in which every individual is autonomous. This equality can therefore be called "collective freedom".⁶⁸ Whereas equality in the first sense is an assumption, equality as collective freedom is a *value*. In addition to its expression in terms of "equality", this value is also expressed in talk about "organizing your neighbors and yourself and together [causing] that emancipatory life,"⁶⁹ as well as "fighting individual oppressions" in activist organizing spaces with the aim of "collective liberation."⁷⁰ Three interviewees with experience in SDS give such attention to fostering collective freedom in activism and organizing; for them, much of the importance of SDS is that it is a space where collective freedom can be approximated.⁷¹ Beyond these explicit mentions, the value of collective freedom appears to be shared given the general commitment of the interviewees to egalitarian processes in activist organizing; as will be discussed in the next section, such processes are intended to prevent oppression and protect the autonomy of each individual in a collective.

The clearest evidence for collective freedom as a shared value comes from the interviewees talk about "solidarity" as well as "community" in a second sense (the first being "collectivity"). The value "solidarity" appears in four interviews—three of which are with labor union members—and is clarified by Luke, an IWW and NEFAC member, as he discusses his labor- and community-solidarity work:

⁶⁷ Gender *inequality*, for example, would then be the state in which men have more autonomy than women.

⁶⁸ Terming it "collective autonomy" would imply the ability of one collective to manage itself vis-à-vis other collectives.

⁶⁹ Interview 11, p. 11. Similarly expressed in Interview 14, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Interview 3, p. 3.

⁷¹ Interviews 1, 3, 4.

I see myself as a working person who is in struggle to, you know, make a better life for myself, but, you know—when you become conscious of your position and your class in society, you realize that you're connected with everyone else....You know, like, realizing that my lot in life is very similar to many other people who are struggling for their rights and their liberation. And, I'm gonna butcher the quote, but to paraphrase—I think it was Freire—you know, one does not liberate oneself, neither does one liberate the other. But we liberate each other, you know, together.⁷²

Solidarity is understood as a feeling of commonality with and support for others in their striving for autonomy. It stems from a recognition that one's experience of oppression is in fact a shared experience, and that this oppression can only be overcome with the help of others who also experience it. Luke is echoed by Sara—member of a travelling circus, not union—for whom solidarity means "seeing all struggles as inherently being linked with our own struggles" and thus, "not limiting yourself to only advocating for or fighting for things that directly affect you and your circumstances."⁷³ Solidarity implies a positive valuation on the autonomy of others, and so, it expresses the value "collective freedom."⁷⁴ In this way, solidarity is closely related to the idea of community in its second sense: a group in which individuals are respectful and supportive of each others' striving for autonomy. This notion of community appears in six interviews, mostly amongst non-union members. It is compatible with solidarity in that one could say community is a group in which individuals all feel mutual solidarity.

Having clarified the relationship between solidarity, community, and collective freedom, it is now possible to better understand obscure phrases such as: "building community", i.e., fostering an environment of mutual support within a group; "empowering communities", i.e., developing a group's capacity to provide for its needs;

⁷² Interview 14, p. 2.

⁷³ Interview 10, pp. 6,7.

⁷⁴ Solidarity also implies a general interest in the well-being of others—insofar as well-being and autonomy are distinct concepts (it seems they do overlap). This is apparent in Sara's discussion of the importance of "self-care" which sometimes gets neglected by anarchists: "Having space to talk and taking care of each other. And, like, you know, that's what ultimately sets us apart from the rest of society—is, like, having each others' backs and not just, like, closing the door on each other" (Interview 10, p. 12).

or “We [anarchists] valorize community”, i.e., anarchists value a social environment in which individuals' support each other in a collective effort to make individual autonomy universal.⁷⁵ What has not yet been clarified are the root reasons given by the interviewees for their willingness to accept life among others and, furthermore, their willingness to care about the liberation of others. The response of one interviewee, Jill, to a question about her vision for social change illustrates the internal tension between—as Emma Goldman once put it—“the individual and social instincts, the individual and society” (1917):

I go back and forth. Like, part of me is just, like, 'Man, I would just love to drop out and live a really nice, simple life by myself and fake my own death and live, like, on a nice little island somewhere, and everything, and not worry about this stuff.' And then part of me is like "No, I'm gonna, like, be holding the slogan...." So, it's—and I know I would get bored with that life. Like, I just know personally, if I'm not feeling like I'm contributing to something of a greater good beyond myself and beyond my own personal agenda, then, like, I'm—I don't feel like I'm a human being in [this] world.⁷⁶

Jill demonstrates here that not all anarchists gladly welcome the demands of social life, particularly when social life means "holding the slogan" in a struggle for social- or "community-change". She does not suggest that social life is *necessary*, but rather that individual life would be boring, and social life without attention to the "good" of others would cause in her an unwanted sense of alienation. Accordingly, she continues to concern herself with what she perceives to be the "greater good". But the tension between the individual and the social is not resolved; Jill continues to feel the simultaneous pull of both forces. No other interviewees express the tension as explicitly as Jill, nor is there any standard articulation of the pull of the social. Additional mention of rationales for concerning oneself with a greater good—for most of the interviewees, collective freedom—do occur in a few other interviews, but no consensus is apparent. Some of the

⁷⁵ Interview 1.

⁷⁶ Interview 8, p. 6.

given rationales include: "you have a responsibility to everyone around you"⁷⁷ or some self-evident "human obligation"⁷⁸ to others; compassion;⁷⁹ and following Kropotkin, an appeal to nature and the necessity of anarchism—"the *most social ideology*"—for human society to evolve.⁸⁰ Yet, while interviewees' motivations for valuing collective freedom may vary, their discourses show that they all attempt to reconcile their individual desires for autonomy with their desires to respect the autonomy of others.

Such an attempt at reconciling the individual and the collective—namely, the values individual autonomy and collective freedom—has long been a defining feature of anarchist ideology. This feature can be traced back at least as far as classical thought of Bakunin, whose doctrine of collectivism was rooted in the idea that individual freedom can only be realized with the freedom of everyone. The values and their meanings may be largely unchanged, but what appears to be new is the language of "community" and its (at least) double sense.⁸¹

This section has attempted to elucidate the shared value *collective freedom* and trace its intimate connection to *individual autonomy*. In examining this connection, it becomes clear that other mediating values and norms arise when individuals who value autonomy also accept collective life and aim for collective freedom. The next section turns to one such value and its related norms.

⁷⁷ Interview 2.

⁷⁸ Interview 14, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Interview 14.

⁸⁰ Interview 13, p. 13.

⁸¹ Two interviewees also ascribe a sense of "belonging" to the term.

Participatory Democracy: Reconciling Individual and Collective Freedom

From the concurrent positive valuation of autonomy and collective liberation stems the value of participatory democracy. The value of participatory democracy is mentioned explicitly in nine of the twelve interviews and can be gleaned from the remaining three. It serves to answer the question of how individual autonomy and collective freedom can be reconciled in social organization. As current SDS member Emily explains, this a question that liberal or “false democracy” fails to answer:

I’m also particularly frustrated with liberal democracies because we give away all of our own autonomy and capacity to act to these larger actors, these, like, these larger-than-life pseudo-celebrity politicians that are gonna take care of everything. And so [we] forget that we’re responsible for taking care of our own communities, and feel disempowered to do so. Not only do we give away that sense of duty, but we give away our belief in our capacity to do anything. And that’s fucked up! And disempowering....The issue with our democracy is that it isn’t democratic enough.⁸²

The flaw of liberal democracy is not that it favors the individual or the collective, one over the other, but that it fails to respect both; it necessitates the loss of a responsibility “for taking care of our own communities” and of autonomy or “capacity to act”. In another interview, the loss of autonomy is stressed: “decisions shouldn’t be made by people who (a) are completely not affected by an issue and [(b)] who don’t know anything about the lives of the people that they’re making decisions for.”⁸³ In a similar vein, Nick of NEFAC and the IWW says, “having to only vote once a year, or once or twice a year, and that’s like the only say you get?”⁸⁴ and lastly, Jill, a once-member of the old Love and Resistance Collective:

Things happen in the world and you’re just like, “These aren’t my decisions; this has nothing to do with any way that I want to live my life; I didn’t vote for these people, I didn’t vote for,” and it just feels like this endless churn of just, like, crap that you’re subjected to.⁸⁵

⁸² Interview 1, p. 2.

⁸³ Interview 4, p. 3.

⁸⁴ Interview 2, p. 17.

⁸⁵ Interview 8, p. 4.

The problem with existing political organization is that individuals have minimal control over the collective decisions that affect them; these decisions are made by removed others (this is objectionable in itself), and these removed others are not fit to make them (this too is objectionable).

For these individuals, matters of democracy extend beyond existing political institutions. This is evident in the work of SDS members in their “university democratization” campaign, which is motivated by the belief that—with regards to matters such financial aid, university investments, and employee layoffs—“the people who are being affected—either within the university or outside of it—are not the people who have the power.”⁸⁶ Whatever the social organization, the method of decision-making matters. Social arrangements that deprive people of capacity to “have a say”—that deprive people of autonomy—in collective decisions are objectionable: “So, even like, say a factory worker really has no say over, like, what it is their factory is making; I don’t think that makes a lot of sense.”⁸⁷ Thus, a fundamental lack of democracy—and so, individual autonomy and collective freedom—in economic organization also motivates, for some of the interviewees, an opposition to capitalism that permeates the discourses.⁸⁸ In order to clarify what it would mean to preserve autonomy in community and collective decision-making, the remainder of this section examines the alternative ideal of *participatory democracy* that runs through the individual discourses as a shared value.

⁸⁶ Interview 6, p. 4.

⁸⁷ Interview 5, p. 5.

⁸⁸ Interviewees express an array of additional motivations for an opposition to capitalism, including: it is inhumane; it is atomizing; it causes mass poverty and suffering; and it causes ecological destruction. None of these are voiced as often as the argument from democracy.

Following her critique of liberal-democracy, Emily motions to participatory democracy as a model for collective decision-making that would preserve autonomy and promote collective freedom:

But the point is that, like, large representative government that can rule an entire country screws people over. And so the whole point is to move to more localized communities where there is participatory democracy, where everyone or almost everyone is participating and all opinions are voiced and taken into account, and decision-making is more based on consensus than majority screwing over minority.⁸⁹

Participatory democracy, also referred to as direct democracy by three interviewees,⁹⁰ is understood as localized, small-scale democracy that can ensure people have the ability to participate (“to voice their opinions”) and have their interests respected (“taken into account”) in decision-making processes. It allows those who are affected by a decision to have control over that decision;⁹¹ again, this is seen to be missing in most social organization, where political representatives, owners and managers, corporate executives and directors, school administrators, and even teachers⁹² monopolize control over decision-making. But in diffusing meaningful control over decision-making—participatory democracy—“people would be able to participate as they felt they want.”⁹³ Consequently, one’s autonomy can be preserved in that “...you’re making your own decisions and obviously you know better than anybody else what’s best for you.”⁹⁴

The “making of one’s own decisions” in participatory democracy is typically enabled by the norm and practice of *consensus*. Consensus relates to the actual structuring of decision-making. It is only mentioned explicitly in three interviews, but it is the preferred collective decision-making process of many of the groups with which

⁸⁹ Interview 1, p. 3.

⁹⁰ Interviews 8, 13, 14. Interview 11 contains reference to “actual democracy”.

⁹¹ Interview 5, p. 4; Interview 6, p. 4. Here, we can see autonomy mattering at super-individual level, that is, the autonomy of sub-collective groups becomes valued in collective organization.

⁹² Interview 7, p. 3.

⁹³ Interview 2, p. 17.

⁹⁴ Interview 5, p. 5.

interviewees are involved.⁹⁵ if everyone must approve of a given decision for it to go forward, then everyone has a degree of control over that decision. It is in this sense that one, and all, are able “to make their own decisions” and thereby preserve individual autonomy, while also preserving collective freedom, the autonomy of every individual in the given collective.

In summary, the individual discourses of the twelve interviewed individuals reveals that participatory democracy is generally understood as the ideal of social organization that is compatible with the concurrent values of individual autonomy and collective freedom.⁹⁶ It is participatory democracy as an ideal that serves as a standard against which forms of social organization are judged; this ideal thus drives the interviewees' oppositions to the State, liberal-democracy, and capitalism. Participatory democracy, however, is not an end in itself. It derives from a theoretical and practical attempt to reconcile the individual and the collective. But just as this tension and reconciliation are not new to anarchist ideology, neither is participatory democracy. Various iterations of direct and participatory democracy can also be traced at least as far back as the writings of William Godwin. In American anarchist history in particular, the intentional effort to create participatory democracy in activist organizations was made amongst New Left libertarians, such as SDS, and likely had previous exponents.

⁹⁵ Further participatory observation would likely shed more light on consensus process. Similarly, the principle of direct action is largely missing in the discourses but would likely be apparent in participant observation.

⁹⁶ Two interviews with former SDS members make no mention of democracy, but instead invoke “non-hierarchical organization” as a value. Through the descriptions of non-hierarchical organization in their activism, however, it is easy to see that participatory democracy as a value guides such practice.

Having established and clarified the principal shared values of the interviewees—individual autonomy, collective freedom, and participatory democracy—I will now turn to the shared goals and activities which extend from those values.

Goals and Activities

The goals and activities which derive from the shared values and norms are: the short-term, small-scale goal of *empowerment*; the long-term, large-scale goal of *social structural change*; and, in accord with these two goals, the prevailing practice of *issue-based activism and organizing*.

Short-term, Small Scale: Empowerment and Issue-Based Activism/Organizing

The word *empowerment* appears in five of the interviews.⁹⁷ Though this term is only used by a minority of interviewees, it is used to express the universally shared, general goal of increasing individual autonomy and collective freedom.⁹⁸ Ben, a former SDS member, distinguishes between two fields of empowerment, the clarification of which will help to explain the translation of individual autonomy and collective freedom (values) into forms of activity, or anarchist praxis. The first field is made clear in Ben's description of the ONA campaign for the right of undocumented persons to obtain drivers' licenses: he says that the goal of the campaign is "a small little reformist whatever. It'll make lives better, and it'll make, like—increase the capacity of people to do the things they need to do for themselves. And so I guess small things like that are the

⁹⁷ Interviews 1, 2, 6, 7, 11.

⁹⁸ In a few of interviews, *empowerment* is also used to refer to the goal of increasing a localized community's autonomy vis-à-vis other communities or a broader collective.

work.”⁹⁹ The first field of empowerment, then, is oriented toward increasing individual autonomy by ensuring that people have what they need in order to do such basic things as find employment or get to work. In this way, individual autonomy is inseparable from more immediate needs and entails the capacity to meet those needs. This relationship between individual autonomy and immediate needs is also apparent in an interview with Steve of the IWW and NEFAC: “We need to be able to survive *now*. You know, you're not gonna have a revolution of starving, you know, like, starving people who can't afford clothes.”¹⁰⁰ The meeting of immediate needs appears to be valuable end itself, but it is also seen as vital to a more significant increase in individual autonomy and collective freedom (the achievement of which comes about by “revolution”, according to Steve and some other interviewees).

As the ONA campaign example (above) suggests, one main type of activity that aims at the goal of empowerment is activism and collective organizing around small, particular issues; this can be called *issue-based activism and organizing*.¹⁰¹ This type of activity includes varied activities such as: trying to democratize university governance, supporting workers in labor disputes, helping immigrant populations gain new legal rights, and organizing in labor unions. Every interviewee except one¹⁰² either participates in such activity, occasionally supports such activity by volunteering or donating money, or expresses approval of such activity in her/his discourse. One of the main aims of issue-based activism and organizing is the meeting of immediate needs and increasing

⁹⁹ Interview 7, p. 9.

¹⁰⁰ Interview 13, p. 6.

¹⁰¹ The distinction is not made by most of the individuals and the two seem to be used interchangeably, except by Nick in Interview 2 (p. 7).

¹⁰² Interview 11, with Eric, who is in an independent labor union.

individual autonomy in that way. But issue-based activism and organizing also aims at increasing autonomy in a second way.

To restate, the first field of empowerment involves increasing individual autonomy by increasing capacity to meet immediate, every-day needs. The second field of empowerment involves increasing autonomy by equalizing power relations through activist/organizing activities. Ben proceeds to explain that “the other side of the work is taking people who are doing the work [the activism] and giving them the capacity to do more work like that,” or in other words, “developing people so they can change their own lives.”¹⁰³ This field of empowerment is understood as the fostering of the real capacity of individuals to control their lives in a broader, more total way. A major location for the development of this capacity/autonomy is the social space of activism and collective organizing (including SDS student activism/organizing, ONA and DARE community activism/organizing, and labor organizing). As Tony of SDS claims, “activism should be empowering. That’s what I think the point of it is. I think it’s about adjusting relationships of power and making people feel like they are empowered.”¹⁰⁴ Not only is real capacity an aim of activism and organizing, but so too is a *feeling* of such capacity.

Some interviewees focus on the potential for empowerment *within* activist groups and collective organizing, while others emphasize the relations between activists/organizers and non-activists/organizers. In both cases, activism and organizing become empowering when they—as Tony claims above—involve “adjusting relationships of power”. Ben, in talking about this second field of empowerment, notes that intentionally non-hierarchical or anarchist relations between individuals *within*

¹⁰³ Interview 7, p. 9.

¹⁰⁴ Interview 6, p. 4.

activist groups are more empowering than hierarchical ones. This is because—as the earlier discussion of participatory democracy explains—non-hierarchical social organization allows for greater individual autonomy and collective freedom. In addition to intra-activist-collective empowerment, the extra-collective relations between activists/organizers and non-activists/organizers are also seen by some as potentially empowering. This perspective is voiced in talk about *solidarity*. Luke, of the IWW and NEFAC, expresses the way in which "solidarity work" around specific issues attempts to foster autonomy through a non-hierarchical, egalitarian approach:

Basically what that [Rhode Island Solidarity and Equality]¹⁰⁵ entails is being a network of working people that support each other when you have problems with a boss or landlord, and using the direct action model to remedy grievances. So, say someone was denied their security deposit unjustly—which is, you know, very often happens—we would work with the person who was affected and, you know, making it clear that this is not a social service, we're not lawyers, this isn't a charity, it's not a state-run agency. It's based around someone being involved in their own, you know, struggle, with people backing them up.¹⁰⁶

This response shows how the two fields of empowerment merge and overlap, and offers an illustration of how the interviewees navigate the tension between meeting immediate needs and fostering a more intangible autonomy. The specific issues addressed by solidarity activities are practical, every-day issues. Resolving such issues and meeting immediate needs is seen as an end in itself. This end, however, is accompanied by the goal of helping other individuals develop their own capacity to take more control in meeting those immediate needs; thus, solidarity work takes an approach that adjusts power relationships between the individual facing an issue and the other(s) providing assistance. In contrast to the work of social services, lawyers, charities, and state-run agencies, solidarity activities aim not only at remedying a grievance, but also at fostering autonomy—meaning, here, greater individual responsibility and power. The given

¹⁰⁵ This is a project in development.

¹⁰⁶ Interview 14, p. 1.

grievance is not redressed *for* the individual by more powerful or capable others. Instead, it is redressed by the individual at center, supported by others offering discussion about courses of action and participating with the individual in direct actions. Thus, the individual is seen to develop autonomy by being "involved in their own struggle, with people backing them up."¹⁰⁷

What is not clear from the interviews is the relative importance ascribed to the two fields of empowerment. It seems that through issue-based activism/organizing, Providence anarchists negotiate a tension between meeting immediate needs and fostering a more total individual autonomy. This tension, as well as the different types of involvement in issue-based activism/organizing, will be discussed in the next chapter.

What *is* clear, though, is that issue-based activism/organizing—like the other diverse activities in which the interviewees are engaged—carries with it another layer of significance in addition to its purposes for immediate empowerment. This further significance is the orientation of all activities toward larger-scale changes at the levels of local community and larger society. I now turn to this orientation of activity toward the goal of gradual, long-term social structural change by which individual autonomy and collective freedom could be maximized.

Long-term, Large-scale: The Slow Revolution, or Social Structural Change

As anticipated, all of the interviewees share the goal of long-term macro-level societal change, which—like empowerment—derives from the root values individual autonomy, collective freedom, and participatory democracy. This goal infuses their

¹⁰⁷ Though all interviewees place value on issue-based activism and organizing, not every interviewee is involved with the activity in the same way. These differences in involvement will be discussed in the following chapter.

projects and daily activities with an additional layer of meaning. Not surprisingly, the interviewee discourses reveal a general disinterest in the particulars of this goal. No one holds any detailed vision of the society towards which their activities are oriented. The most specific talk mentions the goal of localized, participatory-democratic communities, but even this talk is vague and open-ended.¹⁰⁸ Emily mentions “trying to create smaller-scale democratic communities;”¹⁰⁹ Amy makes similar mention of “smaller, self-sustainable participatory communities,”¹¹⁰ as does Kim, who aims at creating “something that’s more community-based and focused on, like, interactions with other people.”¹¹¹ Talk about “revolution” or “social revolution” is even less specific and addresses itself primarily to the general goal of abolishing capitalism and State.¹¹² No interviewee talks in any depth about alternative, non-capitalist economic structures,¹¹³ nor does any interviewee elaborate the details of alternative, participatory-democratic political structures. While such vagueness and open-endedness is intentional for two of the interviewees (they find “beautiful visions” and “blueprints” to be problematic),¹¹⁴ it seems more generally to reflect the prioritization of increasing autonomy and collective freedom in the present.

The primary activity of the interviewees is *not* propagandizing for an anarchist revolution that would overthrow capitalism and the state. Instead, their praxis focuses on more present, immediate goals and—in addition to the common issue-based

¹⁰⁸ Five interviewees mention the goal of localized, participatory-democratic communities.

¹⁰⁹ Interview 1, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Interview 5, p. 4.

¹¹¹ Interview 4, p. 3.

¹¹² Interviews 2, 7, 11, 13, 14. Interview 13 also sees revolution as the abolition of class. Interview 14 also sees revolution as the abolition of economic exploitation.

¹¹³ Only one interviewee (Interview 13) mentions that this desired society would have an alternative form of ownership, i.e. social ownership.

¹¹⁴ Interviews 11 and 14.

activism/organizing discussed earlier—includes: teaching, assembling with other anarchists to share ideas, performing art and making it more accessible, adjusting one's consumer and lifestyle choices, and being self-critical and changing the way one relates to others.¹¹⁵ This focus on present, smaller-scale goals like empowerment is driven by an understanding that: (1) individual autonomy and collective freedom are realized gradually and can be augmented *now*; and (2) this slow, gradual augmentation is the means to achieve the large-scale goals for societal change. Thus, Ben, a teacher and former SDS member:

I think a lot of times people on the Left, like, jokingly talk about “the revolution”, like, “When the revolution comes, X or Y.” But for me, like, either we’re always in the middle of it or it’s not happening; either we’re in the middle of doing the work of making...the change that we think we need or it’s not going to happen. Like, the revolution isn’t a moment in time; it’s a long, long process....¹¹⁶

The achievement of large-scale change—for Ben, “the revolution”—is understood as an ongoing, micro-level process. This understanding is echoed by other interviewees who see their daily activities to have import for the present *and* the future. Emily speaks of her issue-based activism, which she says “should be about trying to sidestep what’s wrong and create alternative models that could potentially replace the bullshit that exists—but not to bloody my fists battering against the system that exists.”¹¹⁷ Kim speaks of adjusting individual beliefs and lifestyles: “How do we go about destroying capitalism? I dunno. Stop believing in it. Stop buying things. I don’t know.”¹¹⁸ She also speaks of adjusting interpersonal interaction: “If we want to go out and create a world that we think is great and that we feel positive about, I think that has to start with the way that we

¹¹⁵ None of these activities enjoys the degree of consensus had by issue-based activism/organizing.

¹¹⁶ Interview 7, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ Interview 1, p. 6.

¹¹⁸ Interview 4, p. 7.

interact with each other."¹¹⁹ The same trend of seeing large-scale change as a gradual, micro-level process is found in the interview with Luke, who talks about his shift away from a praxis emphasizing propaganda and confrontations with the State to one based around issue-based activism/organizing:

Sometimes we purposely propagandize....But usually it's, you know, a longer-term thing. It's about building relationships. And it's about, you know, being a part of people's—each other's lives, you know, learning from each other and that interplay. And through that, you know, you naturally end up discussing political ideas and ideology...that was something that, you know, I changed. Because it used to be more, you know, come down from the mountain top with the Ten Commandments sort of deal, like, you had the grand ideas....[Now] instead of just waving the flag, we're gonna go ahead and do the hard work that's gonna really make change because that's—if you look at what's really always made change—[it's] hard work. People, together.¹²⁰

For Luke, the only way to achieve large-scale change is the slow, "hard work" of building relationships and (as he explains elsewhere in the interview) engaging in issue-based activism/organizing that will (1) empower individuals and groups and (2) serve as a way to discuss and spread anarchist values and practices. Noteworthy here is the belief that anarchist ideas are best transmitted through established relationships and "natural" conversation, particularly between people who are working together to address practical, immediate issues;¹²¹ purposeful propagandizing and recruitment are not preferred. This belief is widely shared amongst the interviewees, with some even believing "movement-building" approaches like propagandizing and recruitment to be "coercive" or "contrived" and therefore objectionable.¹²² Eric, who describes himself as a "class-war syndicalist",

¹¹⁹ Interview 4, p. 11.

¹²⁰ Interview 14, p. 10.

¹²¹ Other avenues for transmitting anarchist ideas mentioned in the interviews include informal conversations in every-day life (Interviews 10 and 13) and conversations in the workplace (Interview 2).

¹²² Interviews 2, 10, and 11.

elaborates this belief, hinting toward gradual change toward an anarchist society through persuasion and appeal to reason:¹²³

I've come to discover that fighting Nazis when you're 15 is very, very different from fighting them when you're 38. And that when you come to work and you see that there's a guy that has a—he's a Hell's Angel or has some SS thing on his jacket—is that you can't actually just fight immediately and just do that. You actually just have to engage that person and try to figure out where it is that they came from and try to make him reevaluate that concept, which to me, is not movement-building. It's much—anarchists need to see it as a slower—they need to slow down the concept of everything and see it as a generational thing...that, if it holds your heart, you have to make other people understand why it's part of you. And make them feel either—they don't have to feel excitement, they don't have to understand, they have to say things like, "Maybe you're right. Maybe a four hour day *is* worthwhile." And then you realize that that's actually part of a new way of thinking. All of a sudden they can never take that back. And then from there it's another step.¹²⁴

The Providence-area anarchists interviewed for this study seem to be in agreement with Eric, viewing their desired societal change and increase/eventual maximization of autonomy and collective freedom as a very slow, and even generational, process.

This acceptance of slow societal change by gradual, small-scale empowerment has, in fact, historically differentiated anarchist ideology from other socialist ideologies which see social structural change to be possible by political revolution and top-down initiative. There is an obvious tension, however, that results from the anarchist approach. Most of the grievances and issues addressed by activism and organizing are attributed by the interviewees to structures like capitalism and the State, patriarchy and racism. If these structures are only to be changed by slow and gradual micro-changes, then immediate grievances and practical issues (like labor disputes) will persist over the long-term. So long as these structures do cause such practical problems, and so long as these anarchists remain committed to their values of individual autonomy and collective freedom, there appears to be no resolution to this tension. For these anarchists, the acceptance of slow

¹²³ Interestingly, this excerpt recalls the anarchist philosophy of William Godwin, one of the earliest European anarchist thinkers.

¹²⁴ Interview 11, p. 14.

change also means the acceptance of seemingly endless immediate, unwanted grievances/issues.

This section has presented the finding that the activities of interviews, such as issue-based activism and organizing, are not only oriented toward immediate, small-scale goals (like empowerment), but also toward long-term, large-scale goals (like non-capitalist, participatory democratic communities); in this way, these activities are characterized by a duality of purpose. The longer-term, large-scale goals of interviewees remain vague and open-ended, as increasing autonomy and collective freedom in the present seems to be prioritized. This gradual, continuous increase, however, is seen to be precisely, and exclusively, the way to achieve the large-scale goals. Insofar as immediate grievances/issues such as labor disputes are rooted in social structures, there is a tension between the slow "revolutionary" approach of these given anarchists and their desire for the end of such grievances/issues.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the inter-subjectively shared ideology of a group of individuals in the Providence area who can be classified as anarchists. An initial content analysis of the interviews revealed the degrees of prevalence for seven major themes: anti-capitalism; anti-Statism; individual autonomy/anti-authoritarianism; equality; participatory democracy; pluralism; and issue-based activism and organizing. The four themes which appeared in at least eleven of the twelve interviews were: anti-capitalism, individual autonomy/anti-authoritarianism, pluralism, and issue-based activism and organizing. This content analysis suggested some major components of the shared

ideology, but it left unknown the meanings of these themes and the relationships between them. I performed a deeper discourse analysis to explore the shared meanings of these ideological themes and locate them within an ideological structure. This analysis revealed that the main components of the common ideological structure are: the values *individual autonomy*, *collective freedom*, and *participatory democracy*; the goals *empowerment* and *large-scale social structural change*; and the activity *issue-based activism and organizing*.¹²⁵

The core of the shared ideology is the concurrent valuing of individual autonomy and collective freedom. The interviewees express unanimous opposition to authority and hierarchy, or any relations which have an effect of oppression or domination. Interviewee expressions about individual autonomy clarify that oppression and domination are phenomena marked by the limitation or absence of autonomy. Individual autonomy, in turn, means the state of being responsible for and in control of one's life circumstances that are believed to come about by human volition. Paired with individual autonomy are an acceptance of social life and a respect and desire for the autonomy of others therein; this respect and desire amounts to the value *collective freedom*. The term *solidarity* expresses *collective freedom*; it is the feeling of commonality with and support for others in their efforts to gain more autonomy. Likewise, *community* is often used by interviewees to mean a group in which individuals mutually feel and act upon solidarity.

There is a tension negotiated by the dual valuing of individual autonomy and collective freedom, namely, between the desires/interests of the individual and the interest of others. A commitment to individual autonomy asserts the desires of the

¹²⁵ One common theme found by the content analysis, *pluralism* proved to lack consistent meaning and I could not identify any patterns of its semantic variation.

individual, but within the limits set by a commitment to autonomy of others, or, collective freedom. The value *participatory democracy* serves as a model for reconciling individual autonomy and collective freedom within social organization. It is a small-scale model for collective decision-making that allows individuals to have real and felt control over the collective decisions that shape their life circumstances. As an ideal, participatory democracy also serves as a standard by which many of the interviewees judge liberal democracy, capitalist economic relations, and other various social arrangements. In practice, participatory democracy is facilitated by the norm and practice of *consensus*. Like the core values individual autonomy and collective freedom, participatory democracy has historically held an important place within anarchist ideology.

From the three core values stem the short-term goal of *empowerment*, the long-term goal of *social structural change*, and the prevailing practice of *issue-based activism and organizing*. *Empowerment* is a term used by some of the interviewees, and it represents the shared group goal of increasing individual autonomy and collective freedom. The term encompasses two fields: first, increasing autonomy by increasing capacity to meet immediate, every-day needs; and second, increasing autonomy more totally by equalizing power relations through activist and organizing activities. Issue-based activism and collective organizing is seen as an activity which can serve both fields of empowerment. There appears to be a tension between the two fields that will be discussed in the following chapter.

The final main finding of this chapter is that, in addition to the immediate micro-level increasing of autonomy, the interviewees simultaneously orient their daily activities toward the distant maximization of autonomy by macro-level structural transformation.

For all of the interviewees, this more distant goal is vague and open-ended; by different interviewees it is described as ending capitalism and the State or creating localized, participatory-democratic communities. The only way to work toward the distant goal is by continuously accomplishing the more immediate, small-scale goal of increasing autonomy. For different interviewees, this continuous effort involves: issue-based activism and organizing; teaching; assembling with other anarchists to share ideas; performing art and making it more accessible; adjusting one's consumer and lifestyle choices; being self-critical and changing the way one relates to others; and, engaging in every-day conversation in which anarchist ideas can be discussed and spread. The slow nature of this effort brings with it a third key tension in the anarchist ideology: if the structures believed to cause immediate, every-day problems can only be changed by gradual, long-term micro-changes, then those every-day problems will persist over the long-term. This appears to be a more general, inherent tension within anarchist ideology.¹²⁶

The works of Graeber (2004, 2010) and Gordon (2008)—in which each makes claims about the nature of the contemporary anarchist movement—lack the level of analysis I have performed in this chapter. As a result, a nuanced understanding of the movement, and particularly its ideology, is missing from the scholarship. This chapter has contributed to such an understanding. By delving into the discourses of individual anarchists, I have reconstructed the ideological system shared by the group. To use van Dijk's conceptual language, I have shown why it is possible to refer to the interviewees as a distinct *ideological group*. I clarified the meanings of symbols used in the interviewees'

¹²⁶ Future research might look to this tension in seeking to explain anarchist demographics or why anarchism is less prevalent in some contexts than in others.

discourse and the key concepts that comprise their ideology. I located these concepts within an ideology schema, so that it is now possible to see the relationships between them. For instance, it is now possible to see the basic ideational motivation and significance behind various forms of issue-based activism/organizing.

Having now established the shared ideological structure of diverse Providence-area anarchists, the following chapter will turn to an exploration of major sub-groupings of interviewee ideologies and, in view of the Graeber-Gordon discussion, examine the lines of difference that run between them.

Chapter 4: A Critical Look at Small-a and Capital-A Anarchists

The previous chapter established the common ideology of the interviewee group. In the present chapter, I examine the main patterns of variation upon those core ideological components. Based on these patterns, I conclude that the Providence case largely supports the small-a/capital-A distinction as posited by Graeber and Gordon. I argue, however, that there is another way to look at this distinction, namely, the divergent ways in which the two sub-groupings construct their respective self-identity and social position.

Framework and Overview

As introduced in the review of literature in Chapter 1, the small-a/capital-A, or new school/old school distinction made by Graeber and Gordon is as follows. In terms of their activities, methods of organizing, and political language/ideology, Capital-A/old-school anarchists closely resemble those of the anarchist movement before World War II. They tend to organize in formal organizations and are less committed to consensus decision-making than are their small-a counterparts. Their activities stress workplace organizing, anti-militarist actions, and publishing. For Graeber, they are also somewhat dogmatic and interested in ideological purity; this renders them "sectarian." Gordon does not explicitly lend support for the "sectarian" accusation, and he assumes that capital-A anarchists are not as "dogmatic" as Graeber paints them to be.

Small-a anarchists, on the other hand, resemble less the pre-World War II anarchist movement, informed more by indigenous, feminist, ecological, and cultural-critical ideas. In North America, explains Graeber (2010), small-a anarchists are descended less directly from the old anarchist movement and more directly from the American Civil Rights, feminist, and anti-nuclear movements. Both Graeber and Gordon agree that small-a anarchists tend to be more committed to consensus decision-making—the creation of "true democracy," the pre-figuration of the future society for which they strive. They also tend to be less "sectarian," more committed to ideological pluralism than capital-A anarchists.

In this chapter, I examine the discontinuities within the interviewee discourses and individual mental schemas in order to determine if and what ideological currents exist amongst the interviewees. Guiding my analysis, I again apply van Dijk's model for ideological discourse analysis to a reading of the twelve interview transcriptions. I analyzed each interview according to van Dijk's ideological categories (values/norms, goals, activities, self-identity, position, resources) and looked for patterns by which I could sort the individuals into sub-groups. I expected to find patterns of discontinuities which would suggest that the interviewees can be categorized into two fairly distinct sub-groupings which correspond to the Graeber-Gordon small-a/capital-A distinction. This expectation was confirmed. While the two groupings share the same core values, goals, and certain forms of practice, with respect to the categories *self-identity*, *positions/relations*, and *activities*, one group generally fits the capital-A categorization and the other generally fits the small-a categorization. The main unanticipated finding was that the two trends substantially differ in the category of self-identity: the capital-A

anarchists see themselves as part of the working class, which influences their activities and their choice to designate themselves anarchists; the small-a anarchists tend to see themselves as privileged, which similarly influences their activities and their uncertainty about the anarchist designation.

The four interviewees whom I classify as capital-A anarchists are Nick, Steve, and Luke—all members of both the IWW and NEFAC—and Eric, of an independent union. Described in terms of race and gender, three of the interviewees are white males, and one is an African-American male. In terms of age, three of them are in their twenties and one is in his thirties.

The eight individuals whom I classify as small-a anarchists are Cory, Kim, Amy, Ben (former SDS members); Sara (former participant in Food Not Bombs); Jill (former member of the Love and Resistance collective); and Emily and Tony (current Brown SDS members) According to the categories race and gender, this group is comprised of three white men, four white women, and one African-American woman. The individuals are mostly in their early to mid-twenties, with one person in his/her thirties.

Self-Identity in Terms of Social Position

There is a real difference between the two sub-groupings with respect to their constituents' primary daily activities and educational background. These differences suggest that one could distinguish between the two sub-groupings upon class lines. While there is a wealth of contending conceptions of class and approaches to class analysis (Olin Wright 2005), I am interested less in examining the interviewees "real" class position than in the ways they see their own identities and construct their social positions.

Capital-A Anarchists as Working Class People

One of the main divergent patterns within the group of twelve interviewees emerges from descriptions of self-identity in terms of class. Such descriptions occur in four of the interviewee discourses. Luke, for example, notes that his parents are "from working-class backgrounds"¹²⁷ and—if we look again at one of his self-reflections—describes himself in this way:

I see myself as a working person who is in struggle to, you know, make a better life for myself. But, when you become conscious of your position and your class in society, you realize that you're connected with everyone else. And in some ways, I have privilege being a white man.....But, for the most part, like, realizing that my lot in life is very similar to many other people who are struggling for their rights and their liberation.¹²⁸

Part of Luke's identity is being a "working person". By virtue of understanding that his "lot in life" is not unique, he finds himself within a "class" of others who are in the same difficult, un-liberated "position" as he.

A similar view of self-identity and position is expressed by Nick: "We need to organize as the oppressed people, pretty much anyone who works."¹²⁹ Here Nick locates himself within the "working class". He then explains that he finds it practically useful to think of society in terms of two classes: on the one hand, the elite or bourgeoisie, "that, like, *one* percent up there" which "tell[s] you what to do"; and, on the other hand, the working class, anyone who earns a salary or wage—people that are told what to do. The working class, as he understands it, comprises a white collar working class and a blue collar working class.¹³⁰ He Nicks that his analysis is quite simplified—that, for instance, there is additional oppression between groups within the working class—but maintains that this two-class perspective is most useful to him.

¹²⁷ Interview 14, p.3.

¹²⁸ Interview 14, p. 2.

¹²⁹ Interview 2, p. 5.

¹³⁰ Interview 2, p. 6.

Eric, also, locates himself within the "working class",¹³¹ and Steve considers himself and other anarchists little different from other people who work:

We're just regular people, you know. Like, what makes me different from other workers is just—or other people that I work alongside, or other people in general, not to be vulgar and to describe people as workers or anything, but—I've just found a particular idea that I feel articulates, like, my desires. You know, like, people don't have the privilege or anything to have, like, searched. But I see it every day, people are miserable. People hate this, like, life, you know. People despise working. And they don't know why, you know, like, they don't have those—but they feel it, you know what I'm saying?¹³²

Thus, Steve identifies, to some degree, with people who work and "despise working;" this seems to be his manner of self-identifying as part of the "working class". That his identification with working people is incomplete—and that he is aware of a difference, however slight—reveals that there is an another dimension to the perceived social position and role of this grouping of what Steve calls "conscious anarchists". This dimension will be addressed in the discussion of role and activity descriptions that follows later in this section.

Acknowledgements of personally-experienced oppression such as those in Luke's and Nick's discourses (Luke grouping himself with others "struggling for liberation," and Nick grouping himself with the "oppressed people") are not found in many of the twelve total interviews. Outside of these four "class-oriented" interviewees, only one other interviewee makes any mention—direct or indirect—of personally-experienced oppression. In the same vein, the discourses of these four interviewees are marked by a near absence of any talk of personal "privilege." Luke's brief mention of his privilege as a white man is the only instance of such talk within this grouping. None of the four make any mention of class privilege. As will become clear later in this chapter, this thematic

¹³¹ Interview 11, p. 1. Eric does so indirectly, saying he is part of a union, and that he believes "the only actual democracy that working class people ever experience is inside a union."

¹³² Interview 13, p. 6.

absence is one of the most distinctive features of this first grouping. From these findings, it seems fair to conclude that these four interviewees largely lack a sense of privilege and, instead, feel in some way oppressed.

The four interviewees' consistent reference to workplace struggles, as well as the importance they place on union organizing, suggests that it is *in their economic activity* that they most immediately experience oppression. Responses to an interview question concerning feelings about current jobs communicate more explicitly such oppression in economic life. Steve, for instance, expresses his desire for the freedom that he imagines could be enjoyed in a more anarchistic society where production is more democratic, where he wouldn't have "to work a terrible, meaningless service-industry job that doesn't actually contribute anything—you know, I just make profit for an individual boss."¹³³

Similarly, Luke reflects:

Work is work. It's shitty, but it's a—I think it's a necessary part of life, but it's very painful and alienated under capitalism....So what would I rather be doing? Working less, working in a much different way, working without a boss, you know; controlling the means of our own labor and, you know, all of the wonderful joys that life has. And doing other work, too, not having to just specialize because that's how you make money in a capitalist society.¹³⁴

Luke, in short, desires greater autonomy in his work and other daily activities. Even Eric, who—unlike the others—loves the work he does, participates in unions in order to "mitigate capitalism,"¹³⁵ presumably meaning to help working people preserve some degree of autonomy in the face of capital. Thus, one of the main features of this grouping of class-oriented interviewees is a common awareness of personally-experienced oppression.¹³⁶

¹³³ Interview 13, p. 4.

¹³⁴ Interview 14, p. 7-8.

¹³⁵ Interview 11, p. 9.

¹³⁶ This personally-felt oppression also logically fits with their self-identification as members of some notion of "the working class": if they are members of the working class, and if their ideological belief is

Small-a Anarchists as Privileged

In contrast to the capital-A sub-grouping, six of the eight interviewees in the small-a sub-grouping describe themselves as having some sort of privilege.¹³⁷ Of the six, all mention class privilege, five mention race privilege, two mention gender privilege, and one mentions privilege in terms of health. The trend of referencing privilege is contrasted to the single brief mention of privilege found in the first grouping.¹³⁸ The awareness of privilege seems to reveal that it is a core part of the six interviewees' self-identity and self-understanding. I also contend that the sense of personal privilege affects the way the individuals understand their social position, relation to other groups, and praxis.

There are few clues as to what, exactly, these six interviewees mean when they state they "have privilege" or "are privileged." There is, however, a part of Emily's discourse which provides an answer. When asked to talk about "ally-work," such as labor rights/immigrants' rights activism, Emily responds:

You may as well just acknowledge that anarchists tend to be white, middle-class youth. We're really fucking privileged. So the value, the value that we hold—the way that we valorize community and how important it is and how communities should be empowered to face their own problems and should struggle together to fight oppression—internal and external oppression—and all of these things, it's like, most anarchists *don't* face that much oppression....So the point is that like, [it's] ally work in the sense that we're not oppressed....I think just the point of mutual aid or ally work or whatever it is, is just that a lot of the work that needs to be done has to do with empowering people and educating people and giving them—working with them to find the tools and resources to fight for justice. So, a lot of that has to do with us leveraging the privileges that we have.

In this response, Emily appears to connect "We're really fucking privileged" with "most anarchists *don't* face that much oppression" and "we're not oppressed." It seems that

that the working class is oppressed and exploited within capitalism, then they must be oppressed. Here we can see how the interviewees' constructions of their class may be shaped by their ideologies.

¹³⁷ Of the two interviewees who do not describe themselves as privileged, one is a graduate of an elite university and the other works in medical research. They do not construct their identity as privileged, but one could reasonably contend that they, like the other six, have some sort of "real" social privilege.

¹³⁸ Interview 14, p. 2.

privilege, for her, is used to mean the opposite of oppression. In essence, privilege comes to mean something similar to autonomy. To acknowledge one's privilege, then, is also to be aware that one has/feels autonomy. This awareness is paired with an awareness that others do not feel such autonomy (she recognizes that there exists oppression to be fought). Thus, the meaning of privilege for Emily seems to be relational: to feel a sense of privilege is to recognize that one has/feels a greater degree of autonomy than others. Following from this definition, different types of privilege can be understood in this way: class privilege means that the source of relative autonomy is one's class position; race privilege, one's race; and gender privilege, one's gender.

Feeling a sense of privilege does not mean that one does not seek greater autonomy. This is evident in the efforts of current and past SDS members to democratize Brown University governance. Even so, these efforts are just as oriented toward fostering the autonomy of others as they are towards fostering one's own autonomy. This is apparent in the focus on university investment transparency in the call for democratization—it is largely for the autonomy of exploited workers, oppressed Palestinians, etc. that Brown SDS members seek disclosure of university investments. In general, those interviewees who feel a sense of a privilege remain as concerned with fostering the autonomy of others as any of the other twelve interviewees. I do not contend that they are more concerned because they are privileged; rather, I suggest here that their sense of privilege leads to different ways of concerning themselves in practice.

Activities and Roles

Capital-A Anarchists: Unions and Platformism

Also corresponding to the capital-A classification are the main ideologically-informed activities and perceived roles of the four interviewees. In this regard, the interview data reveals three main trends of distinctive commonalities: (1) participation in and organizing of unions as a main activity, (2) comparatively little attention given to changing one's personal attitudes and behavior towards others as an ongoing activity of praxis, and (3) participation in organizations of like-minded anarchists. The first two trends are common to all four interviewee discourses, while the third is seen across three of the four interviewee discourses.

Predictably, the sense of personal oppression experienced in working and the lack of a sense of privilege (particularly class privilege)—both elaborated earlier in this chapter—correspond to a focus on union participation and organizing. All four of the interviewees are a part of at least one union. Nick, Steve, and Luke are active members in the IWW (again, an international revolutionary leftist union—see Chapter 2). Steve and Luke are also members of unions at their respective workplaces. The fourth—Eric—has been an active IWW member in the past. Now Eric's membership in his workplace union precludes his membership in the IWW, though he still attends meetings on occasion.

The second trend is a comparative de-emphasis on personal change as an ongoing activity of praxis. By personal change I mean the adjustment of one's attitudes towards others and one's behavior in social interaction—a theme more prevalent within the discourses of another grouping. Nick, for instance, only speaks to the subject when prompted by a question about male domination in activist/organizing spaces—the

question was posed near the end of the interview. Prior to the interview question, there were no descriptions of such personal change prior to that instance. Nick does offer a substantial response in which he describes the difficulty of fighting "weird socializations and ideas" that individuals inevitably incorporate from their interaction with "the dominant society." These socializations and attitudes—such as hetero-normativity, sexism, patriarchy—must be confronted within organizing spaces. He warns, however, against focusing too intently on such confrontation or personal change. Compared to the discourses of interviewees in other groupings, Nick's discourse as a whole demonstrates a low prioritization of such activity within his understanding of praxis.¹³⁹

The trend found in Nick's discourse continues through the discourses of the other three interviewees. Luke's only mention of personal change is a brief observation that anarchists in Providence should not be so harsh on each other; that they should be accountable to each other if they cause each other any hurt.¹⁴⁰ This instance, as in Nick's case, comes near the end of the interview. Steve gives some equally brief attention to personal change, noting the importance of "watching our own racist or sexist attitudes" in order to "[ensure] the anarchist movement is a liberatory space for *all* people."¹⁴¹ This sole mention is once again located near the end of the interview. Lastly, Eric makes no mention of ongoing personal change as a form of praxis (to reiterate, personal change is here conceived as change with respect to one's attitudes and behaviors toward others). It could be hypothesized that this thematic de-emphasis is correlated to the lack of a sense of privilege, or inversely, the sense of personally-experienced oppression common to these four interviews. Perhaps one who experiences oppression focuses more on fighting

¹³⁹ Interview 2, p. 17.

¹⁴⁰ Interview 14, p.9.

¹⁴¹ Interview 13, p. 16.

the felt oppression rather than on fighting any oppression which one may be causing in their interpersonal relationships—particularly if that experienced oppression lies in economic life and is tied to physical needs. Further exploration of this connection is outside the scope of this chapter.

While the activity of changing personal attitudes and behaviors towards others is not emphasized in the discourses of the capital-A anarchists, one additional praxis activity is stressed. Discussion of this activity will shed light on the interviewees' understanding of their social role.

The first activity is that which, for Graeber, largely defines the capital-A trend: the participation in an explicitly anarchist organization, in this case, the Northeastern Federation of Anarchist Communists (NEFAC). Eric, however, does not participate in NEFAC, so this activity is not a universally defining feature of this grouping. Nonetheless, it is a significant trend that deserves mention. The participation in NEFAC is theoretically rooted in *platformism*, the belief in the strategic necessity for anarchist political organizations in working toward the long-term goal of social structural change discussed in Chapter 3—"revolution," as NEFAC members understand it. Steve and Nick describe that one of the primary functions of NEFAC is to provide a space for self-identifying anarchists to congregate, deliberate, and coordinate. According to Steve, "It's a place for us to develop our ideas, meet, you know, be an organized anarchist presence in the social movements."¹⁴² The role of those participating in groups like NEFAC—as they understand it—is to generate, organize, and spread those ideas. In one moment of his interview, Steve begins to say that there are working people who "put anarchism into practice themselves, naturally," but then he checks himself:

¹⁴² Interview 13, p. 17.

Maybe not naturally, of course, like our—'cause they're not gonna get anarchist ideas without us also arguing it to some degree, too, you know what I'm sayin? 'Cause there's always gonna be people who come to certain conclusion first, or whatever, and then they organize with their fellows, you know what I'm sayin, and then those ideas spread. However, like, it's more important that the ideas, the principles are there, not—rather than the label.¹⁴³

"The social movements" are one area for "organizing with their fellows" and spreading anarchist ideas and principles. By "the social movements," Steve seems to mean the less ideological collective efforts to address more specified issues; he has in mind community organizations like ONA and DARE:

[There are] other anarchists simply involved in other excellent community organizations such as Direct Action for Rights and Equality, DARE, and ONA, and they do excellent work with those organizations and I think that's also very, very important. And I feel *that* puts us in, like, even—in a very important position. Like, we have ideas, you know, and they're *in* there.¹⁴⁴

It is this "platformist" perspective—endorsed also by Nick¹⁴⁵ and Luke¹⁴⁶—which informs the labor/community organizing of these three NEFAC members. They approach their organizing with a general unity of ideas and strategies which have been developed through deliberation with others of similar ideology.

The two excerpts above taken from Steve's interview illuminate the way in which he understands his social role and position. On the one hand, as earlier shown in this chapter, the interviewees in this grouping see themselves as part of the "working class." On the other hand, they are aware of being different: recall Steve's understanding of that difference, "I've just found a particular idea that I feel articulates my desires."¹⁴⁷ This is no small difference. As the above excerpts demonstrate, the anarchist ideology of these interviewees profoundly affects the way in which they relate to other "working class" people. In relation to the "working class," they see their role to be one of

¹⁴³ Interview 13, p. 8.

¹⁴⁴ Interview 13, p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ Interview 2, p. 6-7, 13.

¹⁴⁶ Interview 14, not recorded.

¹⁴⁷ Interview 13, p. 6.

generator/propagator of ideas and principles that assist other "working people" in their struggles to articulate and satisfy their desires for autonomy, material well-being,¹⁴⁸ and "better lives."¹⁴⁹ The previous chapter explained the manner in which the "propagation" occurs. The fulfillment of this role is achieved in the issue-based activism and organizing, the labor organizing and solidarity work in which anarchists "organize with their fellows." Every-day conversation is the primary medium, and the ultimate goals, of course, remain autonomy and collective freedom.

Small-a Anarchists: Ally Work and Personal Change

To recall from Chapter 3, the fostering of autonomy can be summarized as "empowerment." I will use this term once again in the following discussion. There are multiple ways in which the "privileged" interviewees engage in activities oriented toward empowerment. I use a term from Emily's discourse to classify the first of two main forms of empowerment activity found in this second grouping: "ally work," or from a position of privilege, contributing one's capacities and resources to the empowerment-oriented projects of those who are more oppressed ("leveraging their privileges," as Emily put it). The second main form of empowerment activity is a form of personal change, specifically, the altering of one's attitudes and behavior toward others so as not to cause oppression. These two forms of praxis, ally work and personal change, stand in contrast to the direct action solidarity work and labor organizing which are the main empowerment activities of the capital-A sub-grouping.

¹⁴⁸ According to Steve, "At the very end of the day it's, like, *anarchism* ultimately means, like, my dad doesn't have to work 80 hours a week to *not* make enough money to survive" (Interview 13, p. 3).

¹⁴⁹ Interview 14, p. 2.

Ally work

Ally work, for this second grouping, is analogous to the direct action solidarity work which interviewees in the first grouping are trying to engage in more regularly. Both are issue-based activities primarily rooted in the spirit of collective freedom, "not limiting yourself to only advocating for or fighting for things that directly affect you and your circumstances."¹⁵⁰ As suggested above, ally work differs from solidarity work in that it involves a certain inequality. Whereas interviewees in the first grouping understand solidarity work as working class people helping other working class people become empowered, interviewees in the second grouping understand ally work as people with privilege helping people with less privilege become empowered.

Ally work is expressed in multiple ways by interviewees of the heterodox grouping. It seems to be expressed even by the two interviewees who do not mention privilege (both are college graduates working with ONA and DARE,¹⁵¹ respectively). SDS members, as mentioned above, engage in on-campus campaigns ultimately aimed to benefit more oppressed groups outside of the university. Another interviewee, Jill, works for a non-profit, federally-funded organization that distributes grants for public projects in the humanities. Two recent Nick recipients have been ONA and DARE. She also personally makes financial donations to those organizations, while occasionally assisting with specific campaigns by writing letters of support and letters to legislators or finding people who will come to important events.¹⁵² Still others, like Ben, engage more directly in what Cory calls "struggles that affect people day-to-day....things that affect people

¹⁵⁰ Interview 10, p. 7.

¹⁵¹ ONA, the Olneyville Neighborhood Association and DARE, Direct Action for Rights and Equality. See Chapter 2.

¹⁵² Interview 8, p. 3.

without as much skin privilege or gender privilege."¹⁵³ Ben helps ONA with translation and computer problems from time to time.¹⁵⁴

These three examples demonstrate the way in which a sense of privilege can shape the nature of one's other-oriented empowerment work, one's issue-based activities. In the case of the SDS member interviewees, past and present, there is a recognition on their part that they are in a position of privilege whereby they can access and affect an institution (the university) that has a relatively wide impact—direct and indirect—on the lives of less privileged people (such as Brown Dining Service workers or hotel workers associated with HEI Hotels and Resorts.)¹⁵⁵ In addressing themselves to the practices of the university, the interviewees can foster the empowerment of others in other ways than they could if they were workers like those in the first grouping: for issues involving Brown workers, the interviewees leverage their standing as Brown students to prevent the university/Brown Corporation from (further) oppressing the workers. In the case of external labor issues, such as the HEI case, the interviewees fight oppression by using the power of the university to place an alternative form of pressure on the source of oppression. This differently-angled approach may be less direct (that is, it is not workers empowering themselves), but its impact may be far-reaching.

These SDS interviewee examples are negative ones, as empowerment is fostered by targeting oppression. The example of Jill's non-profit work is a positive one, where empowerment is fostered through the provision of resources. Neither this provision nor

¹⁵³ Interview 3, p.7.

¹⁵⁴ Interview 7, p. 3.

¹⁵⁵ The interviewees have supported Brown Dining Service workers during heated contract renegotiations, and have also been involved in the recent success of a campaign for ending university investment in HEI Hotels and Resorts, an owner and operating of such brands as Westin, Marriott, Hilton, Embassy Suites, Le Meridien, Sheraton, Renaissance, and Crowne Plaza.

her personal donations are simply charity because she is not providing the ends sought by those participating in or represented by ONA or DARE; rather, she is supporting their efforts to reach those ends themselves, that is, she is supporting their empowerment. Jill is privileged, among other ways, in that she has access to her organization and the power to distribute its grants. She leverages her privileges in that she uses that access and power to support the empowerment of those who are more oppressed than herself. It can thus be said that Jill engages in ally work.

The final example of ally work I offered, Ben's translating and computer help, shows that ally work can just mean sharing one's practical capacities in order to facilitate others' efforts to increase their autonomy (which includes meeting their needs). Ben is privileged, among other ways, in that he has those capacities which others lack and that he had the ability to acquire those very capacities. In sharing his capacities with those who are more oppressed and struggling for greater autonomy, Ben, too, engages in ally work. In this way it might also be said that his job—teaching, which he orients toward empowerment—might also be construed as ally work. Ben, through his teaching, uses his privilege to help empower those who are more oppressed.

Part of the complexity of ally work is that individuals engaging in it must confront the inequality inherent to this form of praxis (one who is more autonomous offers their capacity to one who is less autonomous). This can produce an uneasiness and uncertainty for some, although seemingly resolved by an emphasis on the empowerment aspect of ally work. Hence Emily, when asked to talk about ally work, stresses that "charity is dehumanizing, [it] just fucks up everyone because we get the holier-than-thou savior attitude, and they get this "Well, someone will provide for us so we no longer feel that we

need to do this and thus lose the capacity to take care of ourselves.”¹⁵⁶ But the difficulty in dealing with the unequal dynamic persists, and it is observable in Emily's discourse: "A lot of the work that needs to be done has to do with empowering people and educating people and *giving them—working with them* to find the tools and resources to fight for justice [my italics]."¹⁵⁷ Emily corrects herself because she uses language which suggests the very activity she has just condemned earlier in her response: *giving them* denotes charity; *working with them* suggests ally work, empowerment work. More than that, however, the phrase "working with them to find the tools and resources to fight for justice" seems to obscure the existence of any inequality at all. Emily does not actually deny this existence, and so, her slip in word choice serves best to demonstrate her uncertainty.

There appears to be a range of outcomes with respect to facing the inequality inherent to ally work. On the one hand, one may not perceive it to be a problem because one takes less notice of one's own privilege. This seems to be the case for one former SDS member who organizes comfortably with more oppressed individuals in ONA.¹⁵⁸ On the other hand, one may perceive it to be significant enough a problem that one's ally work purposefully excludes organizing with more oppressed groups. This is true of Jill, who says she "know[s] a lot of people of color really want to build up power within their own circles" and feels that the regular involvement of a white, more privileged activist in their meetings can interfere with that empowerment.¹⁵⁹ In the middle, perhaps, there is

¹⁵⁶ Interview 2, p. 8.

¹⁵⁷ Interview 2, p. 8.

¹⁵⁸ This case poses a problem for the notion of ally work: Is it still ally work if one does not acknowledge her/his real privilege while using that privilege to help empower those who are more oppressed?

¹⁵⁹ Interview 8, p. 9.

Ben, who is very conscious of his privilege and whose occasional ONA involvement is mostly limited to translation and computer-fixing.¹⁶⁰

I have just presented my findings with respect to ally-work, the first of two main empowerment activities common to most of this interviewee sub-grouping. In the next section, I present my findings with respect to changing one's social attitudes and interactions, the second main empowerment activity.

Changing One's Social Attitudes and Interactions

Earlier in this chapter I showed that the capital-A grouping de-emphasized the praxis activity of ongoing personal change with respect to one's attitudes towards and interactions with others. An opposite trend can be observed in the discourses of the interviewees in the small-a grouping, thus lending support to Gordon's claim that small-a anarchists stress "pre-figurative politics." Four of the eight interviewees in this grouping place what I consider a high degree of importance on such personal change,¹⁶¹ observable in the frequency of its mention and descriptions of its importance. By the same standards, two interviewees place moderate importance on this activity,¹⁶² and two place upon it low importance.¹⁶³ This section will clarify what is meant by *changing one's social attitudes and interactions* while also examining how this form of praxis might be related to privilege.

¹⁶⁰ Further adding to the complexity of ally work, privileged individuals may also be motivated by a sense of culpability for complicity in oppression. This culpability is only acknowledged by Emily (Interview 1, p. 5, 8).

¹⁶¹ Interviews 3, 4, 7, and 10.

¹⁶² Interviews 6 and 8.

¹⁶³ Interviews 1 and 5.

It is evident from the data that privilege, for some of the interviewees, corresponds with a general comparative emphasis on *changing one's social attitudes and interactions* as a form of praxis/empowerment activity. However, this form of praxis/empowerment activity is not tied as intimately to privilege as is ally work; one interviewee in this grouping who recognizes no sense of personal privilege emphasizes this type of personal change to a greater degree than many other interviewees. Attention to this type of personal change, then, may be motivated more generally by an awareness of one's capacities to be oppressive. In some cases, this capacity is related to one's privilege—if one has more autonomy, one might have more capacity to act oppressively toward others. This relationship between privilege and oppressive behavior is evident in following excerpt from Ben's interview:

One of the things SDS changed me in—really, strongly impacted my ideas about my position in respect to my gender and race and class privilege. Yeah, I guess there was some point when I realized that, like, I, that in some ways the world that I want to see won't exist as long as I'm alive because in some ways I won't ever really escape the way that I've been socialized to think about money or women or people of color. And like, I, there was a point a couple years ago when I said, "Wow, I'm gonna die a racist and a sexist," and I just, like, cried for a little while [he chuckles]. In some ways, like the—understanding that about myself sounds like sort of a harsh judgment to make. I don't necessarily think that I'm gonna, like, be on my death bed and be a bigot or a prick or make people feel bad—I hope not....But, what it did for me was reset my goals as far as how I deal with that privilege or how I deal with the way that I've been socialized to do some things that are messed up.¹⁶⁴

Here Ben talks about his need to confront certain attitudes, certain socializations which can lead him to treat others in oppressive and hurtful ways; he aims to shed those socializations and treat other in a better way. The relationship between those socializations and his felt gender, race, and class privilege is not entirely clear. It seems that there may be two connections. First, Ben makes it seem that his privilege—his relative autonomy—may have produced in him (1) certain attitudes of superiority, and (2)

¹⁶⁴ Interview 7, p. 9.

certain behaviors that damage the autonomy (and feelings) of others. In "dealing with" his privilege and those attitudes and behaviors, Ben demonstrates that the key assumption of equality, at the base of the anarchist ideology,¹⁶⁵ is simply a given; for some, it must be consciously integrated into one's system of beliefs. Likewise, he demonstrates that the value *collective freedom*—the valuing of the autonomy of others—does not automatically translate into practice consistent with that end. For some, this translation, too, must be consciously practiced and improved.

The second connection between privilege and those oppressive and hurtful socializations is a more positive one. Ben reveals this connection later, when he reflects on his tendency to fixate on his privilege and socializations; when this fixation is expressed in activist/organizing groups, he calls it "process obsession:"

Process obsession is, like, a trap that I find myself, that I have to check myself on. And I think that's probably in some ways bound up with my intellectual background—just like, where I've had time to sit around and think about—or like my intellectual, my class background; I've had the time and the inclination to sit around and think about things like that.¹⁶⁶

Here Ben shows that privilege has also enabled him to become aware of and reflect upon his negative socializations. Thus privilege can have conflicting effects: on the one hand, it can produce attitudes and behaviors which are oppressive or disempowering; on the other hand, it can produce the capacity to critically reflect upon and adjust those attitudes and behaviors.

Cory echoes Ben's awareness of the negative effects of privilege and the need to redress them, particularly in activist/organizing groups: "changing the world," he says, not only involves changing structural problems like capitalism and private property, but also dealing with "those oppressions that we've been raised with, that we accept into our

¹⁶⁵ The equality of all individuals in their claims to autonomy and respect. See Chapter 3, p. 5.

¹⁶⁶ Interview 7, p. 10.

own organizing space....hetero-normativity and things like that, and also just like class oppression in terms of people who have economic privilege bringing that into organizing space." Accordingly, he says he is concerned with "changing myself and how I relate to people."¹⁶⁷ But the practice of changing one's social attitudes and interactions is not necessarily tied to an awareness of privilege. Kim and Sara both recognize the fundamental importance of changing these micro-level interactions within the project of larger-scale social change. Kim expresses her opinion:

It's important to recognize that like being, or the way that we interact with each other is political too. And like, the way that we treat each other in activist spaces, like, if we want to go out and create a world that we think is great and that we feel positive about, I think that has to start with the way that we interact with each other.¹⁶⁸

Sara articulates a similar position:

We could have an insurrectionary overthrow of our government, right, and that would be pretty sweet. But, if we're still having the same interpersonal relationships even within, like, alternative communities, repeating themselves, you know—it's like, I don't really know what can come out of it....Building positive relationship...is pretty much the first thing we have to do if we really want to make any kind of new world.¹⁶⁹

Changing those relationships requires "being aware of things like internalized racism and cultural appropriation,"¹⁷⁰ those socializations criticized by Ben and Cory, above. In addition to being aware of those things, one must also resist them. Some interviewees, like Tony of SDS, extend their self-critique beyond those negative socializations to any behavior which is dominating or oppressive; he is concerned with informal leadership and hierarchy in his activism, and he objects to his own behavior in occasional moments where he is "dominant" or "manages things" in ways that are "disempowering."¹⁷¹ Though he does talk about privilege in relation to this behavior, it appears that there may

¹⁶⁷ Interview 3, p. 5.

¹⁶⁸ Interview 4, p. 11.

¹⁶⁹ Interview 10, p. 5.

¹⁷⁰ Interview 10, p.5.

¹⁷¹ Interview 6, p. 4-5.

be some privilege involved, given that privilege entails greater autonomy and capacity than others—characteristics which would create hierarchy and enable one to lead or be dominating.

Such a level of attention to the ongoing practice of changing one's social attitudes and interactions is one of the main distinctive features of the small-a interviewee grouping. For some of the interviewees, this emphasis is related to privilege or an awareness to privilege. For others, it seems to have a different origin. Perhaps in Kim's case, a former SDS member who makes no acknowledgement of privilege in her discourse, the emphasis on such personal change originates in the SDS culture she experienced, which seems to have emphasized such change itself (she is of the same SDS generation as Ben and Cory).

Thus far, my comparison between the capital-A and small-a interviewee subgroupings has focused on the role of class/privilege in the self-understanding and praxis of the interviewees. Just as definitive of the distinction are the groupings respective attitudes towards the anarchist designation and classical tradition.

Self-Identity in Terms of the Anarchist Label

Capital-A Anarchists as "Anarchists"

I turn now to the capital-A groupings' second set of self-identity descriptions, namely, those pertaining to their political or ideological self-designation. Here I follow van Dijk in conceiving ideology in a way that encompasses one's understanding of self-identity. I will focus on the interviewees' use of the self-designation "anarchist" and their

main ideological influences. Furthermore I will extend my analysis beyond descriptions to the historical and intellectual references found in individual discourses.

In contrast to most of the other interviewees, the four referenced thus far were not hesitant about referring to themselves as "anarchists." In describing his current manner of self-identification, Nick states, "I generally describe myself now as an anarchist communist or libertarian communist." With similar certainty, the other three of this grouping consider themselves anarchists. Like Nick, Steve specifies that he considers himself an "anarchist communist." Eric specifies that he is a "class war syndicalist." Luke, when asked in his interview, does not specify any particular type of anarchist, but his participation in NEFAC would suggest he may also identify as an anarchist communist. This common use of the anarchist designation is multifaceted. I will turn here to an analysis of one interview passage in order to illuminate the processes involved in the act of anarchist self-identification.

When asked why he is not hesitant to use the designation "anarchist" to describe himself, Nick responds in this way:

I mean, they're my political beliefs. Some people are like, "I'm a Democrat, I'm a Republican, I'm a conservative, I'm a liberal, I'm a progressive." Some people are like, "I'm a socialist." I've studied it, and like, I'm not so afraid of, like, the stigma. At least especially with "anarchist." 'Cause there can stigma with like, "socialist" or "communist", but other than the scary bomb-throwing things, a lot of people haven't heard about what anarchism is—that it's, like, a more libertarian form of socialism or communism that has a bigger emphasis on independence, autonomy, and freedom. So, I think it's—I dunno, I just don't want to lie to people. I mean I'm not gonna—I don't always—depending on the situation, I don't always tell people that I am, but if they ask me, like, I will, you know. I'm not gonna lie to them about what I believe. So yeah, um, so I identify as such.¹⁷²

I think it is useful here to examine the nature of the object with which the capital-A anarchists identify, in order to further explain what it means for these interviewees to call themselves anarchists. Answers can be found in locations in the data wherein

¹⁷² Interview 2, p. 9.

interviewees state their main ideological influences and make historical and intellectual references.

Conforming with the capital-A current as posited by Graeber and Gordon, the capital-A interviewees express an affinity the ideology, discourses, and practices—what Gordon calls *political culture*—which come out of classical European and American anarchism and socialism. Nick, for instance, makes explicit his identification with three classic bodies of discourse, stating, "Generally I identify with...Bakunin, Kropotkin, and to a degree also Marx, the more libertarian Marx."¹⁷³ Steve also cites Marx and Bakunin as significant influences, while Luke says he has been influenced by Kropotkin, Proudhon, Emma Goldman, and Marx.

The common mention of Marx highlights an important aspect of these interviewees' self-understanding. Insofar as they are anarchists in ideology, they see themselves in relation to Marx's theoretical communism as well as historical communist ideologies and movements (three of them participate in an "anarchist-communist" institution, NEFAC). This is true even of Eric, who does not cite any of these theorists as major personal influences. Eric grew up among "authoritarian communists" and eventually gravitated toward anarchism because he took issue with their inadequate respect for individual autonomy.¹⁷⁴ Steve tells a similar story, recalling one stage in his ideological development: "I was, like, well as soon as—every time Marx is [almost] put into practice or whatever, like, it turned out bad. And I was like, is there any example of anything else?" Steve then recounts that it was learning about and being inspired by the

¹⁷³ Interview 2, p. 12.

¹⁷⁴ Interview 11, p. 1-2.

present-day Zapatistas that "turned me to anarchism, finally."¹⁷⁵ This trend of understanding one's ideology in relation to communism is unique to this grouping of interviewees, as is the affinity to the classical anarchist political culture.¹⁷⁶

It appears, then, that in considering themselves anarchists, anarchist communists, or class war syndicalists, these four interviewees are consciously situating themselves within—and understand themselves as part of—certain historical traditions. This understanding of the self as part of a larger historical phenomenon is significant because it is another feature uniquely shared by the capital-A grouping. There are excerpts from two of the interviews which clearly demonstrate this self-understanding. For example, Eric speaks of a realization he once had:

And then you find there's always this kind of other history that runs behind it [union organizing], these labor folks who were anarchists and libertarian, libertarian communists—and you find that you're actually part of a larger history. As much as it belongs to you, it also belongs to them. And it belongs to the people who come after you.¹⁷⁷

Likewise, Steve speaks of the role of what he calls "conscious anarchists" in preserving the history anarchist or "anarchistic" ideas and struggles, a history that can help motivate present and future revolutionary movements of "the laboring masses":

I think it's good that, like, we [conscious anarchists] can keep some sort of, like, continuity of memory—of some sort of long, continued collective memory of those struggles that we can keep carrying on to others, so we can do it again and again and again. Until, like, it finally breaks through....until a revolution is finally successful.¹⁷⁸

Understanding themselves as part of a historical tradition can also be a source of inspiration that keeps the movement alive.

¹⁷⁵ Interview 13, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ Though Eric does not cite any of the classical anarchist theorists as major personal influences, his affinity to classical anarchism is shown by his use of the self-designation "class war syndicalist" and his belief that he is part of "a larger history" of "anarchists and libertarian communists" (Interview 11, p. 2).

¹⁷⁷ Interview 11, p.2.

¹⁷⁸ Interview 13, p. 8.

The participation of all four interviews in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)—a revolutionary union dating back to 1905—clearly exemplifies the interviewees' self-situation within tradition. Less overtly, the comparatively high level of references to anarchist-related historical events and figures demonstrates a historical self-understanding (such references are far less common in discourses of interviewees in other groupings). For example, each of the four interviewees in this grouping either cite anarchists in the Spanish Civil War as an ideological influence or make reference to it in demonstrating a point. In the same vein, Eric and Luke name historical figures in the IWW as major personal influences; Steve references the Ukrainian Revolution, *Dielo Truda*,¹⁷⁹ Florence Magon and Emilio Zapata; and all of the interviewees reference historical communism.

As a final point, the affinity of the classical-A anarchists to the classical anarchist movement does not appear to entail dogmatism as Graeber has insinuated. Diversity and self-reflexivity can be seen through the discourses. For instance, Luke cites his parents as his main ideological influence and believes that a sense of compassion is foundational to anarchism.¹⁸⁰ Eric, the class war syndicalist, once met a major IWW figure named Judi Bari who led him to reevaluate the bases of his ideology and soften his emphasis on class:

It has to be class conscious, but you have to be aware of the total at the same time....The total, the whole world, that there's this—when you think of class—like syndicalist or a class-war anarchist, you know, a lot of the times what comes to mind will be, like, the Spanish Civil War, you know, industry and unions...this really romantic collectivization. But at the same time you really have to be industrious in a lot of ways, and it had to be broader. It had to be much more inclusive and change the definition, maybe, of how we approach class. And I think we spent a lot of years collectively, as a movement, really examining the role of class as *a factor of* and not the be all and end all. Even though I still consider myself a class war

¹⁷⁹ *Dielo Truda*, or *Workers' Cause*, was an anarchist publication operated by anarchists exiled from Russia after the Russian Revolution. This group argued for what came to be known as "platformism," which entails belief in the strategic necessity of anarchist political organization.

¹⁸⁰ Interview 14, p. 3.

anarchist, instead of—I've expanded, I've learned, I'm not quite as knee-jerk as I used to be.¹⁸¹

Small-a Anarchists as Uncertain

Unlike the capital-A interviewees, the small-a interviewees are marked by a general ambivalence with respect to the anarchist designation. An examination of this ambivalence, paired with an examination of ideological influences of these eight interviewees, reveals an important facet of their self-understanding, namely, their tenuous relation to the anarchist tradition. It seems that instead of identifying with those ideologies and movements which have called themselves anarchist, they only have an affinity to select core elements of those ideologies and movements (such as the values and goals discussed in Chapter 3). Complicating Graeber's and Gordon's claims, it is not simply the case that these small-a anarchists value diversity and pluralism.

Interviewee responses to the question about identifying as anarchist are varied, but no one responds affirmatively with confidence: Emily hesitantly says she does, for the most part, and later expresses disinterest in the identity of being an anarchist;¹⁸² Kim says she does not generally label herself as an anarchist, but if she had to, she would identify as an anarchist-feminist;¹⁸³ Amy says, "I guess I am one—that would make sense—but, like, [I] really don't like the label;"¹⁸⁴ Tony says, "I do, but in a not—I dunno," then proceeds to criticize dogma;¹⁸⁵ Ben says he considers himself a "leftist;"¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Interview 11, p. 3.

¹⁸² Interview 1, pp. 1, 6.

¹⁸³ Interview 4, p. 4.

¹⁸⁴ Interview 5, p. 6.

¹⁸⁵ Interview 6, p. 1.

¹⁸⁶ Interview 7, p. 5.

Jill is unsure; and Sara, lastly, says she thinks she does, at least it's the only "political structure...that [she] can identify with and relate to."¹⁸⁷

The discourse analysis of the interviews reveals four different reasons why individuals who share in the core anarchist ideology (outlined in Chapter 3) are reluctant to, hesitant about, or uninterested in identifying as anarchists: (1) they feel that using the anarchist designation can be impractical due to its negative connotations (Amy and Tony); (2) they feel that the designation has little utility because there are so many varieties of anarchism or so many "ways to be radical" (Amy, Sara, and Kim); (3) they are wary of doctrine in general (Tony and Ben);¹⁸⁸ and (4) they identify only partially with anarchist tradition and ideology (all). The fourth and most common reason seems to be the most decisive, so I will further analyze it the following paragraphs.

Individuals may recognize some overlap between their personal mental schema and those ideologies which have called themselves anarchism, but not enough that they would readily apply the anarchist classification to themselves. There are numerous illustrations of interviewees expressing the incompleteness and insufficiency of this overlap. Emily, for instance, says she "mainly" identifies as an anarchist but is "a little concerned that [her] definition of anarchy isn't, like, quite what anarchy is. Or, like, the

¹⁸⁷ Interview 10, p. 4.

¹⁸⁸ Tony speaks explicitly about his wariness of doctrine and "attachment to beliefs," which makes him unsure about calling himself an anarchist. Ben's disinclination for the anarchist designation is more subtle, embodied in his strikingly non-doctrinal language. By this I mean he makes no little or no use of words like democracy, equality, justice, autonomy, freedom, oppression, domination, empowerment, or class. He talks about "revolution," but in a way that contradicts traditional anarchist ideology—as a slow, ongoing process, not a moment in time. The one word he does use frequently is "non-hierarchical," and in this way he communicates values, goals, and practices which coincide with the inter-subjectively shared, Providence-area anarchist ideology. Two of his criticisms of Providence-area Left and anarchist Left—the tendencies to "overemphasize theory" and "insist on ideological purity"—seem to indicate that the use of such non-doctrinal language is intentional, and so, might be called "anti-doctrinal."

parts that I would identify with aren't exactly what anarchism is."¹⁸⁹ Her consequent ambivalence about identifying as an anarchist appears in her inconsistency when talking about anarchists; at times she refers to anarchists as "they" and, at other times, as "we." For Cory, "it was never really about the ideology so much as it was about, like, the organizing model of non-hierarchical space...and also the idea of collective liberation."¹⁹⁰ To employ terminology presented in Chapter 3: Cory has had an affinity to the values autonomy, collective freedom, and participatory democracy, as well as the goal of empowerment, but not to other aspects of what he perceives to be the whole of anarchist ideology. Similarly, Jill expresses that she has "yo-yoed back and forth with the term *anarchism*" because the norm/practice of consensus¹⁹¹ has at times, in practice, proven ineffective for accomplishing her goals. She has an affinity to all the core anarchist values and goals—including the norm *consensus*—but she gets so frustrated with the *practice* of consensus decision-making that she sometimes engages in practice that run counter to certain core values (such as lobbying legislators). Recognizing this imperfect overlap between her ideology and what she perceives to be anarchist ideology, she is uncertain about identifying as an anarchist.¹⁹²

The lack of affinity to classical anarchism may be attributable to the privileged position of the interviewees; it is likely that they have trouble seeing themselves in the proletarian anarchists of the classical European and American movements.¹⁹³ But the lack of affinity is also observable in the interviewees' descriptions of their ideological

¹⁸⁹ Interview 1, p. 1.

¹⁹⁰ Interview 3, p. 3.

¹⁹¹ Consensus is meant to facilitate the practical realization of participatory democracy. See Chapter 3, p. 10.

¹⁹² Interview 8, p.5.

¹⁹³ In this way, the privilege felt/had by the interviewees might contribute to their ambivalence toward the anarchist designation.

influences and their attitudes toward classical bodies of anarchist discourse. Emily concedes that her "historical framework for what anarchism has been is pretty slim and embarrassing and small," and that she has "barely read a tiny bit of actual anarchist theory."¹⁹⁴ This is the norm for this grouping of interviewees. Two interviewees (Kim and Sara) note that the writings of Emma Goldman have had some influence on them, but beyond this, references to classical anarchism are conspicuously absent in the discourses of these more heterodox interviewees. This is intentional for some interviewees, who are disinterested in classical anarchist theory and history.¹⁹⁵ Instead, the influences mentioned by the interviewees include: texts—book, websites, and zines—by contemporary anarchists, like Crimethinc (Emily and Sara); texts coming out of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, such as those by Angela Davis (Kim); more contemporary anarchist theorists like Murray Bookchin, Graham Purchase, and Hakim Bey (Tony and Jill); involvement in SDS and other activist projects (Cory, Kim, Ben); and lastly, ancient Greek philosophy, post-colonial literature/theory, and feminism (Jill). These sorts of influences coincide with Graeber's and Gordon's descriptions of small-a anarchists.

What Gordon and Graeber have not explained is the ambivalence of small-a anarchists with respect to their self-identity. Many small-a anarchists, in part given their sense of privilege and in part because of their main ideological influences, do not tend to see much continuity between classical anarchist movements and themselves. Certainly some draw from certain classical anarchist ideas, but they have difficulty seeing themselves in the long anarchist tradition and are more interested in newer radical

¹⁹⁴ Interview 2, p. 4-5.

¹⁹⁵ Amy, for instance, feels that classical anarchist thought is not very relevant to "what is going on in [her] community, or what should be happening" (Interview 4, p. 11).

sources that may be more relevant to them. Insofar as some of these new sources call themselves anarchist (such as Crimethinc), small-a anarchists might see more sense in calling themselves anarchists; this affinity, in addition to the recognition that one shares core values and goals with classical anarchism may prevent some interviewees from fully rejecting the anarchist designation. This non-rejection of the designation leaves the small-a anarchists in a state of ambiguity with regards to their individual and collective identity: as Kim reflects, “I still don’t know what it means to call myself an anarchist because most people I know who identify as anarchists disagree on a million different things.”¹⁹⁶

Conclusion

My analysis in this chapter produced a number of findings that were anticipated according to the Graeber-Gordon distinction. First, the capital-A anarchists, more like their IWW than Galleanista predecessors, organize together in formal organizations and focus on workplace/union organizing (the IWW and NEFAC). Small-a anarchists, on the other hand, tend to focus on prefigurative politics, adjusting their every-day relations with others in order to avoid oppressive behavior. Second, the capital-A anarchists identify unequivocally as anarchists and express affinity to the classical anarchist movement; the small-a anarchists are either ambivalent or unwilling to refer to themselves as anarchists and express a lack of affinity the classical anarchist movement. Lastly, small-a anarchists are much more diverse with respect to the types of ideological activities in which they engage. I did not find any data to confirm or challenge Graeber's claim that capital-A anarchists are more "sectarian" and less committed to consensus decision-making; further

¹⁹⁶ Interview 4, with Kim, a former SDS member. Page 3 of transcript.

research in the form of participant-observation would likely shed more light on this the validity of this claim.

In addition to finding that Graeber's intimation that capital-A anarchists are dogmatic is unfounded in the Providence case, I have made other findings which can contribute to the small-a/capital-a literature. My main finding is that the small-a and capital-A trends can also be distinguished along the lines of self-identity. The capital-A interviewees see themselves as "working people" or part of the "working class." In such a position, they feel oppressed; this is observable in their discursive mentions of such oppression, accompanied by their near silence with respect to personally-experienced privilege. This pattern contrasts with one found amongst the small-a grouping: most of these interviewees express an awareness of personal privilege. In identifying themselves as privileged, the interviewees understand that they occupy a particular social position. There is a distance between them and those who are more oppressed. This relation stands in contrast to the more level relation between the capital-A anarchists and other people in the "working class."

The divergent senses of social position/identity help to explain other distinct features of the respective sub-groupings. The capital-A anarchists feel oppressed in their economic activity, so they focus much of their activities on labor organizing and "solidarity work" with other oppressed people. The small-a anarchists, on the other hand, focus on types of activity in which they can apply their capacities as privileged people to the struggles of more oppressed people—in a way that is empowering. Occupying a privileged position, they can engage in certain empowerment activities inaccessible to others who have less privilege than they have. SDS members, for instance, can use the

power of their university to support exploited workers. The inherent inequality to ally work can produce varying degrees of uneasiness and uncertainty for some those engaged in it. Some interviewees, like Jill, have intentionally chosen their form of ally work with that uneasiness and uncertainty in mind.

Also in relation to their felt privilege, the small-a anarchists emphasize, as a form of praxis, personal change with respect to one's oppressive attitudes and behaviors. Anyone, it seems, can oppress others, but people with privilege are more prone to do so because they have more autonomy and capacity/power. The discursive emphasis on "dealing with" one's privilege and oppressive capacities demonstrates that the translation from anarchist values and goals to anarchist practice is not always easy or simple. It can require conscious, persistent effort. However, while privilege can produce obstacles to the translation of anarchist ideas into practice, it can also facilitate that translation by enabling one to critically reflect upon one's oppressive capacities.

One last main finding was that the capital-A anarchists identify as anarchists in part because they see themselves as part of the working class—indeed, perhaps because they are actually part of an oppressed social group. Conversely, the small-a anarchists are uncertain about identifying as anarchists because they lack an affinity to classical anarchism, which, I argue, is partly due to their feeling/being privileged.

In bringing to light the small-a/capital-A divergence with respect to class/privilege and understandings of personal identity/social position, this chapter has painted a much more nuanced picture of the small-a/capital-A distinction made by Graeber and Gordon. Small-a anarchists, between their ambivalence with respect to their ideological identification, privilege, and the imbalance inherent to ally work, are not only

a diverse group, but an uncertain group. Capital-A anarchists, on their part, are also a complex group whose ideology and practice are influenced by their understandings of self-identity.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

This thesis has explored the nature of the contemporary anarchist movement in the area of Providence, Rhode Island. It has been addressed primarily to the dominant claim within existing scholarship of contemporary anarchism, that which sees the global movement as essentially defined by two trends: one minority "small-a" trend which draws upon and closely resembles the anarchist movement prior to World War II, and one majority "capital-A" trend which draws upon and has descended primarily from anarchistic tendencies within the Civil Rights, student, feminist and anti-nuclear movements (Graeber & Grubacic 2004; Graeber 2010; Gordon 2008).

By examining the various discourses and shared ideology of anarchists in the Providence area, I have investigated Graeber's and Gordon's notion that small-a or new-school anarchists define the contemporary anarchists movement. This thesis has inquired into the content of the Providence anarchist ideology as well as the variations upon it. Do these variations suggest that there are two distinct anarchist sub-groupings that could be called small-a/new-school and capital-A/old-school anarchism? Or is the distinction problematic? As a secondary concern, I have also tried to show how deeper understandings of a movement's ideology can help to explain aspects of its mobilization, such as its collective identity and its strategic choices.

In order to answer these inquiries, I conducted in-depth interviews with twelve individuals who can be classified as anarchists. I then analyzed their discourses using Teun van Dijk's model for ideological discourse analysis. This model sees ideology as a

mental schema shared by a group that orders the fundamental components of that group's self-image. The ordering occurs in terms of categories including *self-identity, values/norms, goals, activities/practices, position, and resources* (van Dijk 1995a, 1995b, 2006).

Findings

My main claim is two-fold. First, the small-a/capital-A distinction posited by Graeber and Gordon is founded, but, as in the case of Providence anarchism, the authors' emphasis on the small-a nature of contemporary anarchism can obscure the significant commonality between the two trends as well as the complexity and marked empirical presence of the capital-A trend. Second, the small-a/capital-A distinction can be made more nuanced by contrasting the two trends in terms of their respective representations of self-identity and social position. Comparison along these lines reveals that the small-a trend tends to see itself as "privileged" and not so oppressed, while the capital-A trend tends to see itself as part of the oppressed working class. This difference has implications for the sub-groups' respective ideological practices as well as other aspects of the groups' respective identities.

In performing a basic exercise lacking in the small-a/capital-A literature, I have taken a diverse group of anarchists and analyzed their individual mental schema using van Dijk's ideological categories. In this way, I was able to uncover a shared group ideology through a bottom-up analysis of "personal ideologies."¹⁹⁷ The twelve interviewees shared several core components of an ideological schema. The main

¹⁹⁷ According to van Dijk's conception, ideologies, by definition are shared by a group. Individuals do not have ideologies; they have their personal "mental models." (See Chapter 1.)

components of this schema are autonomy, collective freedom, and participatory democracy; the goals empowerment and large-scale social structural change; and the activity genre issue-based activism and organizing. The core of the shared ideology is the concurrent valuing of individual autonomy and collective freedom. Mediating between these dual values is participatory democracy, an ideal for collective decision-making. These three core values drive interviewees' common opposition to capitalism, the State, and other various social relations and attitudes that cause oppression. From the three core values also stem the short-term goal of empowerment, the long-term goal of social structural change, and the prevailing practice of issue-based activism and organizing. Through this type of practice, interviewees simultaneously orient their practices toward on-going micro-level empowerment *and* the distant maximization of autonomy by macro-level structural transformation.

Based on my review of anarchist history and the Graeber-Gordon discussion, I had expected that these above ideological concepts would be somewhere within the anarchist ideology. I did not have any expectations with respect to their precise meanings or how they fit together within a cognitive schema; my literature review did not bring to light any studies that reconstruct anarchist ideology from a systematic empirical study of anarchist individuals. Thus, the merits of my exercise lie primarily in elaborating the meanings of these concepts and the nature of their interrelations—based not in the minds of anarchist writers past and present but in those of contemporary, every-day anarchists. Elucidating the semantic complexity behind the interviewees' discourses helps to demonstrate the significant extent of overlap between the small-a and capital-A

categories into which they can be separated. Such an overlap has not been appreciated in Graeber's or Gordon's accounts of contemporary anarchism.

The second part of this thesis sought to offer an alternative perspective on the small-a/capital-A distinction. The existing conceptualization of this distinction posits that capital-A anarchists tend to organize in formal groups with other anarchists, focusing their activity mostly on workplace organizing, anti-militarist actions, and publishing. For Graeber, they also tend to be "sectarian," that is, overly attached to "ideological purity" vis-à-vis classical anarchist ideologies. On the other hand, small-a anarchists are posited as more accepting of diversity, more inclined to organize informally and focus on creating "pre-figurative" participatory democratic social relations. In North America, small-a anarchists are thought to be more closely related to the Civil Rights, feminist, and anti-nuclear movements than to the old anarchist movements, even if though they may draw from some anarchist classics (Graeber 2010).

My thesis presupposed that this existing small-a/capital-A distinction, based only a handful of works by Graeber, Grubacic, and Gordon, necessitated further investigation. Through further ideological discourse analysis, I found that this distinction could be made amongst the interviewees along expected lines, namely, forms of organization (explicitly anarchist/not), types of activities (unions and not diverse/ally work and diverse), relation to classical anarchist ideology (affinity/not), and attitudes towards the anarchist label (comfortable/hesitant). I also found that the distinction could be recast along additional lines.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ One additional difference to note is the traditional anarchists' belief in a revolutionary moment or period at the end of the gradual revolutionary societal change (see Chapter 3). During this moment or period, capitalism, state, and class will finally cease to exist.

The findings that shed new light onto the small-a/capital-A anarchist distinction stemmed from an analysis of the two groups with respect to the ideological category of self-identity. The Capital-A anarchists perceive themselves to be oppressed and part of the working class (which they arguably are), whereas the small-a anarchists generally perceive themselves to be privileged (and arguably are). Largely overlooked by Graeber and Gordon, this simple difference has significant implications. First, it can obviously help to explain the capital-A anarchists tendency to focus on workplace organizing; if they are working lower-paid, less-secure jobs, then naturally labor organizing would be important for them. Second, the working-class/privilege perspective can help to explain capital-A anarchists' active affinity toward the classical anarchist movements and their ideologies, which were generally of the working-class/proletariat; the capital-A anarchists thus are more likely to identify with those movements than with the more middle-class student, feminist, and anti-nuclear movements. In turn, this identification with the explicitly anarchist classical movements/ideologies influences their attitude toward seeing themselves as anarchists; they see themselves as part of the long anarchist tradition.

Similarly, an awareness of privilege on behalf of the small-a anarchists' has implications for other aspects of this sub-grouping. First, the small-a anarchist stress their involvement in different sorts of *ally work*, or activism and other forms of practice in which one contributes one's capacities as a more autonomous person to the struggles of others who are more oppressed. Second, for many, their sense of privilege is related to their emphasis on altering their personal relations with others, so as to guard against the heightened oppressive capacities/tendencies that can come with privilege. Third, their

privilege can help to explain their tenuous relationship with classical anarchism and uncertainty about identifying as anarchists. Certainly there were elites in the classical anarchist movement, but to be privileged might make it more difficult (or less important) to see oneself as part of a largely working-class, self-designating anarchist tradition. Their tendency to be more pluralistic may also have some origins in their non-affinity to the anarchist designation. At least in the Providence context, these insights add another layer to Graeber's and Gordon's depiction of small-a anarchists.

My findings bring us to something of a paradox: I have demonstrated that the main differences between local small-a and capital-A anarchists are not simply ideological beliefs, but also real social positions and their effects on self-identity and ideological practice. Those positions and their consequences for variations within the anarchist movement have escaped the analytical view of previous studies of contemporary anarchism.

Implications and Further Research

I have recapitulated above the contributions of this thesis to the main body of scholarship of the contemporary anarchist movement. Just as the perspective of ideology added to that scholarship, so too has it added to social constructionist social movement studies. This case study of the anarchist movement has demonstrated that ideology is important in shaping movement practices and development: if recruitment and movement-building are seen by many movement actors as coercive, if one of the main goals of the movement is to empower people in the here-and-now through everyday interaction, and if many movement actors do not tout a particular movement identity,

then such a movement, such as contemporary anarchism, may be hardly perceptible. This thesis has shown the concept of ideology and the ideological discourse analysis model can be very useful for the study of such apparently marginal movements.

The macro-structural origins of these types of movements have been theorized by the New Social Movements segment of social movement theory; scholarship on social movement mobilization, however, is still developing. Polletta (2008), Johnston (2009), and others who take a culturalist approach to the study of social movements have pursued earlier developments (e.g. Swidler 1995) to theorize the culturally and—insofar as structure depends on culture—structurally transformative potential of movements. This thesis has shown that a refined concept of ideology may be useful to the further development of such theory. The case of the contemporary anarchist movement, too, may be useful, given its status as a challenge to existing cultural schema,¹⁹⁹ and key tensions within it, such as that between the goal of remedying structurally-caused issues and the commitment to taking a slow, micro-level approach to structural change (see Chapter 3).

An obvious point made by this thesis is that movements are not always homogenous. This is to be appreciated by culturalist and structuralist approaches alike, which have largely neglected questions of movement content (Walder 2009). Sometimes, it seems, movements may even contain clearly divergent variations: What are the implications of the small-a/capital-A division for the anarchist movement, locally and globally? Certainly variations can pose problems for movement solidarity (van Dijk 2006), especially when they are rooted in the category of collective identity (Polletta & Jasper 2001). Culture, in such a case, seems less a toolkit available to movement actors or an external structural constraint than an internal constraint.

¹⁹⁹ Expectations about how things do and should work (Polletta 2008).

The small-a/capital-A discussion would benefit from further research. This thesis has approached the distinction through interview discourse. Research using methods of participatory observation would provide more robust understanding of the anarchist variations in Providence and the relations between them. Such research could also achieve deeper insight into the constructions of various types relevant to the anarchists. Investigating the supposed anarchistic arts scene might also enrich an understanding of the Providence anarchist movement; I was unable look into the existence of this group. Moving beyond Providence to other similar cities in New England could make for interesting comparative analysis.

Additional empirical studies should also explore additional ways to meaningfully distinguish between anarchist varieties, such as activist generations. Attempted disaggregation of the characteristically diverse small-a trend could also be productive in challenging the utility of the distinction.

A different set of questions would take the interesting small-a/capital-A phenomena and link it back to social movement studies: If the small-a/capital-A distinction continues to hold weight, why do individuals tend towards one trend instead of the other? Does one trend do better than the other to bring people into the movement? Why do individuals sometimes shift orientations from one trend to the other? These questions would be served by social constructionist approaches to social movements and would help to further their development.

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